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Voices of the Say Her Name Campaign: Theorizing an Activist Rhetoric of Blame

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by

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ABSTRACT

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There is a lack of research in communication scholarship that analyzes how Black women employ blame from their unique standpoint. To combat this, this thesis analyzes the Say Her Name Campaign to demonstrate the ways Black women employ an activist rhetoric of blame that deconstructs their historical erasure in the discourse about antiblack police violence. Drawing upon Black feminist scholarship and epideictic rhetoric, I argue that an activist rhetoric of blame, used by Black women, dramatically puts on display the life of individuals who have experienced injustices and exposes blameworthy misogynoir attitudes in order to criticize the inherent flaws within a policy or system and urgently demand sociopolitical transformation. Each chapter analyzes one specific characteristic of an activist rhetoric of blame which includes the pedagogical, resistive, and collectivist functions. My introduction which serves as my first chapter, outlines the history of Black women's activism and connects it to blame. Chapter 2 analyzes three public texts from Kimberlé Crenshaw to explore the pedagogical functions of this form of blame. In chapter 3, I examine three slam poetry performances to investigate the resistive functions of an activist rhetoric of blame whereas chapter 4 analyzes the SayHerName: Moving Toward Justice and Action event to explore the collectivist functions. From this thesis project, we learn that Black women's activist rhetoric of blame sets in motion the necessary awareness communities must adopt to adequately advocate for social justice.

To

my mother,

my sisters,

and my Don,

thank you.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BLMM	Black Lives Matter Movement
SHNC	Say Her Name Campaign
SHNE	SayHerName: An Evenings of Action and Arts
CRT	Critical Race Theory
BAM	Black Arts Movement

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Chapter 1:
Introduction

In 2012, #BlackLivesMatter hashtag appeared on Twitter, first used by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, following the death of Trayvon Martin. The movement seeks to bring attention to state-sanctioned violence against Black bodies and collectively highlight Black people's experience with this form of oppression.[1] The hashtag was moved from social media to the streets under the narrative of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM). National protests and rallies occurred after George Zimmerman, the Florida neighborhood watch coordinator who killed Martin, was acquitted of all charges in 2013.

While the stories of Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Trayvon Martin have become catalysts for public policy debates and garnered nationwide attention, there is a lack of awareness for Black women's experience with police brutality. Black women make up 33% of all women and girls who have been killed by the police, so their stories exist, they have just been omitted from the public discourse about antiblack police violence and the BLMM.[2] Black women's experience with police brutality is very distinct from Black men because it is, as Crenshaw and Ritchie explain, "uniquely informed by race, gender, identity, and sexual orientation."[3] Yet, the stories of Rekia Boyd, Meagan Hockaday, Alexia Christian, and Janisha Fonville have not been exemplars for the police brutality Black people experience daily. Existing as both Black and women under systematic oppression provides little opportunity to assuage the weight of one's identity, which informs Black women's everyday experiences in society. Black women tend to slip through the cracks of the discourse about antiblack police violence because the news stories,

[1]Garza, "A Herstory of the# BlackLivesMatter Movement," 23.
[2]Crenshaw and Ritchie, "Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women," 1.
[3]Jones, *Reclaiming Our Space*, 12.

the journals, the television shows, and the books we read center around Black men and White women creating an anti-Black women narrative.[4]

To address the erasure of Black women from the discourse about antiblack police violence and highlight the stories of Black women that have gone unnoticed by the media, the #SayHerName hashtag was created by multiple Black women on Twitter following the police brutality against Sandra Bland in 2015. The Say Her Name Campaign (SHNC) developed into a movement that aims to reappraise the value of Black women's lives and confront the ongoing mistreatment of Black women by police.[5] Andrea Ritchie argues that the intersectional stance of the SHNC forces increased attention to the experiences of Black women in the BLMM.[6] In this context, the SHNC functions as a corrective to the BLMM because it demonstrates how Black women are demanding recognition and agency in the fight against antiblack police violence. Amber Baylor explains, "The related hashtag #SayHerName has connected activists engaged in efforts to challenge the treatment of women by law enforcement."[7] The SHNC articulates the voice of Black women by situating their experiences and ideas as part of remaking "herstory."[8] The SHNC works to change the history for Black women by providing tangible evidence and resources for the public to understand Black women's experience with police brutality.

Although Black women have struggled to gain recognition for their experience with police brutality, the SHNC allows them to have a platform that recognizes and advocates for their stories to be illuminated. This thesis project illustrates how an activist rhetoric of blame restructures the discourse about antiblack police violence by actualizing new values through the

[4]Smith, "#BlackWomenMatter: Neo-Capital Punishment Ideology in the Wake of State Violence," 264.
[5]The abbreviation "SHNC" refers to the Say Her Name movement/campaign which consist of multiple leaders, activists and members who challenge the treatment of Black women by police officers. The term "#SayHerName hashtag" refers specifically to the hashtag on social media platforms but not the campaign.
[6]Ritchie, *Invisible No More,* 20.
[7]Baylor, "#SayHerName Captured: Using Video to Challenge Law Enforcement Violence Against Women," 143.
[8]The African American Policy Forum, "#SayHerName Campaign."

rejection of misogynoir logics that maintain Black women's oppression. I conceptualize Black women's activism in the SHNC as a form of epideictic rhetoric that challenges the ways gender and racial biases erase Black women from these conversations. I chose to categorize this form of activism within the epideictic genre rather than deliberative or forensic because the SHNC educates and rejects community values in a way that lays the groundwork for political action. This thesis is going to examine the discourse surrounding the SHNC to illustrate how Black women advance an activist rhetoric of blame. Specifically, I argue that an activist rhetoric of blame, used by Black women, dramatically puts on display the life of individuals who have experienced injustices and exposes blameworthy misogynoir logics in order to criticize the inherent flaws within a policy or system and urgently demand sociopolitical transformation. Through the examination of the SHNC, I explore how Black women use this form of blame to reshape how communities interpret their stories, deconstruct misogynoir attitudes they have internalized, provide them with tools to apportion blame, and create a community in opposition to the injustices Black women experience daily.

The aim of this chapter is to trace how the SHNC aligns with a legacy of Black women's activism. First, I discuss the scholarship on the rhetoric of blame and how blame can be utilized by marginalized communities. I then theorize an activist rhetoric of blame by combining Black feminist scholarship with epideictic discourse. Lastly, I give a detailed description of the three rhetorical artifacts that I will be analyzing in this paper including three public texts from Crenshaw, three slam poetry performances, and the SayHerName: An Evening of Action and Art event (SHNE).

History of Black Women's Activism

Over the years, Black women have utilized direct actions and ideas in their writing, petitioning, and speeches to expose antiblack violence in their communities and promote change. In the nineteenth century, Black women activists such as Sojourner Truth, Frances E.W. Harper, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell used their writings and speeches to expose the state-sanctioned violence against the Black community. For example, in Ida B. Wells' famous speech in 1893 called "Lynch Law in All Its Phases," she assumed the persona of an investigator and presented a well-researched narrative in front of a White audience. She did this to expose the unethical and immoral nature of lynching Black bodies.[9] Wells recounts 52 Black lynchings and details the gruesome lynching of Henry Smith in Paris, Texas on February 1, 1893.[10] Likewise, Frances E. W. Harper delivered a public address called "Woman's Political Future" at the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. Harper particularly addressed the issues of lynching Black people and according to Shirley Wilson Logan, urged the women's suffrage activists to stop lynching through their political power and influence.[11]

While public address was one medium Black women used to confront antiblack violence, writing was also a radical act of resistance against white supremacy that exposed the state-sanctioned violence against Black people. Ida B. Wells left an intellectual legacy of writings such as *Southern Horrors, A Red Record, Lynch Law in Georgia*, and *Mob Rule in New Orleans*, that confronted various forms of lynching on Black bodies and asserted that lynching is a "motivated fear over the loss of power."[12] Likewise, Mary Church Terrell used her writings to expose the brutal and harsh nature of lynching on the Black body. In 1904, Mary Church Terrell

[9]Ida B. Wells, "Lynch Law in All Its Phases," 333-347.
[10]Logan, "Ida B. Wells, 'Lynch Law in All Its Phases' (13 February 1893)," 50.
[11]Logan, "Frances W. Harper, 'Woman's Political Future' (20 MAY 1893)," 51.
[12]Logan, "Ida B. Wells, 'Lynch Law in All Its Phases' (13 February 1893)," 61.

stated that "hanging, shooting, burning black men, women and children in the United States have become so common that such occurrences created but little sensation and evoke but slight comment now."[13] Terrell attempts to debunk the false narrative that Black men rape innocent White women which was used to justify the lynchings of Black men by the state.

In the twentieth century, Black women were able to translate their activism onto larger platforms through the use of technology which displayed their message to a broader audience. For example, civil rights leader, Fannie Lou Hamer's famous speech on national television at the Democratic National Convention in 1964, shed light on Black women's experience with police violence. Hamer shared how her own personal experience with police brutality left permanent injuries on her body. She stated, "Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?"[14] Hamer transformed her grief and pain into political activism and confronted how Black people live in consistent fear of the police because they yearned for the same citizenship as their White counterparts. Her powerful testimony specifically, highlighted Black women's experience with state-sanctioned violence and challenged the fact that Black women were essentially denied citizenship rights. As Deborah Atwater explained, examinations of Black women's political activism in the nineteenth and twentieth century demonstrates how they were influential to "the success of the movement, and we see how they expanded their tight spaces to enhance and liberate their overall lives and the lives of those around them."[15] The examples above shed light on Black women's long tradition of activism against racial violence.

[13]Church, "Lynching from a Negro's Point of View," 853.
[14]Hamer, "Testimony Before the Credentials Committee at the Democratic National Convention."
[15]Atwater, *African American Women's Rhetoric,* 81.

In the 1980s, Mary Bumpurs and Veronica Perry held a large initiative in New York City to show how antiblack police violence impacts their community. In 1984, Bumpurs sixty-seven-year-old mother, Eleanor Bumpurs, was killed by police officers in New York City during a mental health crisis. In 1985, Perry's seventeen-year-old son, Edmund Perry, was also shot and killed by police officers in New York City. After losing their loved ones, both cases drew widespread media attention and public outcry from the Black community. For example, the memorial service for Eleanor Bumpurs was broadcasted nationally on channel five news in Bronx, New York in 1986.[16] Bumpurs and Perry collectively used protests, interviews, and speeches to advance their political goals and push for nationwide reform.[17] I offer these contributions as examples for how Black women consistently use different methods of activism and platforms to speak out against antiblack violence and challenge white supremacy.

More recently, Black women have been using social media sites such as Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, and even Snapchat as public platforms for them to share their testimonies about state-sanctioned violence against the Black community. Feminista Jones argues that the internet allows Black women to "create and hold space" for being erased and their "voices have been refreshingly explosive in the self-affirming, self-preserving, digital communities" they form.[18] One of the most popular expressions of hashtag activism is #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. According to their website, the goal of the BLMM is "to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes."[19] The hashtag gained prominence following the killings of Trayvon

[16]Fox5NY, "Shooting of Eleanor Bumpurs."
[17]Schneider, *Police Power and Race Riots: Urban Unrest in Paris and New York*, 60.
[18]Jones, *Reclaiming Our Space*, 13.
[19]Black Lives Matter, "About."

Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and more recently, George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, which cultivated widespread protests across the nation.

However, despite Black women's attempt to expose antiblack police violence against Black communities, there is a long historical erasure of Black women's experience in this particular discourse. Parul Sehgal defines "erasure" as "the tendency of ideologies to dismiss inconvenient facts" that "is increasingly used to describe how inconvenient people are dismissed, their history, pain, and achievements blotted."[20] Although the BLMM was founded by three Black women, the uptake of the hashtag by the public excluded Black women and their experiences in the movement. The BLMM was criticized by the public for reflecting the stories of only Black men who have experienced police brutality.

Within the BLMM, Black women have agency, but they are still susceptible to dismissal due to the power dynamics embodied in the narratives about police brutality that oppress their testimonies and uplifts Black men. Crenshaw and Ritchie argue that the BLMM "has developed a clear frame to understand the police killings of Black men and boys, theorizing the ways in which they are systematically criminalized and feared across disparate class backgrounds and irrespective of circumstance" but the movement failed to highlight the countless Black women that have been killed or assaulted by police.[21] This erasure transpired because of the manner in which images of Black men populated the media feed in a way that overshadowed Black women. This exclusion reveals how Black women are vulnerable to erasure even in the movements they create.

[20]Sehgal, "Fighting 'Erasure.'"
[21]Crenshaw and Ritchie, "Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women," 1.

Black women have spoken out against police brutality. However, they have not gotten much traction in the discourse about antiblack police violence until recently. Within this discourse, Black women were forced to construct their identity as the "Other" which led to the creation of the SHNC. In December of 2014, #SayHerName hashtag was launched by a group of Black feminist scholars on Twitter to bring attention to the violence Black women experience in the United States. The SHNC "sheds light on Black women's experiences of police violence in an effort to support a gender-inclusive approach to racial justice that centers all Black lives equally."[22] The SHNC reveals the untold stories of Black women who have been killed or harmed by the police in order to encourage legal and political action. The campaign allows Black women to process, cope, address, and express their pain with interlocking oppressions as well as heal from them.

The SHNC crystallizes the two capacities that Black women have struggled to obtain simultaneously within the discourse about antiblack police brutality: visibility and agency. The campaign is a corrective to the BLMM because it allows Black women's experiences to be recognized by this discourse and the public. Black women's public activism strives to highlight their encounters with police regarding "lethal and excessive force" in a way that "include[s] sexual harassment and assault, policing of gender and sexuality, and profiling and targeted enforcements."[23] Their activism creates space on public platforms to demand justice, garner attention, and fight back against oppression. The use of the #SayHerName hashtag allows Black women to use their freedom of speech in a way that pushes their agenda to the forefront of the American media consciousness and reconstructs liberation narratives for Black women.[24]

[22]The African American Policy Forum, "Say Her Name" 2.
[23]Crenshaw and Ritchie, "Say Her Name," 21.
[24]Jones, *Reclaiming Our Space*, 14.

The #SayHerName hashtag helps Black women accumulate support through social media and it expands to Black traditional news outlets such as *Essence* magazine, *Ebony* magazine, and major news channels. Jennifer Borda and Bailey Marshall argue that the mobility of #SayHerName hashtag is an example of "rhetorical stratification" which is how the circulation of a hashtag moves and goes beyond Twitter or the platform it was created on.[25] The campaign exemplifies rhetorical stratification through its online circulation across various media platforms in a way that encourages others to be active within the campaign. The media engagements lead to in-person activist events that utilize the narratives of the SHNC to reach a larger audience than ever before. For instance, to demand justice for Breonna Taylor, a Black woman killed by police in her home on March 13, 2020, Tamika Mallory, and the members of Until Freedom hosted a rally on June 25, 2020 in Frankfort, Kentucky where more than 500 people gathered to support their message.[26] Black women employ a wide range of political strategies by using multiple media platforms to create space for their stories to be told and to advocate for policy reform.

The Rhetoric of Blame

Many rhetorical scholars have characterized epideictic discourse as ceremonial rhetoric that praises or blames a subject or types of behaviors in order to amplify or reject communal values and encourage change.[27] What makes epideictic rhetoric different than deliberative discourse is that it enables change through a community's adherence to values. Ilon Lauer contends that Aristotle's view of epideictic discourse connects the topics of praise or blame to the current time and utilizes ethos, amplification, and narratives as its rhetorical force.[28]

[25]Borda and Marshall, "Creating a Space to# SayHerName: Rhetorical Stratification in the Networked Sphere," 135.
[26]Ashley, "Hundreds Rally in Frankfort 104 Days After Breonna Taylor's Death."
[27]Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric,* 1-7; Lauer, "Epideictic Rhetoric," 11.
[28]Lauer, "Epideictic Rhetoric," 5.

Aristotle's view of epideictic is typically applied to speeches at graduation ceremonies, funerals, weddings, eulogies, and the like. However, Kathryn Olson argued that some texts have epideictic dimensions though they might not be generally epideictic such as movies, television shows, spoken word poetry, dances, and rallies. Focusing on epideictic dimensions of nontraditional public artifacts "shows how a text coherently, elaborately, and powerfully promotes and justifies values, beliefs, and practices that maintain status quo power relationships, even when those are not its ostensible lessons."[29] Olson contends that these texts can help maintain the status quo however, an activist rhetoric of blame works to overturn the status quo by showing how the same values that maintain this status quo work to marginalize groups of people.

For many years Aristotle's perception of the genre dominated scholarly thinking. However, more contemporary scholars have perceived Aristotle's view of epideictic discourse as limiting because it neglects communal functions and other rhetorical characteristics.[30] Fortunately, there are other features and communal functions of epideictic rhetoric that contemporary scholars have highlighted. For example, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca argued that epideictic is the foundation for deliberative and forensic action because it "increases[s] the intensity of adherence to values held in common by the audience and the speaker" therefore these values make it possible for the speaker to induce action.[31] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca also integrated education into the functions of epideictic rhetoric while emphasizing the genre's role in maintaining cultural values.[32] Similarly, an activist rhetoric of

[29]Olson, "An Epideictic Dimension of Symbolic Violence in Disney's Beauty and The Beast," 461.
[30]Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric,* 1-7.
[31]Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, "The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation, Trans," 53.
[32]Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, "The New Rhetoric," 51-52.

blame works to increase opposition to public vices in ways that challenge damaging hegemonic systems.

This thesis spotlights the last two functions of epideictic rhetoric highlighted by Celeste Condit which identifies how this discourse entertains an audience and constructs community. Condit argues that epideictic rhetoric consists of three main functions: definition/understanding, display/entertainment, and shaping/sharing community. [33] In definition/understanding, the rhetor gains power and credibility through their epideictic discourse which enables them to persuade the audience to adopt their stance on a particular issue. Second, epideictic occasions serve as public display and entertainment for the audience because the rhetor is given the opportunity to exhibit their own eloquent practice and creativity in a way that entertains the audience. Third, epideictic rhetoric serves to shape and share community "through public speaking and hearing of the community heritage and identity."[34] I focus on the last two functions of epideictic rhetoric, display/entertainment and shaping/sharing community, to demonstrate how blame operates discursively to build community around a particular issue. Specifically, I explore the ways Black women use an activist rhetoric of blame to mold a community's mind toward the attitudes embedded in the injustices they experience from police.

The purpose of epideictic rhetoric is to ultimately induce action within the audience through the portrayal of public values. This extends to an activist rhetoric of blame by showing the audiences role in assigning blame and therefore, taking action against injustice. Christine Oravec extended Aristotle's view of the audience's role during epideictic moments as just passive observers to include the roles of evaluators and judges of the epideictic discourse being

[33]Condit, "'The Functions of Epideictic:' The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar," 288-291.
[34]Condit, "'The Functions of Epideictic,'" 289.

displayed.[35] Lawrence Rosenfield demonstrates how the shared meaning created by the rhetor and the audience during epideictic occasions produce moments of shared truth and knowledge about being.[36] The variety of perspectives by contemporary scholars points to the adaptability and ambiguity of epideictic discourse.

While much work has focused on epideictic rhetoric's traditional style of praise, there has been little attention given to the rhetoric of blame within the epideictic genre. As Clarke Rountree put it, epideictic is an almost "blameless" genre.[37] Blame focuses on the disgraceful and it employs shame or accusations toward a group or an audience.[38] Aristotle perceived blame as being the opposite of praise, but he did not give as much attention to articulating the unique characteristics of the rhetoric of blame.[39] Aristotle briefly discussed blame through the use of public vices including "injustice, cowardice, lack of control, stinginess, little-mindedness, and illiberality."[40] However, Kenneth Burke's arguments about guilt and redemption can provide another avenue for understanding rhetorical strategies rhetors use to blame. Burke argues that language and symbolic action is a means for society to purge collective guilt by providing the "thou shall not's," which are moral commands.[41] Yet, guilt can also be a way of relieving a group from responsibility which Burke termed as victimage/scapegoating and mortification which is self-blame.[42] What differentiates an activist rhetoric of blame from Burke's contentions, is that this form of blame is premised upon the imperative of justice and puts blame upon dominant systems.

[35]Oravec, "'Observation' in Aristotle's Theory of Epideictic," 163.
[36]Rosenfield, "The Practical Celebration of Epideictic."
[37]Rountree, "The (Almost) Blameless Genre of Classical Greek Epideictic," 293.
[38]Kennedy, *Aristotle on Rhetoric*, 1-6.
[39]Rountree, "The (Almost) Blameless Genre of Classical Greek Epideictic," 293.
[40]Kennedy, *Aristotle on Rhetoric*, 149.
[41]Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion*, 231.
[42]Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives.*

While rhetorics of blame that uphold the status quo often scapegoat individuals, an activist rhetoric of blame by Black women challenges the status quo by calling out systems of oppression. Scholars have indicated how powerful individuals or groups use different rhetorics of blame to uphold power and maintain the status quo which relieves them of responsibility. However, less is known about how blame operates among rhetors who are from lower social positions. Barry Brummett used Burke's theory about guilt—specifically, mortification, scapegoating and transcendence—in order to illustrate how social order is established and maintained symbolically by presidential candidates in the 1980s.[43] Likewise, Susan Mackey-Kallis and Dan Hahn's analysis of the "Just Say No" campaigns demonstrates how the Reagan administration used mortification as a rhetorical strategy to force individuals to take the blame for systematic issues. The Reagan administration's rhetoric of blame was centered around individual responsibility by maintaining the argument that "[i]f the individual has the obligation to solve social problems then it must be the individual who is to blame for these problems in the first place."[44] In another analysis by Mackey-Kallis and Hahn, they demonstrate how rhetorics of blame are often used by people of power to position marginalized groups as the enemies. They argue that the judges, lawmakers, journalists, and the Clinton Administration relied on victimage rhetoric to misplace blame for the drug problems in America from 1986-1991. They created enemies out of the drug lords, drug pushers and specifically the Black community. Black communities were disproportionality victimized and were often positioned as the "vicious criminals."[45] All of these examples highlight how rhetorics of blame adopted by powerful rhetors

[43]Brummett, "Burkean Scapegoating, Mortification, And Transcendence in Presidential Campaign Rhetoric."
[44]Mackey-Kallis and Hahn, "Questions of Public Will and Private Rights," 9.
[45]Mackey-Kallis, "Who's to Blame for America's Drug Problem?" 15.

can be used to relief Americans of guilt or relieve the dominant group of guilt, identify common enemies, maintain social order, and "strengthened consensus through marginalizing dissenters."[46]

While Burke's contentions are useful for analyzing blame, it is less useful for understanding how marginalized groups and more specifically, Black women, employ blame to criticize their social positions. I ask, what happens when marginalized groups adopt rhetorics of blame to restructure society? How do individuals in lower social positions employ blame and challenge the status quo? Such questions inform the future work for the rhetoric of blame by expanding it to oppressed communities in order to illuminate how they reject hegemonic values and highlight new ones that cater to their lived experiences.

