



CENTER FOR CIVIL
AND HUMAN RIGHTS

HUMANITY IN
ACTION



PRESENTATIONS

The American Program of the Humanity in Action Fellowship in
Collaboration With the National Center for Civil and Human Rights

Atlanta, Georgia >> July 5 - 30, 2016



Dedicated to U.S. Congressman John Lewis



The John Lewis Fellowship is made possible by the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation provided through The National Center for Civil and Human Rights, Inc.



2016 John Lewis Fellowship Final Presentations

It is our pleasure to share the Presentations of the 2016 John Lewis Fellows, a program in partnership with the Center for Civil and Human Rights and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

After working with speakers, experiencing multiple site visits and engaging in non-stop discussions and conversations among themselves, the Fellows were asked to complete the following task:

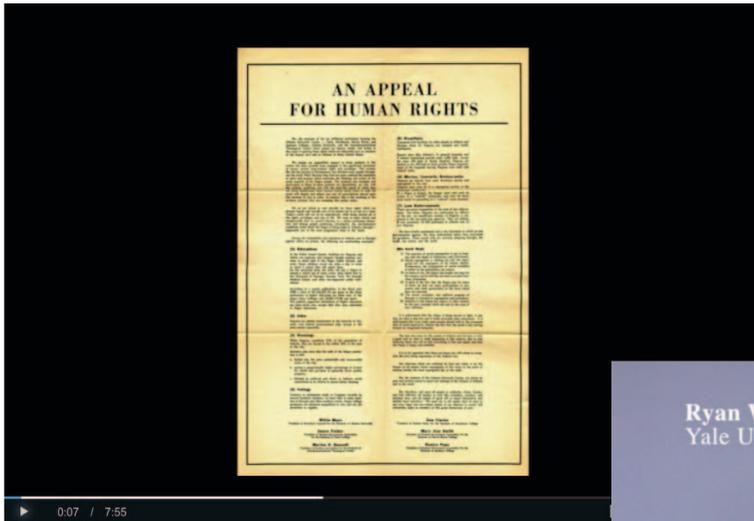
Fellows are asked to write a 1,000 word essay reflecting their experiences during the 2016 John Lewis Fellowship with Humanity in Action and the National Center for Civil and Human Rights. This work should provide an intellectual and personal response to the subjects and speakers presented throughout the program and include quotes from or ideas expressed by designated speakers and references, if desirable, to the readings. This work should reflect, as well, the integration of personal aspects of a Fellow's identity—such as national, ethnic, gender, racial, or religious identity, perspectives and/or experiences. Fellows are encouraged to take copious notes during the program sessions in order to share ideas and words that have made strong impressions and formed the basis for creative reflections. On the last days of the program, each fellow will deliver a seven-minute oral presentation about the content of the essay. The style of the written and oral presentation is up to the discretion of each Fellow and can include paintings, videos, photographs, drawings, poems, power point presentations and graphic work.

The program was deeply enriched by the opportunity to work with Dr. Roslyn Pope, author of “An Appeal for Human Rights” issued by the Atlanta Student Movement in 1960. We urge reader of these presentation to visit our website (humanityinaction.org) to see all the Fellows as they read that historic document.

We are grateful to Prof. Karcheik Sims-Alvarado, La’Niece Littleton and Ufuk Kâhya for their leadership of the 2016 John Lewis Fellowship.

Judith S. Goldstein
Founder and Executive Director

An Appeal for Human Rights



Visit humanityinaction.org to watch the 2016 Humanity in Action Fellows in the John Lewis Fellowship read *An Appeal for Human Rights* written by Dr. Roslyn Pope and issued by the Atlanta Student Movement.



The Fellows' Presentations

Ryan Wilson

John Lewis Fellowship

July 27, 2016

The Fire This Time

I was enthusiastic about heading to Atlanta to join the John Lewis Fellowship until a few days before it was time to catch my flight. I was familiar with most of the assigned reading from my time as an ethnic studies major, so the content of the works only increased my budding excitement for the program. Seeing the diversity of the people interested in immersing themselves in the John Lewis Fellowship made me very hopeful about the future of activism.

Until I got into a heated discussion, over a racial issue which in of itself was largely inconsequential, with a person who deemed himself an ally. The content of the argument was unimportant, but over the course of the conversation, the person showed an unwillingness to actually listen to and engage with the people with whom he was supposedly standing in solidarity. He displayed that he would talk over and down to Black people and other people of color when their visions for self-actualization didn't align with his own. He continued to call himself an "ally", even when the people conversing with him agreed that the descriptor didn't suit his actions when he was called on to be self-reflective and instead became defensive.

Following that, I became so tired. In that moment I realized that I had spent the vast majority of my time, energy, and labor as an activist and an ethnic studies scholar fighting with those that Martin Luther King Jr. deemed "the white moderate". Whether it was "progressive" professors and academics who continue to dismiss the importance of marginalized voices in academia, activists who continue to degrade communities for taking direct action that makes them uncomfortable, humanitarians that will only entertain palatable Black revolutions, or politicians who deploy Black struggles during election seasons in order to paint themselves as the best alternative, but ignore or perpetuate our plight in any other moment; I realized I have spent an incredible amount of time fighting against people who paternalistically tell me they have my best interests at heart, and would stand with me if only I act within the boundaries of their comfort and convenience. I had lost hope that Humanity in Action would be any different; I became convinced the program would simply pay lip service to liberation while hijacking and coopting whichever Black leaders and historical narratives fit its agenda.

Fortunately, the John Lewis Fellowship turned out to be one of the most empowering programs I have ever experienced. There are many more reasons for this than I can possibly talk about in the short word limit I have been given. I could dedicate pages to simply talking about how perfect the city of Atlanta is as both a location to discuss human and civil rights, and a great place to spend several weeks. I would love to dedicate this reflection to the incredible people I have met and have grown to care deeply for, and the amazing intellectual discussions we have shared both in and outside of the program's lectures. The sheer amount of history I have encountered this past month could fill several books on their own. However, I want to instead focus on how the prioritization of Black voices in the teaching of Black history and Black resistance helped me re-conceptualize my own identity as an activist spur me on a long- necessary journey towards self-growth.

On even the most surface level, the collection of Black excellence and high-achieving Black scholars is not something that is often encountered, even in the discussion of issues affecting Black communities. So often, in my experience, there exists this unspoken assumption that a majority or all-Black faculty cannot provide a wide enough breadth of perspective to any discussion, even one explicitly concerning race. However well versed the scholars may be in their respective fields usually means nothing to this assumption that whiteness is needed for objectivity or balance, while the reverse, majority to all-white faculties dominating discussions and educational experiences, is rarely interrogated. While there was great diversity among the races, ethnicities, fields of study, and job backgrounds of the lecturers in this fellowship, the curriculum was unmistakably and unapologetically dedicated to the uplifting of Black voices. For the first time in my academic career, I was told that I am enough; my Black voice can be enough. Even the non-Black lecturers were largely still people of color, and it felt so good to see people of color speaking for themselves in the fight for global liberation.

Interacting with so many Black professors also allowed for a reclaiming of the narrative surrounding race relations in the United States. There's the history that is in the textbooks, on the news channels, and that usually dominates academia that relegates slavery and racism in the United States within explicit spatial and temporal boundaries; it reduces Black revolutionaries to harmless platitudes and conflates resistance with violence. Humanity in Action and the John Lewis Fellowship allowed room for Black voices to deconstruct and reexamine the long history of Black rebellion in the American context. They reached out from an often ignored Black consciousness to touch and connect with marginalized people the whole world over. Purposefully dividing narratives of violence vs. nonviolence gave way to explorations of self-defense as self-love and empowerment. In this exploration, I learned more about making sure to empower and love myself so that I may better serve my community. I learned that empowering my community can lead to the love of others outside of that community, as we learn to humanize in us what has been degraded, and rediscover that humanity that connects us all. Learning to unlearn and deconstruct oppressive and/or erasing narratives is an invaluable tool in any fight for human rights.

The John Lewis Fellowship was reinvigorating; a new source of an energy to continue the fight when I was at my weariest. It was amazingly inspiring. For a while now, I've been saying I plan on getting my doctorate. After meeting over a dozen Black PhDs who all overcame similar dismissals of their intelligence and expertise as I have throughout my educational experience, I now fully believe that me earning my doctorate is not only possible--it's mandatory. I no longer feel alone in this fight for human rights. I now know I have allies across the world that I can rely on. I realize that I want to do what the lecturers, professors, and programs directors did throughout this program; empower others through teaching and give something to the people who will come after me. When I arrived in Atlanta, I was exhausted, believing I could never light a large enough fire to make any real change. Now I realize I only have to teach others how to create sparks.

Having been inspired by the program, my Fellows, the staff, the topics discussed, and the themes of self-care and empowerment, I began to write poetry for the first time in several years. For me, the writings represent a journey towards self-love and self-empowerment that was brought on by the welcoming and encouraging atmosphere of the John Lewis Fellowship. The program showed me the importance of dealing with and recognizing Black trauma so that we can begin to heal, as individuals and as a society. For my presentation I performed spoken word. Here is one of the pieces I performed:

*My tears look like
Kids bleeding out on asphalt
And in playgrounds
Brightly colored skittled
Falling from limp hands into a blooming red rose
Plucked quickly for having the audacity
To grow through the cracks in the sidewalk*

*They feel like broken spines and crushed bodies
And sound like
Voices crying out
Pouring the last of their existences into the demand for the right to inhale Suddenly silenced*

*My fear looks like
Nonexistence
Trying to balance on a small foothold
In the midst of blackness
In the midst of whiteness
Knowing whether I'm pushed, slip, or jump
Falling had always been the plan
My fear looks like my reflection in your eyes
As you glance back over your shoulder for the third time
They contain monsters
And fingers twitch towards buttons
Towards triggers
To call down your angel
To exorcise your demons that have been embodied in me*

*My anger looks like
A raised fist
Gripping the night
Ready to rip down the stars
So that the planets can look down and see constellations
Burned into the cities that built themselves on our backs
It's black smoke curling into fingers
Ready to strike back at the settlers who invade our communities
And a lone figure
Throat and eyes bursting with fire
Prepared to stare down armies
With only a stone I hand and defiance in their voice*

*My heart looks like
Shattered
Dehumanized bodies
Strewn throughout generations
And haphazardly pieced together
Ignoring the parts of me that lie lost and forgotten beneath oceans and mass graves It is bloated
and swollen
Looks blue but tastes red Like strange fruit
It beats to ancestral drums*

*And forces the cosmos through me when life began to its rhythm During the day
It is my war song
In the black
It is strong
It takes in the world
And whispers of revolution*

John Lewis Fellowship: Final Essay

Sarah Ackerman
07/27/201

German

Black Feminism in the Context of German Society – Reflections on Active Engagement for Change

Personal and individual as well as abstract and intellectual topical intersections were what caught my attention during the last four weeks which I was able to spend in Atlanta, GA. Looking back, they were particularly striking and intriguing to me because they appealed to parts of my identity. I cannot specifically point to a topic or session that was most captivating to me, my reflections rather were sparked by smaller events, topics, and their implications as well as side conversations that we touched upon during the fellowship.

To me, the second week was some kind of gateway into becoming emotionally involved and invested. Recognizing and celebrating the impact of people who were essential in making other individuals and groups aware of their conditions and lived experiences particularly demonstrated how their structural and institutional marginalization essentially constructed this nation's wealth and benefits deriving from exploitation, disenfranchisement, and extinction. Assessing these facts through de- and reconstruction elevated me personally in recognizing similarities and continuities that empower history and knowledge as gateways to change. That week to me was designed to empower people of color, in particular Black people, and culminated in an uplifting visit and learning experience while being surrounded by the art of the *Clark Atlanta University Art Galleries*.

Manuel Hughes' untitled drawing from the *Arc Series* sparked my need to interact with a side of my identity, that I have always had trouble to grasp within a German context albeit knowing of its existence. The strips that are drawn onto the paper to me symbolize different entities, be it people, identities, opinions, options, or choices. I interpret them as parts of my identity as well as similar and different identities of other people. Almost all of them are bent in the same way but one of them is different. This I see as pertaining to every human being since there can only be so many things that you have in common, as well as limited choices that therefore are available to you even if things may



Manuel Hughes: Arc Series Untitled, 1987. Clark Atlanta University Art Galleries.

appear the same from the outside, as the coloring and shadows of some of the strips suggest.

There is that something making you special, inherently different, and unique with regard to the things you experience and feel on the inside. And even though you may be aware that you rarely

are an exception to everything, or you perceive your experiences to constantly be different, there might actually be more in common than you may know. Connecting these unique experiences to your positionality in life as such (and within different settings according to which your role changes), it might make you feel the urge to change, to rebel, i.e. to move toward the opposite direction.

Reflecting upon my own positionality in the context of the U.S. and within German society, what is most influential on my current identity is being a Black woman, especially in the realms of academia and activism. For being *Black*, there exists a linguistic and socio-political framework which theoretically allows me to express and reclaim an identity as a so-called *Afro-German*, emphasizing my *African heritage* – irrespective of its extent – thereby challenging the symbolic power (cf. Bourdieu) of being German by adding a global historical, socio-cultural, and political sphere to an otherwise ignorant national perspective. For being a *woman*, there has as a matter of fact, been a *Black Feminist Movement* which started in the 1980s and that was essential in paving the way for German postcolonial and critical cultural studies, especially in the context of literature and poetry¹.

In my opinion, the Black Feminist Movement however failed to adequately and effectively bridge or rather translate into the realm of every day interaction through sensitive and accountable education and perhaps more notably into the sphere of politics. It has also not quite yet achieved to be present within the disciplines subsumed under social science and humanities and therefore did not manage to challenge the dominant paradigmatic assumption of neutrality and objectivity². Objectivity and neutrality in fact still equal normalcy which still equals White Anglo-Eurocentrism as an unmarked reference point and framework. Often times, there is not even the necessity of a recognition for political correctness nor an acknowledgement from where the demand for it is originating in the first place in order to reflect upon the so-called “*normal*”.

¹ However, there still is nothing close to interdisciplinary Ethnic Studies and its various subsections as studied in the US. Populations and communities are mostly studied descriptively by a spectator’s gaze from the outside.

² This also includes its usability for society, which in essence alludes to its rational utilization in terms of supporting an economic, social and cultural status quo.

The fact that feminisms of color or even the acknowledgement of people of color as part of the present-day German society are neither widespread in societal mainstream nor in politics shows that there is still a lot to be done in terms of disrupting and deconstructing the very category of normalcy. Since I identify as a Black woman in Germany, I want to focus on how to push for questioning the entire concept of normal as something that is not thoroughly reflected upon. The fact that the Black population in Germany only constitutes an estimated 0.3 to 0.6 per cent (cf. Flippo) hence makes it necessary to engage in coalition building and forming alliances which becomes even more obvious when trying to account for the female identifying Black persons in Germany.

Where I want to go from here is trying to bring young women of color in academia together in order to communicate about the challenges we face and discuss about how we can raise sensitivity and awareness in general, especially given the fact that Germany's population of migrants and people of color has significantly grown since 2015. As we are following national discussions centered around *either being a person of color or being a woman*, we increasingly witness how darker skin is associated with males; and claims on respecting women's rights only seem to be acceptable if they



Covers of highly popular quality newspaper and magazines following mass sexual harassment allegations after the New Years Eve of 2015/2016. Focus Magazine's headline states: "Women's accusations. After the sex attacks committed by immigrants: are we still tolerant or already blind?"

come from blond, blue-eyed women. Sexism³ currently is publicly blamed on communities of color, especially recent immigrants, while German men who publicly discredit their female coworker's abilities with sexually dismissive jokes are being let off the hook as old-school men who just do not know better, essentially saying that boys will be boys.

The obvious omission of women of color's experiences and needs makes me wonder how communities of color, especially Black women like myself, today can influence social and cultural sensitivity and a critique of the status quo which on the one hand makes us invisible to the mainstream; while it on the other hand targets and constantly highlights our otherness, our exclusion from mainstream society, our "exoticism"? What do we do after we passed the point of sharing what discrimination we face, after pointing out the absurdities of our day-to-day life?

"White Germans often assume that Afro-Germans are not really from Germany because, for them, having black skin is not compatible with being German. Thus, although Afro-Germans are native Germans by birth, language, socialization, and citizenship, they are treated as outsiders in a society that defines itself primarily as white. Afro-Germans, however, are usually only African to the extent that this label has been ascribed to them from the outside and that, as a result, they have adopted it as a shield against racism and marginalization." (Goertz 307)

We do not actually seem to know where to go from there and how to counter and remedy our invisibility and voicelessness in order to disrupt people's comfortability in saying:

"I think I'd be glad if I were you.

German history isn't something one

Can really be proud of, is it.

And you're not that black anyway, you know." (Ayim)

How can we come together and express our anger and needs, how can we claim space, once again, and this time make sure that the public notices what we have to say without relegating us to a place where our thoughts are read, heard, and *consumed* like some kind of ancient travel log about our experiences in a country that we should better refer to as a foreign place instead of home?

³ Violent sexism but also subtler and symbolic forms of sexism

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It's Easier to be White in America
How Can We Fix It?

AN ODE TO MY WHITE PROGRESSIVE ANTI-RACIST FRIENDS
AND MY FELLOW SOLDIERS IN THE REVOLUTION FOR BLACK LIBERATION

**HUMANITY IN
ACTION**

Ashley Needham
John Lewis Fellowship
July 2016

It is categorically easier to be white in America than any other racial identity.

If a cashier is rude to me at a grocery store, I know that it is not because of my race. If I get pulled over by a police officer, I don't worry that I will get shot while handing the officer my license. If I am insulted by someone in my life, I am certain it is not on the basis of my racial identity. When I turn on the TV I am able to see actors that resemble my appearance and actors that I can relate to. When I interview for a job I know that neither my intelligence nor my integrity is questioned because of the color of my skin. When I open a history book I come face to face with facts and stories of my ancestors that are painted as heroes and adventurers. These examples amount to just a fraction of the foundation of my white privilege. It is not because I earned any of these privileges but rather that they were given to me upon my birth. It is not my fault that I have these privileges but they are my responsibility. As an anti-racist white ally of people of color it is my responsibility to be accountable for my privilege in a way that helps fight racism, be it unconscious or conscious, throughout the white community. To not do so is at best a disservice to the legacy of the suffering that black people have experienced in America and at worst another form of violence against black Americans.

When you're white in America it is convenient to think the black liberation movement is something distinct and separate from white participation, and in many ways it is, but that does not mean we as white people are not needed or wanted in the movement at least in some way. One way we can demonstrate our solidarity and further the black liberation revolution is through developing complementary organizations to black liberation organizations such as such as Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ), which complements Black Lives Matter. These anti-racist white organizations, work in conjunction with, and separately from, black organizational movements. The reason is to maintain safe spaces for black leadership. So often the black expression is negatively impacted by the white gaze in the room and complementary organizations mitigate this concern. It is our responsibility as anti-racist white comrades to understand that no matter our good intentions or our sympathetic attitude when talking about black oppression and black liberation white comrades need to leave that space up to black

communities. White supremacy has suppressed black voices and black leadership long enough and we must acknowledge that as well.

Before this fellowship I would describe myself as sympathetic to the Black Lives Matter cause but also as hesitant to share my views or introduce my opinions even if they were aligned with the Black Lives Matter mission. I didn't want to overstep my boundaries and be viewed as part of the "white savior" complex (Cole 2012). I thought 'they – meaning the black community – don't want my voice or my participation.' I thought that my voice will only distract from the movement and once again make something that was meant for black liberation to become something about the white person saving the black person from oppression (i.e. how President Abe Lincoln gets to take all the credit for the Emancipation Proclamation despite the direct involvement from Fredrick Douglass and countless other black emancipators.) I don't want the conversation to be once again regarded as another affirmation to make the white community feel good about themselves. I don't want my participation to become another hurdle for the black community to leap over.

I will probably always face some nervousness or hesitation when addressing racial injustice – nervousness about saying the wrong thing, or speaking at the wrong time, or committing a micro-aggression that makes the day harder for any black colleagues or friends in the room. You can call this white guilt or white fragility or the like but I think many anti-racist, progressive white allies face the same fears and hesitation. Not because we want the conversation to be about us but because we genuinely are devastated that the black community faces continual dismissal, suspicion, exclusion, pity, aggression, violence, and death by the hands of the white community. We, as progressive open-minded white allies, know this is not what we want to stand for and it hurts us (albeit in a very different, peripheral way) to know that it is at the hand of the white community that all this tragedy happened:

- 1) that black people were stolen from their countries, raped, killed, maimed, abused, forced into labor; 2) then segregated, murdered, lynched, made to feel invisible, useless, and less than human; 3) then left to perform menial jobs, which forced large populations to earn money through non-legal ways, incarcerated for life long sentences for drug use and possession of drugs; and finally 4) on top of that now the white community has the audacity to say that racism is dead, that slavery wasn't that bad, and black people need

to get over it because Obama is president; 5) all whilst black men and women are killed nearly every day from unlawful use of deadly force at the hand of white police officers.

So regardless of whether our white families and ancestors were colonizers or not or segregationists or not, anti-black racism and violence is a problem we have both inherited and perpetuated, whether we knew or not, and whether we intended to or not. Thus, it makes it our problem. This means we have to work every day to solve it. We can no longer make excuses that we as individuals didn't cause racism so we don't have to engage with the issue to solve it. Violence and genocide is the legacy of white America and if we don't work to change that who will?

Given this I think it is important to acknowledge that we as anti-racist white allies will make mistakes in the process along the way. And you may need to be patient with us, which I know is a lot to ask. Race and racism is so engrained in our worldview and the way we move through the world that it becomes hard to grapple with and confront. Even asking questions and trying to gain a better understanding can be interpreted or turn into a micro-aggression (Pierce 1974). This is where again, at least for me, participation in racial justice issues becomes difficult. White people don't, necessarily, go back to our community and talk about race with our friends and families – because race is not something we need to talk about for our survival. So if we aren't talking about it in our homes and we don't learn about it in school, the only way we can get a better understanding is through asking questions and independent research. This is where the struggle comes in. When we cross the line or ask something inappropriate or don't say the right thing in the right way, it isn't because we are trying to be cruel, it is because we just don't know. I know it's another layer of burden to put the explanation of prejudice on the people that are oppressed, but in my mind, it is a necessary burden. If the reaction is to get mad – albeit a justified feeling and reaction – it will likely alienate the potential white ally. I can only imagine how frustrating it must be to be constantly facing racial oppression and injustice in your daily lives and then have to educate the oppressors at the end of the day. That being said, for now it may be a burden the black community might, at least in some part, may have to bear.

However, in collaboration I can assure you that this white ally will meet you half way so this burden doesn't have to break you. I will ask you when it is appropriate to talk to you about these

issues. I will respect the black space. I will go back to my white communities and educate them. I will align myself with organizations that support black liberation. I will mind my language as to monitor any micro-aggressions. I will check my privilege and positionality. I will go to police officers and tell them when they have violated the law. I will contact my representatives and call for the indictment of officers that killed, beat, or unlawfully detained people of color. I will support legislation that provides more funds, more resources, and more teachers to school districts in underrepresented communities. I will petition for TV networks to represent more people of color in positive ways. I will argue for the change of draconian drug laws in the United States that incarcerate black fathers and brothers and mothers and sisters while the same laws excuse white mothers and sisters and fathers and brothers. I will do all this not because I pity you. Not because I think you need to be saved by me because you can't save yourselves. Not because I feel a sense of white guilt. Not because my god demands me to. Not in anticipation of glory or praise. I will do this because my life has been easy at the expense of yours. I will do this because by the virtue of the color of my skin I have privileges that I have not earned but were thrust upon me. I will do this because I want my black brothers and sisters to have as many opportunities as me. I will do this because I want to sit in a room with equal representations of all identities. I will do this because I need to be accountable for my own privileges. I will do this because it is the right thing to do.

I am your comrade in this revolution. I am here to fight for your liberation.

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"History repeats itself" & "Bring your knowledge back to your community".

How small statements have large implications

Laure Assayag

1. Introduction

Why these two expressions “history repeats itself” and “bring your knowledge back to your community”, repeated tirelessly by the Fellows and presented as self-evident felt at odds with the conceptual approach that was familiar to me?

I realized that these two sentences underlined a fundamentally different conception of history and of the word community in the US compared to France.

Why is that so?

2. Does “history repeat itself”?

In France, repetition is considered as unhistorical. History is basically designed as a science of the past, although some historians like Marc Bloch added that it informs present actions¹. In France, history is primarily the history of the dead, of the other, of the inaccessible; “Writings set the stage for a population of dead people²”, wrote the French historian Michel de Certeau.

In the US, by contrast, I felt that history and consciousness are intimately linked. I became aware that history is viewed as a kind of recipient that helps to understand the present

¹ Bloch, Marc. *Apologie pour l'histoire ou Métier d'historien*. Armand Colin, 1997.

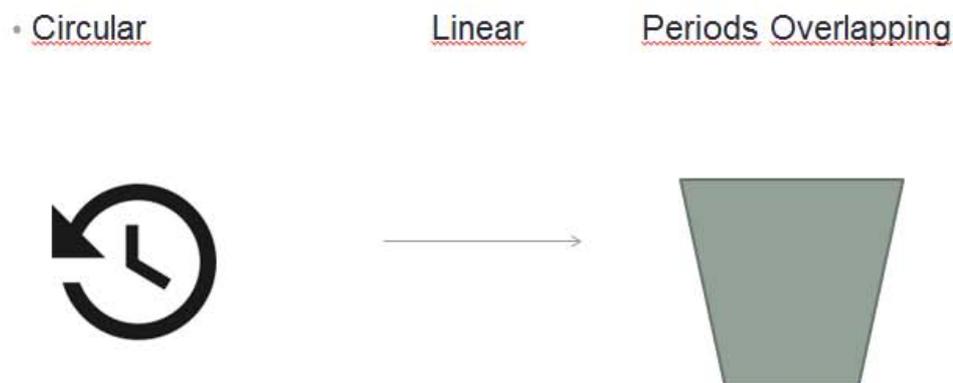
² De Certeau, Michel. *L'écriture de l'histoire*. Folio Histoire, 1975, p. 138

and provides opportunities for future actions³, which makes it available for activism, unlike France.

Saying “history repeats itself” involves viewing history as a circle, similar to the nietzschean “da capo”, an eternal return of life to the same.

But my question was: what is the reference period where everything starts again? Prehistoric times? The genocide of Indians? Slavery? The civil rights movement? How could it be an identical repetition if the socio-historical conditions are different?

Throughout the lectures, my conception of history found itself enriched. It was not anymore linear like French history, but not quite circular like American history -rather like an unidentified object, a cluster, with periods overlapping each others.



This new vision of history allowed me to understand that the denunciation of "modern lynching" used during our march with “Black Lives Matter” was not a historical inaccuracy (black Americans killings have nothing in common with lynching in terms of methods, organization, collective attitudes) but in fact a cry against the recurrence of a historical phenomenon: institutional racism.

³ For example, during the tool kit course, we had to draw a line in order to pick relevant past techniques in history and use them for current activism.

Thus, the "we" used by some speakers to refer to history, that can also be found in the book *The Coming* by Daniel Blake⁴, would be impossible in France, where the tendency is to erase the presence of the historian and to clearly differentiate history and memory.

Nevertheless, I gradually realized that the age-old racial injustice and the white master narrative justify the appropriation of African-American history by the black community.

Discussions with American fellows made me understand that, in the US, the historian was either too emotionally involved to be objective, or lacked this knowledge of experience considered so precious in the United States - in this case his implicit bias does not allow him to tell the history of a community without having lived in his flesh racism.