Past studies have examined the ways marginalized groups employ blame, but Black women's enactment of blame has yet to be uniquely theorized by rhetorical scholars. For instance, the analysis by Elizabethada Wright illustrates how women rhetors who are not in positions of power used blame to change and teach social values. Wright examines a series of letters written by Mother Theodore Guérin during the nineteenth century in order to demonstrate how blame can fortify a rhetor's ethos and move an audience toward envisioning new realities. Wright gave a very simple definition of blame as "a speech that places responsibility for wrongs on another."[47] Wright presents Guérin's rhetoric of blame as nonaggressive and more docile to illustrate how women in liminal positions negotiate values and interrupt established cultural beliefs in ways that do not attack their opponent. Likewise, Elizabeth Church explores the didactic nature of blame in order to demonstrate how blame can be used to teach civic virtues and build a community in opposition to dominant structures.[48] She created a heuristic model that

[46]Mackey-Kallis, "Who's to Blame for America's Drug Problem?" 17.
[47]Wright, "The Caprices of an Undisciplined Fancy," 272.
[48]Church, "Epideictic Without the Praise: A Heuristic Analysis for Rhetoric of Blame."

encompassed thirteen questions and applied them to the writings of Ida B. Wells and a website by the Save Darfur Coalition. Although Church discusses Wells' identity as an African American woman, she does not discuss the role blackness plays in creating and maintaining the rhetoric of blame. Instead, she focuses on Wells' didactic use of blame and her womanhood.

While both Wright and Church broaden our understanding of blame and show how feminist inquiry goals can be put into practice, neither studies discuss the connection between the rhetoric of blame and women of color, specifically Black women. For example, Wright puts feminist inquiry goals into practice through her exploration of the feminist *ēthē* development embodied in Guérin's rhetoric of blame. Wright's concluding argument contends that blame has been previously viewed as a form of attack, which "suggest[s] that this form of rhetoric was not easily used by women."[49] Then, Wright states that blame should also be understood as "a means of restructuring to address wrongs."[50] Yet, Wright does not demonstrate how women's rhetoric of blame, as a form of attack, can be used to restructure society. Wright rather shows how Guérin delivered her rhetoric of blame in a "subtle" manner to achieve her rhetorical purposes which were to demonstrate how her opponents' values inhibits her ability to enforce her moral values.[51] Guérin restructured society by reinforcing old values and forming new ones through her nonaggressive discourse of blame.

In the same way, Church does not focus on Ida B. Wells' distinctive form of blame as a Black woman but rather uses Wells to "unveil women's experience and women's discourse

[49]Wright, "The Caprices of an Undisciplined Fancy," 282.
[50]Wright, "The Caprices of an Undisciplined Fancy," 282.
[51]Wright, "The Caprices of an Undisciplined Fancy," 274.

strategies."[52] Church makes the experience of Ida B. Wells universal which implicitly silences the voice of her blackness, centering instead on her femininity. As Kimberly Johnson states,

> The absence of a discourse or rhetorical criticism that analyzes the dominant forms of oppression that affect black women in their everyday lived experiences strongly suggests that the African American woman's experience is a generic experience / standpoint that can easily be represented by their white feminist sisters from the Feminist Movement or their black male counterparts from the Civil Rights Movement.[53]

There is a lack of research in our discussions about the rhetorics of blame that analyzes how Black women employ blame and use it to confront sexism and white supremacy from their unique standpoint. Rather, rhetorical criticism has combined Black women's experiences with White women and Black men, neglecting their everyday struggles with oppression. Specifically, our current research about rhetorics of blame has neglected the voices of Black women by focusing on rhetors in power or assuming Black women's rhetorics of blame are similar to their White counterparts. Yet blame, as Mackey-Kallis and Hahn's point out, is easily cast upon Black bodies by government officials and people in power because Black people are viewed as savage criminals.[54] Although Black women are often a part of the blaming process, they are normally the ones being blamed. In the process of engaging in blame, it is possible for Black women to be targeted by the groups they are fighting against for speaking out. Since confronting systems of oppression can be seen as pushing against dominant structures, blaming can be misinterpreted as a "deviant act" which can lead to violence or even death. The current framework about rhetorics of blame has not illuminated how Black women use distinctive forms of blame in a way that no longer renders them the enemy. Tamika Carey argues that Black women use discursive practices

[52]Church, "Epideictic Without the Praise," 182
[53]Johnson, "If Womanist Rhetoricians Could Speak..."161.
[54]Mackey-Kallis and Hahn, "Who's to Blame for America's Drug Problem?" 15-16.

such as "'talking back,' 'turning it out' and 'calling a thing a thing,' or radical truth telling.'"[55] This suggests that these communicative strategies can be used by Black women to confront and resist powerful hegemonic discourses. Black women's discourse of blame can be a form of attack toward the systems that oppress them but, as I will show, it is a risk they take in fighting for liberation. This project accounts for Black women's assertive rhetorics of blame on public platforms as a way of exposing public vices, resisting dominant structures, and seeking to reconstruct communities in opposition to these vices.

Defining an Activist Rhetoric of Blame

This thesis explores Black women's long-lasting effort to create an antiracist and antisexist society. As a Black woman, I resonate with the stories within the SHNC discourse because I see pieces of myself reflected through the deaths and injustices of Black women who experience police brutality daily. According to Ashley Hall, Black women's rhetoric must be understood as a threat to white supremacy because it makes visible our "refusal to stay in hegemonic frames."[56] It is the hegemonic frames of white supremacy and Black male privilege that shield the public's knowledge of our experiences. An activist rhetoric of blame will help to consider how we use our voice and agency to disrupt the oppressive structures that maintain an antiblackwoman world.

To demonstrate how Black women disrupt hegemonic frames during moments of blame, I combine Black feminist scholarship with previous research on epideictic rhetoric. Black feminist scholarship can help characterize the tendencies of an activist rhetoric of blame because it interrogates how race and gender inform Black women's public activism. Theorizing an

[55]Carey, "Necessary Adjustment: Black Women's Rhetorical Impatience," 270.
[56]Hall, "Slippin' In and Out of Frame," 343.

activist rhetoric of blame, with the help of Black feminist work, will provide new explorations of Black women's activism and builds a theory from Black women's unique standpoint.

For Black women, activism has been a consistent tool for resisting forms of oppression and countering the exploitation that they experience in their everyday lives. According to Patricia Hill Collins, Black women's activism "consist[s] of actions taken to create Black female spheres of influence within existing social structures."[57] Activism is the act of using one's body, images, campaigns, or the internet to promote social, judicial, or legislative change regarding current ideologies. Activism consists of different agitative practices like boycotts, protests, performances, looting, and rioting in order to reform or challenge the current system. I am defining activism based on the actions Black women have used in the past to challenge and resist dominant structures.

An epideictic discourse of blame is a performance that gives the rhetor an opportunity to showcase their unique positionality[58] and prompts the audience to feel grief or anger. Rhetorics of blame create a sense of community or division through the devotion to certain values and the rejection of vices.[59] Blame can still unite and define communities, but it does so through the exposure of public vices rather than virtues. Injustice, selfishness, prejudice, discrimination, neglect, cruelty, and misogyny are all forms of public vices because they are perceived as wicked or immoral behaviors. Blame is a form of epideictic speech that shames the past actions of a society or an individual by identifying and criticizing public vices and urging the audience to avoid these actions in the future. The rhetoric of blame does not encourage the audience to repeat

[57]Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 204.
[58]Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar," 288.
[59]Kennedy, *Aristotle On* Rhetoric, 78–86; Ray, "The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States," 185; Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Classical Greece*, 185–206.

the past, as a rhetoric of praise might do, but rather, prescribes different iniquities and perspectives for the community to reject in order to create change in society.

An activist rhetoric of blame is the act of a person or group utilizing agitative practices to advance accusations, anger, or grief in efforts to lay the groundwork for changing the system and prompting accountability. When we think of activism as a form of agitation, this is "when people outside the normal decision-making establishment advocate significant social change and encounter a degree of resistance within the establishment such as to require more than the normal discursive means of persuasion."[60] Activists are agitators that lack the political power to make decisions thus, they find different forms of persuasion to address their sociopolitical desires.

In the past, rhetors used rhetorics of blame to maintain the status quo, but marginalized rhetors like Black women have to become more inventive when trying to navigate through constraints that maintain their oppression. Although an activist rhetoric of blame should not be limited to Black women's activism, the way Black women use blame on public platforms is uniquely different. Black women's language is a tool that reflects their identity and is a key component to understanding their heritage and culture. Shardé Davis argues that "many Black American women cherish their respective cultural codes, linguistic styles and communicative patterns because they signify a shared experience of the legacies of colonization, slavery, disenfranchisement, and marginalization."[61] Some communicative practices that Black women enact are assertive and direct verbal language, code switching, talking loud, and culturally nuanced speech codes.[62] Black women's unique style of speech serves as a weapon for

[60]Bower, Ochs, Jensen, and Schulz, "The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control," 4.
[61]Davis, "The "Strong Black Woman Collective": A Developing Theoretical Framework for Understanding Collective Communication Practices of Black Women," 26.
[62]Davis, "The "Strong Black Woman Collective," 25.

challenging the status quo. Marsha Houston characterizes Black women's words as aggressive and outspoken language that can help to dispel negative stereotypes such as the jezebel, sapphire, mammy, or the angry Black woman. When Black women exercise their individual power through distinctive communication acts, or as bell hooks called it "talking back," it can transform society and resist dominant structures of oppression. As Patricia Hill Collins points out, Black women are self-defined individuals who use their own language, experiences, and epistemology as a tool for resisting the dehumanizing definitions of Black womanhood.[63]

I explore how Black women employ an activist rhetoric of blame to dramatically display the life of individuals who have experienced injustices and the vices that maintain these injustices. To understand how Black women expose blameworthy public vices, I turn to Moya Bailey and Trudy's term "misogynoir."[64] Misogynoir is the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience daily. For this thesis project, I focus on the misogynoir attitudes which are emotions and perspectives toward Black women that drive their exploitation and abuse by police. These misogynoir attitudes can include but are not limited to the objectification and dehumanization of Black women, sexist perspectives that prioritizes the experiences of men, and traditional stereotypes of Black women as the jezebel, sapphire, mammy, angry Black woman, and the matriarch.[65] When people accept these negative perceptions of Black women, they assume that Black women are immune to pain, harassment, violence, and suffering. Such attitudes can also be used to justify behaviors that facilitate Black women's mistreatment by police and erase their experience with this form of violence from the narratives about antiblack police violence. I focus on the ways Black women expose these misogynoir attitudes through

[63]Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 17.
[64]Bailey and Trudy, "On Misogynoir: Citation, Erasure, And Plagiarism."
[65]Bailey and Trudy, "On Misogynoir."

their blame on various public platforms such an interview, TEDTalk, slam performances, and a social justice event.

There are three rhetorical functions of an activist rhetoric of blame that I will explore in my thesis. The first function of an activist rhetoric of blame is its pedagogical power to teach the community about values through the performance and demonstration of blameworthy vices. Epideictic discourse can be a pedagogical tool that instructs the audience about adherence to communal values. As Ersula Ore argues, "Epideictic rhetoric is known as a rhetoric of display and might be described as a 'species of pedagogy' that instructs those addressed in the ways of the community through exhibition and demonstration."[66] Epideictic discourse encourages an audience to adopt or reject certain values through modes of demonstration which can be speeches or even slam poetry performances, videos, images, songs, and dances. These demonstrations function epideictically as lessons about political and social misogynoir logics that inform Black women's systematic oppression. As I will show, an activist rhetoric of blame not only illustrates blameworthy vices that the audience should reject but it teaches the audience the language they need to adopt to properly allocate blame. In other words, rather than implying the solution for rejecting these public vices, it shows the audience how to blame specific systems and illustrates strategies they can use to deconstruct public vices they might have internalized.

The second function of an activist rhetoric of blame that will be analyzed is its ability to operate as a mechanism of resistance. Previous Black feminist scholars such as bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Shardé Davis, Angela Davis, and Rhana Gittens have connected the act of resisting oppressive structures to Black women's activism. The act of

[66]Ore, *Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric and American Identity*, 21; Griswold and Griswold. "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Washington Mall: Philosophical Thoughts on Political Iconography," 689.

resisting can be understood as "doing something that is 'not expected,'"[67] that is in opposition to the dominant group or prevailing values. Resistance can be depicted through overt emotional displays such as communicating rage, frustration, aggravation, disappointment, and negative emotions that go against consistent oppression.[68] Shardé Davis states, "Black feminist literature has established that Black women have the agency to enact strategies of resistance" yet many scholars "have not detailed what this looks like in everyday practice."[69] Therefore, Davis calls for communication scholars to examine the specific "resistance strategies Black women employ."[70]

My work will respond to Davis's call by illustrating how an activist rhetoric of blame employed by Black women functions as a weapon of resistance. Resistance is an important component of an activist rhetoric of blame because it reveals how a rhetor exposes flaws within a system in a way that persuades an audience to adopt their urgency and rallies allies. Davis argues that resistance can have the capacity to confront oppression in a "more or less visible extreme, and audible way."[71] By analyzing how Black women enact an activist rhetoric of blame, I shine light on areas that have been suppressed through the impeding political, social, and mainstream structures.

The third function of an activist rhetoric of blame that I will analyze is its collectivistic dimension. With unity and crafting a collective identity being a central component to both Black feminist scholarship and epideictic discourse, it is necessary to examine the communal aspects of

[67]Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 98.
[68]Davis, "The Aftermath of #BlackGirlsRock vs. #WhiteGirlsRock: Considering the DisRespectability of a Black Women's Counterpublic," 286.
[69]Davis, "Taking Back the Power," 301-302.
[70]Davis, "Taking Back the Power," 301-302.
[71]Davis, "Taking Back the Power," 304.

an activist rhetoric of blame. By collectivism, I mean the ways a rhetor emphasizes the importance of communal rejection to misogynoir attitudes and prioritizes shared participatory action to tackle social issues. Scholars have argued that epideictic rhetoric has the power to unify communities who have similar experiences.[72] An activist rhetoric of blame has the potential to have similar outcomes that unite communities together under similar attitudes. It also helps an audience to understand what their role is in eliminating public vices which sets the foundation for deliberative action.

Black feminist scholars have pushed for researchers to focus more on how Black women function as a collective and what the collective can produce. Collins states that "[m]uch of the best of Black feminist thought reflects this effort to find a collective, self-defined voice and express a fully articulated womanist standpoint."[73] One safe space where Black women can craft their collective voice is in relationships with other Black women during moments of activism. An example of this is in Davis's Strong Black Women Collective theory which demonstrates how Black women regulate strength within themselves and in others and by doing so they validate and celebrate their distinctive Black woman identity.[74] We can also see the importance of Black women's collectivism in Brittney Cooper's book, *Eloquent Rage,* which argues that individual acts of rage can be limited but the collective articulation of Black women's fury has the power to change the world.[75] It is through relationships and collective activism that Black women affirm each other's right to exist, to live, and to be loved. An activist rhetoric of blame adopts these ideas by centralizing the power of collective responsibility as a necessary response

[72]Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar," 289.
[73]Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 100.
[74]Davis, "The Strong Black Woman Collective Theory," 20.
[75]Cooper, *Eloquent Rage*, 186.

to injustice and empowering Black women to view themselves as worthy of advocacy. The overarching research questions for this project are: What are the characteristics of an activist rhetoric of blame? How do Black women's activist rhetorics of blame collectively work together to address their long historical erasure from the discourse about antiblack police brutality?

Approach and Artifacts

An activist rhetoric of blame's utility lies in its ability to expose public vices such as injustice, neglect, and misogyny, in a way that highlights marginalized group's experiences, exposes inequities, and urges accountability. To flesh out the rhetorical functions of this form of epideictic rhetoric, I examine different artifacts that engage in the SHNC discourse regarding Black women and police brutality. First, I analyze three different public texts by Kimberlé Crenshaw, then, I examine three slam poetry performances and lastly, I analyze the SayHerName: An Evening of Action and Arts event (SHNE).

Collectively, these artifacts represent how Black women advance an activist rhetoric of blame to communicate frustration and assign responsibility to the legal justice system. While these women do have status in their communities, they do not have the widespread public authority like epideictic rhetors mentioned in previous studies. By analyzing various demonstrations of an activist rhetoric of blame, I investigate how Black women expose misogynoir logics that maintain their erasure in the discourse about antiblack police violence and their oppression. More specifically, I demonstrate how Black women's activist rhetoric of blame has pedagogical, collectivistic, and resistive functions that challenges the legal justice system and rejects blameworthy misogynoir logics. The SHNC is deeply invested in highlighting misogynoir attitudes that can lead to violence against Black women or even their deaths. Therefore, enacting an activist rhetoric of blame is a risk for Black women. In other words, Black women become a

target for public ridicule, violence, and hate by directing their concerns toward powerful systems. Second, these artifacts demonstrate how the SHNC serves as a critical space for Black women to speak out against their historical erasure in discourse about antiblack police brutality. Through slam poetry, programs and speeches, Black women use the space of the SHNC to gain a sense of agency, recognition, and empowerment.

Each of the chapters in my thesis project highlight different functions of Black women's activism to help us understand the ways an activist rhetoric of blame works through various mediums and texts. This analysis also helps us understand three distinctive characteristic of blame that has various outcomes for the audience and the shared perception of Black womanhood. In chapter 2, I focus on the pedagogical function of an activist rhetoric of blame to illustrate how Black women's blame confronts blameworthy misogynoir attitudes and provides the audience with the language to properly allocate blame. I situate Crenshaw's educational approach within Black feminist pedagogy to demonstrate how she makes the blame in the discourse about antiblack police violence intersectional. She does this by refuting normative Western/Eurocentric tendencies in dominant discourses, centralizing the experiences of Black women, and inviting the audience to see their "revolutionary potential."[76] First, I examine her interview on *Democracy Now!* in 2015 to demonstrate the ways Crenshaw teaches the viewers how police violence impacts Black women daily and the language they should adopt to frame these injustices.[77] Second, I analyze Crenshaw's 2018 TEDTalk, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," to illustrate how she teaches the audience to use intersectionality as a resource for helping them interpret Black women's experience with police violence.[78] Lastly, I examine her video about

[76]Joseph, "Black Feminist Pedagogy and Schooling in Capitalist White America," 180.
[77]*Democracy Now!*, "Say Her Name: Families Seek Justice in Overlooked Police Killings of African-American Women."
[78]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality."

#SayHerName hashtag on *The Root*,"#SayHerName: The Fight to Remember the Lives of Black Women by Kimberlé Crenshaw."[79] Crenshaw educates viewers about the power of using specific words and phrases as a group. She illustrates how the discourse about antiblack police violence needs to develop vocabulary that focuses on Black women's experiences which is what the phrase "say her name" works to do. While I do discuss the specific agents that Crenshaw blames in her public discourse, I focus more on the misogynoir attitudes that she unpacks through her blame and the ways that Crenshaw's critiques the language used to discuss this topic. I discuss three distinctive features of Black feminist pedagogy and illustrate the ways Crenshaw uses these strategies to teach audiences about the misogynoir attitudes that marginalize Black women and specific resources or tactics they can use to expand their vocabulary for assigning blame toward the legal justice system.

Chapter 3 seeks to extend my exploration of an activist rhetoric of blame by focusing on the resistive function to demonstrate how Black women oppose dominant hegemonic structures on slam poetry platforms. Slam poetry is the performance of language that is "expressed with and through particular dialects, formats, gestures, and renegade attitudes that underscore its sense of urgency and authenticity."[80] The slam performances by Porsha Olayiwola, FreeQuency, and Temple strategically adopt stories of Black women who experienced police brutality in order to display the harmful attitudes that marginalize Black women so that the audience can resist these perspectives in the future. To examine these texts, I show how each performance uses different rhetorical tactics such as irony, sarcasm, or metaphors to call out misogynoir attitudes. Second, I analyze how the performers bodies also functions as a form of resistance to misogynoir attitudes.

[79] *The Root,* "#SayHerName: The Fight to Remember the Lives of Black Women by Kimberlé Crenshaw."
[80]Somers-Willet, *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity, and The Performance of Popular Verse in America*, 17.

Through body movements and the display of the performer's emotions of anger, grief, and frustration, their performance rhetorically criticizes public vices. Lastly, I highlight the ways the performances temporally link the injustices Black women experience to other instances in the past, illuminating a historical pattern of police brutality. These performances not only criticize misogynoir attitudes, but they also display the impact these vices have on Black women's lives if carried out.

In the fourth chapter, I focus on the collectivist function of an activist rhetoric of blame to show how the SHNE unifies the audience. The SHNE was designed to include Black women into the framework of police brutality: first they commemorate the dead in an effort to include Black women into the framework of police brutality, then they grieve those dead bodies, and lastly, they push for change in the audience's activism. This social justice event led the audience through an experience of blame that confronts misogynoir logics, invites them to engage in blaming practices and constructs a community of resistance toward these attitudes.[81] To examine the SHNE, I analyze how the structure of the event is designed to take the audience through an experience to recognize their responsibility for Black women's liberation. The event is divided into three acts: "Remembering the Women," "How They Were Killed," and "Say Her Name: Moving Toward Justice." I study the ways each act uniquely contributes to building a community of resistance toward misogynoir attitudes. Through this examination, I show how an activist rhetoric of blame works to mold a community's mind through collective witnessing, inviting them to participate in blaming practices and centralizing collective activism as a response to the emotions of grief and anger they felt from collectively witnessing Black women's injustices.

[81]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName: An Evening of Action and Arts."

In the final chapter of my thesis, I contextualize my theory with other scholars who analyze Black women's rhetorical strategies on public platforms. I outline each chapter to demonstrate how they contribute to this scholarly conversation. Second, I discuss future directions for expanding the theoretical framework of an activist rhetoric of blame.

Chapter 2:
Black Feminist Pedagogy and Kimberlé Crenshaw

In her 2016 speech at TEDWomen, Kimberlé Crenshaw states, "where there's no name for a problem, you can't see a problem, and when you can't see a problem, you pretty much can't solve it."[82] The problem that Crenshaw is best known for identifying in her public advocacy for the SHNC is naming. This quote illustrates how public discussions about antiblack police violence have silenced the stories of Black women because many have been unable to name and identify these experiences as problematic. Without a name to identify an issue, it becomes difficult to blame someone or a particular attitude. Crenshaw's activist rhetoric of blame teaches strategies that help broaden the audience's language for recognizing a problem so that they can be a part of the solution. Her most well-known contribution to academia and activism is her theory of intersectionality which is a framework for understanding how overlapping systems of oppression creates different modes of discrimination.[83] This theory provides a solution to this naming issue by helping audiences identify experiences that have been overshadowed and points to issues that are foregrounded because of that silence.

To understand the persuasive dimension of Crenshaw's pedagogy, I turn to epideictic rhetoric. Epideictic discourse uses blame to educate audiences and help them comprehend their relationship to blameworthy public vices. Dale Sullivan contends that epideictic discourse has a pedagogical function "in that it brings the audience into the *ethos*, or dwelling place, of a culture."[84] The educational nature of epideictic rhetoric leads the audience by presenting blameworthy objects or beliefs for them to contemplate. While epideictic rhetoric teaches audiences, it simultaneously persuades them to emulate new virtues that oppose the criticized public vices. Crenshaw's public

[82]Crenshaw, "Urgency of Intersectionality," 8:29-8:33.
[83]Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1265.
[84]Sullivan, "A Closer Look at Education as Epideictic Rhetoric," 72.

activism encompasses this pedagogical function of blame by teaching communities about the ways their words reflect their communal values and vices. Her activism mirrors Cynthia Sheard's characterization of epideictic discourse because it explains words as "instruments of personal, social, and political problem-solving."[85] She teaches the dominant way of understanding held by larger communities and denounces this way of thinking because it does not account for intersectional oppression.

Throughout the following examples, Crenshaw uses the word "frames." Although she does not provide a concrete definition for this word, what she appears to mean is media framing in combination with ideological structures that reflects people's biases, backgrounds, and personal beliefs. Media framing is "a written, spoken, graphical, or visual message modality that a communicator, by means of technological channel, uses to contextualize a topic, such as a person, event, episode, or issue, within a text."[86] In other words, the language consistently portrayed through technological channels activates frames which are mental structures that shape the way large groups of people act.[87]

This chapter focuses on the pedagogical function of Crenshaw's activist rhetoric of blame. Through her activist rhetoric of blame, Crenshaw equips the audience for participation in deconstructing misogynoir attitudes they might have internalized and provides them with tools to apportion blame that advances the mission of the SHNC. I examine three mass-mediated texts from Crenshaw to demonstrate how she uses Black feminist pedagogy to make the blame in the discourse about antiblack police violence intersectional. Crenshaw does this by refuting normative Western/Eurocentric tendencies in dominant discourses, centralizing the experiences of Black women,

[85]Sheard, "The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric," 766.
[86]D'Angelo, "Framing: Media Frames," 634.
[87]Lakoff, *The All New Don't Think of An Elephant,* xii-xiii.

and inviting the audience to see their "revolutionary potential."[88] As Gloria Joseph argued, Black feminist pedagogy "challenges not only the content of what currently passes as 'truth' but simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth."[89] The frames within the discourse about antiblack police brutality generate the idea that Black women do not experience this form of violence. Crenshaw's activist rhetoric of blame provides audiences with the language to identify blameworthy misogynoir actions and attitudes so that they can thoroughly assign blame to the legal justice system.

To illustrate my argument, I first situate Crenshaw's teaching approach within Black feminist pedagogy. Second, I examine three public texts that each uniquely represents the ways Crenshaw has constructed her activist rhetoric of blame throughout her time as a leader in the SHNC. I examine Crenshaw's interview on *Democracy Now!* in 2015 to demonstrate how she educates viewers about the ways the current frames exclude the experiences of Black women and teaches the language viewers should adopt to allocate blame toward the legal justice system. Next, Crenshaw's 2018 TEDTalk, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," spotlights the dominant course of thinking that ignores Black women's pain and suffering and urges the audience to utilize intersectionality so that these experiences are no longer neglected. Lastly, in Crenshaw's 2017 video on *The Root* "#SayHerName: The Fight to Remember the Lives of Black Women by Kimberlé Crenshaw," she teaches viewers why it is important to "say her name" and the power of using language to illuminate Black women's injustices. Together, these public texts demonstrate how an activist rhetoric of blame provides communities with the vocabulary to allocate blame toward the legal justice system and with tools to help individually deconstruct internalized misogynoir perspectives.

[88]Joseph, "Black Feminist Pedagogy and Schooling in Capitalist White America," 180.
[89]Joseph, "Black Feminist Pedagogy and Schooling in Capitalist White America," 177.

Black Feminist Pedagogy

For years, Black women have used education as a tool for helping illuminate their freedom struggle and engaging in practices that criticize their experience with linking forms of oppression.[90] For instance, bell hooks contended that "The writings of black women like Cellestine Ware, Toni Cade Bambara, Michele Wallace, Barbara Smith and Angela Davis…were all works that sought to articulate, define, speak to and against the glaring omission in feminist work, the erasure of black female presence."[91] Black women have used their writings and public speeches to interrogate critical issues of race and gender in Black life from their unique standpoint.

Through the application of education, Black feminist pedagogy manifested as a method of instruction for liberating Black women and continues to demonstrate how misogyny and racism is systematically taught in society through social interactions.[92] Joseph defines Black feminist pedagogy as an educational approach that raises the political consciousness of students, community members, and workers by "introducing a worldview with an Afrocentric orientation to reality, and the inclusion of gender and patriarchy as central to an understanding of all historical phenomena."[93] This pedagogy takes place inside the classroom, as well as in the church, the home, in community groups, and as I will demonstrate, on mass media platforms that reach large audiences.[94]

Since Black feminist pedagogy originated from Black feminist thought, it is interconnected to Black women's lived experiences, collective knowledge, and ongoing political struggles. As Monique

[90]Davis, *Women, Race & Class.*
[91]hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 123.
[92]Higginbotham, "Designing an Inclusive Curriculum: Bringing All Women into The Core," 8.
[93]Joseph, "Black Feminist Pedagogy and Schooling in Capitalist White America," 177.
[94]Lane, "Reclaiming Our Queendom"; Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness;* King and Mitchell, *Black Mothers to Sons;* Hamer and Neville, "Revolutionary Black Feminism."

Lane contended, "Black feminism posits that African American women have historically faced interlocking forms of oppression, which include economic, political, and ideological stratification."[95] Black feminist thought argues that Black women have historically faced intersectional oppression in the form of sexual exploitation, dehumanizing stereotypes such as the angry Black woman, mammy, jezebel, and sapphire, and denial of human rights and privileges.[96] Black feminist pedagogy is a product of Black feminist thought that resists Black women's prescribed marginalization through education.[97]

I situate Crenshaw's teaching and research within three distinctive features of Black feminist pedagogy. First, Black feminist pedagogy offers students, instructors, and communities a methodology that promotes inclusion and equality by refuting normative Western and Eurocentric thought. Black feminist pedagogy criticizes the patriarchal and Eurocentric structure that dismisses the stories of Black women by centering White women or Black men. Evelyn Higginbotham argued that Black feminist pedagogy works to deconstruct Eurocentric "misinformation" that has been systematically taught within schools and curriculum.[98] Building upon this argument, Barbara Omolade noted that Black feminist pedagogy "aims to develop a mindset of intellectual inclusion and expansion that stands in contradiction to the Western intellectual tradition of exclusivity and chauvinism."[99] Black feminist pedagogy calls out the frameworks and patterns of dominant discourses that ignores and devalues Black women's way of thinking, advocating, and being. This approach works to counter the exclusivity of Western thought by presenting communities with alternative ways of "constructing and validating knowledge about their realities."[100]

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[95]Lane, "Engendering Sisterhood, Solidarity, and Self-love," 35.
[96]Davis, *Women, Race & Class;* Collins, *Black Feminist Thought;* Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography of a Revolutionary.*
[97]Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* 116.
[98]Higginbotham, "Designing an Inclusive Curriculum: Bringing All Women into The Core," 473.
[99]Omolade, "A Black Feminist Pedagogy," 32.
[100]Lane, "Engendering Sisterhood, Solidarity, and Self-love," 39.

Second, Black feminist pedagogy centralizes the experiences of Black women and girls. Omolade describes Black feminist pedagogy as an education practice situated within Black women's distinct experience.

> A Black feminist pedagogy is not merely concerned with the principles of Black women by Black women about Black women; it also sets forth learning strategies formed by Black women's historical experiences with race/gender/class bias and the consequences of marginality and isolation.[101]

In contrast with traditional educational approaches, Black feminist pedagogy places Black women at the nexus of education. It not only instructs communities about these experiences, but it also builds theories, concepts, and learning strategies from Black women's standpoint.

Lastly, Black feminist pedagogy invites the audience to "recognize their revolutionary potential," meaning it persuades the audience to act. [102] Black feminist pedagogy is inherently a form of activism because it provides communities with learning strategies to resist and interpret institutionalized systems of oppression, hegemonic frames, and stereotypes. Annette Henry describes Black feminist pedagogy as a "pedagogy of liberation, a pedagogy of protest."[103] This educational approach is a pedagogical form of persuasion that influence audiences to take what they have learned and incorporate it into their actions. Black feminist pedagogy gives the audience an opportunity to be active agents of change which rhetorically sets a foundation for establishing sociopolitical transformation. What connects this methodology to an activist rhetoric of blame is its political commitment that goes beyond the classroom walls and into spaces of protests and activism, working toward liberating Black women.[104] An activist rhetoric of blame works with Black feminist pedagogy to teach vocabulary that calls attention to specific forms of police violence enacted

[101]Omolade, "A Black Feminist Pedagogy," 32.
[102]Joseph, "Black Feminist Pedagogy and Schooling in Capitalist White America," 180.
[103]Henry, "Chapter Four: Black Feminist Pedagogy: Critiques and Contributions." 91.
[104]Omolade, "A Black Feminist Pedagogy," 38.

upon Black women that needs to be addressed. As Tiffany Nyachae argues, Black feminist pedagogy intentionally promotes "activism from, by, with, and for Black women and girls."[105] Black feminist pedagogy provides tools to help make social justice movements blame more inclusive of those who experience intersectional oppression.

Overall, Black feminist pedagogy deconstructs normative Western/Eurocentric tendencies in dominant discourses, centralizes the experiences of Black women, and invites the audience to see their revolutionary potential. Black feminist pedagogy teaches from Black women's unique standpoint so communities can enact political decisions "that are in service of, and responsive to," Black women and girls.[106] In the section that follows, I will illustrate how Crenshaw's past work has represented these elements of Black feminist pedagogy.

Crenshaw and Black Feminist Pedagogy

Crenshaw, one of the most influential Black feminist scholars in the contemporary United States, is currently a professor of law at the University of California Los Angeles and Columbia Law School. She is also the executive director of the African American Policy Forum. She hosts a podcast called Intersectionality Matters, is a columnist for *The New Public*, and a moderator for the webinar series "Under the Blacklight: The Intersectional Vulnerabilities that the Twin Pandemics Lay Bare."[107] Crenshaw's positionality as an expert lends itself to teaching an audience and providing them with tools to construct their own blame that advances the mission of the SHNC.

[105]Nyachae, "Complicated Contradictions Amid Black Feminism and Millennial Black Women Teachers Creating Curriculum for Black Girls," 792.
[106]Nyachae, "Complicated Contradictions Amid Black Feminism and Millennial Black Women Teachers Creating Curriculum for Black Girls," 801.
[107]African American Policy Forum, "AAPF STAFF."

As a leader in the academic community, Crenshaw uses her expertise to help others understand and identify Black women's experience with intersectional oppression. I categorize Crenshaw's teaching approach as a form of Black feminist pedagogy because it equips its audience with the tools to resist dominant systems of oppression and misogynoir attitudes. In order to study how Crenshaw's public texts are a form of Black feminist pedagogy, we must first situate Crenshaw's teaching and research within the three distinctive features of Black feminist pedagogy mentioned in the previous section: deconstructing Eurocentric tendencies, centralizing the voices of Black women and girls, and inviting others to recognize their revolutionary potential.

First, Crenshaw helps communities interpret and deconstruct Eurocentric educational approaches through her teaching. Crenshaw along with Derrick Bell, Patricia Williams, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Charles Lawrence III who are nonwhite professionals at prestigious law schools, constructed the Critical Race Theory (CRT) movement in legal studies. In her essay, "The First Decade: Critical Reflections, or 'A Foot in the Closing Door,'" Crenshaw contended that one thing CRT has done is "managed to keep alive a spirit…that resists all attempts to declare the project of ending white supremacy a done deal."[108] Some of Crenshaw's work for advancing CRT in legal studies and academia includes her theory of intersectionality, constructing workshops for constitutional court judges in South Africa, and writing for the *Harvard Law Review*, the *National Black Law Journal,* and the *Stanford Law Review*.[109]

Crenshaw's work has consistently and intentionally sought to deconstruct white supremacy by providing students and communities with tools to help identify the ways white supremacy works to marginalize people of color. For example, Crenshaw, Priscilla Ocen, and Jyoti Nanda published a

[108]Crenshaw, "The First Decade: Critical Reflections, or A Foot in the Closing Door," 1371.
[109]Columbia Law School, "Kimberlé W. Crenshaw."

report through the African American Policy Forum in 2015 called "Black Girls Matter: Pushed-Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected."[110] This report serves as an educational tool to help "develop gender and race-conscious prism that capture the vulnerabilities" Black girls experience daily.[111] One study described in this report examines the experiences of White girls in grade school versus Black girls. They found that twelve percent of Black girls were subject to suspensions compared to two percent of White girls.[112] This study reveals that teachers and staff exercise disciplinary actions against Black girls to encourage them to reflect a White-middle-class version of femininity. This report is a prime example of how Crenshaw uses her intellectual knowledge to criticize the universalizing of White women's experiences onto Black women and caution against treating various oppressions such as sexism, classism, and racism as separate systems of marginalization.

Second, Crenshaw's work mirrors Black feminist pedagogy by centralizing the experiences of Black women and girls in her research and teaching. In her theory of intersectionality published in 1989, Crenshaw argued that "intersectionality" can help scholars analyze the ways overlapping identities inform marginalized group's experiences with oppression and particularly, Black women. She wrote, "any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated."[113] Her theory of intersectionality has challenged scholars to examine marginalized communities' converging experiences of oppression. Crenshaw intentionally used Black women and girls as a focal point for her theory of intersectionality. Crenshaw's work has highlighted the short- and long-term effects of

[110]Crenshaw, Ocen, and Jyoti, "Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out Overpoliced and Underprotected."
[111]Crenshaw, Ocen, and Jyoti, "Black Girls Matter," 44.
[112]Crenshaw, Ocen, and Jyoti, "Black Girls Matter," 17.
[113]Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," 140.

marginalizing Black women at a young age through higher education, over disciplining in the American school system, and their erasure in the discourse about antiblack police violence.[114]

Third, Crenshaw's teaching approach aligns with Black feminist pedagogy in that it invites communities to recognize their revolutionary potential and fight for Black women's liberation through their actions. She uses her theory of intersectionality along with her expertise as a critical race scholar for diversity training, leading the SHNC, and helping deconstruct institutional racism in some of the world's largest corporations. Particularly, Crenshaw has used her expertise to help others understand Black women's experience with police violence and the ways they have been excluded from these conversations. Within the emergence of movements against antiblack police brutality, Crenshaw has repeatedly noticed the public's lack of advocacy for Black women who have been targets of law enforcement. To combat this, Crenshaw and the African American Policy Forum created the SHNC. As Lanes contended, Black feminist pedagogy is a method of instruction that is intended to subvert systematic inequalities by equipping an audience with tools to help analyze and transgress the oppressive institutions that prescribe Black women's subordination.[115] Crenshaw does this through protests, call-and-response activities, teaching the audience about frames, engaging in chants, and many other Black feminist pedagogical approaches. Crenshaw's educational style teaches society how to transcend social-political injustices toward Black women by bringing them to the forefront of their attention. She has played an instrumental role in expanding the participation of the SHNC.

In the section that follows, I examine the ways Crenshaw's mass-mediated texts utilize the Black feminist pedagogical strategies of refuting normative Western/Eurocentric tendencies in

[114]Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes, and Watson, "Why We Can't Wait: (Re)Examining the Opportunities and Challenges for Black Women and Girls in Education (Guest Editorial)"; Crenshaw, Ocen, and Nanda, "Black Girls Matter"; Crenshaw and Ritchie, "Say Her Name."
[115]Lanes, "Engendering Sisterhood, Solidarity, and Self-love," 38.

dominant discourses, centralizing the experiences of Black women, and inviting the audience to see their revolutionary potential. By illuminating these three distinctive features, I demonstrate how an activist rhetoric of blame not only exposes misogynoir attitudes, but it provides a vocabulary for assigning blame and offers specific tools audience members can use to deconstruct misogynoir attitudes in the future. Crenshaw uses these Black feminist pedagogical strategies to make the blame in the discourse about antiblack police violence intersectional by pinpointing the reasons why Black women's experiences with police violence go unnoticed. Crenshaw contends that for blame to be effective, it needs to include specific characteristics of Black women's encounters with this form of violence such as sexual assault, policing sexuality and gender, and being profiled by law enforcement "in the context of prostitution-related offense..."[116] Through this, an activist rhetoric of blame sets in motion the necessary vocabulary audience members need to adopt in order to expand the frames within antiblack police violence.

Analysis of Crenshaw's Public Discourse

Democracy Now! Interview

In the interview on *Democracy Now!* which aired May 20, 2015, Crenshaw advances an activist rhetoric of blame that teaches the audience how a story should attribute blame and shifts the focus of the discussions about antiblack police violence toward Black women's lived experiences to gain visibility. Crenshaw along with Francis Garrett and Martinez Sutton were featured on *Democracy Now!* an independent news hour hosted by Amy Goodman and Juan Gonzales.[117] *Democracy Now!* is broadcast daily across the United States, Canada, and other countries around the world. The content includes breaking news and is not compromised by

[116]Crenshaw and Ritchie, "Say Her Name," 21.
[117]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interviewed with *Democracy Now!*

corporate or government interest.[118] This program is viewed by millions of people online daily and airs on nine different radio stations. The interview with Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton was posted on the *Democracy Now!* website with a transcript of the program.

Crenshaw's activist rhetoric of blame works strategically in this interview. First, she teaches the audience about what the current frames are in the discourse about antiblack police violence and then criticizes Western thought processes that exclude Black women from these discussions. Next, she builds from the stories of Garrett and Sutton to illustrate why the audience needs to expand these frames and how the audience should allocate blame toward the legal justice system. Lastly, Crenshaw invites the audience to embrace an intersectional approach in their blame by attending specific events for the SHNC.

Crenshaw uses this interview to make the mission of the SHNC more relatable and accessible to a wider range of audiences. The timing of this interview serves as a pedagogical moment for Crenshaw because it was the day her report with Andrea Ritchie came out and the year of the verdicts for Rekia Boyd and Michelle Cusseaux. Throughout the interview, Crenshaw references this report, the goal of which is to uplift the names of Black women that have been overshadowed and excluded from the discussions about police brutality perpetuated against Black Americans.[119] Crenshaw referencing the report provides more accessible information for viewers and concrete evidence for the arguments she is making.

First, Crenshaw explains what the current frames are within the discussions about antiblack police brutality and identifies how these frames reinforce the idea that Black women are not susceptible to this oppression. She says that "there are certain frames around which we

[118]*Democracy Now!* "About."
[119]Crenshaw and Ritchie, "Say Her Name."

understand police brutality."[120] She explains these frames as "driving while Black" and the "entire frame around Mike Brown being seen as literally a monster and that justifies the excessive force that was used against him."[121] The concept of "frames" highlights the misogynoir attitude that Black women are not vulnerable to police violence because the frames mostly tailor to the experiences of Black men. Crenshaw does not blame specific viewers per se, but she rhetorically constructs an implicit blame that invites the audience to think about the way these frames have allowed them to internalize misogynoir attitudes. Past rhetors have used blame to uphold the status quo by scapegoating individuals which minimizes the problem and makes it a personal issue. However, Crenshaw's activist rhetoric of blame maximizes the problem to make it a communal issue which provides more avenues for finding solutions to address these injustices.

Crenshaw criticizes the American history of lynching that forges the misogynoir belief that Black women are not susceptible to state-sanctioned violence. Crenshaw says, "We understand police brutality largely through a traditional frame of this as state-sponsored lynching and we understand lynching as extrajudicial efforts to constrain and suppress and repress Black masculinity."[122] The frames embedded in our discussions about antiblack police brutality originated from the American history of lynching which was largely associated with Black men. However, the frame of state-sponsored lynching has led to the dominant assumption that Black women are not vulnerable to similar violence enacted by the state. Crenshaw explains how this traditional frame works to erase Black women from those same experiences. She is teaching how

[120]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 30:40-30:45.
[121]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 30:45-30:55.
[122]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 32:30-32:44.

the normalized pattern of thinking that constructs lynching as an antiblack action yet works to exclude Black women from this violence because of their gender.

As Crenshaw teaches the viewers what the frames are, she criticizes this dominant course of thinking and illustrates how these frames push Black women to positions of marginality. She says, "What we know less about is how Black women have experienced police brutality. And all during this time that we have been marching around police brutality, there have been a steady number of women who have also been killed and we haven't really known their names, we haven't understood their circumstances."[123] Here, Crenshaw is referencing the stories of Cusseaux and Boyd whose deaths occurred around the same time as Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown but did not ignite much protest or advocacy. Her central argument is that although Black women are being killed by the police, the public is unable to recognize their experiences because the frames within the discourse about antiblack police violence are not gendered as woman.

To reconstruct how viewers legitimize viable subjects of police violence, Crenshaw explains how Black women have not only had a history of being lynched but they have also been victims of sexual assault perpetuated by police. She says that Black women have "also been subject to other kinds of racial violence, like rape and sexual abuse. And we're finding that not only are Black women killed by police, they're also subject to some of these same historical problems of sexual abuse."[124] Crenshaw teaches about common injustices projected upon Black women to illustrate other areas where police violence might occur but needs to provoke advocacy. This Black feminist pedagogical approach extends the discourse about antiblack police brutality by including sexual violence as a distinctive form of abuse Black women

[123]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 30:56-31:14.
[124]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 32:48-33:03.

experience. Through this approach, the audience is invited to incorporate sexual violence committed by police officers into their activism against police brutality. By pointing out how Black women have experienced police violence, Crenshaw expands the frames and makes the blame within this discourse more intersectional.

Crenshaw's rhetoric works to rebuild the frames within this discourse by using specific testimonies about Black women who have experienced police violence. Garrett, who is the mother of Michelle Cusseaux, and Sutton, who is the brother of Rekia Boyd, verbally describe their loved one's interaction with the police and identify misogynoir attitudes that the police enacted. For example, Garrett states that the Phoenix Sergeant Percy Dupra "allegedly said [Cusseaux] came at him with a hammer. And he shot her at close range once in the heart. So, Michelle was killed in her home."[125] Subsequently, Gonzalez plays a recording of Dupra's statement after he shot Cusseaux in her house. Dupra states that Cusseaux "had that anger in her face that she was going to hit someone with that hammer. I became very concerned that she was going to hit me in the head with that hammer and either kill me and take my gun or at least—there, at least, knock me out and start hitting Officer Perches with it."[126] Garrett illustrates the irony in Dupra's statement that Cusseaux was a vicious, angry Black woman who was a threat to police officers. She says that Cusseaux was "five-foot-five, 130 pounds so at some point if the officer felt threatened by someone of that stature, then I feel he should turn in his badge."[127] Garrett's story indicates how the belief that Black women are a dangerous threat is a misogynoir attitude that can lead to their deaths when adopted by police. Crenshaw uses this story in her interview to illustrate the kind of intervention the SHNC is calling for. Crenshaw

[125]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 37:30- 37:40.
[126]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 38:18-38:39.
[127]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 38:49-39:03.

argues for "a detail of officers who respond to domestic disturbances or mental health crisis, who are trained rather than someone who could say, 'I shot someone because of the look on their face.'"[128] Crenshaw uses the testimony from Garrett to pull out the ways the angry Black woman stereotype is used to justify police violence perpetuated against Black women experiencing mental health crisis.