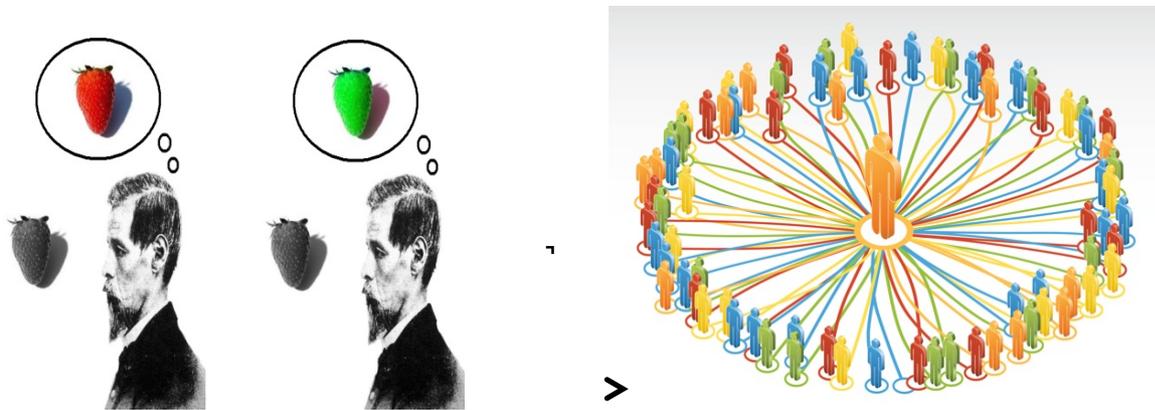
How can the historian get out of this dilemma? In fact, these two apparently contradictory positions seem to me to have more in common than it appears: they presupposed that the very possibility of a historical fact is annihilated. This idea was intolerable for me because it runs the risk of promoting relativism and, as a consequence, negationism.

At the same time, the conferences showed that Malcolm X 's contribution was downplayed compared to the one of Martin Luther King, showing how history is not objective and maintain an ambiguous relationship with ideology.

If history is not neutral, should we nevertheless consider some forms of history as illegitimate? If every history is situated, I wondered, should we not give up the idea of having just a single point of view?

⁴ Black, Daniel. *The Coming, A Novel*. St. Martin's Press, 2015.

As a historian and philosopher, I realized that phenomenology provided an interesting paradigm for history. Phenomenology in philosophy precisely demonstrates that one's perception of an object is always incomplete, we can only have side views of this object. It is only by putting several people around the same object that an idea starts to take shape of what the object is. It therefore seemed important not to prioritize speeches of historians according to some absolute "truth" value, but to accept the fact that all history is situated, and come to understand the contribution of different perspectives on the same object.



From Relativism to Phenomenology

My last question was: should we write a history of community per se or include it in the national history? Should the history of communities be a corrective to national history or should it be a separate and exclusive history? Should it restrict itself to a protest speech or be an original construction?

After this fellowship, I realized that the history of the communities was not a homogenous bloc in the United States. The differences in designations of "race studies" departments are not just a terminological variation, but are a reflection of these epistemological differences;

African-American studies, Africana studies ... Should we reject this artificial hyphen between "African-American" or not?

I began to wonder on how I can translate this reflection on communities and history into the French context.

First, I came to think, at the end of this program, that a racial history according to the "race studies" paradigm probably would be hard to imitate in France because of national reluctance, and perhaps not desirable, because of divisions that this type of history can bring. Secondly, I think however that the national political project as vital as it is, must recognize the diversity of citizens in terms of religion, ethnicity, and culture.

Therefore, I would like to work on the integration of a history of immigration in our national curriculum. A national history that recognizes the role of immigration in French heritage is inclusive and allows to transform the minds of French citizens over time -as Malcolm X said, "Education is our passport to the future"⁵.

The entry by immigration makes it possible to establish a dialogue and prevent from drawing a strict separation: it allows to address all ethnic groups, all French people issued from diversity who seek recognition, but also the so-called "native" French who tend to deny the importance of this phenomenon.

Behind this lies the philosophical idea that recognition is a two-way process and implied a dual dynamics of being recognized and recognizing⁶.

5. Conclusion

⁵ X, Malcolm. "Speech at the Founding Rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity". *BlackPast.org, Remembered & Reclaimed*, 1964, blackpast.org/1964-malcolm-x-s-speech-founding-rally-organization-afro-american-unity. Accessed 26 July 2016.

⁶ On recognition, see for example Ricœur, Paul. *Parcours de la reconnaissance*. Folio Essais, 2005.

To conclude, this fellowship had the merit to raise new questions for me and to be intellectually stimulating. My main take-away is the conviction that:

1. the appropriation of history by a community is essential, since it has just been dispossessed of its history,
2. But if all history is situated,
3. History cannot be exclusive and diversified narratives are essential.

Laure Assayag, from Paris, France

Cassandra Chislom
July 27th, 2016

Humanity in Action: John Lewis Fellowship

A Call to Relearn the Historical Struggle for Black Liberation and to Imagine a Liberated Future:
What we can learn from the success and failures of our Ancestors

It is no secret to us as millennials that when looking at today's Black Lives Matter Movement in guise of a historical past, the issues of police brutality, mass incarceration and an unfair criminal justice system in America is nothing new. Engrained in America's history is the countless deaths of innocent black bodies bleeding out at the hands of senseless anger, state sanction violence, and white fear.

However, while we are conscious of the legacy that America fails to grapple with, there seems to be little urge to study and recycle the strategies, tactics and ways of organizing utilized during historical efforts for Black Liberation. Personally, prior to participating in the John Lewis Fellowship, I felt the need to recreate and start the movement anew. Instead of looking back to move forward, the undercurrent theme of the fellowship, I constantly focused on gaining remnants of justice for innocent blood shattered today. Although I can now say I understand my previous sense of urgency for conviction, from this groundbreaking program, I have come to realize that blood of Treyvon Martin pours into the rivers of our ancestors' like Emmett Till, and creates a stream that seeks to flow towards justice.

Throughout my four weeks in Atlanta, I have become more knowledgeable about the tradition of resistance in the Black community and the nature of activism as well as organizing that has passed down for centuries in life lines of blood and generations of those born in black bodies. A legacy that has also been shared with many other oppressed groups at home and around the world. The struggle for freedom seems to be a melody and it is up to us to relearn the notes. Despite the fact it can be argued that the song sung during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements has never been fully heard in America and Martin Luther's cry for Freedom to Ring remains unreached, we must seek to understand both the successes and failures of each movement, not to sing the same song, but to fine tune the melody, amplify and reinvent.

Of the many lessons I've learned in Atlanta and the information I gathered, the perspectives offered about organizing, reshaped my perspective on the current Black Lives Matter movement, and has brought to my attention the historical road we as activist embark on. From reading different works, meeting with various scholars and having the opportunity to learn from the renowned *Historian in Heels*, Dr. Karcheik Sims-Alvarado, and the intelligent, well-spoken La'Neice Littleton, I was able to gather the tools used to foster social reform throughout time.

Through the works and examples of Frederick Douglass, W.E.B Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, I was able to understand the importance of education, publishing newspapers and acquiring self-knowledge in the struggle as a gate way to freedom and building consciousness within the community. From the legacy of MLK and Malcom X, I learned the significance of having a well-spoken leader who can appeal to media to serve the needs of the people. With organizers like Roselin Pope and Adelina Nicholis the role of political advocacy and clearly articulating and writing the demands, goals and shared visions in a clear and concise way became evident.

From Bayard Rustin, I absorbed knowledge about the significance of organizational structure, the role of systemic thinking, strategic planning of demonstrations, and marches that have larger goals and importance. Financial power houses like Alonzo Herndon and institutions like Black Churches helped me understand the need to have resources, a constituency and service programs that provide the financial means to support and fulfill the needs of the community.

Moreover, the Black Panther party for Self Defense highlighted the role of coalitions. They illuminated the power that can arise from rejecting the boundaries and borders created by our oppressors and finding solidarity with other groups and tying together movements. Along with the Panthers, Du Bois, Malcom X also stressed the need to think internationally, and build collective identity among black people all over the globe.

While the Black Lives Matter movement has quickly swept the world, internationally, activating people through social media, hashtags, viral videos and t-shirts, in the minds of many Americans and those all over the world, remains the question, what is the movement calling for and what are their demands? The organization on one hand has been successful in raising awareness of the failure of the justice system and the issues of police brutality, but on the other hand there is still a lack of awareness of the movements' leaders and their vision. Constantly the movement is co-opted and organizations around the world are organizing using the slogan 'Black Lives Matter'. The state of the movement and its loose structure drowns out and overshadows, Alicia Garza's. Patrisse Cullors' and Opal Tometi's role and their leadership.

Within the movement there is a need to build structure, organize protest and to clearly articulate what this movement is about, the vision of the validation of black life and to think about what exactly does that look like? Not only from the founders, but other activist engaged in the movement. It is not enough to demonstrate in order to stop certain police practices, correct the criminal justice system and pressure politicians to rewrite the wrongs. We cannot stay on the streets to dismantle systems and structures, through protesting, from our ancestors we must gather the strength to start articulating our demands, becoming political engaged in policy and thinking about how we can we build new systems, structures and coalitions.

As activist, change agents and leaders, we are too often told that our victory does not come in the now, but in the tomorrow. While this is true, we rest too much hope in the future, and our current leaders, to think that once we start organizing and get people in power to listen, our dreams will come into fruition. We think it is our role to start the commotion needed create the conversation for justice, however I have begun to question our organizing investment in the “someday” and our inability to see that we must start the conversation ourselves. We are doing the resisting, but our we reimagining, storytelling or drafting of the narratives? To put it simply, our work is too fold, to not only organize, but to visualize.

I believe that it is time to reframe the direction of human and civil rights and expand upon the current framework of social justice used to talk about racial inequality in the United States. We must discover new frameworks and invent a language to talk about to the problems that are occurring both in the black community and with all oppressed groups. Frameworks that are not constant co-opted or as Dr. Livingston stated “ethical frameworks” that do not have their history or origin in oppression.

Fredrick Douglas, Martin Luther King, Malcom X, W.E.D Du Bois, Booker T Washington, expounded on the notion of freedom. Although they all offered different visions, in some respects, it was shared as economic, personal and political autonomy, the ability to vote, self-determination and perseveration, education, equality, equity and human rights. Martin Luther King painted the picture of his children holding hands with children from other races. Although I have seen how historic black leaders have critically thought about the black struggle and strove to imagine what freedom looks like, there is still the need to continue to do so, not only particular values and ways of life we seek to attain, but also policies and laws.

The Voting Rights act of 1965 is thought to be one of the greatest successes of the Civil Rights movement, however it is an executive order that needs to be renewed every seven years and there are no requirements regarding its enforcement. In fact, in states throughout America there are voting barriers in place suppressing the vote of thousands of voters in unrepresented communities. Furthermore, the Supreme Court has made several rulings that disregarding the act entirely. With this, I hope to bring attention to the need to not only look back to our foundation laid for Black Liberation, but to also imagine true justice, a new role for the police, laws and policies as we forward. We must start to recreate, reimagine and rethink. We must play a hand in creating policies, we must play a hand in our future.

Malgorzata “Margo” Sobolewska

John Lewis Fellowship 2016

Learning, unlearning and being a white ally

Learning

As the proverb reads, it takes a village to raise a kid. Education and shaping a young mind is a communal process where multiple factors as well as interactions with many people play crucial roles. It also takes a whole community to have a brilliant fellowship like the one we were provided with. We all experienced fast growth, because we learned: from our professors, from speakers, but most importantly – from one another in this huge pool of people from very diverse backgrounds. Each individual and his or her contribution leaves in us an imprint and gives us better understanding of the problems we discuss.

As one of the fellows, Laure Assayag pointed out, history is not objective. When we listen to just one part of it, only the dominant narrative, it turns out it is actually a very limited view. Therefore I really value the collective method of learning we experienced. Our diversified contributions on the same object made the history we learned much more complete.

The activism without knowledge and constant learning could be, sadly, just shouting your anger in vain. It is crucial to show the power of the people, but as we progressed during the program, we learned that it takes more than that to instigate a real change. We have to list very clearly what our demands are, identify and mobilize people who share the same goal, together organize, create a strategy and enforce it.

Dr. Roselyn Pope, as a young student of Spellman College, representing six educational institutions of Atlanta, crafted a profound, powerful statement describing the discriminatory conditions African Americans had to endure under the segregation laws in the 1960s. Her “Appeal for Human Rights” gave the Atlanta Student Movement momentum and recognition. But to create such a document, statement or list of demands, we have to, as one of the grassroots activists, Adelina Nicholls said powerfully, “learn to listen and listen to learn.” Leaders are vital part of the movement, but they are not there to push their own agenda, but to

extract the voices that must be heard from the community and make sure the goals are commonly shared by all members.

The lesson that we have learned from local officials and from grassroots activists, is to organize, not only mobilize. We have to have numbers of people shouting in the streets and voicing their anger, but at the same time also people who will be in front of a Police Department Building, will take part in a sit-in at the steps of the county building, and most importantly will present the list of demands in the meeting with law enforcement.

Very early in the program, one of our spiritual mentors here, dr. Daniel Black told us: “It is not a summer camp. You are soldiers getting ready for the battle.” And we, as soldiers, have to keep strong and have to... take good care of ourselves. “You are all here, because you are all wounded,” dr. Black said to us. “But if you can get your healing, nothing can stop you from resurrecting others.”

Being a white ally

We learned about slavery. We learned about horrific spectacles of lynching. We learned about segregation. We learned about powerful leaders who challenged it. We learned about modern Jim Crow era with prisons and jails incarcerating 2,3 million people, out of which 40% are African Americans, even though black people constitute only 13% of the US population.

So will I understand my black brothers and sisters fully?

Never, cause I have different experience, I walk the earth differently and we are faced with a different reality. For my black friends it is an everyday fight. Many of them repeat in mind: maybe If I climb a little higher, maybe if I do this, get this title, get this job, I will finally meet with... respect and dignity that is due and innate to every human being. My black fellow humans are being hunted, chased after for minor transgressions. Philando Castile, who was shot in Minnesota by a police officer, while he was sitting in a car with his girlfriend and their daughter, had been previously stopped by police 52 times in a span of few years, last time being fatal.

But I can listen. I can be receptive. I can speak out when I see that injustice slaps someone in the face. Win every day microbattles counteracting racism. Get in a way, as John Lewis likes

to put it; to prevent mistreatment of other fellow humans. “When you see something that is not fair, not right, not just, you must have the courage to stand up, to speak up and find a way to get in the way” John Lewis said.

In the first line to defend our rights is government. But on the microlevel – it is you and I. And when YOU see injustice, it is not anybody else’s calling. It’s YOUR calling.

Unlearning

Now, as we took this journey through history, our eyes are wide open. But that also means we are confronted with ugly truths. And we need to become comfortable with discomfort, cause it is not going to abandon us. It takes me now not only to learn, but also to unlearn the biases that are deeply ingrained in my mind, regardless of whether I wanted them to be there or not. Having become more conscious, it is now my responsibility to further de-bias myself.

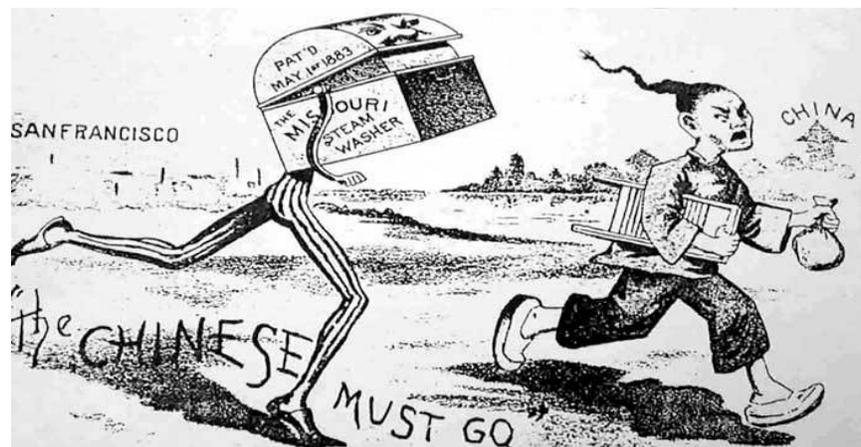
After this transformative experience, I feel that new knowledge and ideas are outpouring through each and every cell of me. I became strengthened, empowered and cognizant. I am committed to share it, and as one of the first steps, upon coming back to my community, I want to combine learning with unlearning to elevate my fellow activists. We, too, need to be strengthened. We, too, need to be empowered. We, too, need to know where we come from in order to know where we are heading. We, too, need to look back in order to move forward.

**“We Will Not Be Used”:
On History, Accountability, and Liberatory Solidarity**



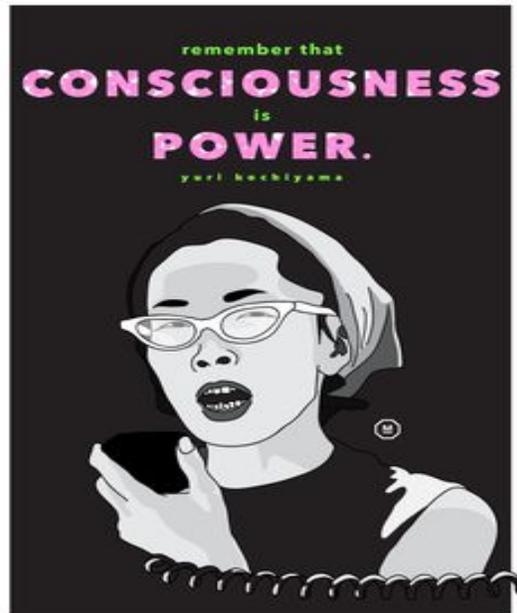
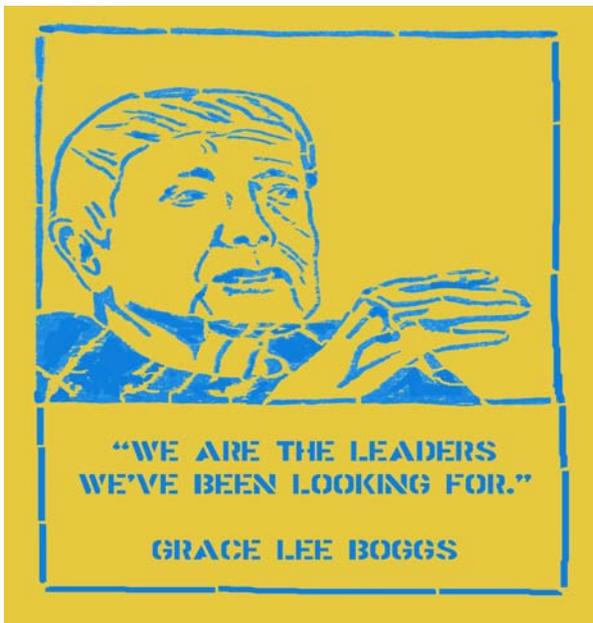
Samantha Keng
Humanity in Action, John Lewis Fellowship
July 2016

In my junior year of high school, I cracked open my U.S. history textbook and, for the first time, I saw someone who looked like me in it. Next to a paragraph detailing the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was a racial caricature of a Chinese man with exaggerated features, slanted eyes, and a menacing expression – a visual embodiment of so-called “Yellow Peril.” My first exposure to Asian American history in twelve years of formal education was far from empowering or affirming. It only solidified what I had come to realize as a Chinese-Taiwanese American from an immigrant family attending an all-white high school: despite my efforts to assimilate and blend in, to aspire to whiteness, I still remained somehow foreign, alien, Other.



In reality, my struggle with identity and self-definition had begun charting its course long before eleventh grade. I grew up in a largely white suburb, had mostly white friends, and would later attend a predominately white university. I spent most of my life navigating through white space, yet I was always acutely aware of my difference. In my mind, my Otherness – my appearance, my native language, even the contents of my lunchbox – was unavoidable, loud. My ignorance regarding my history and my discomfort with my identity converged to produce a distinct lack of pride in my own heritage. How could this pride develop when the only Asian American history I ever encountered revolved around our exclusion and demonization? Where were our stories of resistance and resilience? Where were the heroes of American history who looked like me – if they existed at all?

Because my high school U.S. history class never progressed past the Great Depression, I never learned about Japanese internment during World War II or the racially motivated murder of Vincent Chin in 1982. Nor did I learn about the rich history of Asian American organization and mobilization. These histories were hidden and buried by white America, out of fear that this knowledge would lead to an empowerment it could not control. Malcolm X referred to this process as a “whitening” of history;¹ Kenneth B. Morris called it “deodorization.”² Whatever the term, the aim of this process is to deprive people of color of the tools and the vocabulary to truly understand themselves. In college, once I began unearthing these narratives – the ones that white America hoped I would not find – there was no going back. I learned the names of radical revolutionaries like Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs and tacked their photos up on my wall. I dug deeper into solidarity movements between Asian Americans and the Black Power movement, the farmworkers’ rights movement. For the first time, I felt liberatingly and unmistakably proud of my roots.



¹ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, as told to Alex Haley, New York: Ballantine Books (1964), 165.

² Kenneth B. Morris, “The Life and Legacy of Frederick Douglass,” July 8, 2016.

This fellowship, for me, has been an intensive, four-week long experience in uncovering more of these narratives and rewriting the false histories I had been fed. The stories I absorbed were ones of survival, strength, and community – Martin Luther King, Jr. traveling to India to connect the Black struggle and the Dalit struggle, Yuri Kochiyama occupying the Statue of Liberty alongside Puerto Rican activists, immigrants’ rights advocates showing up at Black Lives Matter protests. This fellowship has been a timely reminder of the importance of complicating traditional narratives. Even more so, it has been a lesson in understanding that knowledge of one’s own history is the critical first step towards self-love.

Our discussions linking the long Civil Rights Movement with modern social and political movements, from Black Lives Matter to the immigrants’ rights movement, also forced me to consider my own place within these struggles. The fellowship’s focus on coalition building and allyship has deepened my understanding of the work I do on my own campus, primarily with Asian American civic engagement and undocumented students’ rights. Now, I am equipped with a framework that interprets the struggle for civil and human rights as transgenerational, cross-racial, and transnational. My provincial mindset widened, because I realized more and more just how interconnected different oppressions are – how racism collides with mass incarceration, residential segregation, immigrant detention, unchecked capitalism, police brutality, border militarization, educational disparities, and neoliberalism to immortalize white supremacy.

As I saw these lines being drawn, I was confronted with the question of allyship, of how I can best be present and support movements not necessarily my own. My fear has always been that I will fall into the trap of “performing” allyship. Too often on my campus, I have seen people participate in a movement without being truly invested in it. They show up at protests for the gratification of being deemed a “good ally,” then speak over the very voices that should be centered. Yet although insincere, irresponsible allyship does more harm than good, inaction and apathy are just as poisonous. When Dr. Jacqueline Rouse said “Your presence here is the rent

you pay for the space you occupy,” I think she meant that activism is not so much a choice as it is a duty we owe to our ancestors, to our future children, and to ourselves.³ In other words, to sit idly by in times of social change is to fail to do justice to both others and ourselves.

The most profound thing I ever read about allyship was exceptionally simple: “Allyship is a verb.” Allyship means consistently demanding the best from ourselves – doing the work to educate ourselves while admitting that the work is never done. To me, the essence of allyship is what Ta-Nehisi Coates calls “questioning as ritual.”⁴ Being a good ally means humbling ourselves to constantly be self-critical of our actions and the amount of space we occupy. Especially in the context of racial justice in the U.S., where every group has been racialized and slotted into the racial hierarchy to bolster white supremacy, this kind of intentional allyship is crucial.

As a Chinese-Taiwanese American, intentional allyship means understanding how the construction of Asian Americans as “model minorities” or the “racial bourgeoisie”⁵ is a strategic move to pit minorities against each other in what critical race theorist Claire E. Kim refers to as “racial triangulation.”⁶ The prototypical, monolithic narrative of Asian American success has been manipulated to “disprove” white privilege and discredit claims of structural inequality by other racial groups. The result is that many Asian Americans have bought into the myth of meritocracy and participated in perpetuating anti-Blackness.

On my own campus, I’ve watched this pattern unfold many times over. While many students of color organized a die-in following the murders of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, our Asian Student Organization organized a ramen-eating contest.

³ Jacqueline Rouse, “Women in the Civil Rights Movement,” July 11, 2016.

⁴ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, New York: Random House (2015), 34.

⁵ Mari J. Matsuda, “We Will Not Be Used: Are Asian Americans the New Racial Bourgeoisie?” in *Where Is Your Body? and Other Essays on Race, Gender, and the Law*, Boston: Beacon Press (1996), 150.

⁶ Claire J. Kim, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans,” *Politics and Society* (1999).

Whenever I attended discussion groups on Black and Asian solidarity, I was struck by the lack of Asian faces in the crowd, especially in comparison to the room full of Black students ready to collaborate and exchange ideas. Given these dynamics, I've come to understand that intentional allyship in my context means actively working to dismantle the rampant anti-Blackness within Asian American communities. Whatever privilege we have been afforded as Asian Americans must be leveraged to oppose white supremacy, not Blackness.



I've watched many of my Asian American friends, classmates, and family members pretend they have no stake in the struggle for racial justice. To be clear, by no means do I believe that Asian Americans have always been a silent, complacent group. I do believe, however, that many of us have forgotten the history that formed us – in fact a history deeply rooted in organized resistance, from the Oxnard Strike of 1903⁷ to

⁷ United Food and Commercial Workers, "1903 Oxnard Beet Sows the Seeds of Diversity," http://www.ufcw324.org/About_Us/Mission_and_History/Labor_History/1903_Oxnard_Beet_Sows_the_Seeds_of_Diversity.

Delano Grape Strike of the 1960s⁸ to the San Francisco State strike that led to the formation of ethnic studies⁹ to the Asian American Movement of the 1980s. Most of all, I believe the lack of Asian American mobilization in support of Black lives stems from a misunderstanding of liberation and solidarity.

Most often, when we discuss liberation, we define it as something fractured along color lines: Black liberation, Brown liberation, Asian liberation. What is missing from this dialogue is the idea of liberatory solidarity, which stresses that as our oppressions are inextricably linked, so too is our liberation. Some writers have named this model of thinking as “selfish solidarity,” calling upon us to reframe standing in solidarity as standing for ourselves.¹⁰ Ultimately, I believe this is the key to sustainable coalition building – realizing that the freedom and the safety of all of us are inherently tied to the freedom and the safety of Black Americans, of undocumented immigrants, of marginalized or impoverished or oppressed people in the U.S. and around the world.

A week before the start of this fellowship, I found myself reclining in a chair at a tattoo parlor in Antigua, Guatemala. I was on one of the last legs of a six-week backpacking trip that took me through the Guatemalan highlands, down to the Pacific coast, and up the third highest volcano in Central America. To commemorate this whirlwind of a journey, I decided to get a tattoo, a small symbol of my *nahual*, or spiritual protector according to Mayan cosmovision. The meaning of this symbol, directly translated, is “to feel another’s pain as one’s own.” Having this symbol of liberatory solidarity permanently on my body challenges and reminds me to understand others’ struggles, distinct as they may be, as my own and to take others’ liberation as seriously as I take mine.

⁸ United Farm Workers, “The 1965-1970 Delano Grape Strike and Boycott,” http://www.ufw.org/_board.10482.

⁹ San Francisco State University, “Campus commemorates 1968 student-led strike,” <http://www.sfsu.edu/news/2008/fall/8.html>.

¹⁰ Sasha W., “On Selfish Solidarity,” *To Speak a Song*, <https://tospeakasong.com/2015/04/28/on-selfish-solidarity/>.

In *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates describes his hope for his son, a young Black boy coming of age in a country that seeks to negate his very existence. Coates writes: “I would have you be a conscious citizen of this beautiful and terrible world.”¹¹ Among some Asian American scholars and activists, a new refrain, articulated by Mari J. Matsuda, has emerged. Drawing inspiration from “We Shall Not Be Moved,” the title of a Black spiritual that gained popularity during the Civil Rights Movement, Matsuda insists: “We Will Not Be Used.”¹² By this she means: We, as Asian Americans, will not be used to prop up white supremacy or to devalue Black life. We will not be used to drive wedges between communities of color or to silence marginalized voices. The conscious citizenship that Coates discusses, the coalition building we have emphasized throughout these past weeks, the liberatory solidarity model we must strive to build – all of it hinges on this refusal to be used, this commitment to genuine accountability. When we refuse to be used, we participate in the active reclamation of our history, in the redefinition of our identities on our own terms, and in the struggle for truly collective liberation.

¹¹ Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 108.

¹² Matsuda, “We Will Not Be Used.”

John Lewis Fellowship 2016 | Final Essay | Eric Otieno (Germany)



Matigari at Auburn

Matigari is a fictional character in a 1987 book of the same name by renowned Kenyan novelist-in-exile Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. The character "Matigari is disappointed by what has become of his homeland, and how the masses have not yet been freed from the yoke of oppression [...]" by the ruling

party. "Meanwhile, stories about him begin to spread, as his adventures are retold and recast. He is in many respects Christ-like. He affects "an air of mystery, and some of the near-miraculous (or so at least they sound in their re-telling as they pass among the masses) happenings also help, as Matigari embraces his role to the fullest" (Orthöfer). On this sticker at the historic Auburn Avenue in Downtown Atlanta, Matigari is used either as an embodiment of, or as the saviour from a current presidential candidate.