Similarly, Sutton's testimony builds upon Garrett's story by illustrating how Black women's experiences with police violence are easily dismissed by the legal justice system. Sutton blames both the legal justice system and the former Chicago detective Dante Servin for the death of his sister. He says that Servin "told me his version of what happened that night. And from what he said— 'I shot out the car, and then I got out the car and continued to fire'—he was looking for blood that night."[129] Sutton identifies Servin as a specific agent of blame and illustrates how the legal justice system worked to protect Servin rather that fairly judging his actions. Sutton argues that the judge acquitted Servin of all allegations because he believed the prosecutors should have charged him with second-degree murder instead of involuntary manslaughter. The legal justice system did not work to hold Servin accountable but rather protected him from facing the charges they believed he deserved. Sutton states, "they didn't do everything that they could"[130] and "I haven't even heard from the prosecutors since this case has been over. They haven't called me. They haven't contacted me at all. It just further shows that they was working with the police all along."[131] Sutton's story points to the

[128]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 48:46-49:03.
[129]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 47:01-47:13.
[130]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 45:14-45:16.
[131]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 44:35-44:47.

intentionality within the legal justice system to dismiss Black women. This exposes the misogynoir attitude that Black women are undeserving of justice and their deaths do not matter.

Crenshaw uses the stories from Garrett and Sutton to teach the viewers the ways police violence impacts Black women daily and the language they should adopt to frame these injustices. Garrett's and Sutton's stories not only show the audience who should be blamed for their loved ones' deaths, but they demonstrate the ways a story should assign that blame. Both testimonies indicate that their loved ones were killed unjustly by police officers, identify the legal justice system as the perpetuators and illuminate misogynoir attitudes that these officers adopted to justify these deaths. Crenshaw uses these stories to explain why it is important for the audience to include Black women in their advocacy and provides the audience with an example for how they should structure their blame. Crenshaw says, "So the report was basically an effort to literally lift up the names of people like Michelle Cusseaux or Rekia Boyd to recognize that Black women experience police brutality in many of the same ways that Black men do and also in some ways that are different."[132] The testimonies by Garrett and Sutton provide the audience with examples for how they should "lift up the names" of Black women. Crenshaw's rhetoric works to incorporate Black women's experience with police violence into the blaming language within public discussion.

Lastly, Crenshaw leads the viewers toward a more intersectional approach to blame by providing them with opportunities to enact blame that reflects the expansion of the frames in the discourse about anitblack police violence. She says, "The vigil is designed to remember their names, to lift them up. At noon today at New York Law School, they're going to be talking more about the specifics of their families' cases but, importantly, the kind of interventions that they are

[132]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 31:15-31:32.

calling for."[133] The viewers are invited to mirror the advocacy of Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton by saying the names of Black women who have been targets of the law enforcement and being a part of the blaming process. Crenshaw uses this interview to help the viewers recognize their revolutionary potential by providing them with an opportunity to apportion blame toward the legal justice system. Overall, this interview is exemplary for the ways Crenshaw's activism utilizes Black feminist pedagogical strategies for teaching communities how to allocate blame that includes the experiences of Black women.

The Urgency of Intersectionality

Crenshaw's TEDTalk "The Urgency of Intersectionality," intentionally pulls from the discourse of the SHNC to help the audience understand the ways Black women have been silenced in the conversations about police brutality.[134] Crenshaw centers the voices of Black women by providing intersectionality as a tool for helping audiences interpret Black women's experience with police violence and inviting them to utilize this theory in their activism. This is a Black feminist pedagogical strategy because it exposes the ways audience members have internalized misogynoir attitudes and then serves as "a catalyst for new thinking" and "growth."[135] Crenshaw's activist rhetoric of blame illuminates the dominant course of thinking that ignores Black women's pain and suffering and urges the audience to utilize intersectionality so that they can interpret these experiences.

Crenshaw's speech was presented in 2016 at TEDWomen, a global conference supported by TED which is a nonprofit organization that is devoted to spreading ideas. The TEDWomen conference gives

[133]Crenshaw, Garrett, and Sutton, interview with *Democracy Now!*, 48:34-48:49.
[134]Crenshaw, "Urgency of Intersectionality."
[135]hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 133.

women around the world an opportunity to share about their research, experiences, ideas, and current activism. The website states that this conference is "about the power of women and girls to be creators and change-makers."[136] Approximately 1,000 women and men gathered at the Yerba Buena Center for Arts in San Francisco for this three-day event from October 26-28.[137] The audience consisted of activists, protestors, community members, and educators from a wide range of racial, geographic, socioeconomic, and age backgrounds. The theme for this particular year was "It's about time" which fostered conversations exploring the ways time and attention shape women's everyday lives. The TEDWomen event was live streamed to several thousands of people worldwide at 275 locations in 70 countries organized by TEDxWomen.[138] The event extended beyond the facility through the TEDx program which allows communities from different countries to engage with this event through video and local community speakers to share their ideas. This TEDWomen program included five short films, featured twelve international art organizations, and included speeches from Brittney Cooper, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and many others. [139]

Crenshaw opens her speech with the African American rhetorical tradition call-and-response to introduce the dominant course of thinking many audience members have internalized. Michele Foster defines call-and-response as "a type of interaction between speaker and listener(s) in which the statements ('calls') are emphasized by expressions ('responses') from the listener(s)…can be solicited or spontaneous, and… either the calls or responses can be expressed linguistically, musically, verbally, nonverbally, or through dance."[140] In the Black culture, the audience participation with the response co-creates the meaning of the message.[141]

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[136]TED, "TEDWomen."
[137]Mitchell, "TEDWomen 2016 Speaker Lineup Announced."
[138]TEDWomen 2016 Conference, "'It's About Time,' Kicks Off in San Francisco."
[139]TEDWomen, "TEDWomen 2016: It's About Time."
[140]Foster, *Using Call-And-Response,* 1-2.
[141]Gilyard and Banks, *On African American Rhetoric,* 48-49.

Together, the speaker and the audience shape the effectiveness and impact of the speaker's central argument. Call-and-response can also be effective in introducing new information to audience members through their participation. Rhetorically, call-and-response activities can allow audience members to consider a new idea or approach without directly stating it to them.

For Crenshaw's call-and-response activity, she asks the audience to stand, she calls out a name and tells them to respond by sitting when they hear a name that they are unfamiliar with. This call-and-response activity is a standard part of Crenshaw's activism and scholarly speeches. She states the names of Black men who have been killed by the police such as, "Eric Garner, Mike Brown, Tamir Rice," and "Freddie Gray."[142] Most of the audience remained standing which demonstrates that they are familiar with these names and stories. Then, Crenshaw says the names of Black women who have experienced police violence such as "Michelle Cusseaux, Tanisha Anderson, Aura Russer" and "Meagan Hockaday." Immediately after she says these names, a majority of the audience sits down which suggests that they are unfamiliar with these names and stories.

This call-and-response activity illustrates how the audience facilitates the historical erasure of Black women who have encountered police violence through their unawareness of these names. Rhetorically, this activity works to situate the audience as active agents of misogynoir attitudes that predominantly centralize the experience of Black men with this form of oppression. Crenshaw grounds her prevailing argument that the audience is unfamiliar with Black women's encounters with police violence by highlighting the fact that they do not have a framework that directs them toward understanding these experiences. She says, "Only one thing distinguishes the names that you know from the names that you don't know: gender."[143] This is a

[142]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," 00:04-01:33.
[143]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," 01:59-02:05.

Black feminist pedagogical approach because Crenshaw builds from this call-and-response activity by using it as a common ground for teaching the audience how to utilize intersectionality so that they can recognize Black women's experience with police violence in the future.

Crenshaw illustrates how the discussions about police violence has centered around Black men or White women. She says, "There's police violence against African-Americans, and there's violence against women, two issues that have been talked about a lot lately."[144] Crenshaw educates the audience about how Black people's experience with police violence has been viewed as separate from women's experience with this oppression. She argues that this common dichotomy has been adopted by various groups around the world such as women's rights organizations, civil rights groups, professors, students, psychologists, sociologist, and progressive members of Congress.[145] Crenshaw blames the way this route of thinking has become so widespread among different groups of people. She then characterizes this common dichotomy as a misogynoir attitude because it ignores the intersectional oppression that Black women experience daily. She states, "But when we think about who is implicated by these problems, when we think about who is victimized by these problems, the names of these Black women never come to mind."[146] Black women's overlapping forms of racial and gendered oppression have fortified them as illegible because their experiences do not align with Black men or White women.

Crenshaw constructs her blame by criticizing the ways our language has allowed Black women's stories to be dismissed. Crenshaw argues that the frames available to the public regarding police violence are limited and therefore, the "people have a difficult time

[144]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," 02:49-02:53.
[145]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," 02:21-02:48.
[146]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," 03:02-03:07.

incorporating new facts into their way of thinking about a problem."[147] In other words, Crenshaw means that the frames surrounding our discussions about police violence has prevented the audience from interpreting Black women's experience with this oppression. She states that Black women "have slipped through our consciousness because there are no frames for us to see them, no frames for us to remember them, no frames for us to hold them."[148] Crenshaw teaches the audience how language adopted by a large group of people can be used to erase Black women from these discussions. She says, "As a consequence, reporters don't lead with them, policymakers don't think about them, and politicians aren't encouraged or demanded that they speak to them."[149] The words we use for determining what counts as legitimate police brutality has silenced the voices of Black women. Crenshaw demonstrates the rhetorical power of our words in social movements to either lift others out of oppression or further oppress the communities we are trying to liberate. She casts blame upon this line of thinking which rhetorically opens a discursive space for her to construct intersectionality as the solution to this issue.

Crenshaw argues that Black women have been invisible because the societal frames cannot interpret their conjoining oppressions. Crenshaw situates intersectionality as the productive response to the omission of their oppression in the discourse about antiblack police violence. She says, "Without frames that allow us to see how social problems impact all the members of a targeted group, many will fall through the cracks of our movements, left to suffer in virtual isolation."[150] Our language helps us understand the issues that need to be solved. But without vocabulary to interpret Black women's issues, these problems remain unsolved.

[147]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," 03:17-03:25.
[148]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," 03:37-03:53.
[149]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," 03:39-04:01.
[150]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," 04:23-04:36.

Crenshaw proposes her theory of intersectionality as a solution to this issue and offers instruction on how this theory provides society with a lens to interpret Black women's experience with police violence. Intersectionality serves as a tool that allows us to see how each layer of oppression has dangerous implications for Black women and helps make visible the violence enacted upon these bodies by the police. Crenshaw defines intersectionality as the ways "many of our social justice problems like racism and sexism are often overlapping, creating multiple levels of social injustice."[151] Further Crenshaw characterizes intersectionality as "being impacted by multiple forces and then abandoned to fend for yourself."[152] From this definition, Crenshaw teaches the audience how intersectionality can be a flashlight for illuminating misogynoir logics and expanding the language within their activism.

Crenshaw invites the audience to recognize their revolutionary potential by providing them with an opportunity to engage in activism that accounts for Black women's intersectional oppression. Crenshaw asks the audience to stand and say the names of Black women and girls who have been killed by police. She repetitively uses the pronoun "we" to invite the audience to view themselves as part of the SHNC and enactors of the new course of thinking that she has taught them. She says, "We have to be willing to bear witness, to bear witness to the often-painful realities that we would just rather not confront, the everyday violence and humiliation that many Black women have had to face, Black women across color, age, gender expression, sexuality and ability."[153] She calls her audience to be more engaged with these stories and gives them an opportunity to protest which sets the foundation for sociopolitical change. Crenshaw's activist rhetoric of blame functions pedagogically to not only criticize normative behaviors, but

[151]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," 04:45-04:54.
[152]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," 10:35-10:37.
[153]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," 14:24-14:53.

also provide audiences an opportunity to make their blame intersectional. Crenshaw does this by explaining how the current frames within the discourse about antiblack police violence facilitates misogynoir attitudes and teaches how intersectionality can help the audience expand the language that they use to allocate blame.

#SayHerName: The Fight to Remember the Lives of Black Women

While Crenshaw teaches how intersectionality can help communities broaden the frames within the discourse about antiblack police violence, she also explains the importance of the phrase "say her name." Crenshaw teaches the power of using specific words and phrases as a group. She illustrates how this discourse needs to develop vocabulary that focuses on Black women's experiences which is what the phrase "say her name" works to do. On May 1, 2017, *The Root* posted a video on its YouTube channel called "#SayHerName: The Fight to Remember the Lives of Black Women by Kimberlé Crenshaw."[154] *The Root* is an African American online magazine that discusses important issues occurring within the Black community to engage its viewers in diverse viewpoints. After transcribing the video, I analyzed how Crenshaw's used Black feminist pedagogical strategies to advance her activist rhetoric of blame. In this video, Crenshaw teaches the viewers about how the discourse focuses on Black men as the "household names" and how the narrative of safety pertaining to the police erases the experiences of Black women from this form of violence. These language structures contribute to the reasons why it is important to say the names of these Black women, and through this, Crenshaw teaches the ways our emotions can help drive the SHNC. While Crenshaw is speaking, there are videos of Black women who have experienced police violence playing in the background. Although these images help to reinforce Crenshaw's message that Black women

[154]*The Root*, "#SayHerName."

also experience this form of oppression, I focus on the words Crenshaw uses to construct her activist rhetoric of blame. This approach allows me to analyze how Crenshaw is connecting blame to language specifically.

Crenshaw deconstructs normative thought processes by shedding light on the "household names" constructed within the discourse about antiblack police violence. A household name is a story that is not only well-known by a large community, but it is held dear to the community's heart and emotions. Crenshaw illustrates a naming issue within our conversations and lists the names of Black men whose deaths have garnered national attention such as Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, and Freddie Grey. She describes these stories as "household names" because of the response they received from the protestors and the way these stories moved communities to advocate against social injustice.[155] However, Black women have also experienced police violence, but their names and stories have not held this same level of meaning as these Black men. Crenshaw states, "Black women have lost their lives and that loss of life just hasn't reached the level of community concern and outcry that it should."[156] When Crenshaw says that these stories have not "reached the level of community concern and outcry," she is teaching viewers that Black women's experience with police violence does not ignite the same level of anger or exasperation that Black men's has in the past. Crenshaw uses the concept of "household names" to educate the viewers about the misogynoir attitude of sexism that is fostered when they exclude Black women's stories.

Crenshaw centralizes the stories of Tanisha Anderson and Natasha McKenna to illuminate the misguided belief that the police are always there to serve and protect Black women.

[155] *The Root*, "#SayHerName," 00:35-00:43.
[156] *The Root*, "#SayHerName," 00:57-01:08.

Crenshaw states, “Many Black women who are killed by the police are killed when family members call for help.”[157] Crenshaw teaches the viewers that not only are the police to blame for the harm they do to Black women, but the safety and security associated with their presence needs to be deconstructed. Crenshaw critiques the fact that police do not live up to the promise of their role which is to protect people. She uses Tanisha Anderson as an example by noting that Anderson’s family called for assistance because Anderson was having an emotional episode. This story leads Crenshaw to suggest that “any kind of social circumstance that increases the likelihood of an encounter with police increases the likelihood that that encounter might not be survivable.”[158] The police are capable of enacting violence upon the Black women they claim to protect and if we ignore this, we neglect the long historical patterns of police brutality in American culture.

To add emotional gravity for her argument, Crenshaw uses the story of Natasha McKenna to further critique the belief that all police officers protect all American people. This belief is a misogynoir attitude because it relieves police officers of responsibility for killing Black women by premising their actions upon the notions of providing “security.” Crenshaw reframes this narrative by demonstrating how police encounters can be a deadly and dangerous experience for Black women. She says, “Natasha McKenna haunts me. Her last words were, ‘You promise not to kill me?’”[159] McKenna was taken into police custody during a mental health crisis. Crenshaw explains that “six police officers dragged her out of the cell completely nude, threw her into a restraining chair, handcuffed her to that chair, put a hood on her and continued to taser her. As she was dying and they were trying to resuscitate her, they actually said ‘Keep an eye on

[157]*The Root*, “#SayHerName,” 02:06-02:11.
[158]*The Root*, “#SayHerName,” 02:28-02:39.
[159]*The Root*, “#SayHerName,” 02:58-03:12.

her.'"[160] Here, Crenshaw focuses on the excessive use of physical force during McKenna's encounter with the police. The number of police officers engaged in this situation as well as the words "dragged," "threw," and "handcuffed," illustrate how McKenna was viewed and treated as a dangerous human being although she was in need of mental health assistance. Crenshaw says, "that level of inhumanity means they never saw her as a human being in the first place."[161] She demonstrates how the police enacted the misogynoir logic of dehumanizing Black women and using lethal force to exert their power.

Crenshaw builds from the stories of Anderson and McKenna to demonstrate how the viewer's lack of advocacy for these Black women insinuates the belief that they are not worthy of justice. Crenshaw argues that there "are moments where the police are showing where our lives don't matter and then the fact that we don't really protest suggests that maybe they're right. Unless we make it matter."[162] Crenshaw illustrates how the people who should be protesting for Black women's justice are falling into the narrative they are supposed to be fighting against. More specifically, Crenshaw points to the ways that our language outlines the bodies that we deem are most important and worth fighting for. From this, the viewers are taught that the lack of protests and advocacy for Black women who have experienced police violence fosters the misogynoir attitude that Black women's lives do not matter. Crenshaw urges the viewers to take a step forward in addressing the problem by saying out loud the names of these Black women.

Crenshaw invites the viewers to recognize their revolutionary potential by illustrating how their emotional engagement is what fuels the power behind the words "say her name." She teaches the audience the emotions they should feel and how they should use those emotions to

[160] *The Root*, "#SayHerName," 03:14-03:40.
[161] *The Root*, "#SayHerName," 03:40-03:47.
[162] *The Root*, "#SayHerName," 03:56-04:06.

construct blame that advances the mission of the SHNC. She says, "That pain, that indignation, that demand that this not be the case fuels the campaign, fuels the hashtag, fuels the support and the commitment."[163] When she says, "that pain, that indignation, that demand that this not be the case," Crenshaw instructs the viewers about how anger and outrage are the appropriate emotions to feel from these painful stories. She emphasizes that emotions fuel the SHNC and the demand for justice. The phrase "say her name" becomes its own frame in the discourse about antiblack police violence that centralizes the experiences of Black women and characterizes Black women as the "household names." Incorporating the phrase "say her name" into one's activism illustrates an awareness for Black women's injustices and a commitment to advocating against social injustice. The more energy and dedication viewers put into the SHNC, the more the campaign will thrive and raise awareness for Black women's encounters with police brutality.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to illustrate the pedagogical functions of an activist rhetoric of blame. Using the lens of Black feminist pedagogy, I demonstrated how Crenshaw's activist rhetoric of blame worked to make the blame in the discourse about antiblack police violence intersectional. She did this by refuting normative Western/Eurocentric tendencies in dominant discourses, centralizing the experiences of Black women, and inviting the audience to see their revolutionary potential. An activist rhetoric of blame not only demonstrates how the dominant course of thinking facilitates misogynoir attitudes, but it provides communities with the language they need to apportion blame to the legal justice system. Crenshaw's interview with *Democracy Now!* is exemplary for the ways her activism utilizes Black feminist pedagogical strategies for teaching communities how to allocate blame that includes the experiences of Black women. Her

[163] *The Root*, "#SayHerName," 04:13-04:26.

TEDTalk explains how intersectionality can help the audience expand the language that they use to assign blame. Lastly, her video on *The Root* demonstrates the power of using the phrase "say her name" consistently in one's activism.

Crenshaw's activist rhetoric of blame provides communities with tools to construct their own blame that advances the mission of the SHNC. From this, we learn that an activist rhetoric of blame sets in motion the necessary vocabulary audience members need to adopt in order to expand the frames within the discourse about antiblack police violence and properly allocate blame toward the legal justice system. The next chapter analyzes slam performances by Black women to demonstrate the resistive function of an activist rhetoric of blame.

Chapter 3:
Resistance, Blame, and Slam Poetry Performances

Black women use slam poetry to engage in political resistance as they demand for their experiences to be recognized as worthy of attention. Slam poetry is a competitive form of spoken word poetry that integrates words, body movement, audience participation, and judging. The slam poetry event is two-to-three-hour's long and allows any individual to perform their original poetry in front of a live audience. This atmosphere is artistic and emotionally driven. It provides Black women with an opportunity to enact blame in a performative context. Variations in tone, pace, body movement, and volume dramatize the blame as an act of resistance and inspires resistance from the audience.

Like the ancient genre of epideictic discourse, slam poetry performances engage in a rhetoric of display. In the beginning, ancient epideictic rhetoric was considered "'mere' entertainment or self-display."[164] The traditional conceptualization of epideictic derives from the transliterated Greek word *epideicix*, which means as a form of display or exhibition. S. Michael Halloran and Gregory Clark state, "Epideictic rhetoric does not *argue* the ideas or ideals that bind people into community so much as it *displays* them to a witnessing public."[165] This is prevalent in how slam poets structure their performance in a way that criticizes society's most pressing issues and fights back against "false representations, discrimination, and oppression."[166] Slam poetry manifests resistive dimensions through hyperbole, simile, rapid moving metaphors, sarcasm, singing, dancing, invective, shouting, performing choregraphs moves or acrobatics. Slam poetry is unique because of the way it engages in bodily performance that constructs

[164]Adams, "Epideictic and Its Cultured Reception: In Memory of the Firefighters," 293.
[165]Halloran and Clark, "National Park Landscapes and the Rhetorical Display of Civic Religion," 141.
[166]Muhammad and Gonzalez, "Slam Poetry: An Artistic Resistance Toward Identity, Agency, and Activism, Equity & Excellence in Education," 449.

narratives, stories, and perspectives about the world that have been invisible within dominant discourses.

Although the poets compete for the audience's approval, they also give the audience an opportunity to behold their reality from inside the margins of oppression. Slam poetry demands "a highly interactive relationship between the performer and audience."[167] The poets are competing for the audience's approval because their feedback determines the judge's score. Black women perform with a goal of garnering attention and action from the crowd. While there is little accurate research regarding the racial demographic of slam poetry audiences, many poets believe that the general audience for national slam poetry events is White people.[168] When Black women perform slam poetry, they are speaking to an audience that has the potential to use their privilege to help them fight against injustices they highlight in their poems. As Susan Somers-Willet explains, the orality of slam poetry is "the range of performative aspects of a poem—vocal dynamics, physical dynamics, appearance, [and] setting,"[169] which, for projecting blame, can oppose immoral vices. One of the main objectives for Black women's slam performances is to inspire the audience to play a role in resisting dominant systems of oppression.