In the following paper I will briefly reflect on my experiences and embed them in my biography, as well as briefly explore how the experience of the fellowship is likely to shape my social justice work in the future. I use a selection of my original photography taken during the fellowship to explicitly situate my perspective to local contexts in Atlanta. The John Lewis Fellowship (JLF) was indeed a transformative experience whose impact is only beginning to unfold as the programme ends. I now have a network of fellows from all over Europe and the United States who I can work with and fall back on. I will briefly discuss some of my experiences and explain why they signify my learning experience in the first part. The second part will link my experience to biographical aspects of my identities and my work.

In the first two days of the fellowship, two Black men were murdered by police officers.

The aftermath of the shootings, which have become a familiar unwritten script, played out before the country's eyes. The involved officers were reluctantly sent home pending investigations. No arrests were made, and the chances of the involved officers ever facing a jury are very slim. The anger and desperation was palpable, and thousands across the USA, including some of the JLF took to the streets to express their anger and concern. It thus remained etched in my mind when Dr. Daniel Black, in commencing his lecture, declared that:

"America is killing black People"

At the time of writing this paper, yet another black man had been shot despite lying on the ground with his hands up and calmly explaining to the police officers that he was trying to calm down an autistic patient of his who had gone out of the group home he lived in and was sitting in the middle of the street. He lived to tell his story: Upon asking the officer why he had been shot, the officer replied that he didn't know. Dr. Black infers that:

"Racism is America's Lifeblood and [that] nobody challenges it more than a black person who forgets their place"

He embeds his claim historically, citing that,

"The hierarchy of the slave ships [has become] the story of the Nation."

He speaks to a specific historical and systematic *situatedness* of racism in America, and how Race is fundamentally a defining factor for any conceptualisation of the USA.

It was an amusing surprise for me to find a sticker that spoke to (either) Matigari's salvation from or comparison to Trump. Here, the current presidential race is perceived as warranting a superhero's (Matigari's) intervention, or as having a candidate who embodies Matigari's theatrics and 'second-coming' or 'return (to greatness)' rhetoric. In a country that stylizes itself as post-racial on account of having achieved the first black presidency, Trump arguably signifies and (mis)articulates the unspoken backlash that parts of white America have been harbouring since President Obama entered the white house.

While it is clear, as Congressman John Lewis was quick to note, that claiming nothing has changed since the Civil Rights Movement would be incorrect, parallels can still be drawn between the violence that Black bodies have been subject to. According to Dr. Thomas, the mundanity of Lynching at the time fulfilled the function of...

"lending stability to whiteness in unstable times, a collective [form of] identity-building, and a dramatisation of the boundaries between power and powerlessness"

The negligible amount of police officers who are arrested or face charges after fatally shooting African-Americans on camera, reinforces the idea that wanton injustice against Black bodies is just the way it is, and that alleged police on-the-job experience of African-Americans' proneness to violence justifies blatantly criminal acts of fatal violence



~~Ode to Violence~~

Violence against people of colour has historically been associated with heritage and tradition, in America even with greatness. The irony of a

Atlanta, the city that hosts a center for non-violent social change is apparent; following Fanon, "Colonialism is violence in its natural state [...]", its purest, most absolute form (Fanon). Should violence and the oppressor be glorified, or should we restore human dignity by acknowledging and being accountable to the oppressed and their suffering? Naming Squares after them would be the very least attempt in that direction. (Strikethrough is intentional.)

The USA is a contradiction in itself. The global champion of democracy, human rights and the rule-of-law is systematically undermining these very things within its own borders. A lot of parallels can be drawn to the rise of the populists in Europe, and the death by drowning of thousands of Refugees at (fortress) Europe's borders, who come believing that Europe will be as fervent in defending their Human Rights as it is in promoting these in various countries of the Global South.

As a consequence of ongoing global developments, social justice work is no longer a choice one has the luxury of making, it is rather our responsibility as citizens. A quote by one of my fellows resonated with me in this respect.

"I did not want to be an activist. I had no choice, living in a country that constantly tells me that i shouldn't exist"

I have also learned the value and role of Allyship from the work of Mitchell Esajas who is involved in the anti-black-Pete Campaign in the Netherlands. Allyship is an important component of Social justice work, because without Allies, it can be extremely difficult to achieve concrete results, especially concerning minority issues where a large number of people feels that it is not affected,

and hence does not see the issue as being fundamental to harmonious coexistence in specific contexts.

In summary, i have learned a great deal from this fellowship, and this essay only captures a small fraction of my experiences. I believe that my experiences with the fellowship in Atlanta will sustainably shape my approach to social justice issues in the future, and provide me with resources of various forms to be able to do that work in an effective, strategic and systematic manner. I wish to express my profound gratitude for all that i have received, and all that i will continue to receive from the JLF fellows, staff and community and to state that nothing shall not go to waste. This fellowship could not have come at a more significant time and space.

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instruction could lead to in students of both Chicax and other backgrounds. When Tucson erupted in protest after the passage of HR 2281, I joined in disapproval of the bill but did not fully understand the implications of this legislation and the motivations behind it. After this fellowship, it is painfully clear to me why HR 2281 was passed, and why there continue to be intentional efforts to block or manipulate the instruction of history from a people of color lens.

Reflections

The John Lewis Fellowship has been one of the most metamorphic experiences of my life. I can sense myself walking away from Atlanta differently than when I arrived—more proud and more humble with the feeling that I have learned so much and that I have so much yet to learn. I sense my activism reenergized and maturing as I continue to digest all the ways that this extraordinary program has impacted me. Yet one of the impressions I find most present in my mind is the recognition that teaching history from the perspective of people of color has the radical power to ignite social activism.



Mural by Paula Scher at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta, GA

From day one, the strong, brilliant, passionate scholar-activists leading this program emphasized the idea of *sankofa*: reaching back to move forward. They recognized the power that history has in inspiring current generations of activists not only to better understand their positionality in the world, but also to see that oppression continues today in many of the same forms it has in the past. Moreover, they taught—and embodied—the responsibility we each have to pick up the baton of resistance left to us by our ancestors. As Dr. Daniel Black said, “The blood has demands.” We are required to be activists to improve the condition of oppressed communities in the U.S. and internationally, but also to honor and understand the groundwork that has been laid by so many that have come before us. Without knowing this history—history of and by people of color—it is far too easy to detach activism from the real world and forget one’s responsibility to the blood. Education is inextricably linked to freedom, and, in a world where our human rights are constantly being attacked or denied, we need this type of radical education—we need ethnic studies—to cultivate leaders who understand and can navigate cultural crises.

As a Chicana-Lebanese American, I craved to see my people’s history taught to me in school. I grew up in Tucson, a mestizo borderlands community infused with a blend of Mexican, Native American, Mexican American, and American cultures, but I never saw the history behind this blend translated into my curriculum. I had heard stories from my grandmother about the abuse she faced as a Mexican American child growing up in the 1940’s but I never heard anything about that reality in school. I recognized the name Cesar Chavez and his face from the murals but I never spent a day of class learning about the United Farm Workers of America or the Chicano Power Movement. And, of course, I certainly never heard a whisper about what it meant to be an Arab or Muslim American in this country beyond the occasional “Do you know any terrorists?” question. My conceptualization of the legacy of oppression and resistance from which I descended was informed entirely by my parents and the informal education they gave me. It wasn’t until my first years of college that I actually began to learn about Chicax history, and started to embrace my identity. Through this process, I felt connected to and empowered by my cultural inheritance in a way I never had before. Not coincidentally, this journey to empowerment also marked the beginning of my activism around human rights on the border. I had always had a passion for human rights, but for the first time I really felt a connection to my people and a duty to address the gross human rights abuses happening to them and other Latinxs in the region.

This is an all too common experience for children of color growing up in the U.S. We live in societies dominated by Whiteness², societies that seek to define, control, and promote narrow images of us. Through media, policy, and education, we are taught to understand ourselves through offensive stereotypes and are removed from any proud connection we may have to our racial or ethnic identity. Rewriting or completely refusing to teach our history is one of the most subtly brutal methods that have been utilized to perpetuate the narrative that people of color are small, of little contribution and little importance. Moreover, education is used to promote the idea that we live in a post-racial society where everyone is treated equally and where racism is a rarity rather than a mundane, pervasive characteristic of American culture. As Tom Horne said in an interview in 2010, “We shouldn’t teach our kids the downer that they’re oppressed” (CNN). For students of color whose daily experiences teach them the opposite, this lack of validation and historical understanding can be personally and socially destructive. As the artist Fahamu Pecou said on the last day of the fellowship, “We stick to this idea that if we stay in our lane, if we keep our head down, if we wear



“Paragraphalizer” mural by Fabian Williams, Atlanta, GA

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**2** *use the term Whiteness to refer to those, White and non-White, who implicitly or explicitly prescribe to the belief in White supremacy.*

a suit and tie, if we say “yes, sir” and “no, mam” that we’ll stay alive, but that is no life.”

I came to the John Lewis Fellowship with years of experience in human rights activism on the U.S.-Mexico border and what I believed to be a good understanding of the struggles of communities of color in the U.S. I quickly realized, however, that I absolutely didn’t have a deep enough knowledge about the history and current status of the black struggle, and that I had never explored in any real depth the inextricable connections between the long Civil Rights Movement and the Latinx struggle against oppression. I felt embarrassingly disconnected from my history and from the long legacy of solidarity and parallels that existed between the black and brown struggles for liberation. The John Lewis Fellowship’s commitment to re-learning the history of the long Civil Rights Movement inspired my own investigation into the Chicano Power Movement and similar actions. I would spend the day entrenched in exciting conversation about figures like Malcolm X and Bayard Rustin, and the night learning for essentially the first time



Brown Beret standing in solidarity with Black Panthers in 1968



about leaders like Dolores Huerta and Corky Gonzales. This continued rediscovery fostered even more pride in my identity and cultural inheritance, as well as a renewed and strengthened commitment to solidarity among oppressed people, however that oppression is manifested (i.e. racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, etc.) I am going home wanting to learn more about the Chicano legacy, to collect more personal and communal history, and translate that pride into my current activism.

The John Lewis Fellowship empowered us to understand the critical importance of history, but along those same lines, it also helped me see that the personal journey of discovery I continue to go through was something that needed to be replicated on a larger scale in order to truly ignite the widespread social activism and political engagement by people of color that the world needs. Too often, people of color in the U.S. are made to think that our voices do not matter when, in fact, in 21<sup>st</sup> century America the minority voice might actually be the largest untapped political power there is. As Dr. Beverly Tatum said when she referenced Steve Phillips’ book *Brown is The New White*, we are living in a country of rapidly shifting demographics where people of color are no longer the minority, but form a minority majority with a political powerhouse. According to Phillips, of the 8,000 people born in this country every day, 90 percent are people of color; this is a stark contrast to 1950 when 90 percent were White (Phillips). Imagine the change we could see if more young adults, both White and of color, had the knowledge of true—not whitewashed or reimagined—history in their arsenal. Imagine the social activism and refusal to accept the status quo that would result if more people meaningfully understood the historical and contemporary systems that are used to keep minority communities “in check”.

It is no coincidence that so few people in society have a meaningful understanding of history, particularly history of people of color. As I stated in the beginning of this reflection, the passage

of HR 2281 in Arizona was an intentional political agenda to keep ethnic studies out of public schools. The Whiteness power structure that dominates so many societies around the world, but specifically that controls the U.S., knows what this type of education means. It recognizes the untapped political and social power of the voice of communities of color. It fears this power. It fears what it would mean for millions of people, White and of color, to step up in coalition and dethrone Whiteness from its seat of control that it has enjoyed for centuries and believes it deserves, especially at the cost of other human beings. It is precisely out of this *fear* that the language of colorblindness and equality is being used to control access to information and the resultant pride and anger that would occur in communities of color and in White allies. Whiteness would have us not teach the history of minorities in this country for fear that it would cause division—as if institutional racism has not already perfected that role—or sow hatred against Whiteness. But as Malcolm X said, “History is not hatred.” History is reality. History is repeating itself every day. We are witnessing a fear-driven offensive pervade in our society, from the meticulous filtering of news media, to the outright banning of ethnic studies programs, to the domination of political campaigns by fear-mongering bigots who indoctrinate the masses with blatantly false information about minorities.

As John Lewis fellows we are members of a diverse community of social change-makers and activists with a vital responsibility, that is to continually educate ourselves and use that knowledge to impact those around us and to train the upcoming generation of activists who will inevitably have even more social and political power than we do today. One of my favorite quotes of all time is by the Argentine revolutionary Che Guevara when he said, “*El conocimiento nos hace responsables.*” Knowledge makes us responsible. This quote has influenced me for much of my life, but never have I felt it more applicable than I do now with this unique fellowship and cohort of leaders. We, as educated and informed activists, must be cognizant of the intentional narrative formulating around us. We need to disseminate the information we know and use our own knowledge of history—and its modern day manifestations—to expose the hypocrisy, racism, and destruction of the truth. It will not be an easy task, but as Sojourner Truth said, “I feel safe in the midst of my enemies, for the truth is all powerful and will prevail.”

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River Bunkley

John Lewis Fellowship

Humanity In Action

**A Call for Accountability: A New Vision for a Liberated Future**

*“We look back, not to become inflated with conceit because of the depths from which we have arisen, but that we may learn wisdom from experience. We look within that we may gather together once more our forces, and, by improved and more practical methods, address ourselves to the tasks before us. We look forward with hope and trust”*

*-- Anna J. Cooper*

It was fitting to me that during the first week of my Fellowship, I participated in the historic social justice practice of nonviolent protest. As activists and individuals dedicated to justice, we exist in the lineage of the liberation struggle of people of color. We are fluent in the language of resistance and resilience flows through our body, as it is part of the culture of the struggle we inherited from the warriors that came before us. Yet, as history has shown, despite our efforts, systemic oppression evolves to sustain its’ pervasive barriers that continue to make equality a far off dream rather than an attainable reality for marginalized groups. Across America, widespread apathy plagues the lives not only of the privileged, but the marginalized as well. Apathy, a lack of interest or concern, allows individuals to turn a blind eye to the ever present daily injustices we face. Apathy allows the history of erasure people of color have faced to go unaddressed and unchallenged. Apathy is a barrier to progress, covertly fueling America’s commitment to maintain rather than dismantle the systems of supremacy that exist in this country.

This now introduces the question of how do we combat systemic and individual apathy in our schools, communities, and country? Part of the answer to that question

requires something that America has never been: *accountable*. There needs to be a critical assessment of racism and power in this country, and that is not possible without a call for us to honestly examine how we all have had a hand in the history of oppression, subsequently cultivating a demand for justice and truth as the products of an accountable society.

Often times, society makes the claim that it is love that we need to heal and move forward during times of pain and strife. While this is a tempting narrative, the type of love that is often called for does not emphasize the need for truth nor address the forms of love inherent to truth. Our personal understandings of love are too individualized to emerge as the solution to global pain and oppression. Demanding accountability and justice, however, is a more progressive demand because justice is what love looks like objectively and publicly. The suppression facing our world cannot be solved by something that is not bound to universal morality, but rather by something that understands and affords every human being dignity and equity (i.e. *justice*). Moreover, truth encompasses loves; a desire for truth requires accountability and unapologetic confrontation of not only the love in this world but the hate as well - which is the essence of truth. If we do not prioritize a commitment to the responsible interrogation of societal structures and an unearthing of how both love and hate are embedded within them, then we as activists run the risk of ignoring the truth and reproducing the oppression against the lives and labor of marginalized people.

Accountability exists as a broad term that can manifest in many ways, so what does it look like for young activists striving for change? Through this John Lewis

Fellowship, it has become clear to me that every individual plays a role in dismantling oppression. Whether it is on the streets protesting, in the classroom learning, or advocating for policy reform in politics, there is a collective responsibility and effort required to eradicate systems of oppression. Investing myself in the solidarity and growth of students of color at my academic institution, sharing the knowledge I acquire with those who systematically do not have access to the opportunities I have, while challenging the present apathetic state America resides in is what I hope to dedicate my efforts to. More succinctly, I see my role play out through engaging education of myself and my community, challenging society to reimagine human rights, and work to affirm the Black identity and its intersections in all spaces I create.

Being on a college campus privileges me to the title of intellectual or scholar by simply being at Emory University. However, the term intellectual is not reserved for the academy and is not an empty term, but rather, a term that comes with responsibility to engage in public scholarship. Accountability in the academy exists as intellectualism not for a grade or degree, but as education for liberation and education for service. Education for liberation and service, requires an understanding that social justice is the work of the perpetually undone. It is a life commitment that mandates us to understand that our work will never be complete. Our relentless and persistent efforts to dismantle the system must be grounded in an acknowledgement and challenging of prejudices we have internalized through our participation in the system, which is something we will always have to work through. Furthermore, education for liberation and education for service requires for us to be selfless with the knowledge we acquire. Social justice work requires the

acknowledgement of any privileges you possess as well as the leveraging of those privileges when they can work to dismantle the system. Therefore, those privileged in to have access to academic spaces should be committed to the dissemination and production of a discourse around what they have learned. The discourse is essential to growth and truth, as it requires an open mind dedicated to the inclusion and exchange of ideas in the name of justice. Accountability is remaining malleable to learning facilitated by exposure to different perspectives, receiving constructive criticism from others, as well as engaging in self critique.

The pain of oppression perpetuated by the United States currently exists as a narrative in the margins and darkness; negated by the privileged who cling to claims of “progress” and “multiculturalism” and validated only by the individuals who know oppression and darkness as well as their own name. Reimagining human rights means confronting the biased application of the term against marginalized groups as well as combating the complete denial and exclusion of people of color’s history and experiences that comes as a result of this skewed practice. Furthermore, if Americans invested in social justice are not challenged and tasked with understanding how America’s historical dehumanization of marginalized people domestically and abroad (via colonialism) connects to the contemporary oppressions then our approach to justice will not be rooted in historical truth. To progress towards truth and freedom, we as activists and allies in our own right must constantly challenge the exclusive paradigm our society operates in, where humanity is only afforded to a certain segment of society, subsequently forcing a large population of individuals to work for something they should receive innately. It is

our duty to work to change America's commitment from one of white supremacy to one of dismantling oppression.

The erasure marginalized people face in America is not limited to their history and culture, but also their personhood and ability of self-determination. That's why, an essential part of our duty is working to make sure marginalized identities are being affirmed throughout all aspect of society marginalized people navigate. To affirm the identities of marginalized people, we must love ourselves, because when we love ourselves we are engaging in a revolutionary act, capable of the paradigm change and eradication of oppression. When we as marginalized people love ourselves, we chip away at a system that denies us any sense of self or humanity, making our inherent existence and acts self love as resistance against systems of oppression. Furthermore, I view a part of our duty as as marginalized people is to believe in our future and never settle. Refusing to settle is an act of futurity - when we choose not to settle, we are making a statement of hope; we are willingly inhabiting a space that assumes progression despite having no proof of a progressive future's existence.

“Sankofa” a word in the Twi language of Ghana, is a phrase that was used frequently throughout the John Lewis Fellowship. Literally translating as "go back and get it," Sankofa's greater meaning lies in looking back at the past, mistakes made, lessons learned, and victories won, to better equip and prepare us to work towards a more equitable, just, and true future. I believe in movements and I believe in the power of the people. And when I look back, I see a history of triumph, resilience, and greatness from

my people, and so I work now because I know I have the power to forge a future of liberation.

## “Drive the Right Car” - Critically Examining Allyship and Organization

During my first week of the John Lewis Fellowship, an Uber driver warned me to expect additional traffic, because *Fast & Furious 8* was filming car racing scenes in Atlanta. Looking back now, I find this wholly appropriate, as I can summarize my main takeaways using this metaphor of **cars and driving**. I had written an overly-sentimental application essay that included these words:

*"There is a metaphor I like... 'Passion is the fuel, skill is the vehicle.' Besides the fuel and vehicle, there is also the navigation amidst bumpy or non-existent roads, which requires direction from others. I hope to learn from the thoughtful guidance from a committed community like that of Humanity in Action."*

Additionally, during an initial discussion on group dynamics and rules of engagement, Professor Littleton and other Fellows articulated the principle of **"staying in your lane,"** which means, to me, recognizing: (i) positionality, (ii) when to listen rather than speak, and (iii) that **we may differ in the cars (differing methods, etc.) we drive, but as a collective, we are driving in the same direction (shared intent).** (1)

This principle gave me a framework for thinking about activism. The cars (opinions and means) may look different, and there are pros and cons to each vehicle - some are better for the environment, some have better safety features or mileage, and some are simply beyond my ability to afford or drive. The principle of "staying in your lane" requires a constant examination of the lane, the cars around us, the space we occupy, when to should hit the gas pedal a little harder, how to carpool, and **how to pick the right car.**

A second theme of the programmed content was an emphasis on the importance of **long-term strategic thinking** in sustaining a social justice movement. The combination of these two principles - **"Stay in your lane"** and **"Strategize for the long-term"** - create a lens through which I could observe lessons from the Civil Rights Movement ("CRM"). Two categories of observations are discussed below: **[A] strategic deployment of human capital, and [B] strategic organizational structure.**

### **[A] Strategic deployment of human capital ("how to drive carefully and stay in your lane")**

Under this first category of observations are some takeaways relevant to modern social justice movements that I learned from this Fellowship.

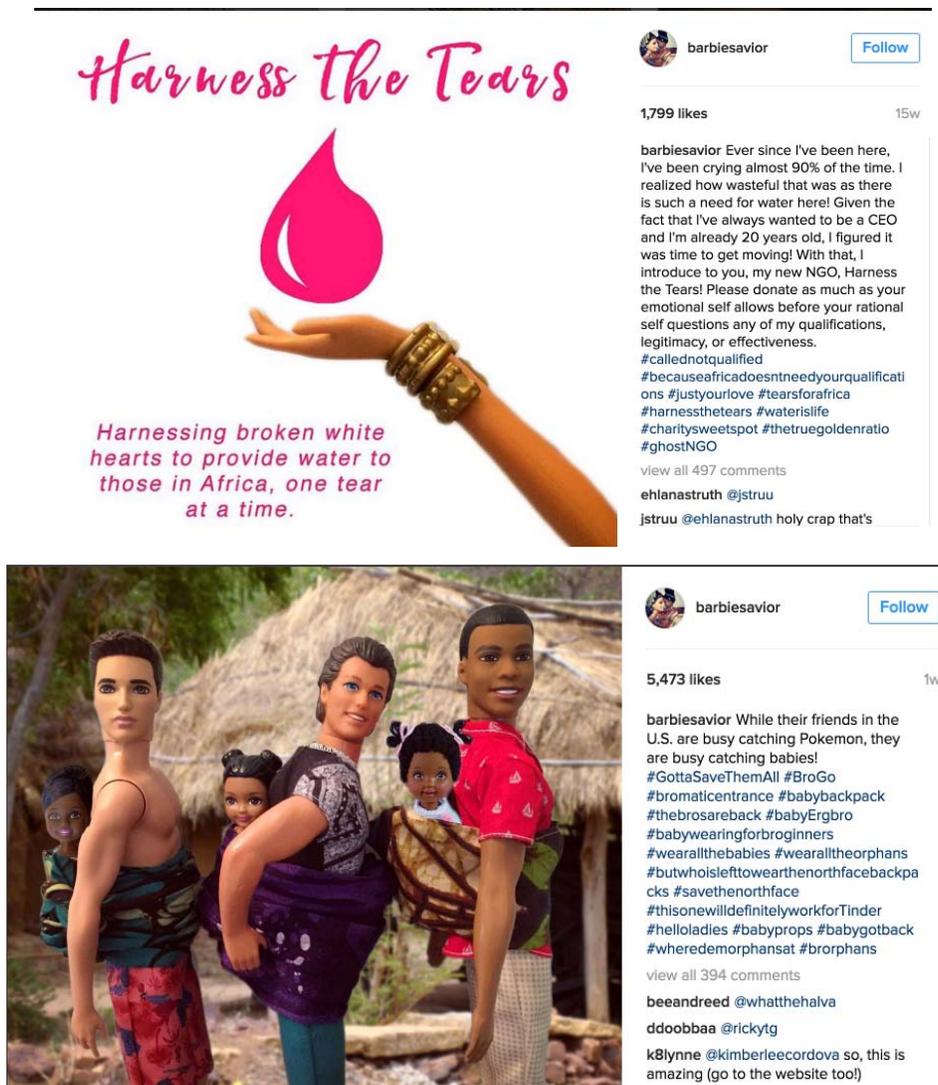
**[A.1] Self-care**, "any intentional action one takes towards one's own physical, mental and emotional well-being," **is important** not only as "a form of self-love," but also as "a form of resistance" because "living and surviving in the midst of scrutiny and violence is a radical act." (2) During the CRM, the black church provided a form of self-care and "escape from the harsh realities...blacks were temporarily free to forget oppression while singing, listening, praying, and shouting...[and] in institutional setting where oppression could be openly discussed." (3) Today, emotional burnout rates have long been a particular concern for those in the activist and/or humanitarian space; **self-care needs to be prioritized in order to sustain movements.** (4)

**[A.2] Passive ally-ship is a another name for complicity, and neutrality is another name for quiet perpetuation.** As Dr. Daniel Black puts it, "When you get to heaven and you stand before God, He won't ask you a thing about your life. He'll ask you how many other lives you've saved." (5)

**[A.3] Humility is critical to successful leadership and sustained social justice engagement.** Former Atlanta Shirley Franklin also identified humility and the flexibility to change as critical competencies (6). Community organizer Adelina Nichols advised "staying in your lane" by organizing around community needs rather than self interest, describing her own approach as "organiz[ing] in a way where, if I die tomorrow, people can easily continue to organize." (7)

It was humbling to learn about **positionality**, the understanding of "how we are positioned in relation to others...[and] where [we] stand with respect to power" - which is "an essential skill for social change agents" **and to apply the framework** to myself in the context of Fellowship group dynamics. (8) I also learned about the importance to continuously be wary of engaging in "**ally theater**" - performing on social media, for example - rather than effective and needs-based ally-ship. (9)

*Below are some satirical Instagram posts by account user "barbiesavior" poking fun at the lack of self-awareness and prevalence of behaviors such as "volun-tourism" and "ally theater performance" in so-called social impact work. (10)*



**[A.4] Social justice movements are not free of discrimination;** the historical and actual treatment of civil rights figures such as Anna Douglass, Ella Baker, and Bayard Rustin is clear evidence that leadership of social justice movements can be susceptible to perpetuating discrimination in other forms; women and the LGBTQI community in particular were often relegated to roles outside of the spotlight during the CRM.

**[A.5] Play chess, not checkers.** Rather than deploy all people and allies on the streets, strategically allocate based on long-term objectives and skillsets. **Long-term, strategic deployment of human capital (people and skills)** was a big part of the black struggle and CRM. The SCLC recognized that not everyone was best suited for demonstrations, and that some would be better deployed in other ways such as clerical work and transportation. (11) Walter White strategically pretended to be white and infiltrated Klan meetings. Adrienne, Alonzo, and Norris Herndon strategically built up business relationships with, and thus, revenue sources from, upper class whites that would eventually fund NAACP lawsuits. Bayard Rustin said "We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers" - not "obvious" troublemakers. (12) **When Ilyasah Shabazz said "Get your five friends and organize," she probably did not mean five friends with identical skillsets and networks.** (13)

An example of strategic deployment of support is the nonviolent movement commitment card; the one shown below is taken from a SCLC Newsletter (July 1963, Vol. 1, No. 10, p.4)

## All Participate In Workshops

Every one of the more than three thousand freedom fighters of Birmingham, Alabama participated in the nonviolent workshops conducted throughout the campaign. Workshop leaders included James Lawson of Memphis, Tennessee, Andy Young of Atlanta, James Bevel of Cleveland, Mississippi, C. T. Vivian of Chattanooga and Bernard Lee, all members of the SCLC staff. Prior to the massive demonstrations that finally broke the back of the resistance, those mentioned above intensively trained local Birminghamians among them William Douthard, George C. Scott and Lester Cobb. The nonviolent dialogue developed between staff and volunteers accounted directly for the well-disciplined and precise execution of the largest demonstrations in the history of the nonviolent struggle. The facsimile Commitment Blank (below) is an exact replica of those used during the Birmingham campaign.

### Commitment Blank

I HEREBY PLEDGE MYSELF—MY PERSON AND BODY—TO THE NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT THEREFORE I WILL KEEP THE FOLLOWING TEN COMMANDMENTS:

1. *MEDITATE* daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.
2. *REMEMBER* always that the nonviolent movement in Birmingham seeks justice and reconciliation—not victory.
3. *WALK* and *TALK* in the manner of love for God is love.
4. *PRAY* daily to be used by God

in order that all men might be free.

5. *SACRIFICE* personal wishes in order that all men might be free.
6. *OBSERVE* with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy.
7. *SEEK* to perform regular service for others and for the world.
8. *REFRAIN* from the violence of fist, tongue or heart.
9. *STRIVE* to be in good spiritual and bodily health.
10. *FOLLOW* the directions of the movement and of the captain on a demonstration.

I sign this pledge, having seriously considered what I do and with the determination and will to persevere.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
Please print neatly

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

NEAREST RELATIVE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Besides demonstrations, I could also help the Movement by:  
(Circle the proper items)

Run errands, Drive my car,  
Fix food for volunteers, Clerical work,  
Make phone calls, Answer phones,  
Mimeograph, Type, Print signs,  
Distribute leaflets

ALABAMA CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
Birmingham Affiliate of SCLC  
505½ North 17th Street  
F. L. Shuttlesworth, *President*

## [B] Strategic Organizational Structure ("how to pick the appropriate car")

There is a level of organizational genius and complexity in the Civil Rights Movement that is not clearly articulated in mainstream media portrayals, or many classroom textbooks. The movement was remarkable in that a number of local, community-based, and autonomous institutions were involved, rather than a single entity; the Southern Christian Leadership Conference ("SCLC") and leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. forged unity through leadership, but these individual entities did not have direct reporting structures to one body, as evidenced by both philosophical and tactical disagreements with the National Association for Advancement of Coloured People ("NAACP") and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee ("SNCC"); the significant effort managing relationships and joint action between these organizational structures may not be easily replicated in modern civil rights movements, as the CRM also had the unique institution of the black church to facilitate organization.

### [B.1] The CRM was much more strategically complex than often portrayed in mainstream society.

It was not a homogenous and/or spontaneous movement, but an organized movement with many different, local groups, organized together loosely through the church and organizations like the SCLC). (14) The aforementioned image of "different cars driving in the same lane" - perhaps with the additional image of the SCLC and church as traffic flow directors - can be used here, with the **takeaway that a heterogeneous, multi-pronged approach is a time-tested option in the "toolbox" of community organizing, and that social change agents can legitimately choose to use different organizational structures to achieve a shared vision.**

### [B.2] The way the CRM movement was organized cannot be replicated in modern society.

During the CRM, the black church served as "the institutional center" of the movement, "suppl[ying] the manpower, finances, and communication networks that brought out the indispensable mass participation." (15) Since then, the social, religious, and political landscape of America has changed; **many modern social justice movements have shifted away from a single religious source of moral authority or homogenous support base** (e.g., feminism is not confined to a single belief system or gender), and social media has permanently altered how communities organize. **The black church as the central organizing body for disseminating information and movement organization is no longer the most viable option.**

## What now?

**We are driving in entirely new terrain and infrastructure. What can we carry over and what can't we from the Civil Rights Movement in terms of organizational structure practices?**

The two takeaways previously mentioned, **which are that multi-pronged approaches are legitimate**, and that **the black church is no longer the obvious organizational structure** - leads to a number of questions, including: **"What now? What is the modern institutional center that can play the role in modern civil rights movements that the black church did during the CRM? If there is no singular source of moral authority, how can movements be organized?"** To resume language of the "stay in your lane" analogy, in other words, the black church was an incredibly effective and unique car, but now that the terrain and infrastructure have changed so dramatically, what is the best vehicle for change?

These are questions that warrant further discussion and analysis. The hypothesis I will offer here, is that **there is no perfect, or singular, replacement.** Just as there is no singularly perfect car for all drivers, so too is there no universally perfect organization structure for all social justice efforts - but we still must evaluate and pick our vehicles carefully. Thankfully, we have more tools and options (cars) than ever before.

One relatively new option to consider is utilizing the business world as both a **target of** and a **tool for positive social and political change**. Given the political and structural influence of the global financial system, it would be remiss to exclude the corporate sector from discussion. As mentioned earlier, when Ilyasah Shabazz said "**Get your five friends and organize**," she probably did not mean five friends with identical skillsets and networks; when community and advocacy organizations "get their five friends and organize," it may be **beneficial to cultivate strategic relationships with structures other than nonprofits and foundations in order to broaden resources and networks of influence**. I am optimistic that the business world can be transformed to be more human-centered, rather than profit-centered. In the last several decades, **the number of options through which social justice agents have tackled poverty relief, advocacy, and a number of other measures has grown - it is no longer a "nonprofit vs. for-profit" decision**. The tables in the Appendix below illustrates the shift in structure options, as well as a draft outline of some distinctions.

**In other words, the number of vehicles has increased dramatically, and the corporate sector deserves consideration for a few reasons:**

- 1. A multi-pronged approach is necessary to tackle systemic harms**, and business is a legitimate tool that can, for example, challenge how financial systems and capitalism affect minority communities;
- 2. In some instances, financial sustainability may be more appropriately achieved through a structure other than a non-profit;**
- 3. There are new partnership opportunities**. Just as the NAACP held a relationship with the family behind the Atlanta Mutual Insurance Association that resulted in significant financial support, **cultivating good relationships with a variety of organizational structures can lead to shared resources and networks**; private foundations are no longer the only sources of investments in nonprofits;
- 4. Not all social change agents or agendas are suited to the same type of work. Part of "staying in your lane" is recognizing capabilities and limitations - in some instances, these alternative structures may be the more strategic fit for some**. For example, a Limited Liability Corporation has the option to lobby politically and typically has greater financial strength (via profit) than a non-profit, but is likely not the optimal structure for physically executing community programming and local poverty relief. (16)
- 5. If neo-capitalism is "slow motion white supremacy," as Opal Tometti describes, then at the very least, greater communication channels and engagement between advocacy organizations and the corporate sector may generate further clarity on next steps and potential solutions.**

## Conclusion

For my personal "what now?" - this program has encouraged me to master hard skills in order to be a resource. As business and data seem to be "my lane" I am going to master data analytics in order to produce analyses, data visualization, and storytelling that can aid social justice and philanthropic movements in the future. As a human capital consultant, I will bring this deepened understanding of racial and economic prejudice into my work, which involves evaluating fair market pay for jobs and objective performance evaluation criteria. As an individual, I will be more involved in the activist spaces in my home community, and invest in my relationships to communicate the ideas of privilege and structural inequality.

Thank you to Dr. Karcheik Sims-Alvarado, Ufuk Kahya, Professor La'Neice Littleton, and Raphael Schoeberlein for this phenomenal experience. Gratitude to Dr. Judith Goldstein, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, Humanity In Action, the city of Atlanta, and Dr. Roslyn Pope for all that they have done.

APPENDIX:

| Traditional                            |                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Organization Type                      | Description                                                                                                                                                              | Social Contribution Examples                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Traditional NFP and foundations</b> | NFP: Public charities, civic leagues, community development corporations<br>Foundation: Primarily invests and grants money to other organizations to execute programming | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Robin Hood Foundation (invests in multiple programs and NFPs to tackle poverty in NYC)</li> <li>◆ World Vision (poverty, disaster relief)</li> <li>◆ Carnegie Hall (performing arts)</li> </ul> |
| <b>Typical For-Profit</b>              | Profit focused, geared towards shareholders                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Apple</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                |

| Emerging                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Organization Type                                                                     | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Social Contribution Examples                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Traditional NFP and foundations</b>                                                | NFP: Public charities, civic leagues, community development corporations<br>Foundation: Primarily invests and grants money to other organizations to execute programming                                                                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Robin Hood Foundation (invests in multiple programs and NFPs to tackle poverty in NYC)</li> <li>◆ World Vision (poverty, disaster relief)</li> <li>◆ Carnegie Hall (performing arts)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Solutions-focused NFP</b>                                                          | NFP focused on systemic solutions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Teach for America (educational inequality)</li> <li>◆ B Lab (certifies B corporations)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>NFP with for-profit business units / Hybrids</b>                                   | NFP may operate as the holding company over a for-profit entity; or partnership between NFP and FP entities                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Challenge Workforce Solutions (barriers to employment for minorities and disabled)</li> <li>◆ AFCU (American First Credit Union; financial literacy and banking)</li> <li>◆ Greystone Bakery (FP employs disadvantaged, affil. with Greystone Foundation the NFP)</li> <li>◆ Delancey Street Foundation (operates a FP employing ex-cons and ex-addicts, fights recidivism)</li> </ul> |
| <b>For-Profit with a social mission, low-profit limited liability companies (L3C)</b> | "Allows companies to achieve modest profits while operating under a business model that emphasized impact over profits. L3Cs were specifically designed to help social entrepreneurs raise capital from a much broader range of investors than are typically attracted to traditional NPOs [non-profit org.]" (17) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Grameen Bank (NGO, microfinance and community development bank)</li> <li>◆ D.light (affordable solar-powered solutions)</li> <li>◆ Aspire Food Group (food security and jobs, using insects)</li> <li>◆ Maine's Own Organic Milk (L3C, small farmers, organic farming)</li> </ul>                                                                                                      |
| <b>Values Driven Business (B-Corp certified Benefit Corporations)</b>                 | "B Corps are for-profit companies certified by the nonprofit B Lab to meet rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency." (18)                                                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Ben and Jerry's (sustainable food, climate change)</li> <li>◆ Warby Parker (access to affordable glasses)</li> <li>◆ Breckinridge Capital Advisors (investment advisory)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>For-Profit with affiliated values-driven business, NFP, etc.</b>                   | May include Limited Liability Corporations (e.g., allowed to lobby lawmakers whereas NFP cannot)                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Bain &amp; Bridgespan (top tier management consulting firm; supports Bridgespan, nonprofit consulting)</li> <li>◆ Gray Ghost Ventures (impact investments)</li> <li>◆ Chan Zuckerberg Initiative</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                            |

|                                                       |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>/ Limited Liability Corp.</b>                      |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Typical For-Profit</b>                             |  | Profit focused, geared towards shareholders                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | ◆ AIG, who had the audacity to sue the US gov't after getting a bailout from US taxpayers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>Can invest in/partner with range of org. types</i> |  | Impact investing: focuses on both for-profit companies that have an explicit intent to have social impact via their business model or practices (which we called for-profit "social" enterprises) and nonprofits with revenue and earned income streams<br>Venture Capital | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Omidyar Network (gov't transparency, property rights, microfinancing)</li> <li>◆ Goldman Sachs Social Impact Bond</li> <li>◆ Arabella Advisors</li> <li>◆ Tideline (e.g., evaluated effectiveness of Ford Foundation's grants)</li> <li>◆ Gray Ghost Ventures (microfinance, affordable education)</li> </ul> |

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*Transformational read-in(g)s. Reading as a form of activism*

Malgorzata Leszko

I have never taken any particular pride in being a part of groups into which I was born. Growing up, few things did I find more ridiculous than rooting for a national sports team or emotional celebrations of tragic past events that shaped the history of the country I happened to belong to. I rejected Polish patriotism with its mystical view on ancestry and ethnicity at the core. What, other than my passport, made me entitled to feel pride, grief or shame for something experienced by people to whom my only connection was the language: a set of grammar rules and vocabulary that defined the mental boundaries of our worlds? Why, standing in a classroom and singing Polish national anthem, was I expected to feel an almost spiritual sense of unity with 25 individuals?

Refusal to think of myself in terms of my roots was, then, an act of personal liberation. It meant asserting the freedom to shape my identity, to own responsibility for my actions rather than to hide in the mystic world of „we” - a plural pronoun that brings the comfort of belonging to a lineage of kings, generals, poets, inventors and rock stars.

Pronoun so vague, never explained, yet always understood. Because to say „we” is to imply the existence of „them”, and to draw a circle for those who are a part of it is to draw a line of exclusion. Hungarian writer, Peter Zilahy, wrote: „If the US is a human melting pot, Eastern Europe is a scrap yard” (Zilahy). Coming from a region tragically marked by systematic genocide and forced displacement of millions, as well as by bestial, chaotic acts of ethnic violence, I viewed roots as a gateway to nationalism that would inevitably lead to exclusion. The great pride of small countries (a typical feature of Central and Eastern Europe) was grotesque as much as it was dangerous. In my perception, our overattachment to the origins was why, 70 years after the end of WW2, we still didn't have a transnational history book to tell our shared past and its influence on the current shape of Europe.

For this reason, my approach towards ethnicity was always cautious, and my understanding of an open, inclusive society was based on a notion that while descent and ancestry are interesting facts in a family tree, true patriotism stems from conscious participation in shared values of democratic, civic state.

This is why the fellowship, with its emphasis on roots as a part of identity, has been challenging from the first days. The attention given to blood bonds—from Daniel Black's novel *The Coming*, through numerous lectures, up to personal conversations about other fellows' identity, slowly made me realize that my stance was coming from a place of privilege. While my race, both back

in Poland and here in America, most of the times goes unnoticed as the dominant (in the meaning to which Derrida refers to in his theory of deconstruction), element of the racial binary, almost as a transparent state of non-race, this invisibility is not some-thing a person of color would usually receive. Their race or ethnicity is met by questions and the desire to categorize and validate: to put a value on their personal abilities and character as well as on their culture. The program made me realize the healing potential of connecting to one's roots and being immersed into their own culture. I sensed this therapeutic value of honoring individual stories and transforming them into a shared, collective memory of the oppressed community in Radcliffe Bailey's collage (Date of Arrival), and in the celebratory, strong images of African American women portrayed as icons by Charmaine Minniefield. While I sought liberation in rejection of national myth, for a minority group empowerment can come from listening to the true, overlooked or suppressed, voices of their ethnic and ancestral legacy.

This suppression plays an important role in maintaining the structure of power in today's society. First, it allows society not to be confronted with the original sin of America's founders: the genocide of Native Americans and enslavement of Africans. Historic portrayals of both these groups as noble or ignoble savages (carefully conserved by modern society), together with the outdated yet still popular nature vs. binary, serve as an implicit justification of settlers' brutality. If one supposedly live in a state of nature, then colonization and enslavement can be seen as elevating them to the state of humanity, and therefore is not only acceptable but also charitable. Nature is supposed to be an ahistorical (prehistoric) condition, as history can be interpreted as a process of constructing and assigning meaning to a continuous, unrestrained flow of life that we recognize as events. The absence of culture, therefore, implies no collective memory, no tradition extending beyond here and now, no conscious recognition of one's place in time.

The consequences this have extended far beyond historic significance, which brings me to the second point. To deny African and Native Americans their culture, while also ignoring the systematic destruction of social structures, languages, religion, family bonds done by a white man, is to claim that every manifestation of culture in modern America is a deed of European descendants. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. This notion, which we owe to David Hume (Hume 198-199), is an axiom of the contemporary Western World.

Although not explicitly stated, it runs through our culture, perpetuating the narrative of inferiority, inducing a feeling of shame on marginalized minorities and justifying their underprivileged position in the system. When Ta-Nehisi Coates says „The larger culture's erasure of black beauty was intimately connected to the destruction of black bodies” (Coates 44), I believe he refers as much to physical beauty of black features, hair, and figure, as to the beauty of language, music, customs and other forms of African American cultural universe disregarded by the society.

How does this apply to my home context and my work? Coming from a country where 97% of the population identifies as Polish, and 87% as catholic means the minorities – on top of not receiving the recognition of their culture's value – often don't even get the visibility. On the other hand, as a seemingly homogenous society, Polish people tend to exclude other viewpoints and perspective, since the number of individuals to hold them accountable for this omission is still relatively low. Yet the eurocentrism is so deeply embedded in our discourse, our institutions, and our curriculum. How can you truly adopt the perspective, widespread in history books across Europe, that the world extended with European descendants discovering its existence? How is it that someone can claim to be well educated, with a university diploma to confirm that, and yet be oblivious of cultural achievements outside Europe and North America? As for 2016, students in Poland don't have a single book on their reading list that has not been authored by a person outside the Western world, throughout 12 years of education. Nor there is a single book written by a Ukrainian, a Belarusian, a Roma, a Lithuanian and other ethnic minorities living in our country. On the other hand, foreign-written books include *Robinson Crusoe*, *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Around the World in 80 days*, as well as a large number of Polish literary works containing stereotypical, to say the least – depictions of other ethnicities. A perfect example would be a historical novel *With Fire and Sword*, penned in a colonial-like fashion and portraying Ukrainians as an uncivilized and violent mob of men. This title, beloved by generations and perceived as a classic work in the Polish literary canon, is often accused of spiking the antagonism between Poles and Ukrainians in the end of the 19th century (Sadaj 162).

Standing in the historic Ebenezer Church, I was looking at the stained glass windows and the subtle play of lights and colors on the floor. A long time ago a similar experience made me realize the deceitful, treacherous beauty of stained glass. While windows are built with the purpose of showing us the outside world, stained glass is not made with the intention to allow the light inside, but rather to control it. If our education is a window to the world, then it is a stained glass window. We need a real window so that we can let the harsh light, at first painfully bright, inside. We need an alternative education that will equip young people with a critical approach towards our „empire of signs”: our history, our art, literature and the political ideas which are imposed on us at schools with a „made in Poland” label.

But we need more than deconstruction. Ta-Nehisi Coates quotes Ralph Wiley's ingeniously simple answer to famous Bellow's question („Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus?”): Tolstoy is the Tolstoy of the Zulus (Coates 56). Rather than just explaining our empire of signs, we should recreate it so that the Zulus become its part. As long as we present our biased set of criteria used to estimate the value of cultural works and practices (along with the concept of culture itself) as an objective, transparent standard of quality, we will be living in a small room behind a stained glass. A crack in that window has been made by the emergence of ethnic studies, but so far their work doesn't seem to be translating into the broader society.

How can I play a role in this change? What is my „medium of transformation”, as Dr. Daniel Black referred to it? I am a graduate in literature and I am passionate about education, I can, therefore, see myself at the intersection between the two. Ideally, the change I am hoping for would include a radical change of national curriculum towards a syllabus that meets 4 criteria:

#### 1) CRITICAL READING

We need a critical approach focused on uncovering the hidden assumptions and power structures of the text (in other words, rather than asking what author wanted to say, we should be asking what he/she said although they didn't want to).

#### 2) DIVERSE AUTHORS

We need to read a selection of great works representing literature from various backgrounds, with a provision of cultural context, provided by experts or scholars rooted in the community/culture discussed.

#### 3) DIVERSE CHARACTERS

We need literary works that depict characters differing by ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious identity and other aspects of identity.

#### 4) MEANINGFUL LITERATURE

We need socially engaged texts that can help us understand the pressing problems both in our own communities and in different parts the world, as well as their interconnectedness on a global level.

I am in no doubt that given the current political situation in my country, as well as the mainly conservative society, advocating for this change on a systemic level could not bring any positive outcome. What can be achieved though is forming a basis for a creeping revolution through grassroots activism. This may happen through a movement of local reading clubs in the communities focused on non-scholars, or through similar institutions on an academic level, or it can come from an effort to provide diversified reading lists to teachers willing to challenge the monolithic curriculum in their classrooms. It can also include a pressure on city libraries to purchase and promote texts written by authors of diverse ethnic origin, or by campaign such as We Need Diverse Books, focused on increasing the representation of diverse characters in children books.

Let's read-in!

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Ana Jovanović, University of Sarajevo

Humanity in Action Essay

### **Exclusion politics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brexit case study and USA**

In this essay I will try to articulate the problems of the political rhetoric of fear of globalization through the lens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, The United Kingdom and USA elections. I know it seems like a lot but bear with me.

I'm going to start with a decade old hot topic in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the constitution. It was made by prominent members of the international community locking up the main political actors of the '91-'95 war and making them rethink their actions, hence the Dayton Agreement was made and it would be the first constitution that is also a peace agreement. Fast forward twenty-one years and the country is locked in a political paralysis with the constitution judged as a violation of Human Rights three times by the European Court of Human Rights, first time in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

These cases were connected to the election law that states only constituent peoples (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs) can be considered for presidency. The country has always been on the crossroads between East and West, being previously invaded by Ottoman Empire for about five centuries, followed by the Austrian Hungarian Empire and the willing accession to Yugoslavia. During all this time, it was also a sanctuary for Sephardic Jews and many other European minorities. This created a very complex society that many locals like to call a « melting pot of cultures », coincidentally a word used to describe USA too.

Unfortunately, nowadays the focus is only on the three constituent peoples (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats), putting aside the needs of minorities and the three peoples themselves being a minority in different parts of the country.<sup>2</sup> These conditions were agreed upon in peace treaty. The system where people are chosen based on their religious and ethnic background has

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<sup>1</sup> European Court of Human Rights, Press country profile: Bosnia and Herzegovina [http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/CP\\_Bosnia\\_and\\_Herzegovina\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/CP_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina_ENG.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The status of constituent peoples and Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/469cbfd80.pdf>

proven not to be the most efficient since those characteristics don't necessarily make a good leader.<sup>3</sup> It has created a segregated state where each group blocks the progress of another based on the logic that it may be bad for « us » but it's worse for « them », bringing back the 1990's rhetoric of « us » vs « them » and neglecting the fact that it's still one country, under one umbrella government.<sup>4</sup>

This rhetoric isn't isolated to Bosnia and Herzegovina, but is prevalent in other Western countries; the actors may be different but the effect is the same. Transitioning to the UK with the words of British Ambassador to BiH, explaining the obvious blame of political will to solve these issues, « But the Presidents are the heads of their parties — and it is their job to lead. »<sup>5</sup>

Almost a month ago, on July 24th, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union.<sup>6</sup> The leave campaign was heavily based on the fear of the British people of « foreigners » taking their jobs. It had a general language that appeals to broader masses promising everything and nothing in particular. For example the leave campaign stated that « a huge amount of money is going to the EU and wouldn't it be great if that same amount went to health care? », explaining after the referendum that they don't really have the means to do this.<sup>7</sup>

However, the UK may never exit the European Union because Article 50<sup>8</sup> has to be triggered which is left to the next Prime Minister, since David Cameron resigned.<sup>9</sup> The data shows that

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<sup>3</sup> Pod Lupom, election irregularities statistic <http://www.podlupom.org/en/nepravilnosti.php#5>

<sup>4</sup> Bosnians applaud as their neighbors cows perish  
<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bosnians-applaud-as-their-neighbours-cows-perish-07-21-2016>

<sup>5</sup> MOSTAR: Time to restore democracy  
<http://blogs.fco.gov.uk/edwardferguson/2016/08/02/mostar/>

<sup>6</sup> Ted Talk, Alexander Betts: Why Brexit Happened and what to do next  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/alexander\\_betts\\_why\\_brexit\\_happened\\_and\\_what\\_to\\_do\\_next#/t-947729](https://www.ted.com/talks/alexander_betts_why_brexit_happened_and_what_to_do_next#/t-947729)

<sup>7</sup> Nigel Farage: £350 million pledge to fund the NHS was 'a mistake'  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/24/nigel-farage-350-million-pledge-to-fund-the-nhs-was-a-mistake/>

<sup>8</sup> Article 50 by Lisbon Treaty means any state can withdraw from the EU in accordance with the state's constitutional requirements

<sup>9</sup> Will article 50 ever be triggered? <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/26/who-will-dare-pull-trigger-article-50-eu>

people from areas which benefit the most from EU programs are the ones who voted to leave. The general public says they weren't quite sure of the pros and cons of leaving and this crisis could potentially result in some of the territories of the Kingdom making their own referendums for independence. It should also be noted that this referendum was non binding. The referendum emboldened racists to speak more loudly, as it was pointed out by complaints.<sup>10</sup>

Across the ocean the presidential elections are culminating in the US with two candidates. Now, I am too young to have followed all of the previous elections across the ocean but what people are saying is that there has never been an election like this. While I can see the sensation of potentially having a first female President and a first orange President, my focus is more on what does the « rise of Trump » mean and how does it compare to Brexit and Bosnian context. When people feel a big change they turn to leaders for guidance. Unfortunately globalization has left some folks behind who were unable to reap the benefits of an on-growing global market, easy access to information, exchange programs, etc. This created a whole new minority who feel excluded from this conversation and threatened by the changing demographics. Which would pretty much be the oversimplification for all three cases and most visible in the USA. Dr. Kim further explains that this group might be the middle class in high income countries.<sup>11</sup>

Many would argue, including people such as Derrick Kayoing of the NCCHR, that the sole reason why the USA is strong is because of the variety of cultures coming and bringing different perspectives. While that is the liberal popular opinion of today, unfortunately this is not the first time in US history where there was advocacy and actual implementation of migrant exclusion and racist laws.<sup>12</sup> Main motto of Trumps campaign is building a wall to keep the Mexicans out and of course making them pay for it. This argument completely neglects the fact that there is a wall at the border, but that doesn't seem to matter.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Brexit: Increase in racist attacks after EU referendum  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/brexit-increase-racist-attacks-eu-referendum-160628045317215.html>

<sup>11</sup> The answer to anger over globalization is not xenophobia  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p043h3qb>

<sup>12</sup> Jim Crow laws of the 1940s-50s American South and Chinese exclusion act of 1882

<sup>13</sup> Illegal Immigration: Current Length of US-Mexico Border wall  
<http://www.newsmax.com/FastFeatures/U-SMexico-border-wall/2015/09/04/id/673637>

To conclude with some counter arguments: in Bosnia and Herzegovina not all policies are far right, but the segregation rhetoric is strong. For example just recently the anti-discrimination law was amended to offer protection to inter-sex people and LGBTIQ community.<sup>14</sup> Back to UK, vote to leave won with only about 4% difference. Leave campaign also made some other arguments like security concerns and economic growth because the decrease in value of the Euro is directly affecting the UK. Furthermore, Trump isn't running unopposed and there is a speculated string of hope that the populist politics of Trump is only there for sensational purposes.<sup>15</sup> These are also facts that should be taken into account.

So, what do we do to combat the rise of right wing parties and segregation policies? We need to think of « global inclusion ». It is a term coined by former UN Secretary General Kofi Anan to refer to ensuring globalization benefits (economic, political and social) to a wider population within the « global village ».<sup>16</sup> The task now is to address this issue by engaging people from various backgrounds: all classes, rural areas, urban areas, young and old, etc. with the benefits that come with an exchange of culture.<sup>17</sup>

Young activists can't afford to live in the « liberal bubble » anymore, the issues of rural communities and disappearing middle class must be addressed. We can't stay silent while separate but equal laws are trying to find their place in the 21st century. In the risk of sounding overly dramatic, I'm going to finish up with a quote from Pastor Martin Niemoller from the Holocaust Memorial museum:

**« FIRST THEY CAME FOR THE SOCIALISTS, AND I DID NOT SPEAK OUT— BECAUSE I WAS NOT A SOCIALIST.**

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<sup>14</sup> BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA AMENDS ITS ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAW; INTERSEX PEOPLE OFFERED PROTECTION FOR THE FIRST TIME <http://www.lgbti-era.org/latest-news/bosnia-herzegovina-amends-its-anti-discrimination-law-intersex-people-offered-protection-for-the-first-time>

<sup>15</sup> In 1988, Oprah Asked Donald Trump If He'd Ever Run For President. Here's How He Replied. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/donald-trump-oprah-show us 55b691b9e4b0074ba5a5a7a0](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/donald-trump-oprah-show-us_55b691b9e4b0074ba5a5a7a0)

<sup>16</sup> N YALE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS, SECRETARY-GENERAL PLEADS CAUSE OF 'INCLUSIVE' GLOBALIZATION <http://www.un.org/press/en/2002/SGSM8412.doc.htm>

<sup>17</sup> There are really two Americans. Urban one and a rural one. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/10/21/there-really-are-two-americas-a-urban-one-and-a-rural-one/>

**THEN THEY CAME FOR THE TRADE UNIONISTS, AND I DID NOT SPEAK OUT— BECAUSE I WAS NOT A TRADE UNIONIST.  
THEN THEY CAME FOR THE JEWS, AND I DID NOT SPEAK OUT— BECAUSE I WAS NOT A JEW.  
THEN THEY CAME FOR ME—AND THERE WAS NO ONE LEFT TO SPEAK FOR ME. »**

In my opinion, it is the duty of the new generation, the Millennials as people call it, to create an environment where conflicts are not avoided but are seen as an opportunity to grow through civic engagement. The duty to leave the world a little better than we found it. In the words of one of the John Lewis Fellows « Love is the biggest form of resistance, not encouraging the system, not continuing the cycle of bitterness » and it's how I chose to understand when John Lewis says « Love your enemy like a brother ». You don't run from a family conflict, you confront it. Our respective nations and all the fellow citizens in them are our family, even when we don't agree we live in a global village and isolation is not a sustainable response.