Black women use the platform of slam poetry to create spaces of refuge and criticize the oppression they might be experiencing directly or indirectly.[170] As stated earlier in the thesis, resistance is an act of opposition against the marginalization of Black women and speaks back to dominant hegemonic structures in order to provoke change. There are three slam performances that I will analyze to illustrate the resistive functions of Black women's activist rhetoric of blame

[167]Muhammad and Gonzalez, "Slam Poetry," 445.
[168]Somers-Willet, *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry*, 78.
[169]Somers-Willet, *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry*, 16.
[170]Muhammad and Gonzalez, "Slam Poetry," 444.

enacted through slam poetry. First, I examine Porsha Olayiwola's performance "Rekia Boyd," to demonstrate how she retells the story of Boyd to criticize misogynoir attitudes and insists that the audience members view Black women as vulnerable subjects who possess the capacity for experiencing police violence. In the same way, in FreeQuency's performance "Say Her Name," they use prosopopoeia, to embody the absence of Sandra Bland, which critiques the discourse about Bland's death.[171] This critique works to counter the erasure of other Black women who have been killed by police. Lastly, in Temple's performance "Sandra Bland," they use collective voice to relay the story of Bland in a way that brings together their experiences as Black women, center Black women's oppression as the focal point for advocacy and resist myopic tendencies from the discourse about antiblack police violence. Collectively, I argue that these performances retell stories about Black women who have experienced police violence as a way to display the harmful attitudes that marginalized Black women so that the audience can resist these perspectives in the future.[172] This analysis will allow us to see how an activist rhetoric of blame not only resist misogynoir attitudes, but it also appeals to memory by laying out the historical patterns of Black women's experience with police violence to combat their erasure. This form of blame sets in motion the necessary awareness audience members must adopt to adequately advocate for Black women.

In the following sections, I first discuss the history of slam poetry to illustrate how it is an inherently resistive practice that provides poets with a platform to advocate for social justice. Second, I analyze each performance by Olayiwola, FreeQuency, and Temple to demonstrate how

[171] FreeQuency uses they, them, and their pronouns.
[172]The term "audience" I use throughout this chapter refers to the literal people who attended these slam events which includes the National Poetry Slam, the College Union Poetry Slam, and the Individual World Poetry Slam.

slam performances are a space where Black women can resist the systems that marginalize them and uniquely call out misogynoir attitudes.

History of Slam Poetry

Traditionally, slam poetry is said to have originated from Marc Smith because he transformed spoken word poetry into a competitive artistic activity in the late 1980s. Smith, a White Chicago construction worker, attended many readings of poetry where the performances lacked audience involvement. So, he created arbitrary rules and scoring to assess the poems and used the space of bars in Chicago's middle-class neighborhoods to attract larger audiences.[173] Slam poetry is more than reciting or reading a poem, it encompasses grappling with debated issues, sharing testimonies and ideas with a large group of people.

Smith describes himself as the creator of what we now know as "slam poetry," and, as Somers-Willet observes, "assumes his place as the unquestioned patriarch, the father who created the slam and deserves recognition for doing so."[174] However, as Jennifer Coletta Tullos points out, Smith is a part of the history of slam but he did not create spoken word poetry.[175] In Susan Weinstein's book *The Room Is on Fire: The History, Pedagogy, and Practice of Youth Spoken Word Poetry,* she contends that spoken word poetry can be traced back to West Africa's verbal traditions during the Atlantic slave trade where enslaved Africans used embodied oral performances as a mechanism for resistance and control.[176] Since the first thing that White slave owners attempted to strip away from enslaved Africans was their languages, many Black Americans have strived to reclaim this authority through spoken word poetry. This control "became one of their ultimate goals for literary attainment because this led to greater ends of

[173]Somers-Willet, *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry*, 3.
[174]Somers-Willet, *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry*, 4.
[175]Tullos, "We Gon' Fight, Emmett," 263.
[176]Weinstein, *The Room Is on Fire: The History, Pedagogy, and Practice of Youth Spoken Word Poetry*.

liberation, self-determination, self-reliance, and empowerment."[177] The practice of spoken word poetry has been a tool for Black communities to reclaim power over their language in an unapologetic manner and allowed them to advocate for their human rights.

A key influence on contemporary poetry is the Black Arts Movement (BAM), which emerged in the 1960s as a response to the turbulent socio-political landscape that oppressed the Black community. BAM was a politically motivated movement that surfaced during the wake of the Black Power movement. After the assassination of many Black leaders such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s, BAM was created amid anger from these major historical events as well as the daily racial inequalities manifested through policies and laws.[178] BAM was formally established by Imamu Amiri Baraka following his creation of the Black Arts Repertory Theater in Harlem, in 1965. BAM driven by the concept of "the Black Aesthetic" was "a corrective—a means of helping black people out of the polluted mainstream of Americanism…"[179] It spoke "directly to the needs and aspirations of black Americans."[180] BAM called for Black poets, musicians, artist, writers, rappers, and actors to create artistic work that confronted the racial inequalities Black people faced daily and relayed the Black communities desire of nationhood and self-determination in popular culture.[181]

The politically charged nature of BAM was steeped in the mission of the Black Power movement which focused on black autonomy and centralizing the voice of Black people as a way of recreating what it meant to be Black in America. Larry Neal, a theorist of this movement, contended that BAM was aesthetically and spiritually linked to the Black Power movement. BAM was politically charged in that it "understood black radicalism as the most genuine, *natural*

[177]Muhammad, and Gonzalez, "Slam Poetry," 444.
[178]Gladney, "The Black Arts Movement and Hip-Hop," 292.
[179]Smith, "The Black Arts Movement and Its Critics," 94.
[180]Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," 1.
[181]Crawford, *Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty-First-Century Aesthetics*, 175.

response to white supremacy and viewed assimilation as a dead end."[182] This movement focused on black liberation, black nationalism, white racism, racial inequalities, and urged Black people to challenge the current status quo through their art.

The movement had its greatest impact through written and spoken word poetry. Poetry was designed to offer Black communities an artistic form of expression that allowed them to cope with their frustrations inside the margins of oppression and was rooted in resistance toward dominant hegemonic structures. Amiri Baraka's poem "Black Art" written in 1965 after the assassination of Malcolm X demonstrates the type of resistive poetry BAM called for:

> We want "poems that kill."
> Assassin poems, Poems that shoot guns.
> Poems that wrestle cops into alleys and take their weapons leaving them dead with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland ....
> Let there be no love poems written until love can exist freely and cleanly.[183]

Baraka intentionally called for poetry that threatened white supremacy and centralized Black people's experience with oppression. He knew that spoken word poetry could be a way of raising awareness about racial inequalities, inciting progressive social change, and building a community that felt politically empowered. Spoken word poetry was a form of activism because it allowed Black artists to express their anger and frustration while also engaging in discourses that were not hearing their voice. Anger dictated the creative path for poetry and manifested due to the "unfilled promises…toward legislator who steeped on policies decided, passed and not implemented, anger pouring undiluted toward a rulership that feeds on greed and exploitation and views Black people as enemies or as necessary burdens to be thrown crumbs like animals in their latest theme park."[184] BAM called for spoken word poetry that expressed the frustration and

[182]Crawford, *Black Post-Blackness*, 26.
[183]Baraka, "Black Art."
[184]Madhubuti, *Why L.A. Happened*, xiv.

rage Black people felt and moved communities toward demanding racial equality from the institutions that oppressed them. Inherently, these oral performances were a form of activism that provided many Black communities with a platform to advocate against racial injustice.

Slam poetry in the twenty-first century is heavily influenced by BAM due to its activistic nature and resistive approach that unapologetically criticizes dominant hegemonic structures that silence the voices of the Black community. In Javon Johnson's book *Killing Poetry: Blackness and the Making of Slam and Spoken Word Communities*, he notes that slam poetry is a way that "disenfranchised black and brown youth [have] used art as a backdoor means to engage with formal political systems that had never seen them as human beings."[185] Like BAM, slam poetry is an artistic form of resistance that allows poets to talk about issues in the world in a way that necessitates change. These performances helped people who are oppressed mobilize themselves by engaging with large issues occurring in their communities. As Gholnecsar Muhammed and Lee Gonzales argue, slam "becomes a means to achieve self-determination, sovereignty, and authority" for those in marginalized communities.[186] The poets are given a space to respond to their own oppression and criticize the ways they are forced to exist under those conditions.

For Black people, slam poetry is not only a resistive art form, but it has utilized stylistic elements of the African American oral traditions that appeals to "certain Black cultural sensibilities."[187] Fahamisha Patricia Brown describes an array of themes within slam performance by Black people:

> In the sacred and secular traditions of African American vernacular cultural expression, we can identify modes of language performance: sermon, testimony, and prayer as performed in the traditional Black Church; public orator in the spheres of political and social life; children's games and jump-rope rhymes: "playin the dozens"; rappin' and signifyin'; tall tales, including toasts and boasts; and the lyrics of the spirituals, shouts,

[185]Johnson, *Killing Poetry*, 17.
[186]Muhammad and Gonzalez, "Slam Poetry," 450.
[187]Biggs, *The Poetic Cries of The Impoverished*, 338.

> jubilees, gospel songs, field hollers, work songs, blues, jazz, and popular songs. In form, subject, and theme, all of these elements are present in African American poetry.[188]

Slam poetry incorporates a wide range of these aural styles and rhythms which appeals to the essential realities of blackness. Through slam performances, Black people are able to understand, and feel confident in their identity as Black Americans while also using these oral traditions to respond and challenge elements of pervading power inequalities.[189] In the sections that follow, I analyze the slam performances of Olayiwola, FreeQuency, and Temple to demonstrate the resistive functions of an activist rhetoric of blame.

Analysis of Slam Performances

Porsha Olayiwola: "Rekia Boyd"

Olayiwola's slam performance, "Rekia Boyd," interrogates why police brutality toward Black women goes unnoticed in the media and does not ignite protests against this violence within the BLMM. Her performance calls out the national silence and lack of meaningful accountability for Boyd. Boyd was shot and killed by Dante Servin, a police officer in Chicago, Illinois on March 21, 2012.[190] A month after Boyd's death, Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old Black boy, was shot and killed by George Zimmerman in Sanford, Florida. Martin's story garnered national attention, serving as a catalyst for the BLMM. Though Martin and Boyd's experience with police violence both led to their deaths, Boyd's story did not garner nearly as much support or attention as Martin's did.

To criticize the lack of advocacy for Boyd, Olayiwola enacts an activist rhetoric of blame by retelling the story of Boyd in order to resist sexist misogynoir attitudes and urge the audience members to view Black women as vulnerable subjects who possess the capacity for suffering.

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[188]Brown, *Performing the Word*, 8.
[189]Biggs-El, "Spreading the Indigenous Gospel of Rap Music and Spoken Word Poetry," 163.
[190]Editorial Board, "Rekia Boyd Shooting Was 'Beyond Reckless,' So Cop Got a Pass."

She goes beyond criticizing police brutality, to pinpoint the media and the Black community as parties deserving of blame for their lack of advocacy. Olayiwola criticizes certain attitudes so that the audience can resist these assumptions and embrace a mindset that will lead toward more protesting and rioting for Black women.

Olayiwola describes herself as a Black "writer, performer, educator and curator who uses afro-futurism and surrealism to examine historical and current issues in the Black, woman, and queer diasporas."[191] Olayiwola is a Black hip-hop feminist from Chicago who recently published the book *i shimmer sometimes too* in 2019. She openly critiques harmful practices that maintain Black women's subjugation such as police brutality targeting Black women. In 2015, Olayiwola performed the piece "Rekia Boyd" on behalf of the House Slam at the National Poetry Slam tournament in Oakland, California. Olayiwola is a co-founder of the House Slam, a slam poetry group based at the Haley House Bakery Café in Boston, Massachusetts, where she resides.[192] Her "Rekia Boyd" performance won the National Poetry Slam which is an annual slam poetry championship tournament that allows poets to share their work with others and compete against each other in front of a live audience.

Olayiwola begins her performance "Rekia Boyd" by retelling the story of Boyd while emphasizing how this story did not ignite much attention from the BLMM. She says, "Last night no one showed up to march for Rekia Boyd. Rekia was shot dead in the head by cops in Chicago on Monday. A Cook County judge acquitted police of killing Rekia. Dante Servin, charged of manslaughter, went jailbird free…and last night no one showed up to march at her rally."[193] Olayiwola positions Boyd as the victim of police violence and Servin along with the city of

[191]Olayiwola, "Bio."
[192]House Slam, "Home."
[193]Button Poetry, "Porsha Olayiwola – 'Rekia Boyd' (NPS 2015)," 00:02-00:45.

Chicago as the reason for her death. The phrase "no one" functions as a site of blame that brings the audience into the story of Boyd by including them in the population of those who could not support her because they were unaware of her story. By saying that Boyd's story was ignored, Olayiwola implies that the reason for this neglect is based upon the perception that Black women are immune to police violence. This perceived invulnerability reinforces Black women's erasure in the discourse about antiblack police brutality because their experiences are immediately deemed invalid which does not allow them to have a voice in these discussions.

Immediately following the articulation of Boyd's story, Olayiwola draws attention to the casual nature of the killings of Black women embedded in the dismissal of these stories. She repeats the phrase "I guess" to speculate reasons for why Black women are still neglected. She says, "I guess all the protesters got tied up. I guess all the Black folks were busy making signs saying, 'stop killing our Black boys.'" [194] Olayiwola shrugs her arms as she sarcastically maps out these potential explanations. Her gesturing and words work interconnectedly to emphasize the horrific nature of this trauma that people treat casually. She suggests that the frequency of Black women killed by police has become so mundane that it is dismissed in the BLMM and the Black community. Olayiwola focuses on the ways Black men garner more thorough and immediate public attention from the Black community than Black women. By her specifically pointing out Black men, she emphasizes how it is ironic that activists care so much about the Black men in this community that it ultimately hurts Black women.

Olayiwola uses irony to convey the Black community's and the BLMM's inability to recognize Black women and girls' tragedies with police violence. She says, "I guess no one hears the howling of a Black girl ghost in the nighttime. We stay unheard, blotted out, buried, dead.

[194]Button Poetry, "Porsha Olayiwola," 00:45-1:00.

Black girls receive tombstones too soon. And never any flowers to dress the graves so we fight alone."[195] When Olayiwola starts to use the phrase "we," the audience is taken out of disembodied speculations and instead forced to see Olayiwola as an embodiment of the oppression Boyd has experienced. Olayiwola's staccatoed manner of breaking up the words "unheard," "blotted out," "buried," and "dead," point out the different forms of Black women's neglect. These words function to illuminate the misogynoir belief that Black women should be subject to silence. Olayiwola's choice to become the embodiment of Boyd's oppression confronts the audience with the parallels between the national silence surrounding Boyd's death and the reality Black women face in being ignored in the discourse about antiblack police brutality. She exposes the materiality of this misogynoir logic that demands Black women to advocate for themselves without support.

Olayiwola repeats and hyperbolizes the words "beat" and "never" to set up a contrast between everyday conversations and her performance. She says, "They will tell you the woes of a Black man who got beat by the police in the street, beat by the man at work, beat by the system at the institution."[196] After listing instances of Black men's oppression, she waves her hands and in an angry tone says, "But never of the Black woman he took his frustration out on. Never of the Black girl he stretched into a casket. They will tell you of the Brown boys who get pushed from school through pipelines to prison. But never the girls who fill the cells."[197] She repeats the words "beat" and "never" three times each in subsequent sentences. The parallel structure of her words connects the idea that Black men's oppression is garnering more attention than Black women and also, that Black men play a role in reinforcing Black women's oppression.

[195]Button Poetry, "Porsha Olayiwola," 01:00-01:07.
[196]Button Poetry, "Porsha Olayiwola," 01:20-01:31.
[197]Button Poetry, "Porsha Olayiwola," 01:30-01:51.

Olayiwola's use of the word "never" functions as a hyperbole to emphasize how the violence enacted against Black women is continuously neglected in our everyday conversations. She illustrates how the stories of Black women operate within the backgrounds of our discussions about Black men, meaning that they exist, but are not considered important topics for discussion. Olayiwola uses her performance to interject into these conversations that have ignored the experiences of Black women. Her repetition within the performance seems to be symbolic of this cycle of Black men oppressing Black women, although they are a part of the same community. Ultimately, Olayiwola critiques the dominant hegemonic structure of masculinity that privileges the experience of Black men over Black women.

Olayiwola contextualizes her focus on the lack of advocacy for Black women by critiquing the role that American media plays in dictating public sentiment and downplaying their injustices. She uses the United States' lack of urgency to send troops for the girls kidnapped by Boko Haram as an example of the ways the violence toward Black women has been perceived as insignificant. She states, "Two hundred Black girls go missing in Nigeria and America puts out a hash tag instead of a search party, no one ever causes a riot."[198] Olayiwola illustrates how the absence of Black girls did not provoke immediate attention from American authorities. She exposes the flaws of hashtag activism that highlighted the fact these girls were missing but did not move the United States military or presidential administration to act. Further, Olayiwola uses the media's dehumanizing comparison of former First Lady Michelle Obama's facial features to animals to illustrate how Black women are subject to ridicule and mockery on mass media outlets. She states, "The first Black first lady is being called the first ape on all the media outlets

[198]Button Poetry, "Porsha Olayiwola," 01:51-01:57.

and no one is outraged, there ain't no boycott or nothing."[199] The sound of Olayiwola's enraged voice emphasizes her anger regarding the ways Black women's tragedies go unnoticed and are not deemed valid by popular media. The phrases "no one ever causes a riot" and "no one is outraged" point to how anger was not deemed an appropriate emotion for these tragic events. Rhetorically, these examples show us that the issue within American culture lies in the lack of empathy and fury toward the injustices Black women and girls experience daily on mass media. The mistreatment of Black women has become so normalized and dismissed that even when it is in front of our faces, America turns a blind eye.

Olayiwola uses rhetorical questioning to criticize how the interpretation of Black people's deaths by police does not extend to Black women and move activists to protest police brutality. She says, "If a Black boy gets shot by the cops, isn't that a tragedy? Ain't it the blues? Isn't it a misfortune? If a Black girl gets killed by police and the killer goes free does anyone notice? Do you still call it a lynching? Or is her rally just a rehearsal? Ain't that why no one ever shows up?"[200] As she asks these rhetorical questions in an aggressive manner, her fist starts to clench which suggests she is outraged**.** Olayiwola uses herself as an example for the anger and frustration the audience should feel because of Black women and girls being killed by police. Her rhetorical questioning works to resist the foundational motives for why activists show up to protest. She uses this questioning to display that what is missing from this discourse is the emotional outrage for Black women's experience with police violence. For Black boys, these deaths are viewed as a "tragedy," "misfortune" and "the blues" so much so that it kindles protesting and rioting. Through rhetorical questioning, she insists that these same perceptions need to apply to Black girls to avoid perpetuating their vulnerability to police

[199]Button Poetry, "Porsha Olayiwola," 01:58-02:09.
[200]Button Poetry, "Porsha Olayiwola," 02:43-03:07.

violence. Rhetorically, Olayiwola tries to persuade the audience to be aware that Black women experience police brutality and that these deaths should be viewed as a form of lynching.

Overall, Olayiwola's performance criticizes misogynoir attitudes that marginalize Boyd's story and calls out the national silence and lack of meaningful accountability for Black women experiencing police violence. Her resistance toward these attitudes rhetorically urges the audience members to view Black women as susceptible subjects that can experience police violence and invites them to resist misogynoir attitudes in their advocacy.

FreeQuency: "Say Her Name"

In their poem "Say Her Name," FreeQuency enacts an activist rhetoric of blame by criticizing the discourse surrounding Sandra Bland's death through the use of prosopopoeia, which speaks from the point of view of an inanimate subject. Bland was pulled over by state trooper Brian T. Encinia for failing to signal a lane change in Walker County, Texas on July 10, 2015. Three days later, a guard found Bland hanging in her cell in Walker County Jail "with a plastic trash-can liner roped around her neck and affixed to a U-shaped metal hook overhead."[201] Bland was pronounced dead that same day at 9:16 a.m. and her death was ruled a suicide. Social media users gathered online using the hashtag #SayHerName and #SandraBland while also rallying in the streets in order to bring attention to Bland's story. While Olayiwola and Temple's performance advocate for Black women to be mourned and recognized, FreeQuency criticizes how exclusive the discourse became to the extent of becoming myopic. In other words, the users focus so much on Bland's story that they ignore the experience of other Black women who have also been killed by police. FreeQuency's argument is complementary to Olayiwola's and

[201]Hassan, "The Sandra Bland Video: What We Know."

Temple's contentions because it demonstrates another way Black women's historical experience with this form of violence becomes overshadowed by another story.

FreeQuency is a "Kenyan, immigrant, queer, womxn storyteller."[202] They are a poet, host, worship leader and a social justice activist whose work focuses on blackness, and sexual identity. Their work has been featured on the *New York Times*, OkayAfrica, *the Independent, Upworthy*, TEDx, *For Harriet, Teen Vogue, Huffington Post, Everyday Feminism,* and other media platforms.[203] Their slam performance "Say Her Name" won the 2018 Women of the World Poetry competition in Dallas, Texas. A video of FreeQuency's performance was posted on the YouTube channel of Poetry Slam Inc which is a nonprofit organization that organizes the Women of the World Poetry competitions along with the National Poetry Slam and the Individual World Poetry Slam.

To criticize the discourse regarding Bland's death, FreeQuency's performance "Sandra Bland" stages the retelling of Bland's story. They begin by stating, "I keep trying to figure out how I got myself here," followed by a detailed description of Bland's internal thoughts leading up to the moment she was killed.[204] FreeQuency does not explicitly state what they mean by "here" in the beginning of the poem which allows the audience to speculate about the "place" FreeQuency is speaking about. As Elizabeth Church notes, a rhetoric of blame is a discourse that "creates a place and narrates the action that can call the [audience] to move beyond that place."[205] In this case, the "place" FreeQuency addresses is the one racial justice movements carved out for Bland in the discourse about antiblack police brutality which highlights her tragedies with this form of violence but no other Black women. Rhetorically, this "place"

[202]"Mwende 'FreeQuency' Katwiwa."
[203]"Mwende 'FreeQuency' Katwiwa."
[204]Poetry Slam Inc., "Individual World Poetry Slam Finals 2015," 00:05-00:09.
[205]Church, "Epideictic Without the Praise," 51.

exposes a flaw in the discourse that gives an unequal focus toward Bland's story and does not fight against the overarching oppression Black women experience from police.

FreeQuency uses prosopopoeia by acting as if they were Bland and speaking from her point of view before and after her death. Richard Lanham defines prosopopoeia as a rhetorical exercise for when an inanimate object is represented as having human or living attributes and made to speak as it were alive or in this case, still living.[206] Prosopopoeia as a rhetorical tactic elevates the unique qualities of Bland as an imperfect person who was still undeserving of police violence. They state, "I remember I was driving down a bland Texas Highway… I was smoking a cigarette which I knew of course would kill me, eventually. I just never imagined for the life of me or at least, the life that used to be inside of me, that it would lead to my death like this."[207] Immediately, FreeQuency appeals to the general audience through the narrative choice of using "I" and discussing Bland's psychological perspective which illustrates that they are the embodiment of Bland. FreeQuency's quick pacing of words along with their disturbed tone confronts the viewer with minute details to exemplify Bland's vulnerability during her interaction with Detective Encina.