**« WE HAVE TO CALL UPON OUR MEDIA TO DROP THE LANGUAGE OF FEAR AND BE TOLERANT TO ONE ANOTHER » - ALEXANDER BETTS**

Love is resistance.

... And civic engagement. Please vote. Four years is a lot.

Within the Humanity in Action John Lewis Fellowship, I have been struck by the types of questions that I have been brought to sit with through the learning sessions.

“What do I want?”

“Who is my oppressor?”

“Who is my friend?”

These questions have required me to rethink the ideas with which I entered this program. I come from a very Black background. By that I mean that I live in a predominantly Black community, went to an all Black college, and organize in an all Black organization. I have never spent much time in a community as racially diverse as the one provided by this fellowship. This was I came in with assumptions that were immediately challenged.

Over time, I have studied and become a student of Black queer feminism. I feel it is helpful to discuss the history and necessity of this philosophy in order to better relay my point of view. Maria Stewart, a free black woman from Hartford, Connecticut, was the first American woman to speak in public to a mixed crowd regarding women’s rights. She wrote a speech to the black community regarding the negative responses of black ministers regarding their disdain for her speaking out as a woman. This was one of the first examples of a Black woman having to address the sexism within the Black community. Frances Harper, a free Black woman from Baltimore and a member of the Underground Railroad, had to work to have white women address racism within the American context and even within the suffragist movement. Historically, the Black church has spewed vitriol rhetoric against the queer community constantly blaming queer people for the destruction of Black society and condemning those folk to an eternal damnation. Black woman – especially queer Black women have consistently been called to pick a side. Are you a woman first? Are you Black first? Are you queer first? With which team will you side? But the issue is that we are Black women all the time and at the same time. I cannot be one without being the other. It is a unique intersection of identities that few truly care to understand.

Thus, Black women had to create a new framework for understanding and articulating their position in life. It became necessary to take that liberation process into their own hands because there was no other group that could or would fight for them. Black feminism has a few constant premises as articulate in “Words of Fire: An Anthology of Black Feminist Thought” as compiled by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. These ideas are as follows: “1) Black women experience a special kind of oppression and suffering in this country which is racist, sexist, and classist because of their dual racial and gender identity and their limited access to economic resources; 2) This ‘triple jeopardy’ has meant that problems, concerns, and needs of black women are different in many ways from white women and black men; 3) Black women must struggle for black liberation and gender equality simultaneously; 4) There is no

inherent contradiction in the struggle to eradicate sexism and racism as well as the other “isms” which plague the human community, such as classism and heterosexism; 5) Black women’s commitment to the liberation of blacks and women is profoundly rooted in their lived experience.”

I was a student at Spelman College when the Black Lives Matter movement truly began. It was very often that our protests would begin at Morehouse College – the all male institution – and would be run solely by men with little interest in input from women. But something changed. There was a shift in the systematic power dynamics from my point of view. The Black Lives Matter international organization was started by three women – two of whom identify as queer. The organization is run in a non-centralized fashion, but in order to be an official chapter – that chapter must be recognized by the central office. This gave the women in charge a great deal of power and a strong position to ensure that the people who are running the local chapters are working to operate in a way that does not further promote racism, sexism, homophobia, or other forms of oppression within the movement. I was so surprised by this change in the narrative and was more inspired to take part in this movement than ever before.

I moved to Washington, D.C. and joined an organization called the Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100). The organization made it very explicit that it worked with a Black, queer, feminist lens meaning that in all of the organizing that the group does – it works to center the marginalized voices within a marginalized community. With that in mind, we often center the voices of women, LGBTQ folks – especially Black trans women, and femmes. Right now we are working on a school-to-prison pipeline campaign that will focus especially on the ways that Black girls and LGBTQ youth are criminalized in the educational system and pushed into the correctional system.

The issue that I have seen and what concerns me the most came about the future of the movement is an idea that arose during the conversation with Professor Daniel Black. He noted that he did not like the idea of screaming the mantra of black lives matter because he did not think that it was important to try to convince white people of this truth. However, I don’t know that we are only stating this mantra for white people. I think we are also saying it to ourselves. To Black people.

I remember the night that the George Zimmerman verdict came out as clearly as I remember this morning. I sat in the car with a friend from Spelman. We felt sure that the jury would come back with the only right verdict of non-guilty. When we heard that the defendant would instead walk free. We sat there in stunned silence. We didn’t say a word to each other – because we knew there were truly no words worth saying in that moment. It was almost like a moment of silence. For what – I’m not exactly sure. But I understand feeling hurt and helpless and hopeless. People in the street are acting to prove to others, to each other, and often to ourselves – that our lives matter. And I support that.





Kassandra Valles

University of Kansas

John Lewis Fellowship 2016

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My previous work and research has focused on museums and cultural heritage, primarily recognizing their role as an institution to preserve and educate. While I still believe that museums are imperative for cultural preservation, I realize now that I was limiting the role of art and museums. I saw museums as a means to preserve and memorialize something which had already been lost, rather than as tools of activism. I viewed them as more reactionary, versus proactive in dealing with contemporary issues. Furthermore, I remained highly uncritical of museums' efforts to undo hegemonic narratives in their exhibitions. After the John Lewis Fellowship, I am more cognizant of the proactive nature of museums and their increasing responsibility in activism and solidarity building. I also realize now that as an academic, I have a higher social responsibility both to produce research that challenges Westernized discourses of history and criticize institutions, such as museums, who may still be holding on to antiquated historical narratives.

It is the role of museum staff and scholars to conduct veracious research and counteract the "white gaze" narrative of history that has dominated academic fields and depict historical figures as evolving and non-stagnant. Since their inception, museums have served as Eurocentric institutions focused on extracting non-Western cultures from their context and displaying them in exotized manners. Museums have made tremendous strides in decolonizing themselves, but not enough has been done and they continue to ignore the identities of underrepresented communities. To begin this work, museums should deviate from traditional design techniques and towards more participatory methods. One problem with traditionalist museums is that they may fall victim to tokenism and produce work that is "oversimplified, reified notions of representativeness, identity, public, and community" (Fouseki 2010, Lynch 2011). Thus, museums are encouraged to lend greater agency to communities. One method is to increase participatory methodology, which provide "opportunities for diverse visitor co-produced experiences" (Simon 2009). One example of participatory methods is the Lunch Counter Simulator at the "Rolls Down like Water: The American Civil Rights Movement" exhibition at the



National Center for Civil and Human Rights. While the purpose of the interpretation station is the same, no two individuals will experience it equally.

Even with more participatory methods, museums still suffer from predisposed notions of classism and elitism, which may hinder their efforts of activism and solidarity building. Therefore, scholars, artists, and museums must work together to increase accessibility and break down these notions. As it was mentioned in the fellowship, art can be intimidating because audiences may not know what to look for in aesthetic terms, but that does not mean that audiences are not able to garner meaning in other ways. As a History major, I personally struggle with this because I have not been trained in the traditional sense to analyze art. Although I am not trained, that does not mean that I cannot relate to art and build emotional connections with it. Accessibility can be increased by numerous means, including making the collections relevant to communities and focusing on community outreach.

Museums can only function as agents of activism if the information being disseminated is relevant to the community. The National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta, Georgia is making strides in diversifying their staff, exhibitions, and outreach. But for museums whose focus is not solely on historically marginalized communities, diversification must be emphasized. It is essential that more exhibitions focus on underrepresented and marginalized people. Not enough exhibitions exist which focus on the Latino, Black, Native American, immigrant, and LGBTQIA experience. When creating exhibitions and outreach, polyvocality is key. Diverse scholars, members of the community, and curators must work collaboratively to produce the most relevant material possible and disseminate it to their targeted audiences through community outreach.

Community outreach can range from Pre-K programs to programs for older adults. On the university level, museums should focus on interdisciplinary outreach, which creates relevancy among all disciplines. Furthermore, museum staff should be well-equipped to provide necessary materials and resources to scholars looking to enhance their research. The work of scholar-activists can be enhanced by utilizing art in their works. However, activism is not just limited to college-aged and older audiences. As Atlanta based artist Tabia Lisenbee-Parker discussed, she is increasingly interested in activism for children. She works with The Capture Project to provide cameras to children in order for them to document their life and identity building. Numerous museums, such as the Center for Civil and Human Rights, offer programs targeted towards underserved youth and they offer online interpretation material for all ages. At many museums, such as the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, MO, programming is available for English language learners, as well as accessibility programs with people with disabilities. Expanding the breadth of museum and exposing more diverse audiences to art produces more engaged and informed potential activists.

Museums and galleries can increase their role in activism by employing local artists and communities. For example, Dr. Maurita Poole (Director, Clark Atlanta University Art Gallery) focused on showcasing local artists from Atlanta to increase community solidarity and involvement. In her vision for the future of the gallery, she hopes to create better cohesion with the University and the gallery, and provide an interactive space for artists and students. This is something that I see lacking, especially among larger, well-endowed museums and galleries in my communities. The lack of emphasis on local art has created great disassociation between the art displayed at the gallery and the communities which are experiencing the art.

While the John Lewis Fellowship has transformed the way in which I view the role of art and art museums, it has also brought forth challenges. While reading Equal Justice Initiative's *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, it was stated that no memorials or markers exist to memorialize the victims of lynching in Atlanta. While I believe that it is important to memorialize the victims, I struggle with determining whose responsibility it is to erect these memorials and monuments. Is it my right as an outsider to lead these movements? Do outsiders have the right to tell a community how it should deal with transgenerational psychological trauma? After discussing these matters during the

Fellowship, I believe that outsiders have the responsibility to form coalitions and allyships and work alongside movements, rather than lead them. A second issue that I found problematic was the balance between art as a means to empower a culture and the commodification of art. As Mika Wiltz explained, she does not believe in “art for art’s sake.” The work that Ramona Big Eagle Moore is doing as a storyteller and as the Oral Historian and Legend Keeper from the Tuscarora Nation is invaluable, but as the President and CEO of Dare to Soar Enterprises, I worry about the commodification aspect of her work. As activists, we must be aware of the “well-intentioned” exhibition or performance, which focuses on issues of marginalized communities without fully considering their agency, participation, and sensitivity.

Moving forward, I hope to continue to be a conscientious scholar, working against Westernized narratives of history, as well as utilizing my knowledge of art and museums to encourage further collaboration between activism and art. I am also increasingly interested in children’s art and activism, and hope to expand on the topic at my job at the Spencer Museum of Art in Lawrence, KS, working with youth and family programming. While it is important that art and museums preserve cultural heritage it is equally as important for them to be active in fostering activism, educating contentious leaders, and disseminating information that is truthful, regardless of whether it goes against the predisposed Eurocentric narratives of history.



### **John Lewis Fellowship 2016**

**The American Program of the Humanity in Action Fellowship in Collaboration with the  
National Center for Civil and Human Rights**

**Atlanta, Georgia >> July 5-30, 2016**

**Angeliki F. Giannaki**

**Greece**

#### **The Role of 'Privileged' Allies in the Struggle for Social Justice**

From my point of view, one of the most effective ways to bring about social change is direct involvement with communities facing oppression and injustices. However, my major concern in relation to this opinion has to do with my identity as an 'outsider' to these communities, and often as a 'privileged' member of society in comparison to those communities' members. In other words, I have often been preoccupied with questions concerning how I could be accepted by these groups, and how it would be possible for me to constructively contribute to their social struggles, despite being 'other' to them. In alignment with the above mentioned principle concerning activism, the Action Project proposal which I submitted as part of my application process for the John Lewis Fellowship Program was inspired by a method called 'participatory action research' (PAR).

According to this research method, the researcher engages with a community, taking on the role of the mentor and delegating the same role to some of the community's members. Researcher and participants, both mentors and mentees, discuss the issues facing

the group, and come up with and realise activities with the purpose of combatting these issues. In this way, the researcher becomes an ally to the group by sharing his or her knowledge with its members and by attempting to facilitate action against inequality.

Throughout the Fellowship Program, the issue of 'White allyship' has been extensively discussed. Thinking about this issue in a broader sense and changing the term 'White' to 'privileged', in the present essay I intend to reflect on the role of 'privileged' allies in social movements. In order to do so, I shall first explain what the notion 'allies' signifies. Then, I will elaborate briefly on the concept of privilege. Finally, I will talk about the 'toolkit' that a 'privileged' ally should be equipped with, with in order to contribute to a social struggle's progress.

With the purpose of adducing my argument concerning 'privileged' allies, I shall first state that, from my standpoint, it is the people facing injustice that have to lead social movements, that is, take the situation in their hands, assert their needs, and demand those needs' fulfillment. Nevertheless, what should not be overlooked is that these groups might lack the resources required to initiate, or even participate in this kind of struggle; it is possible that they do not fully know or comprehend their history, the sources of their oppression, their rights, and their responsibilities. On a much simpler note, it might be merely financial reasons that prevent oppressed individuals from resisting the inequalities they face. In these cases, the contribution of allies to movements could be crucial. However, the same holds true if a minority group has already organized, launched, and developed its movement; an 'outsider's' willingness to support the group's efforts might be equally valuable and thus, welcome.

Before I move on to explore the role of allies, it is important to define what this term actually means. In our discussions with the speakers, the Fellows, and the staff, we have often used the concept of ‘allies’ to refer to people that do not belong to the group undertaking action, but rather to that of the oppressor, to the dominant class, or at least to a more privileged part of society. Taking the Civil Rights Movement as an example, in her book *Refusing Racism: White Allies and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, Cynthia Stokes Brown (2002) describes ‘how some of those considered white were able to join unequivocally in the fight for the liberation of those considered other “races”, as well as for their own freedom from racism’. One of these ‘white allies’ was Stanley Levison, a close adviser of Martin Luther King, Jr., who contributed significantly to the expansion of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s (SCLC) influence beyond the South to the North, and helped in the momentum required by the movement for its March on Washington (LaFauci, 2016).

Nonetheless, allyship cannot be defined merely on the basis of binaries such as Black and White, oppressed and oppressor, less and more privileged. For, privilege itself cannot be determined only through the variables of race and class. Rather, it is multidimensional, shaped by intersectionalities, that is, by the combination of each individual’s multiple identities and lived experiences. Thus, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, education, and many other factors can make a person privileged among a group of people and less privileged among another. Consequently, it is an individual’s willingness to contribute to and actively participate in a community’s struggle for justice and equality that renders them allies, partners, comrades of this community, despite the fact that this person is not originally a part of it.

Having made my opinion concerning allyship clear, I cannot help but acknowledge the difficulties that emerge in relation to this concept in the case of 'privileged' allies. When it comes to scholars in specific, the privilege resulting from their education is undeniable. What is more, this privilege can be either further enforced or mediated by each scholar's other identities. In both cases, allies should ask themselves what their position in any movement, protest, or research should be, if they are to constructively contribute to a community's efforts towards social justice.

This kind of self-reflection is key for the useful participation of 'privileged' comrades in social struggles. First, it allows them not only to control, but also to take advantage of their privilege and skills to the fullest, thereby maximizing their contribution to the minorities' efforts for liberation and equality. Second, such considerations on behalf of 'privileged' partners encourage the exchange of knowledge and the cultivation of new skills for both parties. Third, such self-reflection promotes understanding and trust between oppressed groups and their allies, both of whom are then able to constructively collaborate and develop effective action. Fourth, these thoughts can help 'privileged' partners make connections between their own communities and the oppressed ones they are involved with. Finally, comrades' constant and thorough reflection on their positionality helps them avoid suspicion and accusations concerning selfish motives and tendency to act like 'saviors'.

Notwithstanding their importance for a movement's development and potentially the whole society's progress, considerations of 'privileged' partners' position in any form of action against injustice are also pertinent to our future work as Humanity in Action Fellows. For, the Fellowship Program will be followed by our return to national or local communities,

in which we will hopefully bring change. The means which we shall utilize for our purposes are going to be central to the outcomes of our attempts. Therefore, as was repeatedly pointed out by numerous speakers, Fellows, and members of the staff, developing a useful 'ally toolkit' is vital for our future action as scholars, activists, and advocates.

What would, then, such a toolkit contain? First, allies should constantly check and use their privilege, whichever form it takes. Comrades shall first realise their positionality, namely both their 'privileged' and their other identities. Then, before taking any action with the purpose of organizing or supporting a movement, they should make sure that their positionality does not interfere with their ability to express a useful opinion and act according to it. It is predominantly at this point that allies as 'others' can not only teach the oppressed groups' members, but also learn from them. Finally, after 'checking their privilege', comrades should learn to use it effectively; as Dr. Jacqueline Rouse encouraged us, 'we should use our privileges and our experiences to make a change'.

Nonetheless, it is not only privilege that potential allies should acknowledge and utilize; their intellectual and hard skills could also be of great value to minority groups' struggle for social justice. For, as Dr. Young pointed out, 'privileged' comrades can educate people who do not have access to it otherwise. More importantly, through the realization of their abilities, allies have the opportunity to get to know themselves and to choose the most suitable role in a social movement, an outcome which was often emphasized in our group discussions as highly beneficial.

When it comes to another necessary ‘ally tool’, I shall utilise Becker’s concept of the ‘outsiders’<sup>1</sup> in a more general sense, and argue that it is not only members of minorities- both in numbers and/or in power- that should be described as ‘outsiders’ or as ‘others’. Rather, allies, as members of the majority, are equally ‘others’ to minority communities; they often have limited understanding of the latter’s culture, everyday experiences, and needs. Thus, ‘privileged’ partners should be willing to constantly exchange knowledge with their oppressed partners; they should be ready to not only offer their resources, but also learn. In Adelina Nicholls’ words, activists should ‘learn to listen and listen to learn’. This kind of exchange ultimately leads to the bridging of the parties’ differences, enhances their collaboration, and advances progress towards social change.

At the same time, it is not only differences between oppressed groups and ‘privileged’ partners that allyship can bridge. Rather, allies can connect wider communities and build coalitions between them by teaching minorities, and by simultaneously learning about their culture and listening to their needs. Comrades can, thus, work towards the elimination of ‘the titles of “them against us” which have made us lethargic in our development’, as Derreck Kayongo mentioned in his speech. After all, according to La’Neice Littleton, if all communities realise their own ways of oppression, they will possibly become able to fight collectively against everyone’s oppression’.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, it is vital for allies to abandon any selfish motives or ambitions to stand out as leaders before going to the field. This was also the

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<sup>1</sup> In his book *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Howard S. Becker (1963) elaborated on the notion of ‘outsiders’ referring to offenders in comparison to the rest of society. More specifically, he argued that even though the term ‘outsiders’ has been traditionally used to describe outlaws, this characterization is equally suitable for non-deviants.

advice of Craig McPherson, who encouraged us to follow the example of Fred Hampton in terms of selflessness and lack of vanity. It is crucial for an ally to understand that, a movement belongs to those that are directly harmed from inequality and that, as Adazadeh Shashahani pointed out, 'change has to come from the bottom up'. In other words, it is the oppressed that should speak and act for themselves in their pursuit of justice and liberation. Thus, the role of an ally ought to be strictly supportive, with his or her intellectual capacities and hard skills remaining in the background rather than appearing on the front line. By acknowledging and taking on such position in movements, protests, or research, 'privileged' allies can avoid patronizing minority groups and acting as their 'saviors'. After all, in Ufuk Kahya's words, 'following can be a form of leadership too- albeit an underestimated one in our society'.

The thorough consideration of the above remarks made by the Fellows, the speakers, and the staff, but also reflection on my own thoughts throughout the Fellowship Program, shall allow me to re-evaluate my initial Action Project proposal and implement an enhanced version of it. More specifically, I still intend to undertake a Participatory Action Research with communities facing oppression and inequalities in Greece; this type of study is, I contend, in alliance with the allyship principles as they are discussed in the present essay. Nonetheless, while I cooperate with members of these communities in order to explore the injustices they face, come up with a suitable collaborative action, organise it, and finally realise it, I will be significantly more confident about my own role in this process. For, my overall experience as a John Lewis Fellow, and especially my daily interaction with people from highly diverse and particularly interesting backgrounds equipped me with both the intellectual and practical tools to utilize myself to the fullest in my efforts to make a difference in the Greek, as well as the global society.

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“I write to give readers strength to take back their happiness, to tell the world to kiss your ass if it thinks you're going to die to satisfy other people and old, outdated, antiquated beliefs. I write so that you can say, ‘NO FUCKIN’ WAY’ when the world tries to convince you that you’re not supposed to be free.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Daniel Black’s impassioned speech about his commitment to doing social justice work through the written word, delivered during our first week at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, moved me to silent tears. Minutes later, tears again trickled down my face, this time while I was partaking in a libation and while holding onto Dr. Roslyn Pope’s waist for support. That hour-long session would be the first of many historical moments for me in this fellowship, connecting me to my history through the voices of ancestors featured in Dr. Black’s *The Coming* and in sharing space with Dr. Pope, who authored *An Appeal for Human Rights* while serving as Spelman College student body president in 1960. I cried when the libation water trickled first into the shape of the African continent and then into the shape of a heart. I cried for my ancestors and how proud they would be to see me learning about the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta. I cried for all of my friends who, barely out of their teens, are already burnt out by the burden of oppression and who I wish could have heard Dr. Black’s words and leaned on Dr. Pope’s shoulder and gleaned healing from them. Through this experience, the concept of Sankofa—looking back in order to move forward—was planted in my mind, and since then, has begun to bloom into something much grander: a vision for a radical humanization through a reimagined education.

When Congressman John Lewis spoke to the fellows, he posed the question, “Is it possible to make humankind a little more human?” I believe it is, but that it’ll take a total restructuring of the American educational system. While policy and legal advocacy are

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<sup>1</sup> Black, Daniel. "The Coming." Address.

undoubtedly necessary for the struggle for social justice, I believe that individual transformation lies at the core of social justice work and that that is best fostered through education. For me, colleges and universities represent the space in which a philosophy of radical humanization—expanding our cultural ideas of humanity, who is deemed worthy of human rights, and how we can refashion ourselves and each other in order to unlearn internalized oppression—has the most potential to enact the most change. Given the right educational environments, young people are encouraged to imagine new worlds, and thus new selves. As an aspiring director of a multicultural center and college administrator, I am committed to revolutionizing the way universities are structured in order to resituate the individual into larger conversations about global systems, structural change, and the practice of social justice. I want to create educational spaces that empower young people through teaching histories that have been systemically denied them and that foster an inclusive culture of resistance to the status quo.

In *A Case for Reparations*, Ta-Nehisi Coates speaks of reparations to Black Americans not just as monetary compensation, but as “a national reckoning that would lead to spiritual renewal.”<sup>2</sup> In order for the United States to move forward as a society, we must confront our role in establishing global and domestic inequity and violence throughout our history and commit to a long process of healing by realizing human rights for all. Accomplishing this and providing reparations for past and ongoing injustices will require international coalitions of activists with a wide variety of specializations and networks. Likewise, institutions of higher education—particularly predominantly white institutions (PWIs)—must go through a similar process of reckoning and reconciliation.

It would be naïve to assume that the same systems of racism, classism, and cis-heteropatriarchy don't also influence the structure of American schools. Too many universities operate under the lie that because schools are no longer legally segregated by race and sex that the university is an equitable environment. In reality, access to higher education has never been

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<sup>2</sup> Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The Case for Reparations." *Atlantic* June 2014: n. pag. *The Atlantic*. Masthead, June 2014. Web. June 2016.

evenly distributed, and the resulting campus climates can be extremely hostile and inaccessible for students from low-income communities, students of color, first-generation college students, migrant students, and LGBTQ+ students, making it difficult to learn, let alone see themselves as change makers. Ironically, this is particularly true at ‘progressive’ PWIs, who believe that because they cater to more ‘liberal’ demographics their structural foundations are beyond criticism or reform. Having just graduated from a private liberal arts college renowned for its progressive political bend, I know this to be true. Universities are microcosms of the society around us, so it is no wonder that in the United States, universities perpetuate a limited liberation only for those who are able to survive in the ivory tower of academia.

The work of taking on centuries-old institutions is daunting, exhausting, and can sometimes seem like a hopeless battle. When I entered this fellowship, I was admittedly exhausted and pessimistic about the prospects of higher education reform, as many people who have made careers working in universities often are. Now, I’m proud to say that I have a renewed sense of hope and passion for educational reform and the future of institutional diversity in universities. I have hope because programs like the John Lewis Fellowship exist.

This fellowship has embodied many of the things that I believe are vital to empowering young people and beginning the conversation about what a new humanity might look like. Dr. Karcheik Sims-Alvarado and La’Neice Littleton, along with their networks of influential local Black scholars, politicians, artists, and activists exemplified the importance of mentorship and exposing young people to role models—people that many of the fellows have said we want to be just like. These opportunities have literally created spaces for intergenerational dialogue and co-learning, which is integral in effective activism. This fellowship has also highlighted the importance of educating those who are privileged by systems of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, language, and nationality in order to make better allies. In order to create a just world, those in places of privilege must also be able to confront their privileges and use them to further advance the humanity of the oppressed. I’ve also been challenged to continually work to make my activism accessible to as many people as possible and not foreclose justice to those who

haven't been afforded the same educational and economic opportunities that I have. These experiences have been invaluable, and will undoubtedly shape my activism for years to come. I know that in the grand scheme of things, higher education reform is but one tiny factor in the interconnected web of social justice and human rights; yet I'm empowered by something that Dr. Black said just four weeks ago: "It only takes one little light to disturb an eternity of darkness."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Black, Daniel. "The Coming." Address.

Dear reader,

Who I am at this very moment is in many ways a direct consequence of my experience within the John Lewis Fellowship. From this program, the perspectives I have gleaned, the history to which I have been unapologetically introduced, and the stories I have heard have all impacted me at the deepest levels of my own self-understanding. My vision of who I can become “someday” has evolved as a result of the content of this Fellowship.

Fundamentally, I know that who I am today is a result of my socialization since birth. This Fellowship has forced me to confront that I grew up white, and male, in a society whose very foundations were grounded in the fallacious ideals of white supremacy. This Fellowship has forced me to confront the reality that the nation to which I feel a deep attachment and loyalty has built itself upon the backs of black people and the land of indigenous peoples. Indeed, humans who enslaved other humans—white men who ‘owned’ colored men—founded this nation, dishonestly authoring a Constitution asserting the equality of all “men”. My white education presented these white Fathers to me as American heroes. I was raised in the United States of America, land of the free and home of the brave... and, now unquestionably to me, this is the home of the slaves.

In reflecting on my life’s experience, I feel obligated to say plainly that I have not been invulnerable to white supremacy. Looking in the mirror, I see white skin that is inherently benign. Looking beneath the skin, however, I see a white, fraudulent *ego* that has been convinced—through socialization—that it is superior to other people. [*Note: I must now advocate my deeply held spiritual belief that I am not my ego. I believe that ultimately, “I” am my Spirit, which is inherently loving and beautiful and unprejudiced and Divine. Furthermore, I believe this because I have experienced a revelation in which my Spirit revealed itself to me, transforming my worldview. Similar revelations have been documented in William James’s book “The Varieties of Religious Experiences” as well as Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay, “The Over-Soul.” Importantly, I believe the ego is the part of me that believes it is God—which though it is not, the ego cannot discern otherwise. Transcending my ego, actualizing my true Self: This is a cornerstone of my life’s mission. Overall and in congruence with this dualistic perspective, it is my opinion that egotistical tendencies are shared among all people. It just so happens that white people’s egos attach themselves to quantities of melanin, adopting the socially, politically, and economically devastating brand of egoism we call white supremacy.*] Thankfully, the degree to which my *ego* has been molded by white supremacy is not extreme. The extent of my own notions of white supremacy is principally limited to my subconscious misperceptions of black people as being dangerous—generally as a result of biased and incomplete media depictions. Furthermore, I must admit that classist overtones also resonate in the dark chamber of my *ego*, pitting my mind against my more deeply held belief that we are all created equal.

Undeniably, this Fellowship introduced to me truths of the past I was largely unprepared to confront. The most influential book I read was most certainly *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Not only did Douglass's visceral depictions of slavery shed new light for me on the quality of black enslavement, but also I would say that it was the specific nature of his Will that shook me. This man's tenacity, his indomitable vision, and the course of modern history: These all are intertwined and cannot be separated. Yes, marching with the BlackLivesMatter protest on the Third Day of this program helped me see that the Will of Frederick Douglass manifests itself in the black Americans of today who risk their lives for Justice. For hours, the unbridled chorus of protestors reverberated down the streets of Atlanta, but when other voices became tired and tapered off, I saw it as my obligation to carry the message of "No Justice, No Peace" as far as my voice could project it, for as long as I was physically able. When the chant became "I love being black," however, I found myself at a loss of what to say—I knew it was not my chant to say, and I could not think of an appropriate alternative. After this program, however, I am now more confident that in my next BlackLivesMatter march, I can say, "I love that you're black" and mean it from the bottom of my heart.

Before this program, systems of inequality seemed much more distant than they do now. As an advocate for the LGBTQ community, I did understand that there are indeed structures in place that prevent people who live just beyond the horizon of social norms from enjoying full protection from the state and equal opportunity in the economy. But now, after having participated in rigorous intellectual dialogue with the speakers and my fellow Fellows, I am awakened to the broader implications of systems birthed by colonialism and white supremacy. To me, these systems represent a Gordian knot—a massively complicated problem with seemingly no real means of untying. But, as the Greek myth goes, since the ends of the knot could not be found, Alexander the Great wielded his sword and cut it open, thus untying it. The Sword with which I will attempt to cut the knot of systematic inequality will be a sword that heals. I believe that white supremacy is a condition of the *ego*, with the most potent antidote being Humility. Though I still have far to go in my own personal journey, I commit myself to leading in the fight for social justice from a place of humility. Admitting white supremacy is not easy, and it is certainly not comfortable; but, without this accountability, I have no sword with which to heal. White people have been the problem, and yet it is my firm belief that they, we, are an essential component of the solution.

The function of Leadership is to inspire, and if I hope to contribute meaningfully to the legacy of John Lewis, I must take all that I have learned at this Fellowship and allow it to serve as a platform of growth both spiritually and academically. My commitment to social justice has been enriched and purified in illuminating fires of Sankofa wisdom. For this, I will be forever grateful.

With love,  
Jacob Rudolph

The Quest for Good Trouble:  
Education and Empowerment

i. Introduction

“You may think you know everything, but you only know this much,” Ramona Big Eagle Moore, expressed to us as she brought her hands very close together to indicate the minuscule amount that a single individual knows about the world. As a Masters student in Human Rights, one would reckon that I knew about Eleanor Roosevelt and the NAACP and the discourse between human rights and civil rights in the United States. Yet, the reality is that I am still learning and my journey for knowledge will never truly be over. The John Lewis Fellowship has opened new doors of education and opportunity in my life. In this paper, I first discuss my learning experience. Secondly, I challenge the integrity of the narrative of history by questioning why certain names are not present in my textbooks. Lastly, I share my hope and efforts to be a positive agent for social change in my country.

ii. Learning Experience

My learning experience in the John Lewis Fellowship has been multifaceted comprising of historical teachings from Dr. Sims Alvarado, words of wisdom from Dr. Black, quantitative studies of racial injustices from Dr. Evans, historical analyses from Dr. Anderson, and mind stimulating arguments regarding social change and politics from PhD candidate Littleton. Dr. Sims Alvarado expanded my understanding of the history of slavery and African Americans fight for freedom long before the Civil Rights Movement and Abolitionist Movement. Dr. Evans taught

me that segregation has been reproduced in new methods through housing, education, incarnation and economic inequality on mass scales. And most moving in my learning experience, was PhD Candidate Littleton's challenge to historical narratives on the Black Power Movement. These incredibly scholars have to me to rethink and challenge my current understanding of slavery, civil rights, and social change. It is imperative that I do not allow myself to fall into the dangerous default and tempting comforts of illusionary social progress. History always has a different narrative based on the storyteller. I'm ready to listen to all stories and develop my own comprehensive perception. I will not submit to the one-sided fake illusion that turns a blinds eye to the reality of the New Jim Crow. In the words of Michelle Alexander, "We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it" (Alexander, 2011).

iii. History: Who's Story?

Throughout our fellowship, I newly introduced to many names that had not been dictated in my American public school education. Why were fundamental woman not mentioned in the Civil Rights Movement? Why had I never heard of Wayard Rustin? Why was history not presenting the full picture? What is the power of manipulating history in reinforcing inequality and injustice? These are a few of the questions that would resonate through my mind as we learned of fundamental leaders who were missing from my understanding of history.

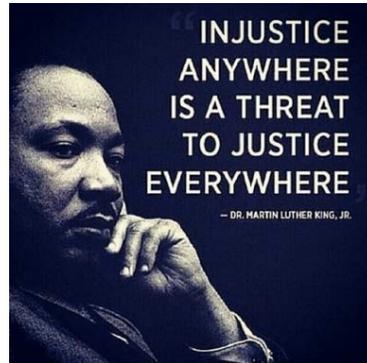
I like to consider my educational experience very multicultural and international as I received my undergraduate degree in Arizona and Masters in

Human Rights in London. Malcolm X proclaims, "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today." But, my education and historical understanding was flawed and prevents my passport to enable my mobility as an effective agent for social change. Rustin, a powerful leader and organizer during the Civil Rights movement was never mentioned once in my studies. Was his sexual identity the basis of his absence from history of the Civil Rights Movement. Additionally, Malcom X was seen as a violent aggressor. Was the State attempting to contain me from acting out in violence even when my human rights have been breached? On that note, who was Fred Hampton? And where were the women in the movement? I was honored to meet Dr. Rosalyn Pope. However, I am sincerely embarrassed to share that I had never heard her name prior. Without these fundamental characters of the civil rights movement and human rights activists, my education paints an extremely fragmented picture of history for me, and it is not fair as it perpetuates further injustices and inequalities.

iv. Agent for Social Change

Within the very first week, our team of John Lewis fellows assembled to march at the Black Lives Matter Protest in response to the murders of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. In this instance, the need for activism was so strikingly vivid and tangible for me. Collectively we joined the Atlanta community to express our solidarity to combat injustice and mourn the senseless loss of life. I held a sign that

proclaimed one of Dr. Martin Luther King's most powerful quotes, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."



This quote captures my core principles as a human rights activist. As my life mission, I aim to empower those who seek to combat injustices and human rights violations occurring throughout our world.

In fulfilling my mission, I have created a potential solution and new mechanism of empowering my fellow allies working as social justice activists. I hope to develop a technological platform for pro bono workers to aid and support non-profits who aim to advocate for social change and work to address human rights violations. This platform would provide resources that include, but are not limited to: legal aid, communications, branding, finance, and research assistance. Throughout my experience at the John Lewis Fellowship program, I have learned about the value in resources to empower and fuel the realization of movements. This is my key take away from the John Lewis program.

v. Conclusion

As a John Lewis Fellow, I am ready to begin my active search for good trouble. My quest for knowledge is equipped with many resources, strategic tools and a powerful network of social justice advocates from around the world. I am greatly empowered and transformed to continue my journey as a social justice change maker and human rights activist.



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## Finding Your Voice in a World of Silent Majorities

Asia Ali

In this time and age, we cannot deny the relationship between colonial history and the condition of the world. Colonial structures have imprisoned people of color in oppression, and racism continues to be a global issue. As every nation is unique with its individual history and culture, racist traditions are expressed differently depending on context (Hervik, 2011:2). However, in the age of Globalization, no nation exists in isolation. Due to the position and influence of America, dealing with racism in the US is universally relevant. The John Lewis Fellowship, a Humanity in Action fellowship in collaboration with the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, put together fellows from the United States and Europe, to create a space in which a diverse body of students and young professionals could discuss civil and human rights with an American starting point and drawing on European comparatives.

As introduction to the fellowship, Judith S. Goldstein, HIA's executive director, spoke on the impact of American exceptionalism and the lack of American accountability excised. The global role as a superpower has made it so that no other nation has been able to affectively condemn and force change for America's racist practices. Moreover, since other nations look to America for a moral compass, the subtle ways in which racism has survived is significant – nationally and internationally.

In the American context, people of African decent and other non-whites have historically been considered inherently inferior, and have from the birth of the nation been treated as such (Miles & Brown, 2003:120). Throughout American history, there have been numerous instances of racism, both structuralized and institutionalized. The concept of races became a patent asset of American society

after the transatlantic slave system, and while there tends to be some disagreement in regards to whether racism was a precondition or consequence of the slave system, it is clear that racism became an instrument that served to uphold a racial and social hierarchy (Miles & Brown, 2003:122).

While slavery can be regarded as the first institution of racism affecting blacks, its abolishment did not immediately free the shackles that it had brought with it. According to Loïc Wacquant, slavery, and other race making institutions (e.g. Jim Crow and mass incarceration) have successfully operated to define, confine and control blacks (Wacquant, 2006:45). Hence, to understand American racism, one has to go back and consider the starting point, timing and composition; the smooth onset, and the quiet ignorance and acceptance of its detritus effects on those it directly and indirectly affects (Bulmer & Solomos, 1999:74). In other words, one must look back in order to look forward.

Sankofa, the idea of taking from the past in order to enrich the present, or looking back in order to move forward, was an important concept presented by Dr. Sims-Alvarado. The notion of finding answers in close inspection of history has continuously been a source of revelation throughout the fellowship. Becoming familiarized with the past, and situating American societal tendencies in an international framework, was a helpful tool in conceptualizing the content of the program. Moreover, by placing the fellowship in Atlanta, the so-called cradle of the civil rights movement and the city that is supposedly 'too busy to hate', history became an inescapable part of not only our physical and spiritual movement in the city, but also with our interaction with the city and with each other.

So what did we learn from history? The fellowship introduced us to a variety of topics and people that were important for the black struggle in America. Perhaps, the most valuable lesson we learned was to understand history as a fundamental element in how we understand the world today.

To a large extent, history has been instrumental in the global issues that are especially inflected upon the world's poor. Unfortunately, in most educational systems, certainly in Western cultures, history is presented through a Eurocentric view. This has failed to acknowledge the ways in which colonialism has been destructive for the perception of the world's non-whites. White supremacy has engaged people of color in systems of oppression e.g. in the claws of Jim Crow (Anderson & Stewart, 2007:82).

The Jim Crow system (1865-1965) was a system created to legally enforce discrimination and segregation of African Americans from cradle to grave, as a response to the emancipation and integration of former slaves into American society. Through mob violence, terrorist group activities and lynchings, whites sought to discourage blacks from asserting their newly awarded civil rights. The system reformed the ways in which slavery could provide sub-designed laws that effectively helped to keep the blacks subjugated. The Jim Crow system deprived black people in America from ethnic honor, and became nationally and politically accepted in society (Anderson & Stewart, 2007:85).

In the consideration of a system that blandly favored whites in all aspects, history teaches us that white supremacy has held immense power and did not seek to conceal it at that time. White supremacy and Eurocentrism has characterized, fashioned, and conditioned the European (and Western) attitude towards African and black people, and has left no place for the African, and others, except for that of servitudes and second-class citizens (Hoskins, 1992:53). Eurocentrism can be perceived in the picture of a long train, in which white culture travels in the front (first class), while the rest of the cultures are found towards the back of the train – or eventually thrown out of it.

In the Eurocentric ideology, Africa is viewed as the “dark continent” and the home of cannibals, savages, inferior, uncivilized, backward, primitive peoples that lack knowledge and culture and

possesses evil traits and desires. Furthermore, in creating this system of oppression, the first necessity was to make the world see blacks as subhuman, then to make fellow citizens believe this notion, and finally, worst of all, to make blacks believe themselves to be inferior (Hoskins, 1992:55).

White supremacy has thrived and conditioned colored people to a permanent position of a globally suppressed group, and has robbed people of color from their autonomy – personal, political and economical. Due to slavery and the aftermath, it can be argued that African Americans have suffered psychological trauma, and hence, white supremacy can be considered as violence. Moreover, it is can be argued that the whitewashing of history has vast consequences in that a people without knowledge on “having done” will have grave difficulty acknowledging the motivation of “can do” (Hoskins, 1992:57). Where the dangers of white supremacy lies today, is in its subtle and embedded nature wrapped up in racially neutral language. The discursive mechanisms and organizational features of what we could call routine or everyday inequalities are harder to combat.

Institutionalized racism is measured by its effect and not its ideological content. Hence, it deals with the notion of certain groups being penalized on the grounds of skin color and not just the degrading public preconception of that group. In the US, the penalty for being black can be very harsh, and that is often caused by unconscious and unintentional biases. These biases are regularly backed up in social and political power, which is often blurred or invisible, and thus it becomes hard to challenge (Miles & Brown, 2003:70). The Black Lives Matter Movement can be seen as a clear example of this. Coincidentally, the BLMM was highly visible in Atlanta in the first days of the fellowship. Demonstrations filled the city as a public response to the shootings of two black men, Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge and Philando Castile in St. Paul. This allowed an insight into the ways in

which “colorblind” rhetoric creates concealment of the racist systems that are regrettably still alive. The killing of these black men by the hands of police officers show the failure of justice and a flawed system where America has not been able to live up to her moral obligations. Perhaps more damaging, the continuous public counter responses to the BLM illustrate a reluctance to see the significance and correlation between race and class in American society. Arguably, this is detrimental, as it creates a form of silent majority (Miles and Brown, 2003:62). Silent majorities are understood as the masses not meaning to, but somewhat responsible for creating and maintaining the unequal power structures by their unawareness or lack of genuine interest in racist traditions. Without a ‘silent’ majority, there could not be the grounds for sustaining discrimination as seen in today’s America.

The past month has been an intense ride, one that familiarized us with the legacy of systematic racism and with concepts of black suffering, strategic racism, white indifference, politics of fear, the harms of oppression Olympics and of white amnesia. As activists, we have learned the importance of organizing, strategizing and mobilizing, the importance of coalition building and ally-ship, as well as the importance of good leadership (we cannot, in the words of Professor Littleton, ‘just be hollering in the streets’). We learned, regardless of our own backgrounds, that we do not live in a colorblind society, but rather, a color silent one and that it is up to us to speak up against it – loud and clear.

On a personal level, this experience has provided the perfect circumstance to reflect, react and rearrange thoughts. Among the many reflections I have had, perhaps, none has been as significant as realizing the power of reflection and becoming more comfortable with being uncomfortable. Change does not come overnight, and an everyday revolution is the required. The big changes will not be granted through the big intentions that we all have; it is in the small choices that we make and in our

unwavering dedication to the cause. Before coming to Atlanta, I had let my activism burn out because I was jaded by the anger and frustration that comes with trying to challenge how people have been taught to see the world. I had become a part of the silent majority. I came to Atlanta wanting to soothe my anger through this fellowship. However, I will be going home even angrier. What has changed in me, however, is that the fire has been ignited once again, and with being comfortably pissed at the status quo, I have rediscovered my voice – my most efficient weapon.

I have realized that no matter how angry, frustrated or tired we get, silencing our voices is by de facto raising the voices of injustice, and that my role as a scholar activist is to speak up and use my anger in a constructive manner. If no one knows that I am mad at the system, the anger will destroy me instead of destroying it; and nothing has liberated my spirit more than coming to this realization. Moreover, in the light of current events, we cannot lose hope. While racism is America's homegrown beast, and the system is indeed a giant, we need to remember that even giants must fall. We have to believe that violence can, as history has showed us, be a catalyst for change, and that by changing the status quo in the United States, we have a shot at changing the status quo at home. As Congressman John Lewis eloquently put it *'we all came here in different ships, but we are all in the same boat now'*.

So what now? A month ago, I had great expectations and vague idea of what to expect of my experience as a John Lewis fellow in Atlanta. I have not only learned a lot about the important figures of the long civil rights movement and of people who have continued the fight, but I have learned a lot about myself. I can see again, that I am warrior – a wounded one admittedly – but in the encouraging words of Dr. Daniel Black, we were all here in Atlanta, in this fellowship, because we are wounded soldier and soldiers that were getting ready for battle. So I will be back on the frontlines, or more

accurately, I will hit the keys and use my scholar activism, now that I have a greater understanding and submission to my role in the fight. The development that happened over the last month will have an impact on me forever. I have realized that you cannot be a revolutionary and a lone wolf, which is why I am so appreciative of the community we have built. If society reflected the 28 unique fellows I shared this experience with, I am sure we would be more efficient in combating racism globally.

29 John Lewis fellows from the United States and Europe, came together in Atlanta, from various personal and cultural backgrounds to form an alliance and common ground for our future personal and collective fight for civil and human rights. We were all here for a reason, and it is now up to us to make it count. In the process, it is important that we keep our close ally-ship, and that we remind each other that progress is never linear. We need to make it our mission to confront and not just complain; we need to list our demands like Dr. Roslyn Pope and her friends, and we need to make more noise and use our voices so that they do not drown in the silent majorities. We need to understand history and draw inspiration from greats like Frederick Douglas, MLK, Malcolm X, Fannie Lou Hamer, Stokeley Carmichael and others, and all in all, we need to get in the way, and take up Congressman John Lewis' advice to stir up some of that *'good trouble'*.

Asia Ali, Danish John Lewis Fellow 2016

July 27, 2016

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# HUMANITY IN ACTION

“Easy movement through the world gives no transformation.”

-Dr. Daniel Black

A letter for those who need stories and black magic,

My first protest began with the scent of incense, the screech of car horns, the shiver of anticipation, and the rumble of hundreds chanting as one. By the end of the day, I was drenched in my own sweat, sprinkled in a thin film of grime, terrified of the consequences of my participation. In that moment, I could compare nothing in my life to the experience of that tumultuous press of bodies hurtling along the streets, driven by shared passion toward a distant destination. The sights and sounds of the march will linger in my consciousness forever. When night shrouds me in darkness, I will dream of stomping forward, fueled by grief, righteous anger, undeterred by the oppressive heat, the looming cars, the blue-white lightning flash of the police lights, the wail of their sirens, the heart-seizing slap of horns, all those sounds and feelings, intermixing in a cacophony of noise and sensation. I will dream of brandishing a crumpled poster with sweat-slicked hands alongside the familiar faces of the other fellows, our heart singing in tandem in a crescendo of emotion. That day, the people voiced their pain as one, tireless, voices raw and tattered, indomitable, unconquered, and I- I was there. I remember the words. No justice, no peace.

Today, I can look back at that moment with hesitant, unsteady pride. My hands still tremble with the onslaught of those memories, but I was there and I did not flee. That quiet thought lifts my shoulders and straightens my spine. On that day, however, I was suffused with fear, my very limbs quaking. I feared the ramifications of my actions. I feared that fellows might be harmed. Terror dogged each of my steps, snarling at me heels, hissing in my ears. Anxiety crept at the edge of my vision, a hungry, remorseless phantom. Would someone be flattened into the filthy pavement as though they were a rabid animal, undeserving of human rights? Would someone be arrested, compacted into another statistic, another senseless death, their humanity flayed away? The fear clung to my lungs, choking my voice. I was afraid that there would truly be no justice, no peace-not then or in our future. I am still afraid, even now, that our shouting echoes unheard, our rhetoric unheeded, our deaths unmourned.

From that day, I learned about fear and uncertainty in a capacity that I had never before experienced. In the end, the protest was peaceful event, yet I spent many days to attempting to parse through that experience before I could realize that though I was afraid, I could channel that fear. I could grasp my fear and mold it, shearing off the unneeded portions of my immobilization and uncertainty, remaking them into anger and action. I could use the tools, the scaffolding that this program provides to direct my fear toward productive ends so that the end result of my fear was transformation.

In the National Center for Civil and Human Rights exhibit, “Rolls Down Like Water,” there was an interactive simulation of the harassment experienced by the brave people who participated in the Lunch Counter sit-ins. What I experienced that day in the protest was tame in comparison. The very sight of the police felt like a punch to my gut, but in truth, no one physically touched me. No one actually singled me out. I was merely one individual in a larger movement. No one screamed their hatred of me and all that I am into my ears. I think that though my fear was only a mere fraction of what the nonviolent protestors of the Civil Rights Movement endured, it helped to foster a change within me, to spark a greater sense of connection, empathy, and awareness toward people’s suffering and sacrifice.

Fear, however, is an intrinsic part of the human experience and as a child, I was not free from the touch of a different kind of fear, one subtler in nature. That fear was directed at myself, even if I never consciously acknowledged it. Everyone around me was white. I had no exposure to people who were unapologetically Black, people who practiced Black magic in the way they walked, the way they talked, the way they fought. I was the token Black girl, the “oreo”- twist me apart and I thought I might bleed white. Even the stories I read were about everyone else but Black people, and I internalized that absence, picking and peeling away my Blackness to carve myself into a person who might feel at home in a white world. The fear I felt in the protest lived within me even then, years ago, wearing a different mask. Through this program, I have learned about the important role fear has played in my history and in the history of my ancestors through the idea of *Sankofa* and in the stories of Black suffering, Black triumph, Black excellence, and Black perseverance. Fear needn’t silence us. As a little girl, I buried my stories but as Dr. Black argued, “Shame has no place in the heart of man”- or women, I might add (Black, 2016).

Striking back against that shame and fear has been an uphill battle. The *Sankofa* symbol reminds us that we don’t have to forget about the past, in fact, our history is powerful, even in its painful moments. *Sankofa* reaffirms for us that our story is powerful, that our fear can stir up others and show them the power of Black magic. The graceful curves of the *Sankofa* symbol remind me that I must look

back and grasp my history while also delving deeper into the history of my people and the systems that chain us in a cycle of oppression.

Dr. Daniel Black also spoke of the importance of writing, crafting, and sharing stories. Similarly, the John Lewis Fellowship is filled with stories and their truths. In recollection, I can only marvel at the theoretical background that this program offers its fellows. I have learned so much about the construction of race, systems of oppression, and the power of language, art, and media to shape historical and contemporary discourse. Being here has taught me that I can be unapologetically Black, as an ally and as an activist. Before I arrived here, I would have never described myself in the aforementioned terms. We each have our roles in this fight, and wherever I go from here, I will be armed with new tools, a global perspective, and a desire to serve my people.

I composed this essay as an open letter but now I realize that it is also a challenge to myself, a way to acknowledge the fears that I have harbored for years and to remind myself and others about the danger-the attraction even-of silence. Sometimes silence is a tantalizing escape, a sanctuary for those who are weary. Yet silence is also a multifaceted beast, one capable of good, evil, and all that lies between them. The silence that I held within myself was a pestilence to me. I camouflaged my fear with silence, assuming that somehow, I could use it to make myself quiet, good, and kind. Palatable. My silence became a bitter knife, an agent of a culling of myself, an erasure of my voice, a censure of my ability to speak up and to speak out. Being in this fellowship has helped me to process how my silence cloaked me in inaction and terror, a cage built by systems outside my control with a door that I locked. Through *Sankofa*, through the memory of my ancestors, I have realized that I am bound to delve back into my history if I am ever to look toward the future. For me, that future is activism. That future is me reimagined as a soldier equipped to fight, serve, and mentor others. I do not think I will ever escape the burden of my fear, but I am learning now that no fear will ever silence my Black magic, or the stories that black magic has yet to tell.

“It only takes a little light to disturb an eternity of darkness.”

-Dr. Black

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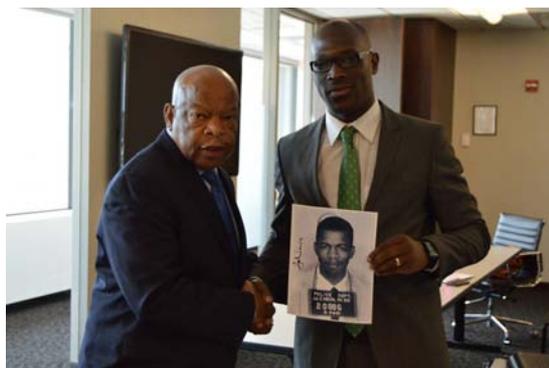
# LESSONS FROM THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT : REFLECTIONS ON THE LONG MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIBERATION FROM ATLANTA TO AMSTERDAM

By: Mitchell Esajas

From: Amsterdam, the Netherlands

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From July 5<sup>th</sup> to July 29<sup>th</sup> 2016 I've had the privilege to participate in the inspiring and transformative Humanity In Action John Lewis Fellowship program in Atlanta, Georgia. We delved into the fascinating history of the modern Civil Rights Movement which was part of the long struggle for freedom in the United States and globally and human rights in a broader perspective. We learned about Sankofa, a word and symbol from the Ghanaian Twi language which means "Go back and get it". The symbol - a bird with an egg on its back flying forwards whilst looking backward - symbolizes the interconnection between our history, our present and our future. It teaches us that we need to learn from the past whilst moving forward and planting seeds to give birth to future generations of people and ideas. In this essay I will reflect on some of the lessons I have learned from studying the history of the Civil Rights Movement and what I will take with me in my future endeavors and my work in the Netherlands.



## THE TRADITION OF DESTROYING THE BLACK BODY

In the first week of the program many people in the US, and many people around the world, were shook by the murders of two black men by the police, their names were Alton Sterling and Philando Castille. Castille was held up for an alleged broken taillight and Sterling for selling cd's in front of a store, both men were brutally shot by policemen. The murders were caught on camera, the horrific images sparked nationwide and global protest against the murder of young black men. Although it was heartbreaking and shocking to see the videos of these men getting shot I could not be surprised. In his seminal book 'Between the World and Me' Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote:

*"In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body – it is heritage. Enslavement was not merely the antiseptic borrowing of labour – it is not so easy to get a human being to commit their body against its own elemental interest."*<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, "the home of the brave and land of the free", was built on the genocide of Indigenous people and centuries of enslavement, dehumanization and racialized violence on African people. In a speech given at the Democratic National Convention, the First Lady Michelle Obama confirmed that even the White House was built by enslaved Africans.<sup>2</sup> During the program we learned how the US became an economic power house based on the profits of slave labor and how a system of white supremacy was developed to legitimize and maintain a social, cultural, political order which privileged people racialized as white whilst dehumanizing millions of people racialized as black, brown and native-American people. The system of white supremacy consisted of an ideology based on the belief that people racialized as white were superior to other "races" on the one hand. On the other hand it consisted of social, cultural, political structures to enforce this ideologies in the everyday lives of people and government of the country. During the era of slavery, so called Black Codes limited the freedom of enslaved Africans, after emancipation African-Americans people were considered only 3/5ths a human being and after Reconstruction the Jim Crow system was introduced which trapped masses African-Americans in a position of second class citizenship and lower levels of the societal ladder.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/tanehsi-coates-between-the-world-and-me/397619/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2016/jul/25/michelle-obama/michelle-obama-correct-white-house-was-built-slave/>

## WHITENESS IN EUROPE

When discussing white supremacy and racism the focus often tends to stay stuck on the African-American experience. In the Fellowship the focus was on the Civil Rights Movement from the perspective of Atlanta. Being a black European, born and bred in Amsterdam from parents who migrated from the former Dutch colony Surinam and roots in the African continent I'd like to broaden the scope. In fact, I'd argue that white supremacy and racism were invented in Europe, yet subsequently refined and implemented in the United States. In Europe, especially in the Netherlands, people often tend to deflect debates about racism by stating "we don't do race, that is something they do in the United States or South Africa". A fellow Anthropology graduate student even told me once: *"the concept of race has been rejected for a long time in the Dutch scholarly society"* after telling me to stop whining or move because I questioned the racist Dutch Saint Nicolas tradition. The Dutch tend to deny or downplay the existence of racism and forget their own history of colonialism and slavery.<sup>3</sup> In her seminal book "White Innocence", Gloria Wekker, the only black professor in the Netherlands, described the dominant self-image of the Dutch as follows:

*"With the title White Innocence, I am invoking an important and apparently satisfying way in which the Dutch think of themselves, as being a small, but just, ethical nation; color-blind, thus free of racism; as being inherently on the moral and ethical high ground, thus a guiding light to other folks and nations."*

Indeed, "race" and racism have been a taboo for a long time in the Dutch public discourse, although it's starting to change due to activism of black and brown communities. The Dutch were major players in the trans-Atlantic human traffic in enslaved Africans and the colonized several parts of the world including New York, major parts of Brazil, several islands in the Caribbean, several coastal parts of Southern and Western Africa and several territories in Asia such as Indonesia. In fact, the first 20 Africans who were ever brought to the United States crossed the ocean on a Dutch warship in 1619 and set foot in Jamestown, Virginia.<sup>4</sup> Just like the United States, the Dutch abolished slavery in 1863, however, they maintained many of their colonial territories such as Indonesia until 1947 and 1975 after periods of decolonial struggle. Although slavery was abolished a long time ago and most colonial gained independence "racism" continued to be an issue, but it became a taboo because of the atrocities of the Second World War which were legitimized by the white supremacist and racist ideology of the nazi's. Did this mean that racism and white supremacy immediately disappear? No, several reports by organizations such as the Dutch Institute for Human Rights and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) confirmed that racism continues to reproduce structural inequality in the Netherlands, especially in the case of people of African descent:

*"The Committee is concerned about the increase in discrimination, including racial profiling and stigmatization, faced by people of African descent."*<sup>5</sup>

## THE BIRTH OF A MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES IN THE NETHERLANDS

At the beginning of the Fellowship I thought a social movement had been born in the Netherlands against racism and the national Dutch blackface tradition Saint Nicolas in which millions of white Dutch people dress up in blackface.<sup>6</sup> However, after the program I question whether this can already be called a real "movement". Throughout the years myself and many of my friends and fellow activists have participated in actions and advocacy to change the tradition. Some of us have been arrested, some of us have been prosecuted, jailed and physically, verbally and digitally violated. We have been inspired by the Civil



<sup>3</sup> Gloria Wekker, White Innocence: paradoxes of colonialism and race. Duke University press 2016

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery>

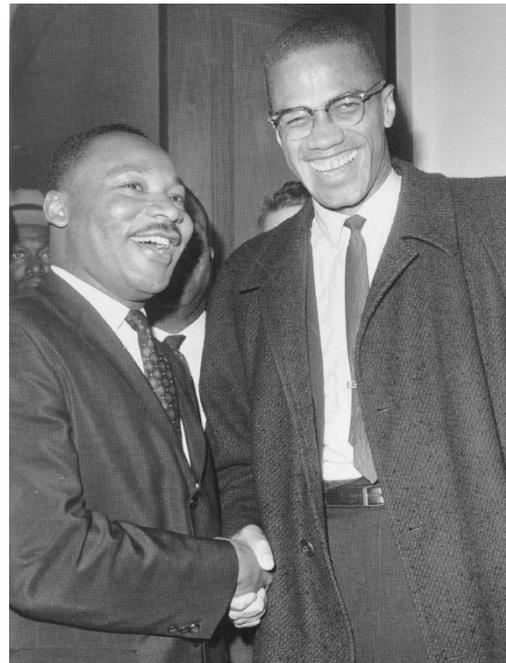
<sup>5</sup> CERD (2015), Concluding observations on the nineteenth to twenty-first periodic reports of the Netherlands. Adopted by the Committee at its eighty-seventh session (3-28 August 2015).