FreeQuency's performance uses the stories of Black men who have experienced police brutality to rhetorically criticize two train of thoughts. First, she opposes the belief that Black men are the only ones who are susceptible to this form of oppression. Second, further in the performance, she criticizes how Black men's experience with police brutality is projected onto Black women. These two arguments work together to legitimize Bland's story as worthy of advocacy but also differentiate it from Black men. In FreeQuency's performance, they connect the stories of Eric Garner, Kalief Browder, and Bland to the perception that they committed

[206]Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 123.
[207]Poetry Slam Inc., "Individual World Poetry Slam Finals 2015," 00:10-00:28.

suicide. FreeQuency says, “Last year they told me a man in Staten Island killed himself with a noose made of police officers’ arms. They said he died after saying I can’t breathe thirteen times.”[208] Without stating his name, Eric Garner, the crowd is aware of the story FreeQuency refers to because of their immediate applause. Further, FreeQuency aligns Bland’s story with Kalief Browder’s to illustrate how both deaths were ruled a suicide. FreeQuency states, “They said I smoked my way into an early grave inside of one of their jail cells. That I got so high I mistook myself for a ceiling fan fixed myself back into place. The same square shape casket they found Kalief Browder’s body in.”[209] Once again, FreeQuency aligns Bland’s experience with police brutality to a Black mans, which suggests that Black women are also susceptible to state-sanctioned violence.

In the middle of their performance, the tone of FreeQuency’s voice begins to change and they describe the “place” that was criticized earlier. The “place” becomes spotlighted when FreeQuency demonstrates how Black women’s experience with police violence has normally gone unnoticed. They state, “I guess somehow I was made to believe that blackness in this woman body would be different. I didn’t realize the difference would be in the silence about what happened to it.”[210] By saying this through the voice of Bland, FreeQuency directs the audience toward the ways Black women are susceptible to neglect because of the belief that their womanhood relieves them from police violence. However, FreeQuency criticizes this “place” by illustrating how Black women are ignored in the discussions surrounding Bland’s story. They criticize the ways Black women’s experience with police violence is discussed unevenly, which perpetuates the belief that this form of oppression is uncommon for Black women. Further

[208]Poetry Slam Inc., “Individual World Poetry Slam Finals 2015,” 00:41-00:51.
[209]Poetry Slam Inc., “Individual World Poetry Slam Finals 2015,” 01:11-01:23.
[210]Poetry Slam Inc., “Individual World Poetry Slam Finals 2015,” 01:25-01:35.

FreeQuency states, “I got so used to hearing the premature eulogies of Black men glared across the CNN. That I forgot about the family tree missing limbs that looked like me. See we seldom hear the funeral tears Black mothers cry over the kin they birth in their own image.”[211] Rhetorically, FreeQuency confronts the insidiousness and ubiquity of sexism that prioritizes the experience of Black men over Black women. FreeQuency exposes invisibility as a misogynoir logic for the audience to reject and identifies popular media outlets as facilitators of this belief.

FreeQuency describes how Bland remained a topic of discussion because her story was portrayed as exceptional and therefore, this story was not representative of other Black women’s experience with police brutality. They state, “somehow in my death [my mother] was given a megaphone…People spoke my story the moment I stopped being able to speak for myself. They marched in the streets with banners bearing my name.”[212] Further FreeQuency states, “And this, this is the place I keep trying to figure out how I got myself to.”[213] FreeQuency’s performance illustrates how this “place” was created and how it is being maintained by the community against antiblack police violence. This “place” or excess of attention for Bland resulted in harm toward Black women because protesters and the media focused on this singular story rather than using this story to call out the ways police violence works to oppress Black women as a whole.

Although this “place” was able to bring attention to Bland’s story, FreeQuency is aware of the effects it had in marginalizing other Black women’s experiences. Through the use of sarcasm, FreeQuency directs the audience’s focus toward the misogynoir attitude that centralizes Black men’s experience with police violence which this “place” originated from. In a sarcastic tone, FreeQuency names some reasons why Bland’s death received attention. They say that it

[211]Poetry Slam Inc., “Individual World Poetry Slam Finals 2015,” 01:35-01:47.
[212]Poetry Slam Inc., “Individual World Poetry Slam Finals 2015,” 01:54- 02:05.
[213]Poetry Slam Inc., “Individual World Poetry Slam Finals 2015,” 02:08-02:14.

could have been because it was "in a pitch you could all hear"[214] or Bland's story had been mistaken "for another one of the boys."[215] FreeQuency exposes the inability to recognize other Black women's experiences and the centering of Black men as misogynoir logics for the audience to resist. FreeQuency calls attention to the ways Black men's experience with police violence is projected onto Black women which either legitimizes or invalidates their oppression and need for support. Their sarcasm works to criticize a line of thinking that uses Black men's experiences to define Black women's experiences. The purpose of this critique is to differentiate Bland's story from Black men and to move the audience beyond the singular realm to the historical oppression and erasure enacted upon Black women.

FreeQuency's activist rhetoric of blame invites the audience to acknowledge that there are stories about Black women that exist beyond Bland's but have been left out from the discourse about antiblack police violence. FreeQuency's performance urges the audience to link Bland's experience with police violence to other Black women's by incorporating their stories into their memories. By expanding their memories, the audience can create a new discursive "place" that recognizes the historical pattern of Black women's experience with police violence. In a sarcastic tone, FreeQuency states, "If I can just remember what it is I did to make you all remember me, even though I died in this Black hole called a Black woman's body, then maybe there is something I can tell my sisters to do that will make you all remember them."[216] Their repetition of the word "remember" rhetorically has a temporal element to it. In the present, FreeQuency is telling the audience about the past so that they can act in the future. They urge the audience to anticipate remembering these Black women so that they can respond to their

[214]Poetry Slam Inc., "Individual World Poetry Slam Finals 2015," 02:28-02:31.
[215]Poetry Slam Inc., "Individual World Poetry Slam Finals 2015," 02:32-02:36.
[216]Poetry Slam Inc., "Individual World Poetry Slam Finals 2015," 02:54-03:09.

injustices in the same way they did Bland's story. Having the audience remember their motive for creating this discursive "place" for Bland forces them to recognize that there are other Black women like Bland who have suffered, and their womanhood did not prevent them from experiencing police violence. This idea of future remembering serves as a rhetorical tactic to deconstruct the "place" that legitimized Bland's story as the only one worthy of advocacy. It does this by incorporating the stories of other Black women into our memory, recognizing Black women's history with police violence, and therefore, rhetorically creating a new discursive "place" that can identify more stories. The concept of future remembering invites the audience into FreeQuency's blame by allowing them to know who to allocate blame toward and the misogynoir attitudes that should be resisted because they further Black women's invisibility. In this case, the future remembering serves as a site of resistance that opposes Black women's historical erasure by ensuring that no one will be forgotten.

Temple: "Sandra Bland"

In Temple's slam performance, "Sandra Bland," they retell the story of Bland through the use of collective voice where all three poets are speaking simultaneously. Temple uses collective voice to retell the story of Bland in a way that brings together their experiences as Black women and centers Black women's oppression as the focal point for advocacy. By doing this, Temple resists myopic tendencies from the discourse about antiblack police violence that primarily legitimizes Bland's story as worthy of support because of the belief that she was murdered. The narrow and limited focus of these discussions harms Black women because it does not account for the ways oppression traumatically affects them. To resist this myopic nature, Temple streamlines Black women's marginalization across Bland's story and the performers experiences as Black women to centralize oppression as the root of antiblack police violence.

The Temple Performing Arts Center, located in New York City, has a performance poetry group called Temple that consists of college students that compete at different slam tournaments. In 2016, Kai Davis, Nayo Jones, and Jasmine Combs, all from Philadelphia, performed for Temple at the 2016 College Union Poetry Slam Invitational in Austin, Texas. Davis is a Black queer performer and writer that focuses on the convergence of blackness, queerness and womanhood.[217] Jones is a Black queer poet and musician that centers her work around her intersecting identities.[218] Lastly, Jasmine Combs is a writer, educator and spoken word poet whose work focuses on the intersections of womanhood, blackness, love, home and mental illness.[219] Davis, Jones, and Combs won the 2016 College Union Poetry Slam Invitational by centering their piece around the story of Sandra Bland. The video of their slam performance was posted in its entirety on Button Poetry's YouTube Channel.

Temple's performance "Sandra Bland" criticizes the idea that Bland was deserving of advocacy because of the ambiguity of her death. Temple does not focus on the idea of murder itself but rather on how the physical and psychological damage of oppression could have led Bland to commit suicide. After taking a deep collective breath, Temple begins the poem by stating, "The police say they found her hanging in her jail cell. And Black folk everywhere erupted in grief…They call it a suicide. We call it murder. What if it was both?"[220] The collective deep breath is an idiomatic expression that illustrates that the performers too are suffering from pain and their exhaling makes that known to the audience. It is not a calming breath but rather a breath that represents their frustration and exasperation with the discourse surrounding Bland's story.

[217]Davis, "Kai Davis Poetry."
[218]Poetry/Pedagogy, "Feature Poet: Nayo Jones (by Kristalyn Richard)."
[219]Combs, "Jasmine L. Combs: Poet, Educator, Jawn."
[220]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs," 00:17-00:40.

Temple assembles their rhetoric of blame by unveiling oppression as the premise of Bland's unjust situation. They use Bland's story to illustrate how oppression works to kill Black women from the inside out. They state, "What if they dragged her so hard against the pavement she did not want to get up?... The culmination of all her past lives caving in on her until the weight of it was too much."[221] As the performers speak, they all drag their arms across their bodies mirroring the motion of police officers hauling Bland on the floor. The movement of their arms along with their words emphasizes Bland's vulnerability but also her agency in the situation. This is evidenced by the statement, "she did not want to get up." The performance depicts vulnerability and agency within the retelling of Bland's story both with the poem and the movement of Temple's bodies.

The audience is forced to view Temple as a collective embodiment of Black women. Temple's use of collective voice invites the audience into their humanity as Black women because they are showing the parallels between Black womanhood and Bland's story. In an aggravated manner they state, "I know what it is like to be crushed. To have hope drained from my bones. A trembling Black woman."[222] As they speak, their volume increases, and the tone of their voices became more incensed indicating their anger and pain. The performers take ownership of these experiences because they themselves are Black women who have and are experiencing a similar oppression as Bland. They use the metaphors of being "crushed" and "drained" to describe their experience of living inside the margins of subjugation. Further they state, "I know what it is like to have one foot in the grave,"[223] and "to succumb to stagnancy and decay in my own bed."[224] Their performance mirrors Bland's oppression in the midst of her

[221]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs," 00:41-00:57.
[222]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs," 00:58-01:05.
[223]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs," 01:12-01:15.
[224]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs," 01:19-01:23.

encounter with police brutality. Temple's performance of this experience constructs Black women's oppression as a dehumanizing and psychologically damaging encounter that resembles Bland's experience but expands outward to the performers and the audience.

Both FreeQuency and Temple's performance temporally link Bland's story to the historical pattern of Black women's experience with police violence, but they take two different directions. FreeQuency uses the concept of future remembering to urge the audience to recognize the historical consistencies of Black women with this form of brutality so that they can move beyond the singular story of Bland. With a slightly different approach, Temple temporally links Bland's story to memory by illustrating the historical pattern of pain and suffering embedded in Black women's fight against oppression. These performers tether themselves to an innocent and vulnerable notion of Black womanhood that has not been granted to Black women because of the illegitimacy of the subjugation they encounter. They state, "With trauma stretching across generations. I've been crying for centuries. I cannot stop."[225] The performers construct a temporal link to Black women's oppression by connecting it to the past. Temple illustrates how persistent oppression is throughout Black women's experience within American history which rhetorically invites the audience to confront the historical realm of their marginalization. Although both Temple's and FreeQuency's performance take two different approaches for linking Black women's experience with police violence to the past, together these performances use blame to deconstruct the historical erasure of Black women's experience with police violence by illustrating how this issue has been prevalent for centuries and thus, has had material effects on Black women.

[225]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs," 01:05-01:11.

Temple's performance illustrates how oppression can be a silent killer which leads to Black women's vulnerability because it is not easily identified. They state, "I've wished death for myself many times, but it was never my idea. Whether I jumped or was pushed, someone still put me on a cliff. Oppression can kill you from the inside out."[226] As they say the line "someone put me on a cliff" their hands gestured in a way that implies careful placement. Temple's performance reveals that being a Black woman puts you on the cliff and you don't realize you're there until it's time to jump. In the poem they declare, "There is a unique kind of sadness that comes with being despised without reason."[227] Being despised has resulted in Black women's self-hate, suicide, and psychological damage but also results in being put on the cliff in the first place. Black women are viewed as lacking vulnerability when they are actually uniquely vulnerable because of marginalization.

Since Temple knows that the audience must be aware of the tragedies Black women experience to further understand the psychological damage of oppression, they expose the strong Black woman stereotype and the perception that Black women are dangerous as misogynoir attitudes for the audience to reject. They contend, "Whether or not she tied the noose herself, she was lynched. If she broke or was broken, it isn't enough to be a strong Black woman."[228] The performers illustrate the downfall of the "strong Black woman" stereotype which has prevented Black women from obtaining public advocacy and support because their strength constructs the assumption that they are independent. When projected upon Black women, this stereotype leads them to advocate alone without support from protestors.

[226]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs," 01:29-01:47.
[227]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs," 02:01-02:05.
[228]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs," 02:10-02:19.

Temple's performance reveals that the march for Bland needs to go beyond Bland's story to focus on the ways police violence has impacted Black womanhood. They state that sometimes it is too much for Black women to "create the movements, they will silence you in. To lead the marches only to have everyone tread on your back. To know your face might not make the nightly news."[229] The movement of their arms up and down their waist along with the increased pace and volume of their enraged voice provokes the audience into understanding their pain as Black women. What makes their rhetoric of blame powerful, aggressive, and unremitting is the way that they use their words and movement to show how Black women are oppressed in the social movements they create. Temple's performance spotlights silencing of Black women's voice, neglect of their story, and the lack of media support for Black women as blameworthy misogynoir logics that facilitate their marginalization.

Temple's performance criticizes the temporariness in our movements by illustrating how Black woman's oppression is not at the forefront of our advocacy. This is evidenced by their statement, "Even when we shout and say her name, we flatten her into a symbol of the movement. Marched for a name and neglected the woman."[230] This critique aligns with not only the performances of Olayiwola and FreeQuency but also Crenshaw's activism in the SHNC because the performers call out the myopic nature of racial justice movements. In other words, the performers criticize advocates for facilitating the historical erasure of Black womanhood by only uplifting the story of Bland and ignoring Black women's historical experience with this police violence.

Temple's use of rhetorical questioning invites the audience to advocate for Black women regardless of how they die and to centralize oppression in their advocacy for Black women's

[229]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs," 02:23-02:32.
[230]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs," 02:31-02:44.

liberation. This rhetorical questioning works to resist the idea that Black women only deserve advocacy if they are murdered. At the end of their performance, they state, "What if she wasn't the hero smiling in every picture? Does that make her any less deserving of a revolution? Some women die for a cause and some women just (pause) I still want to be worth fighting for, even if I surrender."[231] The performers create an alternative image of Bland that is stressed, angry, and tired in order to demonstrate the constraints we place on those within our social movements. Rhetorically, their performance positions themselves and Bland as an epitome of all Black women which bonds their experiences with oppression together. Their performance invites the audience to advocate for Black women regardless of how they died and to understand the physical and psychological damage oppression has on them.

Conclusion

To conclude, the performances by Olayiwola, FreeQuency, and Temple draw attention to the ways social justice movements erase the harassment, mistreatment, and murders of Black women from the advocacy against police brutality. As Somers-Willet points out, slam performance "puts the audience in the seat of critical power" not only for evaluating the performance but also enacting the interventions the poets would like to see. The performances of Olayiwola, FreeQuency, and Temple urge the audience to change their activism against antiblack police violence by incorporating Black women's stories and resisting misogynoir attitudes. These performances advanced an activist rhetoric of blame by dramatically retelling the story of a Black woman who has experienced police violence in a way that exposed harmful misogynoir attitudes for the audience to resist. Olayiwola retold the story of Boyd to urge the audience to resist the misogynoir attitude of sexism and neglect but to also allow them to see that Black

[231]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs," 02:38-03:21.

women are vulnerable to police brutality. FreeQuency, on the other hand, adopted the voice of Bland to criticize the ways the discourse surrounding Bland's death facilitated myopic tendencies that dismissed the stories of other Black women. Similarly, Temple used collective voice to retell the story of Bland in a way that combined her experiences with the performers and Black womanhood so that oppression can be the focal point for the audience's advocacy. Collectively, these performances used the platform of slam poetry to deliver their activist rhetoric of blame in ways that resisted dominant misogynoir attitudes. Their blame highlights the resistance toward the public vices and the emotional investment communities must have to adequately fight for Black women's liberation.

Building on the resistive function of blame, the final analysis chapter illustrates how the SHNE constructs a community of resistance toward misogynoir attitudes. The SHNE takes the audience through three distinctive acts that allows them to be engaged with the SHNC blaming practices. I focus on the collectivist function of an activist rhetoric of blame to illustrate how blame can be used to mold a community's mind and promote collective activism as a response to the injustices the audience has witnessed.

Chapter 4:
SayHerName: An Evening of Arts and Action Event

On March 28, 2017, the SHNC hosted the SayHerName: An Evening of Arts and Action (SHNE) event as one of their programs in the Her Dreams Deferred weeklong series.[232] Hosted by The African American Policy Forum along with Kimberlé Crenshaw and the Hammer Museum, this event focused on Black women's experience with police brutality. This two-hour program was broadcast, live-streamed, and posted on the Hammer Museum website.[233] It includes performances from various writers, spoken word poets, scholars, civil rights activists, and musicians.

As described in chapter 1, epideictic rhetoric centralizes an audience around a particular issue and illuminates public vices or virtues for them to adopt. Mark White asserts that epideictic occasions prepare the audience for action by increasing the community's adherence to values and presenting vices to be rejected in a manner that encourages judicial or legislative change.[234] The SHNE is an epideictic occasion that takes the form of an activist rhetoric of blame because it engages the painful histories, memories, and stories of police brutality against Black women to magnify misogynoir attitudes and accumulate support for the SHNC.

The SHNE was free, open to the public and appears to have been attended by roughly two hundred adults, judging by the video. The demographic make-up of the event seemed to have been quite racially and ethnically diverse.[235] When I use the term "audience" I am referring to the people who attended and participated in the event. These people include community members, actors, educators, civil rights activists, policymakers, family members of the victims,

[232]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName."
[233]African American Policy Forum, "Her Dream Deferred 2017."
[234]White, "The Rhetoric of Edification: African American Didactic Literature and The Ethical Function of Epideictic," 127.
[235]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName."

and scholars. Each performance "lifts up the voices and stories of women and girls of color through spoken word, song, and dance. Featuring family members of the victims of police violence, the program pays respect to the lives of their loved ones by encouraging us to say their names out loud."[236] First, the SHNE commemorated the dead Black women, then they grieved those dead bodies, and lastly, they pushed for a revolution in the discourse about antiblack police brutality and for the audience to act.

This chapter builds upon the resistive and pedagogical functions of an activist rhetoric of blame by illustrating how Black women use blame to construct a community that collectively challenges institutionalized hegemonic structures. As stated earlier in the thesis, collectivism refers to the ways Black women emphasize the importance of communal rejection to misogynoir attitudes and prioritize shared participatory action to dismantle systems of oppression. The SHNE enacts an activist rhetoric of blame by taking the audience through an experience of blame that is intended to evoke civic responsibility and unify a community of resistance toward misogynoir attitudes and the legal justice system. This event is emotionally impactful for the people in attendance because of their physical proximity to others and the utility of tangible materials that allows the audience to be more engaged with the injustice's they witness. This two-hour program not only invites the audience into the community of the SHNC, but it allows them to see and experience the blame they are attributing to the legal justice system with that community. As Sullivan explains, epideictic rhetoric "aims at affecting the general attitude of the audience toward a particular person or action."[237] The SHNE ignites the emotions of anger and grief through storytelling in order to encourage the audience to imitate these emotions and respond by embracing collective activism. When I use the phrase "an experience of blame," I

[236]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName."
[237]Sullivan, "A Rhetoric of Children's Literature," 29.

mean that the event leads the audience through a process of blame that allows them to confront misogynoir attitudes and gives them an opportunity to engage in blaming practices so that they can collectively assign blame to the legal justice system. Black feminist scholars argue that social injustice is a "collective problem that harms us all" and it must be ameliorated by utilizing collective action.[238] Similarly, the SHNE constructs the injustices Black women experience as a communal issue and demonstrates how collective action is the *only* appropriate response.

First, I will discuss how the SHNC has utilized social justice events to encourage communities to fight against police brutality enacted upon Black women. Second, I present my analysis in three sections according to the SHNE itinerary in order to show how the event serves as an epideictic occasion that takes the audience through an experience of blame to construct a community of resistance. In each of the three sections, I analyze how the SHNE constructs its blame in a way that resists misogynoir attitudes that restrain Black women to positions of marginality and unifies a community in opposition to these perspectives.

History of the SHNC Events

The SHNC is more than an online hashtag; it serves "as a resource for the media, organizers, researchers, policy makers, and other stakeholders to better understand and address Black women's experiences of profiling and policing."[239] One way that the campaign honors the lives of Black women who have been killed by police while also raising awareness for their demands is through social justice events. The social justice events that the SHNC hosts are organized protests, rallies, and programs that actively engage with citizens to help them understand that Black women are consistently victims of police violence.

[238]Bell, Berry, Leopold, and Nkomo, "Making Black Lives Matter in Academia: A Black Feminist Call for Collective Action Against Anti-Blackness in The Academy," 40.
[239]African American Policy Forum, "#SayHerName: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women."

Through these social justice events, the SHNC creates a space for activists, performers, and victim's family members to discuss how racism, violence, sexism, patriarchy, and white supremacy impacts Black women daily. For instance, since 2014 the SHNC has hosted an annual "Breaking the Silence Town Hall Series" which consists of multiple town hall meetings that bring Black women and girls lived experiences into public policy debates. This series of panel discussions "provide[s] women and girls of color with a platform to share their experiences in front of a panel of decision makers and a public audience, advocating for their inclusion in race and gender justice agendas."[240] The SHNC has conducted townhall meetings in Minneapolis, New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and many other major cities. At these meetings, they discuss an array of issues that uniquely imperil Black women and girls such as criminal justice, trafficking, gentrification, child welfare systems, inequitable access to wellbeing, and educational resources.[241] These meetings include activists, policymakers, and community members who desire to hear about issues that pertain to Black women and girls and to develop strategies to combat these problems. The overarching goal of this event is to not only focus on the challenges Black women and girls face but to also "develop and advance local agendas for gender-inclusive racial justice."[242] These townhall meetings have an epideictic dimension because they use the gender-inclusive agenda to lay the groundwork for the SHNC deliberative action.