<sup>6</sup> <http://stopblackface.com/beyond-blackface-emancipation-through-the-struggle-against-black-pete-and-dutch-racism/>

Rights Movement and organized several nonviolent direct actions such as the “Freedom Ride to Meppel” where hundreds of people demonstrated against the national blackface tradition during the annual national Saint Nicolas parade ([see video](#)).<sup>7</sup> Much like the Civil Rights Movement we have been able to bring attention to race related injustices in Dutch society by getting into “good trouble, as John Lewis calls it. This has created space to break the taboo and the silence around racism in Dutch society and placed it on the political agenda. Much work still needs to be done, the spirit of resistance has grown but I learned that we need to organize, mobilize and strategize seriously before we can call it a real “movement”.

## A TRADITION OF RESISTANCE: THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

As much as the destruction of black bodies has been an American tradition and a practice in European imperial nations, there has been a tradition of resistance on the side of the oppressed African people as well. Starting on the slave ships, Africans actively and passively resisted slavery, Jim Crow and other forms of oppression in the US. Stories of resistance such as the Amistad revolt, the uprising lead by Nat Turner and the Underground Railroad lead by Harriet Tubman show that process of dehumanization had never been accomplished and Africans retained a sense of dignity and humanity despite the inhumane conditions they were forced to live in. During the Fellowship we learned how the spirit of resistance culminated in the modern Civil Rights Movement with Martin Luther King Jr. as the shining light and icon of a movement that was able to overthrow the system of Jim Crow segregation after centuries of white supremacist oppression. This movement did not operate and arise in a vacuum, it was the result of decades of organized resistance, strategic planning and social, political and cultural developments in what dr. Sims-Alvarado called “the long struggle for freedom”.<sup>8</sup> Several movements, organizations and individuals such as Frederick Douglass and the Abolitionist movement, W.E.B. duBois and the NAACP and Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. Even during and after the formation of the modern Civil Rights Movement other organization and movements such as the Nation of Islam and the Black Power Movement lead by icons as Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael had a major influence on the emancipation of African-Americans and African people worldwide. As La’Niece Littleton said during her lecture, they had a different view on methods and tactics, especially in regards to the philosophy of nonviolence, but they had the same end goal and played an essential role in the struggle for freedom.<sup>9</sup> At the same time different anti-colonial movements organized and mobilized against systems of oppression in countries such as South-Africa, Ghana, Algeria and other African and Asian countries but also in the former Dutch colony Surinam. And these movements and movement leaders were interconnected. In an archive in Amsterdam I found evidence of correspondence between a Surinamese anti-colonial organizer Otto Huiswoud, W.E.B. duBois and Langston Hughes who were part of the movements in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Huiswoud debated Marcus Garvey in Jamaica in 1929. In the building where my organization, New Urban Collective resides, I found newspapers from the 50’s and 60s with articles about the Civil Rights Movement and evidence that Surinamese anti-colonial organizations were in fact in contact with and inspired by the Civil Rights Movement of the US and other anti-colonial and anti-racist movements across the world. The modern Civil Rights Movement, however, became one of the most powerful forces for social change as it was the first mass movement of black people that was able to effectively confront and disrupt the white supremacist system resulting in historic civil rights legislation. Several lessons can be learned from the long movement for black freedom . Based on the John Lewis Fellowship program lectures, excursion, literature and discussions



<sup>7</sup> Several video’s of the Freedom Ride to Meppel and other demonstrations are on the website StopBlackface.com: <http://stopblackface.com/stopblackface-tv/>

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Sims-Alvarado K. Lecture “The Quest for Freedom: From the American Revolution-Post Reconstruction”, John Lewis Fellowship on Thursday July 7<sup>th</sup> 2016

<sup>9</sup> Littleton, L.M. (2016) Lecture “Malcolm X, Human Rights and Coalition Building, John Lewis Fellowship on Thursday July 14<sup>th</sup> 2016

<sup>10</sup> <https://socialhistory.org/en/today/11-05/black-bolshevik>

developed an overview of the lessons that can be learned from the Civil Rights Movement, the overview can be found in the appendix.<sup>11</sup>

## THE NEW JIM CROW AND THE #BLACKLIVESMATTER MOVEMENT.

Although slavery was formally abolished more than 150 years ago and Jim Crow segregation ended a “racial caste system” continues to reproduce the American tradition to destroy black bodies. Despite major victories of the modern Civil Rights Movement and subsequent movements for black liberation, white supremacy continues to dehumanize and devalue the lives of black, brown and native-American people in severe ways. According to research by the Malcolm X grassroots movement, in 2012 every 28 hours a black man, woman or child was killed by someone employed by the US government including the police.<sup>12</sup> In 2015, 306 black people were killed by the police of which 294 were males. This amounted to 15% of all deaths by police force whilst black males only make up 2% of the total US population.<sup>13</sup> More than 7 million Americans are in prison, on probation or parole, mostly for drug crimes. Their convictions remain on their records and limit their voting rights and their job opportunities. In all states, except for two, citizens with felony convictions are prohibited from voting. African-American males are sentenced an average of 20 to 50 times higher longer prison than white males of the same drug crime. This keeps millions of black people trapped at the bottom of the social ladder and sets forth the tradition of destroying black bodies as there are large gaps between white and black Americans in other spheres of life as well. Michelle Alexander, calls this modern day “racial caste system” “the New Jim Crow”, a system based on the prison-industrial-complex and mass incarceration rooted in neoliberal capitalism and the legacy of colonialism.<sup>14</sup> Also in other spheres of life racial inequality remains a pressing problem in American society. From education, to the labor market, from access to healthcare to political representation the disparities between black and white continue to exist despite the victories of the Civil Rights Movement and the election of Obama. For example, the median wealth for single black woman was \$100 compared to \$41,500 for single white women according to research by K. Taylor.<sup>15</sup> Since Obama came to power the median income of Black households fell by 10.9% to \$33,500 compared to a 3.6% drop for white household to \$58,000. Black college graduates were more than twice as likely to be unemployed compared to their white peers in 2014 with unemployment rates of 12 percent for black graduates versus 4.9% for white graduates. 26% of Black households are “food insecure” and 25% of black women have no health insurance. At the same time an elite of black politicians, corporate managers and executives rose after the 60s creating significant class differences within the black community making the challenges current activists face different than the challenges the modern Civil Rights Movement faced in the 60s.

## MARCHING WITH #BLACKLIVESMATTER ATLANTA

The violent deaths of many young black man and women have sparked the birth of a 21<sup>st</sup> century movement in the United States. It is commonly known as the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

#BlackLivesMatter was co-founded was created by three black women, of whom two are queer, after the acquittal of George Zimmerman who murdered the 17 year old Trayvon Martin in 2013.<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that they do not claim to be a movement yet:

*“Black Lives Matter is a chapter-based national organization working for the validity of Black life. We are working to (re)build the Black liberation movement.”<sup>17</sup>*



<sup>11</sup> Due to limitations in the number of words for this essay I have not explained every element and limited the explanation of three lessons from the overview.

<sup>12</sup> <https://mxgm.org/operation-ghetto-storm-2012-annual-report-on-the-extra-judicial-killing-of-313-black-people/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/31/the-counted-police-killings-2015-young-black-men>

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-mariotti/the-new-jim-crow-a-must-read\\_b\\_3679076.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-mariotti/the-new-jim-crow-a-must-read_b_3679076.html)

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, K. Y. (2016). From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation. Haymarket Books. P.11-12

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.politico.com/magazine/politico50/2015/alicia-garza-patrisse-cullors-opal-tometi>

<sup>17</sup> <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>

This fact already distinguishes this present day movement from the modern Civil Rights Movement in which women were marginalized and their contribution has been silenced due to patriarchy and sexism. In addition, #BlackLivesMatter describes itself as an *“online forum intended to build connections between Black people and our allies to fight anti-Black racism”*. They have been able to create a strong online presence via social media but also do work on the ground. Over the past years millions of people have flooded the streets demanding to stop police brutality by marching, sitting in, blocking intersections and other forms of nonviolent direct action. The hundreds of thousands of people marching in the streets and the power of social media have allowed this movement to gain international attention and change the public discourse on issues around issues of race in a time which many people considered as the post-racial era of Obama. Even during the Fellowship we were confronted with the state violence on black bodies through the killing of two black man, Philando Castille and Alton Sterling. I marched and protested in the same streets dr. King and hundreds of thousands of other people have marched for four days in a row. I participated in acts of civil disobedience by shutting down highways and intersections and I chanted #BlackLivesMatter with more than 10 000 other people in a massive demonstration through the streets of Atlanta. Together with many other people I occupied and reclaimed a space which used to be the place where enslaved Africans were sold. I got into some “good trouble” with many other individuals. The marches were powerful as it allowed us to express emotions of anger, frustration and dissatisfaction with the system which continues to dehumanize and devalue black lives. It was a way to collectively heal from the traumatic experience of seeing the killing of men who looked like me.<sup>18</sup>

After days of protest the mayor of Atlanta and the police chief agreed to meet with leaders of the movement.<sup>19</sup> This is where a few point of improvement of the #BlackLivesMatter movement became visible. During the Fellowship several lecturers raised some critical point about #BlackLivesMatter. John Eaves, chair of the Fulton County Board of Commissioners, for example stated it became clear that the protestors did not fully understand how to turn their protest into concrete demands for policy changes and at which level of government to advocate for these changes.<sup>20</sup> To other the concrete goals and objectives weren't clear and they raised the question how #BlackLivesMatter wanted to achieve change without a solid structure.<sup>21</sup> This was reflected in a situation in which it was unclear who the spokesperson of the Atlanta chapter of #BlackLivesMatter was. After days of protest the mayor met with several local “leaders” and representatives of activist organizations, one person claimed to be the leader of “#BlackLivesMatter of Greater Atlanta” but he was denounced by the national #BlackLivesMatter network as another grassroots network called “#BlackLivesMatter Atlanta” was the official chapter of the national network. A week after the Fellowship, however, the movement for Black Lives, a collective of 50 organizations representing black communities around the US, launched an expansive and coherent vision and agenda which echoes many of the objectives and vision of previous movements including the modern Civil Rights Movement, the Black Panther Party and other organizations who have been part of the long struggle for black freedom. This shows that #BlackLivesMatter is part of a larger liberation movement which is still in its infancy but can and must be seen in the context of a long history of resistance and struggle for black liberation.

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<sup>18</sup> I have written about my experiences in a blog on the website of StopBlackface.com:

<http://stopblackface.com/mitchells-humanity-in-action-john-lewis-fellowship-blog/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.vibe.com/2016/07/mayor-kasim-reed-meets-with-black-lives-matter-leaders/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.atlisready.black/demands/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://news.wabe.org/post/black-lives-matter-disavows-atlanta-president-sir-maejor>

## LESSONS FROM THE MODERN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT FOR THE #BLACKLIVESMATTER MOVEMENT

Despite the points of improvement that were raised during the Fellowship #BlackLivesMatter has been able to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people and garner the attention of ordinary people, the international community and decision makers around the world. Much like the Civil Rights Movement who used dramatic nonviolent protest to put pressure on the authorities they've already been able to make issues of racial inequality key points in the 2016 presidential campaign and several lessons can be learned from this upcoming movement as well.



There are many similarities and parallels between this 21<sup>st</sup> century movement and the modern day Civil Rights Movement but also essential differences.

#BlackLivesMatter movement faces different, possibly more difficult challenges, as the issues we face today seem more complex and less tangible compared to the Jim Crow system. The oppression of black communities face today are intimately tied to a global system of neoliberal capitalism and white supremacy but it is not codified in law as it had been until the 60s. The current arising seems to be less hierarchical, formally structured and centered around one or few charismatic, mostly male, individuals. Instead it seems to be organized along the lines of the vision on leadership of Ella Baker, fostering participation from the grassroots. Based on the literature, lectures, discussions and my own reflections I have made an overview of the Lessons from the Civil Rights Movement, in this concluding paragraph I will elaborate on three of the lessons for the Civil Rights Movement and the #BlackLivesMatter movement I will take with me to the Netherlands.

### 1. From protest to policy transformation

One of the major strengths of the Civil Rights Movement was that its goals and objectives were concrete, they strived to achieve equality and justice for black people through the establishment of Civil Rights such as the right to vote, the desegregation of schools, public transport and other public facilities and equal access to jobs and housing. Based on these demand they developed strategies and tactics to realize these objectives through the organizational structures and networks which they had built up. #BlackLivesMatter and the movement for Black Lives, recently launched its vision and agenda with concrete objectives and policy changes. One of the criticisms on #BlackLivesMatter was that it seemed to be focused on police brutality which is extremely important but is not the “root cause” of the problem. Police brutality is merely a manifestation of the systems of white supremacy, neoliberal capitalism and other intersecting systems of oppression. Fighting police brutality alone will not absolve the underlying systems and structures which continue to devalue and dehumanize black people, people of color and (white) working class people. To achieve black liberation and for our basic human rights to be respected the organizing principles of the neoliberal capitalist system which inherently feeds of a global and national “racial caste” of black and non-white people must be addressed. Similarly, the upcoming “movement” in the Netherlands seems to be focused on the blackface tradition. To truly achieve change and transformation we need to broaden our perspective and develop a comprehensive vision and agenda focused on the root causes of the problem and not just one of its manifestations.

### 2. Education is the passport to the future

As the systems of oppression operate in subtle and complex ways we need a thorough understanding of how they work and manifest in different national and local contexts and how they interrelate on a global level. Another strength of the Civil Rights Movement was that its leadership had a thorough understanding of the underlying systems and structures which produced racial and economic inequality and oppression in the United States. Dr. King wrote several publications in which he explained the philosophy of the movement and how what he called “the triple evils of poverty, racism and militarism” kept people in a vicious cycle of violence.<sup>22</sup> The Civil Rights Movement was supported by black institutions such as the Black Church and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s) such as Clark-Atlanta university which allowed the masses of grassroots organizers and protesters to connect with and be informed by the heavy intellectual work which is needed to understand how the systems of oppression operate. Based on the experience of grassroots organizers

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy>

combined with this intellectual work, concrete demands, strategies and tactics were developed. Malcolm X once said: "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today", I believe education, in the broadest sense of the word, is essential in transforming ourselves and the world around us. Currently I work in the field of (higher) education and social justice in the Netherlands. We do not have a large tradition of black scholarship nor do we have institutions that produce critical black intellectual work and scholar-activists who can support the movement such as the HBCU's. Inspired by this Fellowship and the Martin Luther King Jr. archive at Morehouse college specifically I aim to set up the first black archive in Amsterdam which can function as a center of exchange and learning for black grassroots activists and scholar-activists.

### 3. International Solidarity

The third lesson we can learn from the Civil Rights Movement is the international solidarity they build with other oppressed people across the world. Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders of the movement realized that the struggle for freedom of African-Americans was related to the struggle for freedom of black people and other oppressed people who suffered from the systems of white supremacy, colonialism and capitalism across the world. Martin Luther King Jr. visited the inauguration of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, the first African country to gain political independence from the British empire in 1957 and connected the Civil Rights Movement to the struggle for independence in Africa in his "A birth of a new nation" speech.<sup>23</sup> A few years later he wrote in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail":



*"I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea."*

Malcolm X visited several African countries and became an outspoken advocate for pan-Africanism, realizing that the system of oppression of African-Americans was connected to the oppression of Africans worldwide. Just like the movements of resistance and decolonization were connected worldwide. As Dr. Livingstone argued during his presentation on #BlackLivesMatter in a global perspective, white supremacy is a global system and is not just about police brutality. In the US hundreds of black people die at the hands of the police annually in the United States. In Brazil every 23 minutes a black youth is killed, over the past decade 8 000 people, mostly black people, were murdered by the police according to research of Human Rights Watch.<sup>24</sup> Although it happens on a smaller scale racial profiling is a problem in Europe as well. Amnesty International published a report about ethnic profiling in the Netherlands and the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) stated in its report on Afrophobia in the European Union that racial profiling affects black communities across Europe.<sup>25 26</sup> On the same day that the judge ruled that all charges against police officers in the Freddy Gray case in Baltimore were dropped, a Dutch judge ruled that the police officer who shot an unarmed 21 year old black youth in the Hague in June 2016 would not face charges either. His name was Mitchel Winters. A year earlier the police choked a black man to death on video, this led to a massive uprising in the Hague. His name was Mitch Henriquez.<sup>27</sup>

Besides police brutality, many people of African descent are faced with poverty, environmental racism, a lack of quality education and other human rights violations based on the global system of neoliberal capitalism and white supremacy. Do the lives matter of black miners who risk their lives digging for Coltan which are

<sup>23</sup>

[http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documententry/the\\_birth\\_of\\_a\\_new\\_nation/index.html](http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documententry/the_birth_of_a_new_nation/index.html)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/07/good-cops-are-afraid/toll-unchecked-police-violence-rio-de-janeiro>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.amnesty.nl/etnischprofilieren>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.enar-eu.org/Launch-of-ENAR-s-2014-15-Shadow-Report-on-Afrophobia-in-the-European-Union>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/profits-and-loss-mining-and-human-rights-in-katanga-democratic-republic-of-the-congo?page=2>

necessary for the smartphones which allow us to tweet #BlackLivesMatter? Do the lives of black children and poor peasants who farm cocoa for the chocolate we eat?<sup>28</sup> Do the lives matter of black youth in the favelas who face similar state violence by militarized police as the militarized police squads who took over protesters after the uprising in Baltimore after the killing of Freddie Gray? All of these black lives should matter. Many people across the world realize that. After the killing of Sterling and Castille there were massive demonstrations in Amsterdam, Berlin, London, Cape Town and Johannesburg. On the question why he participated in the demonstration in Cape Town, Mone, A South African student said: *“We are lamenting the same pain we are feeling with them. We are here to send the message that black lives matter everywhere in the world.”*<sup>29 30</sup> Gladly, the movement for Black Lives seem to realize this as well in their recently launched vision. To complicate our thinking even further, many other communities of color and even working class whites face similar issues of oppression albeit in different ways. During the program we learned how Native-American and Latinx communities face similar and related issues within the US and over the past years the international community has been shook by the large number of refugees, mostly black and brown people, who die anonymously or live in inhumane conditions, after fleeing their homes in the “global South”. By gaining more understanding of the complex ways in which these systems of oppression operate globally, nationally and locally we should be able to mobilize and strategize on global, national and local levels as well to formulate substantial concrete demands and mobilize people around the world to transform these systems so all people can live their lives and realize their full potential.



What are the **root causes** of inequality, dehumanization, the murder of black bodies & violation of human and civil rights?

White Supremacy – Neoliberal Capitalism – Patriarchy - Heteronormativity

**SANKOFA:** presentday problems are rooted in a history colonialism and slavery which produced social, political, cultural and economic systems and structures of oppression on a global, national, local and individual level



Mental slavery / Colonization of the Mind

Implicit Bias

White Privilege / White Fragility



Social movements: end goal is to dismantle (all) systems of oppression and respect human rights ALL human beings

What are the goals and objectives? How is the movement organized and structured? What factors move people to action? Where do you get money? How will you mobilize and demonstrate? Who has the power, what do they value and how can you disrupt and dismantle the power structure?



**Methods:** Storytelling, Black Archives, Economic Boycotts, Art as Activism (Music, Street Art etc.), Voting, Writing

**Principles:** not binary but intersectional thinking, Inter-generational Cooperation, Pan-Africanism, Human Rights not Civil Rights, Never Stop Learning, Selflessness

<sup>28</sup> <http://thecnfreesomproject.blogs.cnn.com/2012/01/16/chocolate-explainer/>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/400-mensen-bij-black-lives-matter-protest-op-de-dam~a4337084/>

<sup>30</sup>

[http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/the\\_birth\\_of\\_a\\_new\\_nation/index.html](http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/the_birth_of_a_new_nation/index.html)

**Kathy Fernandez**  
Wilmington, CA – UCLA  
Humanity in Action

## **2016 John Lewis Fellowship Final Assignment and Presentation**

### ***Coalition Building: Foregoing the Idyllic Common Good***

*If we can come to an agreement in a democratic society, should we assume that the consensus reflects the common good?*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In my paper, I define “*democracy/democratic society*” and conceptualize “*common good*.” I work under the framework that the goal, in a just and inclusive society, is a democratic form of governance that promotes the common good. Then, I complicate the relationship between the common good and democratic societies. Ultimately, I argue that an ideological preoccupation with the common good inhibits progress for the impractical sake of dogma.

#### **DEMOCRACY**

Purcell defines democracy as a system that “requires that no group be prevented from participating as a true peer in discussion and deliberation” (Purcell, 86). One cannot be a *true peer* if missing *equivalent* resources, power, or cultural esteem. Overall, the deliberation should be what the group, as a whole, perceives as the common good.

#### **COMMON GOOD**

With regards to the common good, “contemporary ethicist, John Rawls, defined [it] as “.. *general conditions that are...equally to everyone's advantage*.” The common good, then, consists primarily of having the social systems, institutions, and environments on which we all depend work in a manner that benefits all people.”<sup>1</sup>

#### **COMMON GOOD: ITS CHALLENGE TO PROGRESS**

Common good, as manifested within the deliberation, is *only* shared by the majority, sometimes a plurality. The common good neutralizes minorities and erases their valuable experiences for an assumed ideal. Thus, I disagree with the notion of the common good as it seems to act as a “legitimation tool” for the plurality to force its agenda upon minorities (Purcell, 81). As a case study, Mike Carnathan stated that metropolitan Atlanta will continue to leave its diverse and youthful population as policy subject to the market.<sup>2</sup> While this may be rationalized as economic development (i.e. common good), it creates severe socioeconomic repercussions for residents who cannot afford a gentrified Atlanta. Shirley Franklin, former Mayor of Atlanta, explicitly said there is a “*permanent underclass of people who cannot break out of poverty*” suggesting a neutralization of those whose interests do not align despite the assumed common good of 'economic development'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Atlanta's high rates of income inequality coupled with low upward mobility complicates the narrative of the 'common good'.

Furthermore, the common good oversimplifies reality. In other words, there cannot be a simplistic or uniform answer to every situation; much less one that results in everyone's advantage. As we cannot agree upon abstract, philosophical conversations during discussion, we will predictably be unable to as we enter personal and emotional terrain. Dr. Black encouraged us not to 'restructure the

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1 Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. "The Common Good." - *Ethical Decision Making*. Santa Clara University, 2 Aug. 2014. Web. 24 July 2016.

2 Carnathan, Mike. ““Gazing into the Crystal Ball of Atlanta: Race and Class in Urban Cities”.” Humanity in Action (John Lewis Fellowship). CARE, Atlanta, Georgia. 27 July 2016. Lecture.

3 Franklin, Shirley. "Discussion on Leadership and the Building of a Center." Humanity in Action (John Lewis Fellowship). CARE, Atlanta, Georgia. 21 July 2016. Lecture.

self for someone else's comfort'.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, should I silence my differences for your comfort, so that we may attain a common good that does not benefit me?



As an example of the impracticality of 'the common good', Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X serve as a valuable warning. Malcolm noted that he could not align with King's nonviolence movement due to his personal struggles.<sup>5</sup> Coretta King later said of the strained relationship: "*I think that if Malcolm had lived, at some point the two would have come closer together and would have been a very strong force.*"<sup>6</sup> This is also reminiscent of the tension between the nonviolent movement and the Black Panthers, who fought for similar goals but also failed to form an alliance.

Furthermore, Dr. James Thomas' summary of crowd behavior (characterized by anonymity, contagion, and suggestibility) suggests that the common good ("deliberation of a democracy") may not be rational.<sup>7</sup>

According to Dr. Thomas, crowds obstruct our higher ideals of sensibility further complicating the notion of the common good. In terms of practicality, the common good is difficult to achieve consensus and unity, especially in a heterogeneous group which can be counterproductive to progress.

Summarily, I argue that a deliberation by the majority ("common good") should not result in unchallenged acceptance, especially when it deteriorates minorities. However, that is not to say that we must never come to an agreement. I believe that our 'deliberations' should be further scrutinized to produce outcomes that manifest in progress, while still accounting for minority interests.

### CONCLUSION

On my last visit to the Center for Civil and Human Rights, Gandhi cautioned the visitor, "You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist"- warning the viewer of a preoccupation with differences as represented by the clenched fist. In turn, such conflict, which is not to invalidate its emotion, shatters hopes of progress (or coalition-building), as represented by the inability to shake hands. Thus, a simplistic concern with the common good, which should nonetheless be challenged, prevents progress.

As we have seen in the Civil Rights Movement, ideological differences prevented what could have been a ground breaking alliance between Malcolm X and Dr. King. Their unproductive focus upon their differences serves as a reminder that as we enter an increasingly interconnected era communication across continents is as simple as a tweet. However, a myriad of challenges accompanies increased communication and will pose a challenge to coalition building if we cannot forgo our differences and focus upon progress. To create meaningful change as a collective, we must dismiss the impractical ideal of a complete consensus (in other words, the common good).



Before I came to Atlanta, I struggled to conceptualize a way to build Latinx coalitions across communities. I simplistically believed that there could be a central agenda on which all could rally behind. The Fellowship showed me that such an agreement is not necessary to work together. In fact, a uniform agenda is

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4 Black, Daniel. "The Coming." Humanity in Action (John Lewis Fellowship). Center for Civil and Human Rights, Atlanta, Georgia. 7 July 2016. Lecture.  
5 The King Center. "Coretta Scott King Meets with Malcolm X in Selma, Alabama." *Coretta Scott King Meets with Malcolm X in Selma, Alabama*. The King Center, n.d. Web. 27 July 2016.  
6 Blake, John. "Malcolm and Martin, Closer than We Ever Thought." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 19 May 2010. Web. 26 July 2016.  
7 Thomas, Dr. James. "Lynching and the Psychology of Racism in America." Humanity in Action (John Lewis Fellowship). Center for Civil and Human Rights, Atlanta, Georgia. 8 July 2016.

impossible. It also reminded me of the strength that is required to set aside personal beliefs in order to progress amidst conflict. However, it is as important to challenge ideas as it is to *give and provide space for the needs of other social groups*. The issues that vex social groups across the United States are as diverse as its demographics. When I return home, I will continue to build and empower my community while making a conscious effort to enter new and at times uncomfortable spaces to advance coalition building.

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*Berna Keskindemir  
VU Amsterdam, The Netherlands.*

## **READY FOR BATTLE**

Fully loaded with knowledge, I am ready for battle. As I sharpen my pen, I reiterate the things I have learned in the past few weeks. You see, the following bullets are both my offense and defense, and as such of great importance to me.

I have learned how the past tells us about the present and predicts our future. It is this that underlines the importance of Sankofa: reflect today back on the past to build a successful future.

I have learned that racism is not only for those that are mentally ill, but that it is an illness entrenched in all levels of our societies.

I have learned that I have to write in order to heal both others and myself.

I have come to accept that I have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable, for challenging the status quo never comes with ease. It is this knowledge that will comfort me whenever the weight of being uncomfortable seems too heavy.

I have learned that persistence in resistance eventually pays off but will not be the end of the struggle against global oppression and inequality any time soon.

I have learned the difference between violence for the sake of violence and necessary violence as a means of self-defense. For the latter being an act of self-love, and the other an act of hate.

I have come to recognize the difference between accommodating the status quo by allowing them to maintain their comfortableness on the one hand and causing good trouble through non-violent resistance on the other.

I have learned that sometimes, I too have to re-check my ideals and beliefs in order to stay true to myself, and the bigger cause.

I have learned that good leadership comes with personal sacrifices.

I have learned that I will have to tell stories until I recognize my sister in every stranger.

I have learned the importance of building and creating allies, for just one specific battle is not enough for me and I alone am not enough for all the battles.

I have come to realize that waiting for someone else to give me my rights or to fight my battles is never the answer. I, too, have to articulate my demands and claim space in defining and re-distributing human and civil rights.

I have learned that in some spaces I have to echo the noise of the unheard voices while also creating space for those who do not have the privileges I have in order to create those spaces by themselves.

I have learned that mentorship and teaching is essential for empowerment and that empowerment is essential for resistance.

So now what?

It is time to love,  
It is time to confront,  
It is time to teach,  
It is time to inform,  
Every person I encounter and myself.

For the time has come to write.  
For the time has come to expose.  
For the time has come to push.  
For the time has come to demand.  
For the time has come to organize, strategize, mobilize and execute.

Fully loaded with knowledge, I am ready for battle.



# JOSEPH SAMUEL QUISOL

JULY 27, 2016 • JOHN LEWIS FELLOWSHIP OF HUMANITY IN ACTION

I began this fellowship by sharing an item of significance: my guitar. When strumming those six strings, I connect with the timeless human tradition of music, but at the same time, with historical tragedy. As I play my Spanish guitar, I'm reminded of empire, conquest, and the colonial brutality exacted on both the Philippines and Puerto Rico where I trace my family roots. But I'm also reminded that music heals.

Music is my form of personal healing as songwriting requires complete vulnerability with myself and the listener. Lyrics cannot be unwritten and a melody cannot be unheard, so with each song I make the choice to remember; to memorialize my experience intangibly as sound which I then share with others. Much like a tattoo, my songs remind me of who I was and what I felt each time I play them. Like tattoos, my songs are intentional, beautiful scars that remind me of how far I've come.

So as I journeyed across the South from Charlotte, North Carolina to Atlanta, Georgia, I dreamt up ways to leverage the power of music as an agent of social healing and social justice. I thought of starting a nonprofit music studio or record label or afterschool program or pop-up concert and lecture series...or all of the above. I just wanted to use music to

empower young people to raise their voices and advocate for their communities. And while this goal remains, Humanity in Action and the John Lewis Fellowship showed me the value of sankofa, which I will keep at the core of my work moving forward.

From conversations with civil rights heroes and scholars such as Dr. Roselyn Pope and Dr. Jacqueline A. Rouse to recounting the stories of the very streets upon which we walked with Nasir Muhammad, this fellowship was saturated in the spirit of sankofa. We looked back to look forward. Our professors breathed life into the history and doing so helped me realize my position in a lineage of activists, revolutionaries, and my own ancestors. I found strength in knowing the hard-fought battles and sacrifices made by those who came before me and I gained wisdom from the intergenerational exchange that took place consistently throughout the program. Indeed, I learned to honor the knowledge and wisdom of my elders and I hope to revive the tradition of seeking their counsel in my work moving forward.

But sankofa was especially formative for me personally as I wasn't taught the history of my people. In fact, I felt uncomfortable saying "my people" until now since my double-minority, Lat-Asian, raised in the South

background made me feel like a misunderstood other. Outside of the black-white racial binary of the South, I felt like I had no history to call my own. However, I learned to seek out the untold stories of my ancestors and be empowered by that knowledge as we discussed the unsung heroes of the civil rights movement.

We learned of Fannie Lou Hamer, Angela Davis, Sonia Sanchez, Coretta Scott King, and many other women whose contributions have been underappreciated due to their sex. We learned of Norris Herndon and Bayard Rustin whose stories have largely been erased due to their sexual orientation. Stories like these were deemed uncomfortable or inconvenient, yet uplifting these stories gave me a fuller, more complex picture of our past and prompted me to reclaim my own history and my own national heroes. Heroes like Don Pedro Albizu Campos, a Puerto Rican attorney and politician, and the leading figure in the Puerto Rican independence movement. Heroes like José Rizal, a Filipino nationalist and writer whose works inspired an anti-colonial rebellion and was among the first to articulate the goals of Philippine independence.

Even the renewed urge to know my own family's history stems from my experience of sankofa here in Atlanta. I will leave here asking more questions about what it was like

for my grandparents to immigrate to the United States. I will seek to understand my own genetic makeup and recover the stories of people movement encoded in my own DNA. But I will also help others experience the power of knowing their history. I know how disempowering it is for the people who look like you to be omitted from the history books. That's why I was so inspired by the joint effort of Asian American and Latino leaders in Atlanta to uplift those untold stories through the interactive timeline that Ms. Helen Ho shared.

"So until America loves truth," as Dr. Daniel Black said, "I'm going to write it." I will write truth into my music. I will tell my story and my people's story and I will encourage others to do the same. I will get my five friends and create the space for people to record their piece in our collective timeline. I'll get my five friends and together we will walk the streets of our city and remember the names and the places where history was made so that we might understand that the baton is now in our hands.

Now as I leave Atlanta, I walk away with a new awareness of my identity as a scholar, activist, and artist. I am empowered by the knowledge of those who came before me and now I seek to empower others so that together, we might achieve a more equitable world.

## Successful Social Movements – A blueprint

I have been reflecting on the program and how I could connect the dots between everything I have learned here and who I am as a person. I am a critically thinking person with a business degree and a need for structure and having an overview. This program was intense and provided a lot of context, background and understanding for the system we live in and how to challenge it. I combined the two with a visual presentation of what social movements need to succeed. Martin Luther King Jr. Said, “*A social movement that moves people is merely a revolt. A movement that changes both people and institutions is a revolution*”.<sup>1</sup> This is the introduction to my yet to be named model, that shows what is needed to create a revolution as defined by Martin Luther King Jr.

This model consists of 4 elements: spark, niche, movement and mainstream. The elements do not always appear in chronological order, but successful social movements will eventually develop from a Spark into Mainstream. Sometimes, a stage is skipped or repeated and therefore, this model is intended to be a blueprint for successful social movements.

The purpose of this blueprint is for readers with an interest in social activism to be able to identify what element any social movement is in and how to proceed to the following element. The model was inspired by many of the discussions during my time as a John Lewis Fellow in Atlanta. A concrete example is that of Black Lives Matter, which some people call a movement but I would argue is only a niche at the time of publishing of this essay. This model will provide an overview and guidance for people at different stages of a successful social movement.

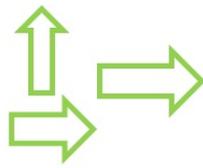
The inspiration for this model comes largely from two people in the John Lewis Fellowship; Dr. Karcheik Sims-Alvarado, who introduced us to her ground work in creating a blueprint for social movements. It initially looked like a 4x4 table with an overview over previous successful social movements and current ones. With her guidance, I developed this visual that encompasses her blueprint and other lessons learned from the speakers in the fellowship.

Another vital person in this process is Professor La’Neice Littleton. Although she did not see the visual before, she played an important role in helping me understand the difference between a “niche” and a “movement”. I am extremely grateful for their help and them sharing their wisdom with me.

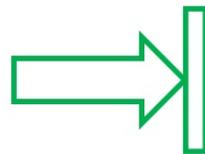
Model:



Spark



Niche



Movement



Mainstream

**Spark:** The element that sparks something. It usually looks like outrage - a common example is the death or killing of someone. In the spark element, there is a mood of dissatisfaction or a feeling of injustice.

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<sup>1</sup> King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Why We Can't Wait*. N.p.: n.p., 1964. Print.

Something is emerging and "agitators" play an important role of sparking this fire. They are usually the ones that ask everyone "Do you think this is okay?" and start a spark in people. It is illustrated as a star.

**Niche:** This is the element of specialization; a fragment. When a niche is created, people are being mobilized. Typically, we see the first set of protests and discontent becomes collective. But a niche is too focused on one specific issue for the big change. They are challenging the status quo, but only in a highly fragmented area. The niche needs a vision in the form of a plan with x amount of points or demands in order to look at a bigger picture beyond their one focus issue. A successful niche is collaborative and wants to work with others that have a different specialization and same vision. It is illustrated as different green arrows that are either moving up or forward. They symbolize progress and green is for "go", but they have not joined efforts yet.

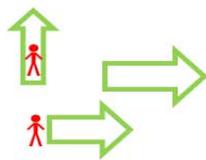
**Movement:** This is the most popular stage in social movements because it goes on for the longest. At this point, there is a clear statement of what the movement wants and a clearly defined stage of dissatisfaction. All the niches have joined together for a greater cause and they start a second wave of protests. The most important part of the stage is that now people are on the streets and every single one of them can answer the question "What do you want?". Their activism had become advocacy. It is illustrated by an arrow symbolizing progress and a line symbolizing status quo, which is being pushed. It also has a darker green symbolizing the strength of the joint efforts of the preciously light green arrows.

**Mainstream:** This is the stage where the movement has successfully created change. Laws have been passed, but they need to be constantly tested, upheld and enforced. Change has been made, but needs to be checked. It is illustrated like gears working, because it is not a permanent state, rather it is a condition, where work is needed to maintain it.

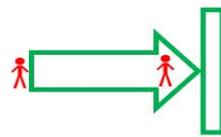
This model should be the basis of the question: Where are you in this model? It can be applied to different situations. For the convenience, I have added possible places to be:



Spark



Niche



Movement



Mainstream

- 1: You can be the person igniting the spark
- 2: You are working within a niche or starting one
- 3: You are the leader or follower of a movement
- 4: You are working inside the system to maintain the new status quo that the movement before it created

To summarize, this model serves as a blueprint to guide people that wish to challenge the status quo through a social movement. This process includes several steps that is divided into four different elements. A successful movement starts with a spark and ends with a working mainstream, but it can get there in different ways. The hope is that the model will help serve as a good guideline for identifying where a social movement is and how the social movement can proceed

*Thank you for your help, guidance and support:*

Dr. Karcheik Sims-Alvarado

Professor La'Neice Littleton

Dr. Daniel Black, Dr. Roslyn Pope, Dr. Carol Anderson, Derreck Kayongo, Adelina Nicholls, Margaret Leszko and John. E. Eaves.

NEDIMA DZAFERAGIC

University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

### “SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY AND STEREOTYPES”

Clever Hans was a horse that was famous for being able to read, spell, and solve math problems by stomping out answers with his front hoof. Naturally there were many skeptics, but when a committee of experts tested Hans's abilities, they were found to be genuinely performed without prompting from Mr. von Osten, his trainer. The world was amazed with such a degree of human intelligence and they wanted to know how it was possible. O. Pfungst, a psychologist, performed a series of careful experiments and found that Hans was receiving subtle unintentional cues from his questioners. For example, after asking a question, people would look down at the horse's hoof for the answer. As the horse approached the correct number of hoof-beats, the questioners would raise their eyes or head very slightly in anticipation of the horse completing his answer. The horse had been conditioned to use these subtle movements from the observers as signs to stop stomping, and this usually resulted in the correct answer to the question.<sup>1</sup> Clever Hans is one of the best examples how a self-fulfilling prophecy works and how our expectations or the expectations of others influence our behavior: What you expect is what you get.

A self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true.<sup>2</sup> When we talk about self-fulfilling prophecy, we are actually talking about behaviors which we unconsciously use to ensure that our false based expectation come true. People expected that Clever Hans would stop his hoof-beats in exact moment, so they would produce behavior which would stop Clever Hans' hoof. And if you can do this with animal, imagine how it works with human being. For example how it works in the context of the race and behaviors caused by stereotypes.

Past research and statistics showed a lower success rate for African American students on the SAT, which led to the conclusion that African Americans were less intelligent than other groups. This was used to justify the small percentage of African Americans in universities.

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<sup>1</sup> Rosenthal, R., SL. Jacobson, L. (1966). *Teachers' expectancies: Determinates of pupils' IQ gains*. AP Psychology; Psychological Reports 19, 115-118

<sup>2</sup> Merton, R. K. (1948). *The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*. The Antioch Review, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Summer, 1948). pp. 193-210.

However, it is now thought that negative stereotypes reduce the performance of individuals who belong to stereotyped groups. If negative stereotypes are present regarding a specific group, group members are likely to become anxious about their performance, which in turn may hinder their ability to perform at their best.<sup>3</sup> Students from stigmatized social groups are often bothered by the possibility that they will be viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype and as a result they feel extra pressure not to fail, else their poor performance will be perceived as evidence confirming the stereotype. This pressure can then impair their academic performance, thereby creating a self-fulfilling prophecy known as stereotype threat.

So, we will conclude that stereotypes could be dangerous: they not only shape our attitude towards a group but they also shape the behavior of that group; we will see what we want to see. We must be aware how our behavior and our perceptions are influenced by these stereotypes. For examples, if we assume white supremacy is behind the actions of every white person, we can easily neglect those non-whites who benefit from white supremacy and whites who are victims of their assumed supremacy. At the same time, when we react in the frames of our own false concepts, we provoke the response we expect—leading to the self-fulfilling prophecy. Things we see, hear or feel are always followed with judgments and sometimes our judgments can be very wrong. Every action, no matter how small requires struggle, choices and consequences. All what we see, hear or feel, we perceive through the prism of our own experiences and expectations completely unconscious to the fact that our perceptions and judgments are products of different conditionings which we (or our group) were exposed to in the past, different expectations which we (or our group) have for the future and emotions which we feel during the present action. If we put it in the term of a radical claim, we would say that we never perceive things in the same way. And, therefor, if we consider the fact that the whole social and ideological world is built on these constructs, we could say that we never even talk about the same things. We must be aware that learning about ourselves personally and through social interaction shapes our identities in different ways.

As a person with a background in psychology, I truly believe in personal accountability, self reflection and personal growth. I believe that the people who have the opportunity to learn and have access to knowledge, should serve their community constructively. Investment in personal growth can be observed through outcomes such as:

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<sup>3</sup> Steele, Claude, M. (1977). *A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance*. American Psychologist (52)6: 613 – 629

1. If you decide to work on your own development, you will be fine. You will gain the tools to make your life better.
2. If you are fine and if you have tools for making your life better, your community will not spend precious resources on you, but instead on someone who needs it more.
3. Through your self-development, you will be able to contribute to your community and you will be able to contribute to those who need help.

And you will have proven the phenomenon of a self-fulfilling prophecy: What you expect is what you get.

Being surrounded with such amazing people during the last month provoked many questions about the system we live in and our role within it, but the most important question during all this time was “what and where is the solution?” and the idea that final solution maybe don’t exist. Even so, we still must strive to make the changes, at least the smallest one, those on the personal level. Some of them will be small as a baby elephant who is holding the Sun with his small legs.<sup>4</sup> Some of them will be small as a simple idea that we can make mistake and that sometimes we are very wrong. But if we strive to gain the knowledge about ourselves and others, if we accept to understand our and others' group and if we learn how to rely on ourselves in the process of communication and forgiveness, we will become the change. And knowing all of this, maybe we can change the world through a change of our first assumptions about the person who is sitting next to us.

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<sup>4</sup> Ramona Big Eagle Moore. (2016). *Story about elephant*. Native American Culture and Racial Identity Lecture. John Lewis Fellowship. Atlanta, GA, July 2016.

## **TRANSFORMATIONS**

*“Education is the passport to the future,  
for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.”*

– **Malcolm X**

Education itself is the practice of freedom. It is through education that we face the realities of injustice. In my view, the John Lewis Fellowship is centered on fostering a transformative learning experience. This involves both intellectual and personal development and growth. The program provides a platform for fellows to consistently challenge and confront ourselves, questioning and reforming our conditioned notions and implicit, unconscious biases. This is crucial because when examining issues of civil and human rights, it becomes clear that we must radically transform the existing systems of oppression and exploitation. However, we can not reform society until we first transform and correct ourselves.

Transformative learning as a concept provides a set of pedagogical principles to get to the root cause of issues. According to sociologist John Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory,

*“At the core of transformative learning theory is the process of ‘perspective transformation’ with three dimensions: psychological (changes in understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioral (changes in lifestyle). Transformative learning is the expansion of consciousness through the transformation of basic worldview and specific capacities of the self; transformative learning is facilitated through consciously directed processes such as appreciatively accessing and receiving the symbolic contents of the unconscious and critically analyzing underlying premises.”<sup>1</sup>*

Moreover, “an important part of transformative learning is for individuals to change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds. This process is fundamentally rational and analytical.”<sup>2</sup> We worked together as a community to foster a collective learning environment to explore the depths of civil and human rights issues in the context of the United States. Through this process, we were able to absorb what we learned to reformulate the meaning of our experiences. The result was an expanded worldview.

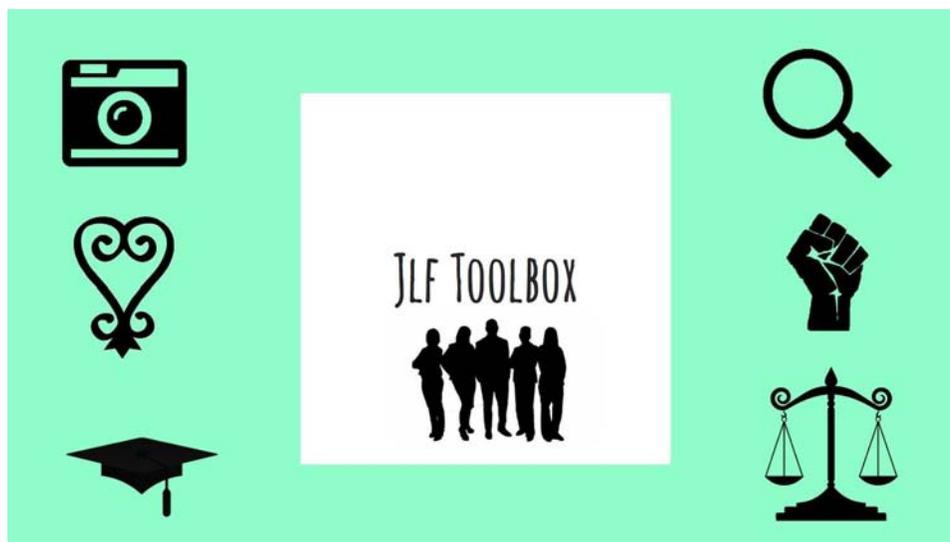
The concept of sankofa was a key theme throughout the fellowship. Sankofa translates to “we must look back to look forward,” or “we must go back and reclaim our past so we can move forward.” Sankofa is also often associated with the proverb, "*Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi,*" which translates to "it is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten.”

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<sup>1</sup> Mezirow, Jack, and Edward W. Taylor. *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

By practicing sankofa, we develop our lens to investigate the past, to inform the present in the fight for liberation. Through this process, we must also continuously confront ourselves.



The fellowship provided us with new, multidimensional ways of seeing, providing new lenses and frames to add to our toolbox for social change. I identified six of the main tools, as illustrated by the above symbols. These tools equip us to reexamine ourselves, our communities, and be active in promoting justice. First, the **camera** signifies the different frames in which we can view the world. The camera can be turned outwardly, to examine the environment around us, or turned inward, to introspect internally and confront ourselves and our existing biases.

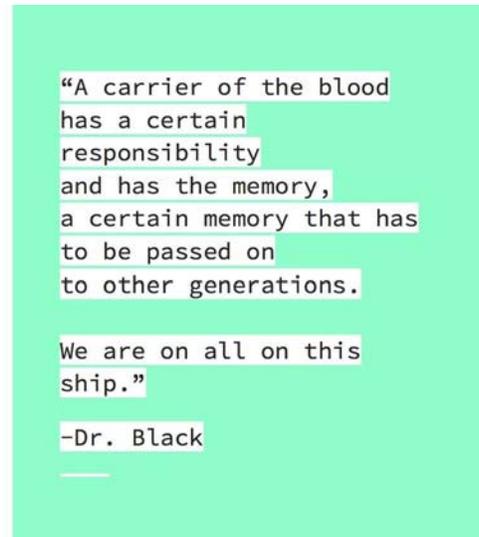
As we known from HIA, “the power of the reformer is that he or she changes things; the danger of the reformer is self-righteousness. For every ounce of diligence we devote to correcting the inequities of society and the world, we must devote twice as much energy correcting ourselves.”<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the **sankofa** symbol denotes that “we must go back and reclaim our past so we can move forward,” as mentioned earlier. Next, the importance of **education**, re-education and scholarship as we develop as “Scholar Activists” and “Intellectual Activists.” In pushing for social change it is not enough to “holler in the streets,” as Professor Littleton humorously pointed out, we must also know our facts, be organized, know our demands, and be credible. The **magnifying glass** is inspired by Dr. Sims-Alvarado, also known as the Historian in Heels, also known as Sherlock Holmes 2.0. Dr. Sims-Alvarado taught us that we must reexamine history, and dig beneath the surface of everything we think we know. History is “whitewashed,” and education often neglects a comprehensive and holistic examination of events, for instance, giving disproportionate attention to male leaders of movements but not females. It is our duty to investigate and question everything. The **raised fist** symbolizes solidarity, strength, and resistance. The raised fist is also associated with Black Power, which promotes Black autonomy and self-determination. The symbol also correspond with the “five friends” icon in the center of the above image (as Ms. Ilyasah Shabazz highlighted during her talk), indicating the community

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<sup>3</sup> Humanity in Action Fellowship Application (United States) – Personal Statement Essay

of allies essential for collaboration with to bring about change. Lastly, the **Scales of Justice** denotes the strife for justice, importance of morality and the significance of the law.

We learned that education and initiatives for change must engage the head (intellect), heart (emotion), and hands (practice).<sup>4</sup> Throughout the program, we were forced to confront ourselves. As we known from HIA, “the power of the reformer is that he or she changes things; the danger of the reformer is self-righteousness. For every ounce of diligence we devote to correcting the inequities of society and the world, we must devote twice as much energy correcting ourselves.”<sup>5</sup> An ongoing transformation must always be focused on challenging one’s self in order to grow.



Dr. Daniel Omotosho Black, author of *The Coming*, spoke passionately on the importance of self-knowledge during his talk with us. He discussed how African Americans and marginalized groups “reconstruct [themselves] for someone else’s comfort,” referring to how we suppress our identities consciously and subconsciously, often in order to integrate into American society, a society founded on systems of oppression. On truth, memory, and personal responsibility, Dr. Black goes on to say, “A carrier of the blood has a certain responsibility and has the memory, a certain memory that has to be passed on to other generations. We are on all on this ship.” We must understand our own personal and ancestral histories in order to examine and address discrimination as it arises today, and educate future generations. Dr. Black’s words especially resonated with me in my own experience of actively reclaiming my identity as an Iranian American.

Iranian American identity exists in a space of racial paradox. Shaped by the social and political dynamics of both the ‘old’ and ‘new’ country, “the Iranian émigrés are part of a diaspora

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<sup>4</sup> Watt, Sherry Kay. *Designing Transformative Multicultural Initiatives: Theoretical Foundations, Practical Applications, and Facilitator Considerations*.

<sup>5</sup> Humanity in Action Fellowship Application (United States) – Personal Statement Essay Prompt

generated by conflict, with a great deal of historical baggage.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Iranian American diasporic identity is complicated by varying ideological, as well as along social, ethnic, and religious lines.<sup>7</sup> The conflicts of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s caused large numbers of Iranians to flee the country and live in exile. Upon arrival, Iranians émigrés were greeted with harsh discrimination and anti-Iranian sentiment in the United States.



AT A STUDENT PROTEST OF THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS, A MAN HOLDS A SIGN THAT READS, “DEPORT ALL IRANIANS, GET THE HELL OUT OF MY COUNTRY.” WASHINGTON, D.C. 1979. PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTON S. TRIKOSKO. COURTESY OF UNITED STATES LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The rise of anti-Iranian sentiment, or ‘Iranophobia’ caused many Iranian émigrés to distance themselves from their cultural and ethnic ties. As a result, we grew up in a space of racial limbo due to the need to suppress our Middle Eastern identity. Because of political events, such as the Iran-Contra Scandal, the 1979 Revolution, Iran Hostage Crisis, and later, 9/11, identifying as Iranian had severe consequences. If you ask an Iranian where they are from, a common response is to that they are “Persian.” *Why?* Because identifying with “Persian” has a less negative connotation, and allows for us to separate themselves from Iran. This was reinforced again after 9/11 and the War on Terror, to bypass any confusion of “Iran” and “Iraq.”

According to the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA), nearly half of Iranian Americans surveyed in 2008 have themselves experienced or personally knew another Iranian American who has experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity or country of origin<sup>8</sup>. The most common types of discrimination reported were airport security, social discrimination, employment discrimination and racial profiling.<sup>9</sup> To circumvent discrimination, Iranian

<sup>6</sup> “Identity and Exile The Iranian Diaspora between Solidarity and Difference.” *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union*.

<sup>7</sup> Shams, Alex. "Are Iranians People of Color? Persian, Muslim, and Model Minority Race Politics." *Ajam Media Collective*. 03 Dec. 2013. Web.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Public Affairs of Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA) <http://www.paaia.org/CMS/2008-national-survey-.aspx>

Americans cultivated attitudes of “laying low” and not “rocking the boat” to stay out of the public eye, and promote their financial success to be deemed a “model minority.”<sup>10</sup> However, this ironically allows Iranian Americans to be complicit in the very system that is oppressing them.

The fight for liberation requires all marginalized communities to come together in solidarity to subvert the systems of oppression. In his essay, “Are Iranians People of Color? Persian, Muslim, and Model Minority Race Politics,” Alex Shams, of the AJAM Media Collective, eloquently states,

*“Identifying as White does not erase the problems of discrimination faced by generations of Iranians-Americans, nor does it aid in the struggle to dismantle the systems of oppression that structure US society as a whole. Iranian Americans in this country today are a diverse lot and are confronted by a wide variety of pressing issues, ranging from legal status to poverty and religious discrimination. The issues of race and racial discrimination outlined in this article are but two lenses with which to understand and interpret the position of the Iranian community in the US today.*

*But the failure of Iranian Americans to recognize their own complicated racial position in the United States risks doing our community a great disservice. We must be brutally honest with ourselves and with each other about systems of race and racial oppression in this country as well as how we fit into them, both in terms of privilege and oppression. Only through this honest discussion can we begin to imagine more clearly how solidarities can emerge among Iranian Americans and other communities of color in this country in the struggle to confront and dismantle institutionalized racism.”<sup>11</sup>*

It is crucial for Iranian Americans and other minority groups to recognize their own positionality, and it is our responsibility to reclaim our identities, and to re-educate the public and other generations about our history. We must stand in liberatory solidarity. As Alicia Garza, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, said, “When Black people get free, everybody gets free.”<sup>12</sup>

The John Lewis Fellowship presents us with a case study of the United States to study African American issues. To study human rights in the context is so crucial, but be engaged with Black liberation is not just simply a case study of a historically marginalized minority group. We must understand that we all hold a stake in Black liberation. Not just as a moral obligation, but because Black liberation will lead to the liberation of all people, the collective liberation of humanity. As an Iranian American, the program exposed me to truths on a personal level, regarding my own identity and racial formation. It provided me with a greater understanding of what it means to stand in solidarity and be an active ally throughout all that I do.

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<sup>10</sup> Shams, Alex.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Garza, Alicia, Opal Tometti, and Patrisse Cullors. “Herstory.” *Black Lives Matter*.

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