Since the start of the SHNC in 2014, the movement has hosted multiple ceremonial events to increase public awareness and support for illuminating Black women's experience with police brutality. The SHNC uses various programs and protests talk about the ways police

[240]Crenshaw, "2019 Year in Review."
[241]Crenshaw, "2019 Year in Review."
[242]African American Policy Forum, "Breaking the Silence Town Hall Series."

violence effects all Black women and girls.[243] The incorporation of multiple art performances such as songs, spoken word poetry, dances, paintings, speeches, videos, and music functions as a form of activism and coalition building. For example, in May of 2015, the African American Policy Forum hosted "#SayHerName: A Vigil in Memory of Black Women and Girls Killed by the Police" at the Union Square in New York City. This event was held the evening prior to May 21 which is The National Day Of Action To Help End State Violence Against Black Women around the world, established by Black Youth Project 100.[244] This event was one of the first times "family members of Black women killed by the police came together from across the country for a powerful vigil designed to draw attention to their loved ones stories."[245] Family members were supported by scholars, activists, artists, performers, community leaders, and politicians. The event featured demonstrations from Kimberlé Crenshaw, Piper Anderson, Eve Ensler, Aja Monee, Tonya Pinkins, and many other activists. Around 5:30 p.m., hundreds of people gathered in Union Square alongside the family members of Rekia Boyd, Kayla Moore, Alberta Spruill, Shantel Davis, Shelly Frey, Miriam Carey, Tanisha Anderson, Kyam Livingston, Michelle Cusseaux, and others.[246] Together, they lifted up the stories of these Black women and discussed the ways Black women have been killed, raped, and beaten by the police. However, they event showed how these experiences are rarely foregrounded in our popular conversations about antiblack police violence.

In honor of women's history month in March and the International Decade for People of African Descent, the SHNC created a weeklong online series of programs and events called Her

[243]African American Policy Forum, "#SHN Demands."
[244]The Black Youth Project 100 is an organization based in Chicago that consists of young Black activists who advocate for freedom and social justice for all Black people; Black Youth Project, "AboutBYP100."
[245]African American Policy Forum, "About the #SayHerName Campaign."
[246]"#SayHerName Vigil in Remembrance of Black Women and Girls Killed by the Police, Wednesday, May 20 5:30pm, Union Square, NYC."

Dreams Deferred. This weeklong program shed light on the specific challenges Black women and girls faced in 2015.[247] This virtual event covered a variety of topics relevant to Black women and girls' experience with intersectional oppression such as "state-sanctioned violence, economic inequality, sexual assault and domestic violence, school pushout, health disparities, and the challenges faced by Black women in higher education."[248] Each day, the SHNC facilitated an activity that highlighted one of these specific challenges while also discussing policy recommendations and demands. The Her Dreams Deferred series is now an annual weeklong program that allows Black women's realities to be recognized and addressed by community members, families, congresswomen, and activists.

As a result of the 2016 Her Dreams Deferred series, the SHNC garnered attention from politicians and stakeholders across the country who desired to join in on the mission of the SHNC. In 2016, Senator Gillibrand "entered into the congressional record that for the second year in a row, the last week in March is officially 'Black Women's History Week.'"[249] The advocacy of the SHNC and more recently, Black women in Congress who are a part of this series, has led to the creation of the Black Women and Girls Caucus.[250] The Her Dreams Deferred series illustrates how deliberative action that centers around inclusive and comprehensive social justice reform can be a result of the SHNC's epideictic rhetoric.

In 2017, the SHNC announced that the Her Dreams Deferred weeklong series would expand from online platforms to the Hammer Museum and Impact Hub LA, both in Los Angeles, California. Most of the events were live-streamed and posted on the Hammer Museum's website.[251] This series challenged narratives about Black womanhood "by hosting

[247]African American Policy Forum, "Her Dream Deferred: A Week on the Status of Black Women."
[248]African American Policy Forum, "Her Dream Deferred: A Week on the Status of Black Women."
[249]African American Policy Forum, "Her Dream Deferred 2016."
[250]African American Policy Forum, "Her Dream Deferred 2016."
[251]African American Policy Forum, "Her Dream Deferred 2017."

dialogues that not only speak to the harms that women and girls of color face but also the tools to dismantle those structural barriers that plague them in their homes, schools, and communities."[252] By moving the series beyond online platforms, it broadened the campaign's ability to connect with community members. This transition allowed them to engage more with the painful histories and realities of Black women and girls. The community members were able to ask questions of different panelists, participate in protesting practices, meet the family members of the victims, and engage in various activities that centered around the experiences of Black women and girls.

The SHNE is one of the programs that was included in the Her Dreams Deferred weeklong series in 2017. This free event offered a "substantive analysis on the status of black women and girls in the United States and explores multifaceted solutions to social injustice."[253] It honored Black women and girls victimized by police violence through spoken word performances, images, chants, songs, speeches from Kimberlé Crenshaw, and featured video clips from the family members of the victims. The event consists of audience members from the community, civil rights activists, policymakers, and scholars. The SHNE was broken up into three acts: Remembering the Women, How They Were Killed, and Say Her Name: Moving Toward Justice.

I have structured this chapter around the three acts of the SHNE in order to illuminate the ways each act contributes to leading the audience through an experience of blame. I will show how the audience is invited to resist misogynoir logics, engage in blaming practices, mirror the emotions of anger and grief, and apportion blame to the legal justice system. Through this

[252]African American Policy Forum, "Her Dream Deferred 2017."
[253]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName."

experience of blame, the SHNE centralizes collective activism as an appropriate response to the emotions provoked after witnessing the injustices enacted upon Black women.

Analysis of the SHNE

Remembering the Women

The first act, "Remembering the Women," encourages the audience to resist negative public images and stereotypes of Black women that have been used to justify their mistreatment and dismiss their encounters with police violence. To combat these negative interpretations, the act presents virtuous qualities of Black womanhood such as strength, beauty, resilience, and tenacity. The audience is encouraged to adopt these new interpretations of Black womanhood, which works to create a sense of belonging for Black women in the discourse about antiblack police violence. Rhetorically, this act creates a community of resistance toward harmful misogynoir attitudes by criticizing these perspectives and illustrating virtuous qualities of Black womanhood for the audience to embrace. The goal is for the audience to reconstruct how they remember and perceive Black women so that they can understand their role in fighting against antiblack police violence enacted upon Black women.

The SHNE exposes negative stereotypes that enable Black women to be forgotten and misunderstood by amplifying the misogynoir logics embedded in the audience's silence. To begin, Crenshaw uses a similar call-and-response strategy to that which was in her TED Talk examined in chapter 2. As stated earlier, call-and-response activities are an oral tradition of African American culture that has a powerful effect when used to evoke the sense of an enslaved past.[254] This rhetorical strategy reflects collectivist goals because it shows that misogynoir attitudes are not an individual mindset but a community mindset that needs to change. Crenshaw

[254]Sale, "Call and Response as Critical Method," 42.

uses this activity to unify the audience by illustrating a collective neglect of Black women's experience with police violence.

In Crenshaw's call-and-response activity, she says chants that are commonly used at protests and then encourages the audience to join in.[255] She says, "Hands up," then the audience confidently responds, "Don't shoot."[256] Crenshaw also states, "Eric Garner, Michael Brown, shut it down, shut it down" and the audience repeats what she says.[257] The audience's immediate response suggests that they are familiar with these chants and the names of Black men in their protest against antiblack police violence. However, when Crenshaw says chants that are used for Black women, the audience's response becomes hesitant. She says, "Back up! Back up! We want freedom freedom! Those women hatin cops we don't need em! Need em!"[258] The audience's response was much slower and less cohesive. Crenshaw says another chant, "Say her name Michelle Cusseaux those racist cops you got to go," and still the audience is slow in their response.[259] This activity invites the audience to blame themselves for their lack of awareness for Black women's experience with police violence. Crenshaw's activity allows the audience to experience how they enact the misogynoir logic of neglecting Black women through their inability to collectively chant against Black women's injustice. This exchange encourages a community of resistance toward these misogynoir attitudes by allowing the audience to see the power in their collective use of voice to confront the legal justice system.

Following this rhetorical activity, Crenshaw continues her speech by connecting the audience's lack of advocacy for Black women to blameworthy misogynoir logics that foster this

[255]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 03:44-04:18.
[256]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 04:25-04:34.
[257]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 04:50-05:00.
[258]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 06:08-06:14.
[259]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 06:25-06:38.

invisibility. Crenshaw highlights how stereotypes such as the perception of Black women as dangerous, threatening, crazy and lethal have been used to justify the deaths of Black women. Through the repetition of the phrase "we are," Crenshaw demonstrates what Black women are perceived to be. She retells the stories of Black women who have been killed by police through the lens of these stereotypes to point to the irony of the excessive use of force and the ways these stereotypes result in Black women being targeted by police in the first place. She says, "We are the stereotypes of the crazy, violent, irrational Black women. You're the monsters. We are the mother of the mothers."[260] In this instance, the "we" is Black women and the "you" is Black men. Crenshaw connects these stereotypes to the stories of Black women and girls who were killed by the police to illustrate how these attitudes have been used to justify violent acts against them and encourage the audience to resist these actions. She sarcastically says, "We are the terrors like Natasha McKenna so lethal, that six officers" had to put on "hazmat uniforms to extract a five foot a hundred- and thirty-pounds self from our cells. Tazering us to death because of our superhuman strength.[261] Further in the speech she states, "We are the gun slinging, gangbanging, grandmothers like Pearlie Golden. Ninety-three years old shot five times by officers in Texas who said she had a gun. We are the collateral damage of the unending war on drugs like seven-year-old Aiyana Stanley Jones, sleeping on a couch when shot by policemen."[262] Crenshaw uses the phrase "we are" to show the irony in the attitudes used to justify the deaths of innocent Black women. She highlights the blameworthy vices of perceiving Black women as vicious, lethal, and threatening in order to encourage the audience to reject these attitudes in the present and future. Crenshaw then states, "We are the sisters. Why don't

[260]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 09:02-09:12.
[261]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 09:15-09:32. Natasha McKenna was also mentioned in chapter 2 of this study. She is a Black woman who was killed in her cell while in police custody. Crenshaw gives a detailed description of her death in her video on *The Roots* YouTube channel.
[262]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 09:43-10:15.

you know our names? Our lives lost are not collateral damage. Our children don't cry any less for us…And we should count no less."[263] Crenshaw explicitly blames the audience when she asks, "Why don't you know our names?" Her blame emphasizes Black women's value and the fact that these lives are not expendable. Through Crenshaw's blame she creates discursive space for Black women's existence in the discourse about antiblack police violence by revealing how normalized misogynoir attitudes foster Black women's invisibility.

In another presentation, Gina Loring's spoken word poetry uses the description of Black motherhood to resist the stereotypes that Crenshaw criticized in the previous performance and exposes the blameworthy misogynoir vices of objectification, violence, and neglect as attitudes for the audience to resist.[264] She describes how the literal and figurative concept of Black motherhood is a gift to society by saying, "We are lifegivers, meant for sacred work. We build bodies in our bodies."[265] Further she states, "We wear wounded hearts like badges of courage, carrying the weight of the world on each shoulder…We are peace treaties, our hips the foundation for families. Future generations depend on the resilience of our bodies."[266] Loring sheds light on the physical value of Black motherhood being able to produce and nurture children. Loring characterizes Black women as lifegivers, resilient, and courageous, which encourages the audience to view them as such. Rhetorically, these virtues resist the stereotypes Crenshaw mentioned earlier by revealing an alternative lens displaying the uniqueness of Black womanhood. Her poem constructs a collective image for Black women to adopt and reinforces a

[263] Hammer Museum, "SayHerName,"10:44-11:07.
[264]I combine Javon Johnson's conceptualization of spoken word poetry in his book *Killing Poetry* with Susan Somers-Willet's definition in her book, *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity, and The Performance of Popular Verse in America*. I refer to spoken word poetry as an artistic performance of one's language and body that uniquely reflects ones' marginalized identities.
[265]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 14:13-16.
[266]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 14:32-48.

communal identity of Black womanhood as strong, resilient, motherly, caring, determined, and independent.

Loring then exposes the blameworthy misogynoir attitude of sexism that has been used to harm Black women and ignore the beauty they bring to the world. She states, "Boys, boys who have forgotten their first home was their mother's womb. Took their first breath in the embrace of her arms. We must remind them; from our breast you were fed… Our wombs are holy ground, so violating a woman is a violation against God. A sin against yourself!"[267] Loring criticizes men for neglecting and abusing the women who brought them into this world. Her rhetoric of blame works to reinterpret the value of motherhood by illustrating how it is instrumental to the physical wellbeing of man. She also rejects the vice of Black women being used as objects for the pleasure of men in order to create discursive space for what Black women really are. She states, "Meant to be honored not objectified…A gender biased consumer agenda has us grooming for days and days…Our reflection is not in mainstream red carpet movie stars, it is in the night sky, the moon softer glow somewhere just past Mars."[268] Loring illustrates how the objectification of Black women is a blameworthy vice because it characterizes Black women's purpose as being created for men's utility.

By resisting the misogynoir attitudes of objectification, Loring creates discursive space for her prevailing argument that Black women need to be valued and appreciated. She states, "Women are the heartbeat of the world."[269] Then she begins to use stories of women in the past to reveal the legacy of women who used their strength, resilience, and tenacity to nurture historical figures. She argues, "Mary brought Jesus through. Jochebed brought Moses through.

[267]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 14:56-15:20.
[268]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 15:27-29; 15:40-46; 16:00-13.
[269]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 16:17-18.

Aminah brought Mohammed through. Isis brought Osiris through. Harriet Tubman brought hundreds through. We are warriors, our love is infinite."[270] Loring not only illuminates the physical value of Black motherhood but also the figurative and spiritual one to criticize the ways patriarchal motives have shielded this value. She characterizes these mothers as "warriors" and "legacies" to emphasize the powerful qualities of strength, resilience, and tenacity embedded in Black motherhood. By Loring using these stories to illustrate the unique power of Black motherhood, she facilitates the theme of remembrance. Loring's poem rhetorically invites the audience to reminisce about how important these mothers were to many historical figures so that they can appreciate Black women. Her poem fosters the event's rhetoric of blame by showing blameworthy logics for the audience to reject while simultaneously encouraging the community of Black women in the audience to see themselves as valuable and worthy of advocacy. Overall, this act urged the audience to resist negative public images and stereotypes of Black women by allowing them to see how these perspectives are used to justify their mistreatment and dismissal in society.

How They Were Killed

To build upon the ways that the audience remembers the Black women who have experienced police brutality, the second act depicts appalling stories about Black women's experience with police violence. Brad Vivian argues that "witnessing" is when rhetors "preserve and publicize recollections of human cruelty and tragic loss in accord with an indisputable imperative."[271] By allowing an audience to witness the brutalities Black women have experienced, the SHNE invites them to view themselves as witnesses or engaged citizens obligated to preserve these memories of past injustices and also prevent similar tragedies from

[270]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 16:20-35.
[271]Vivian, "Commonplace Witnessing," 2.

occurring in the future. The collective witnessing creates an awareness of the tension between being a passive audience versus a powerful one. The collective witnessing invites individuals to view themselves as part of a powerful community rather than a single individual witnessing these atrocities. The act also utilizes the rhetorical tactic "copia" which means "abundance" or "expansive richness of utterance."[272] There are so many iterations of the same story, Black women and girls being brutally abused and killed by police officers. The collection of stories adds emotional depth to the event and provokes the feeling of grief and sorrow. By utilizing both collective witnessing and copia, the audience is encouraged to solidify collective empathy and activism in their advocacy against this violence in the following act, "Say Her Name: Moving Toward Justice."

Collective witnessing is an element of an activist rhetoric of blame that directs a group toward a specific imperative based on the injustices that they are beholding. For instance, Monique Wallace tells the story of her daughter, Meagan Hockaday, to walk the audience through the connected processes of collective witnessing, grief, and blame. Wallace states her daughter was "murdered in cold blood in Oxnard, California, March 28, 2015 by one Officer Rodger Garcia."[273] Wallace immediately attributes responsibility to the police officer who killed her daughter, illustrating whom the audience should blame. As Wallace speaks, there are pictures of Hockaday and her family smiling on the screen. The event used visual representation of Hockaday along with Wallace's interpretation of Hockaday's experience to evoke the feelings of grief from the audience. Rhetorically, Wallace's story creates an opportunity for reciprocal witnessing which is when the audience becomes part of the publicization and preservation of the

[272]Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 41.
[273]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 36:48-37:12.

memory of Hockaday. The purpose of making witnessing a reciprocal act is to lead the audience toward collective action to address antiblack police violence against Black women. In this short video clip, they include PowerPoint slides and images of Hockaday and her family to tell the story through Wallace's interpretation and show the ways her family was impacted by her daughter's death.

The images and words on the screen described Hockaday's story in a way that assigned blame to Officer Rodger Garcia. The slide states that "within 20 seconds of entering her home," Officer Garcia "shot her 4 times at close range, killing her instantly."[274] The slide draws attention to Officer Garcia's abrupt decision to use lethal force against Hockaday and the number of shots he took which rhetorically presents Hockaday as the victim and Garcia as the perpetrator. The slide states that Officer Garcia "did not announce himself upon arrival" and Hockaday's "three young children were all in the house when the incident occurred."[275] Further the clip that states, "Mother stolen away…3 Beautiful Baby Girls left without their Mommy!"[276] Rhetorically, this discourse of blame works to evoke grief by highlighting the powerlessness of Hockaday and her children in this situation. The words "without" and "stolen" emphasize how Hockaday was forcefully removed from her children and her home. Wallace explains, "What say her name means to me is every time I say my daughter's name or the names of these women, I feel like I am taking the power back" and "their lives back from the hands of these murders. There is justice in it for me."[277] Wallace serves as an example for how the audience should respond to this grief that they feel. Wallace rhetorically invites the audience to "take the power back" by viewing the behavior of this officer as ghastly and showing the emotional strength that is

[274]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 37:39-43.
[275]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 37:43-49.
[276]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 37:55-57.
[277]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 38:30-35.

absorbed when people collectively say out loud the names of Black women who have experienced police violence. The video clip allows the audience to witness the atrocities of Hockaday's experience with police violence, which invites the audience into Wallace's activism for her daughter.

In addition to appalling stories being displayed, the act also utilizes a spoken word poem to tell the story of Black women's experience with police violence from their point of view. Kamil Oshundara comes to the stage and reads a poem she wrote about antiblack police violence enacted upon Black women. Oshundara's poem works to reinforce the theme "How They Were Killed" by criticizing the idea of compliance as a safe and effective solution to police violence. This builds upon Wallace's personal testimony of her daughter Hockaday because it highlights the ways Black women are dehumanized before their interactions with police which rules out obedience and compliance as viable options. Her poem allows the audience to collectively witness her interpretation of Black women's internal thoughts when encountering police violence in order to challenge the view of Black women as a dangerous threat and centralize the audience around resistance.

Oshundara speaks from a Black woman's perspective during interactions with police to reimagine how their bodies can be used as a tool of resistance to misogynoir attitudes that have been used to degrade Black women in the past. Oshundara shows how the police view Black women as a powerful threat to society which, in the past, has led to the killings of innocent Black women. She says, "We say hands up, don't shoot. I'm not a monster, don't shoot. I bleed red like you please don't spill me on the sidewalk like some spoiled chocolate milk. I came from the breath of the most high and honestly, I'd rather die than assume that position for you."[278]

[278]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 45:18-23.

Oshundara illustrates how Black women are vulnerable to police violence because they are viewed as a "monster" and "immoral." Immediately, she resists those logics by stating that she would rather die than submit to the beliefs and behaviors that restrain Black women to positions of marginality.

Oshundara argues that regardless of how Black women plead and beg, their bodies are already viewed as a threat by police. In a sarcastic tone she says, "I have been used as a weapon for so long. I can't be trusted to responsibly use myself because I'm catastrophically powerful, because I'm that lethal, because I have the potential motive and mindset willing to shoot a pig and transform a nation and that's a problem."[279] Her sarcasm reveals that the stigmatization of Black women has led to the assumption that these bodies are more harmful than they actually are. Oshundara presents the stereotypes of Black women as a "weapon," "catastrophically powerful," "lethal," desiring to kill police, and the "problem" to rhetorically cast these perceptions as misogynoir logics for the audience to reject. She uses hyperbole to expose the ridiculous nature of the assumptions that Black women are violent and dangerous.

Oshundara's activist rhetoric of blame frames the stories of Black women and girls in a way that criticizes submission and obedience as adequate solutions to police violence. She says, "I can have no hands and to them, I'm always holding a gun, no eyes but they still saw me run… Waving a little white flag will not heal the white imagination. It will not rebuild Mood's home. It will not resurrect Rekia, Natasha, Aiyana or Korryn, Tanisha, Miriam or Shelly, Danisha, Melissa or Sandra, names who ring bland to blast me behind a badge."[280] Oshundara demonstrates how Black women have been presumed a threat before interactions with police. She explicitly states the names of Black women who have all died at the hands of the police and

[279]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 45:43-55.
[280]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 46:20-45.

received little to no justice as evidence for her argument. For these women, obedience and compliance to police officers did not prevent violence from occurring. By conceptualizing these stories as sites of vulnerability, Oshundara reveals how submission and obedience to misogynoir attitudes does not eliminate the hegemonic structures imposed on Black women. As she angrily explains, "No amount of my surrender, begging pleading, can put the human back into you.""[281] Here, the "you" is the police and the legal justice system. Oshundara uses these testimonies to persuade the audience to not only act in a way that resists police violence but to think about the ways our solutions of submission and acceptance facilitates the problem of police violence against Black women as a whole. Oshundara's blame suggests that the issue of police violence enacted upon Black women lies in how these bodies are deemed weapons before their interactions with police not Black women's reluctance to comply.

Contrary to misogynoir logics that socialize Black women to accept dehumanization and exploitation,[282] Oshundara assertively refuses to comply to these misogynoir attitudes of submission and obedience. For instance, she says, "I won't put my hands up,"[283] "I won't fold this time,"[284] and "I only did what I know how to do, never back down."[285] Oshundara consistently enacts resistance by refuting to abide to the idea of compliance. Rhetorically, she engages in the resistance that she wants the audience to adopt in their actions. Oshundara characterizes Black women's resistance as a resource for dismantling hegemonic structures. Overall, Oshundara's poem works to subvert submission and compliance as practical options for defying police violence and illuminate's resistance as a suitable solution for Black women.

[281]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 47:42-46.
[282]Hall, "Slippin'in And Out of Frame," 347.
[283]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 47:12-21.
[284]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 49:03-05.
[285]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 50:27-30.

Lastly, the act displays a short video clip of Rhanda Dormeus retelling the story of her daughter Korryn Gaines. On August 1, 2016, three Baltimore County officers arrived at Gaines's home to serve warrants to her and a man that lived there.[286] According to the police department, no one responded to their knocking on the door for ten minutes, although they heard people inside of the apartment. The officers obtained a key and opened the door to find Gaines sitting on the couch with a shotgun in one hand and her five-year old son in another. After a six-hour standoff with police, Officer Royce Ruby fatally shot Gaines, arguing that he believed she was going to fire at them.[287] Gaines's son was also shot during this exchange. The court concluded that Office Ruby's actions were justified and acquitted him of all charges but gave Gaines's family one of the largest financial awards in the Baltimore area.

Dormeus characterizes Gaines' experience as an act of police violence because the officers were aware that Gaines was mentally ill. Although Dormeus urged officers to allow her to help de-escalate the situation, she was immediately rebuffed. In an interview with Baltimore news channel *WBLA TV*, Dormeus stated, "I feel like, if they had just let me talk to her, it wouldn't be like this…I think I could have gotten her to come out."[288] The issue that Gaines' story confronts is how police officers deal with Black women who are experiencing mental illness. In this short video clip in the SHNE, Dormeus' testimony illustrates how the misogynoir view of Black women as hazardous overshadows their perceived vulnerability to mental illnesses during police interactions. This story extends the acts theme of "How They Were Killed" by demonstrating the ways misogynoir attitudes when adopted by police work to marginalize Black women who have mental illnesses.

[286]Lowery, "Korryn Gaines, Cradling Child and Shotgun, Is Fatally Shot by Police."
[287]Marbella, "Korryn Gaines: Two Years Later, Killing by Baltimore County Police Continues to Raise Legal Issues."
[288]Amara, "Korryn Gaines' Mother Testifies in Wrongful Death Case."

Dormeus begins her story by characterizing her daughter as a small but assertive Black woman who demanded respect. She notes, "I don't think they were expecting to see someone as tiny and as feisty."[289] Further she illustrates how the officers felt threatened by Gaines, she says they had the mindset of "How dare you? Who do you think you are? You little Black girl."[290] Yet, Dormeus puts into perspective the size of her daughter, to emphasize how lethal force was not necessary. She says that Gaines "was about 5'1, she was a hundred pounds…she had a lion's heart and I think that it pissed them off."[291] Dormeus argues that it was their negative perceptions of Gaines Black woman identity that facilitated the police officers use of lethal force against her. In an irritated tone she states, "I believe that if my baby had been Caucasian that she would have still been alive. I believe the negotiation process would have been different… They would have exhausted every means necessary to bring her out alive."[292] Her blame works to confront the racist perceptions embedded in her daughter's story. Because the police officers categorized Gaines' aggressive nature as emblematic of her psychological state, Dormeus argues that they should have sought professional mental help rather than use deadly force. Dormeus' use of blame allows the audience to understand how the misogynoir logics of Black women as dangerous prompted the police officers use of violence against her daughter, like many others. Dormeus builds upon Crenshaw's opening speech and Oshundara's spoken word performance by using the specific story of her daughter to demonstrate how this misogynoir logic works to overshadow Black women's vulnerability to mental illnesses.

This act shows so many iterations of the same story that keeps happening. Black women and girls being brutally abused and killed by police officers because of the enactment of

[289]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 50:55-56.
[290]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 50:58-51:03.
[291] Hammer, Museum, "SayHerName," 51:05-08.
[292]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 51:21-48.

misogynoir attitudes that perceives them as less than human. This act enables the audience to collectively witness these atrocities by demonstrating how police officers enacted these injustices upon Black women and no justice was served for these deaths. What makes the nature of these stories rhetorically effective is that the act uses copia, an accumulation of stories, which adds emotional gravity to the event as a whole. Each story is representative of the reality Black women face daily and it details their injustices. By utilizing both collective witnessing and copia, the act creates a more powerful depiction of why the audience needs to "say her name" and evokes civic responsibility.

Say Her Name: Moving Toward Justice

After allowing the audience to collectively witness the atrocities of Black women's deaths, the final act invites the audience into the SHNC's community of resistance and empowers them to see the strength in their collective activism. Rhetorically, the performances in this act seek to evoke civic responsibility by inviting the audience to engage in the practice of blame. The audience is encouraged to collectively reject blameworthy misogynoir logics that restrain Black women to positions of marginality, assign blame to the legal justice system, and use their collective voice to fight against injustice.

In the first act, the audience was unable to say the names of Black women and girls who have experienced police violence because they did not know their names or stories. However, Crenshaw gives the audience an opportunity to combat their lack of awareness for Black women's injustices by inviting them to collectively say the name of Black women who have been killed by police out loud. Crenshaw uses chants to teach the audience how to reclaim the value of these lives lost and compensate for their lack of advocacy for these women at the

beginning of the event.[293] Crenshaw states, "We have seen, heard, and felt why we must say her name. The time is now for us to do it."[294] The audience members are each given a picture of a Black women or girl who was killed by the police. Crenshaw invites the audience to engage in the blaming process by encouraging them to stand up and say these names out loud. The audience shouts the names of Michelle Cusseaux, Meagan Hockaday, Sandra Bland, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, and many others. There is a cacophony of sound in the room as the audience members scream these names. At the same time, Abby Dobson mournfully sings the words "say her name" while videos of Black women and girls who have experienced police brutality play on the screen in the background. This interactive activity appeals to the emotions of grief and anger in a manner that enables the audience to collectively engage with the feelings they have developed throughout their experience in this event. I view the act of verbally saying these names out loud as a mechanism of resistance toward Black women's invisibility and misogynoir attitudes criticized in the first two acts. By speaking of these names, the audience collectively embraces these stories and brings the dead and the forgotten into living space. Together, the audience commemorates the dead while also reinforcing the community's sense of identity and commitment. This commitment is to illuminate the hidden stories of Black women killed by police violence in order to push forward the SHNC's agenda for obtaining justice.

Following Crenshaw's interactive activity, the Mothers Network speaks at the SHNE. In 2016, mothers of Black women and girls who have been killed by police brutality created an organization called "#SayHerName: Mothers Network."[295] This organization consists of Black mothers who desire to collectively demand accountability and justice for their daughters. At the

[293]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 1:05:54-1:17:48.
[294]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 1:05:54-1:05:58.
[295]African American Policy Forum, "Mothers Network."

SHNE, multiple Black mothers who are a part of the Mothers Network and some family members of the victims gave short speeches answering the question "what does justice mean to you?" The speeches included the voices of the mothers Juanita Jennings, Frances Garrett, Kassandra Johnson, Gina Best, Cherri Overtone, Monique Wallace, Tanisha Anderson, and Sharon Wilkerson. Tina Meeks, LisaGay Hamilton, and actresses Kelly McCreary and Qualiema Green all spoke on behalf of the mothers who were not physically present at the event.[296]

During this part of the SHNE, Abby Dobson sings, "If you want justice say yeah" between the intervals of the Mothers Network speeches. As she repeats this phrase, the audience collectively responds "yeah." These song interludes add to building a community of resistance by giving the audience an opportunity to collectively foreground their commitment for fighting against police brutality enacted upon Black women. Each of the women in the Mothers Network come to the stage one by one and read their response to the question. After they finished their speech, they stood behind the next person who was reading, creating a huddle around the woman giving their speech at the time. The presence of multiple Black women and mothers standing behind each other as they give their speech marks the absence of their loved ones. Following each speech, the women stood on the stage holding and hugging each other while listening to the next person speak. Rhetorically, these Black women serve as an example of collective activism by appearing on stage as a group with similar goals and similar emotions. These Black women model the collective activism that the SHNE wants the audience to enact by communally embracing each other as they all fight for justice for their daughters and loved ones.

The Mothers Network presents the advocacy for social justice as a collective action which builds community and encourages the audience to reconceptualize their role in fighting

[296]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 1:17:48-1:31:23.

against antiblack police brutality. For example, spoken by the actress Kelly McCreary, Francis Garrett states, "Justice for me would be for us, for all of us parents who have lost children to police brutality, to come together, to stand together and make movements, to change laws at every level state, federal whatever. We need to move forward with this!"[297] Garrett's articulation of the collective experience of loss from these Black mothers enables her to nurture their identity as Black women by positioning collective grief as a source of empowerment. She also characterizes the goal of their collective activism as changing the legal justice system not just the acts of an individual. This speech is parallel to Tarina Pouncy's assertions that, "Justice for me is… to look beyond my personal loss and see the loses of so many women, especially women of color."[298] Pouncy used these Black mother's collective experience of anger, pain, and bereavement as a common ground for fostering empathy and uniting the community under the cause for Black women's liberation. In a mournful tone, Sharon Wilkerson cries, "We are gonna fight, we gonna fight, we gonna join together as sisters and unite…we gonna fight for our daughters"[299] Further she laments, "It won't stop here…We just getting' started cause we some strong Black women."[300] As Wilkerson screams repetitively "we are gonna fight," tears flow down her face. These speeches emphasize how collective activism is essential for eliminating Black women's experience with police violence and changing the legal justice system. Rhetorically, these mothers' model collective activism by demonstrating how their advocacy is for all Black women's liberation, not just their loved ones.

The Mothers Network's portrayal of their own emotions of grief works to provoke this feeling in the audience and urges the audience to allow their grief to fuel their activism. The

[297]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 1:21:24-43.
[298]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 1:19:05-25.
[299]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 1:28:45-1:29:04.
[300]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 1:29:46-1:30:12.

previous act gave the audience an opportunity to mourn the deaths of Black women by witnessing their atrocities. This act invites the audience to use the emotion of grief to drive their advocacy for Black women's liberation. The mourning for these Black women should become integrated into the audience's activism for justice. Spoken on behalf of Gina Best, Qualiema Green encourages the community to allow their sadness and mourning to consistently enable activism. She says, we must "continue to stand and cry rivers of tears. We labor in each push for our girls and for one another, that's what justice would look like. Regardless of who is in the house, in the White House."[301] Best calls for the audience to not only act, but to continue to lament these Black women and girls as they advocate for justice. Her rhetoric of blame works to illuminate the consistent emotion of sorrow and mourning as a powerful tool that should drive the audience's activism. This suggests that the act of advocating for justice, in this context, is intertwined with the emotion of grief and mourning loss.

The Mothers Network rhetorically illuminates anger as another appropriate emotion for fueling the audience's activism. As Black feminist scholars, Audre Lorde and Brittany Cooper point out, rage is an appropriate response for Black women who are experiencing injustice.[302] Lorde argues that Black women have to learn to move through their fury so that it does not tear them apart and so they can use this emotion "for strength and source and insight within our daily lives."[303] The integration of anger into Black women's activism is evident in the Mothers Network's speeches. For example, Kassandra Johnson bluntly states, "Justice for me, for Tanisha Anderson, is to simply have the officer pay for what he done. And if that doesn't happen on Earth, his ass gone burn in hell!"[304] As Johnson delivers blame to the officer, her voice becomes

[301]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 01:26:35-53.
[302]Cooper, *Eloquent Rage,* 152.
[303]Lorde, "The Use of Anger," 9.
[304]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 01:22:30-43.

louder and sharper while her facial expressions are disgruntled and dissatisfied which suggest she is infuriated. The volume of her voice and her facial expressions rhetorically illustrates how her anger fuels her advocacy for social justice. Similarly, LisaGay Hamilton who spoke on behalf of Monique Wallace yells, "Justice for my daughter would be accountability, why is there no accountability? Any other person would be in prison, especially a Black person would been in prison… justice means that your ass goes to jail, just like the rest of us… No justice, no fuckin' peace!"[305] Hamilton's distressed voice and screaming illustrates her anger and agony not only toward the system, but those who deprive Black women of basic human rights. Johnson and Hamilton's emotional display of anger rhetorically allows the audience to feel how these atrocities psychologically and physically damage Black women. Through this display, the audience is invited to take on the emotion of anger in their advocacy for obtaining social justice.

The Mothers Network characterize the fight for social justice as collective activism. For instance, Johnson furiously says, "We have to open the doors. We have children, grandchild and we want them to be treated like human beings. So, it don't stop here, we need to have this thing going on everywhere."[306] Johnson puts the obligation on the community to push for policy reform and deconstruct negatives interpretations of Black womanhood. When Johnson says, "we want them to be treated like human beings," this suggests that Black women are not always allowed access to basic human rights. Sharon Wilkerson's speech builds on the notion of Black women being dehumanized when she bemoans, "We are gonna fight because they did not deserve this. No body deserves to die like this."[307] Further she screams in a mournful tone, "We

[305]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 01:24:19-1:25:19.
[306]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 01:23:19-38.
[307]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 01:29:10-27.

going to stop saying 'we loss.' We ain't lose nothin', they took our children! They took our daughters! They took our babies! Justice for Shelly!"[308] Wilkerson argues that the legal justice system is responsible for killing her daughter because they did not hold the individual police officers accountable. Both Wilkerson's and Johnson's rhetoric of blame presents the act of killing Black women without accountability as inhumane and immoral. They discuss a communal "we" which includes both the mothers and the audience's involvement in blaming the legal justice system. Through their inclusion of the audience into their allocation of blame, they invite the audience to be a part of the SHNE's community of resistance. Rhetorically, their blame nurtures the audience's sense of community by emphasizing their role in holding the system that facilitates misogynoir attitudes accountable.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on the collectivist function of an activist rhetoric of blame to demonstrate how blame can be used to mold a community's mind toward resisting misogynoir attitudes. This blame works to "collectively make visible and legible all victims of state and state-sponsored violence."[309] The SHNE enacted an activist rhetoric of blame by taking the audience through an experience of blame that was intended to evoke civic responsibility and unify a community of resistance toward misogynoir attitudes and the legal justice system. The first act urged the audience to resist negative public images and stereotypes of Black women by allowing them to see how these attitudes are used to justify Black women's mistreatment and dismissal by the legal justice system. The second act utilized collective witnessing and copia to allow the audience to observe the brutality Black women have experienced. The audience was invited to view themselves as engaged citizens obligated to preserve the memories of the past

[308]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName," 01:30:25-45.
[309]Lindsey, "A 'Herstorical' Approach to Black Violability," 237.

injustices and prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future. The third act gave the audience an opportunity to engage in the practice of blame and moved them toward action by demonstrating what their role is in the SHNC. From this we learn that an activist rhetoric of blame can "form a community's mind" through collective witnessing, inviting them to participate in blaming practices, and centralizing collective activism as a response to the emotions they felt from collectively witnessing these injustices. [310] An activist rhetoric of blame can be used to create a community of resistance toward misogynoir attitudes and establish collective activism as the imperative. The last chapter of my thesis illustrates the ways an activist rhetoric of blame expands scholarly discussions in rhetorical studies and discusses future directions for advancing this theory.

[310]Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 7.

Chapter 5:
Conclusion

Although Black women have been killed and mistreated by police, their stories are consistently excluded in the discussions about antiblack police violence. According to a report from the *Washington Post*, Black women only account for thirteen percent of women in the United States population. Yet, they make up twenty-eight percent of the unarmed killings by police and twenty percent of the women who were fatally murdered by police officers since the tracking of these shootings in 2015.[311] The discourse of the SHNC provided prime examples for understanding how Black women are strategically working to deconstruct their historical erasure within the discourse about antiblack police violence so that these killings can be brought into political discussions.

One goal of this thesis was to demonstrate that "a Black women's collective standpoint does exist"[312] upon which to build theories. Drawing upon Black feminist scholarship and epideictic rhetoric, an activist rhetoric of blame centralizes the experiences of Black women in America and the rhetorical tactics Black women use to assign responsibility. Black women have consistently enacted an activist rhetoric of blame upon various platforms to critique dominant discourse and reconstruct how communities attribute responsibility. In this concluding chapter, I will first outline the scholarly conversation this thesis is situated within and give an overview of each chapter. Then, I will discuss the future directions for advancing the theory an activist rhetoric of blame.

[311]Iati and Jenkins, "Nearly 250 Women Have Been Fatally Shot by Police Since 2015."
[312]Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* 28.

Scholarly Contribution

In 1986, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell analyzed the rhetorical skills of Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell to demonstrate how Black women's rhetoric converged and diverged from White feminists. Campbell contended that this examination was the beginning for including the rhetoric of Black women into the history of the U.S. women and American public address.[313] Since then, other rhetoric scholars have analyzed the ways Black women are using rhetoric on public platforms as a tool to dismantle systemic oppression. For example, Shirley Wilson Logan examined how Frances Harper, Ida B. Wells and Anna Cooper in the nineteenth century used literary and different rhetorical tactics as a weapon to fight against prejudice, racism, and mob violence.[314]

A little over ten years after Campbell's essay, Olga Idriss Davis published her article, "A Black Woman as Rhetorical Critic: Validating and Violating the Space of Otherness," to urge rhetorical critics to "re-discover Black women's rhetorical traditions in America."[315] Building upon this research, Rondee Gaines along with Ashley Hall both analyzed the rhetoric of Black women and how they respond to dominant discourses of oppression. In 2016, Gaines responded to this call by evaluating the public texts from Mary McLeod Bethune to illustrate how Bethune's rhetoric enabled her to define herself, praise Black womanhood, and reclaim Black woman's humanity by criticizing the dominant narrative of White middle-class femininity.[316] On the same note, Hall's analysis of Assata Shakur and Cardi B. demonstrates how Black women's truth telling engineers rivals of blackness and threatens white supremacy.[317]

[313]Campbell, "Style and Content in the Rhetoric of Early Afro-American Feminists," 443.
[314]Logan, "Literacy as a Tool for Social Action Among Nineteenth –Century African American Women," 176-196.
[315]Davis, "A Black Woman as Rhetorical Critic," 78.
[316]Gaines, "Rhetoric and a Body Impolitic."
[317]Hall, "Slippin' In and Out of Frame," 342.

These scholars shed light on the ways Black women use rhetoric to uniquely respond to dominant systems of oppression. This thesis intervenes into this scholarly discussion by first illustrating how Black women use blame to confront the marginalization they experience in the discourse about antiblack police violence. I argued that an activist rhetoric of blame, used by Black women, dramatically puts on display the life of individuals who have experienced injustices and exposes blameworthy misogynoir attitudes in order to criticize the inherent flaws within a policy or system and urgently demand sociopolitical transformation. This form of blame works to reshape how communities interpret Black women's experiences, deconstruct misogynoir attitudes they have internalized, provide them with tools to apportion blame, and create a community in opposition to the injustices Black women experience daily. Second, while previous research on blame shows how rhetors use blame to maintain the status quo, I demonstrated how Black women use blame to challenge the status quo and the vices upheld by the legal justice system. An advance an activist rhetoric of blame used by Black women is a form of attack toward dominant discourses and systems that facilitate misogynoir attitudes.

To further explain my contribution to rhetorical studies and Black feminist scholarship, I will discuss how each chapter illuminated different functions of an activist rhetoric of blame. In chapter 2, I focused on the pedagogical function of an activist rhetoric of blame to demonstrate how this rhetoric not only confronts blameworthy attitudes but provides the audience with the language to properly allocate blame. I situated Crenshaw's educational approach within Black feminist pedagogy to illustrate how she makes the blame in the discourse about antiblack police violence intersectional. I argued that she does this by refuting normative Western/Eurocentric tendencies in dominant discourses, centralizing the experiences of Black women, and inviting the

audience to see their "revolutionary potential."[318] In her interview on *Democracy Now!* Crenshaw uses the stories by Garrett and Sutton to teach the viewers how police violence impacts Black women daily and the language they should adopt to frame these injustices. [319] To expand upon reconstructing vocabulary to adequately fight against antiblack police violence, Crenshaw uses her theory of intersectionality as a language reframing tool. In her TEDTalk, she teaches the audience the dominant course of thinking that ignores Black women's pain and suffering for the purpose of advancing a new one through the audience's utility of intersectionality.[320] Lastly, Crenshaw's video on *The Root*, educates viewers about the power of using specific words and phrases as a group. Crenshaw illustrates how the discourse about antiblack police violence needs to develop vocabulary that focuses on Black women's experiences which is what the phrase "say her name" works to do. This chapter demonstrates how Crenshaw's public discourse equipped audiences for participation in deconstructing misogynoir attitudes they might have internalized and provided them with tools to assign blame to the legal justice system.

In chapter 3, I focused on the resistive function of an activist rhetoric of blame to demonstrate how Black women oppose dominant hegemonic structures on slam poetry platforms. The slam performances by Porsha Olayiwola, FreeQuency, and Temple strategically reenacted stories from Black women who experienced police brutality in order to display the harmful attitudes that marginalize Black women and provoke the audience to resist these perspectives in the future. For instance, Olayiwola's performance retold the story of Rekia Boyd to resist sexist misogynoir attitudes and urge the audience to view Black women as vulnerable subjects who possess the capacity for suffering.[321]

[318]Joseph, "Black Feminist Pedagogy and Schooling in Capitalist White America," 180.
[319]*Democracy Now!,* "Say Her Name: Families Seek Justice in Overlooked Police Killings of African-American Women."
[320]Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality."
[321]Button Poetry, "Porsha Olayiwola."

Slam events are also a platform for Black women to confront myopic tendencies that centralize one story of a Black woman who has experienced police violence but neglects the others. In FreeQuency's performance, they used prosopopoeia by speaking from Sandra Bland's point of view to criticize the ways the discourse about Bland's death facilitated the erasure of other Black women who have been killed by police.[322] Similarly, Temple used collective voice to retell the story of Bland in a way that brought together the experiences of Black women, centered Black women's oppression as the focal point for advocacy and resisted myopic tendencies within the discourse about antiblack police violence.[323] These performances set in motion the necessary awareness audience members must adopt to adequately fight against the injustices Black women experience.

Chapter 4 focused on the collectivist function of an activist rhetoric of blame to demonstrate how blame can construct a community in opposition to misogynoir attitudes. The SHNE led the audience through a process of blame that confronted misogynoir logics and invited them to engage in blaming practices so that they can attribute blame to the legal justice system.[324] The first act "Remembering the Women," urged the audience to resist negative public images and stereotypes of Black women by allowing them to see how these perspectives are used to justify their mistreatment and dismissal in society. The second act, "How They Were Killed," enacted collective witnessing by allowing the audience to observe the brutality Black women have experienced so that they can view themselves as engaged citizens obligated to preserve these memories of the past injustices and prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future. The third act, "Say Her Name: Moving Toward Justice," invited the audience to engage in

[322]Poetry Slam Inc., "Individual World Poetry Slam Finals 2015 - FreeQuency 'Say Her Name.'"
[323]Button Poetry, "Kai Davis, Nayo Jones & Jasmine Combs – 'Sandra Bland.'"
[324]Hammer Museum, "SayHerName."

the practice of blame and moved the audience toward action by demonstrating what their role is in the SHNC. This event advances an activist rhetoric of blame that worked to mold this community's mind through collective witnessing, inviting them to participate in blaming practices, and centralizing collective activism as a response to the emotions they felt from collectively witnessing these injustices.

This analysis of the discourse in the SHNC can help us understand two questions Davis posed for rhetorical scholars to consider. She asked, "How much more informed are we of the ways Black women and other oppressed groups symbolically create and negotiate their worlds?" and "Will critics find ways to explicate rhetoric of oppressed people and their responses to dominant discourses?"[325] Though epideictic rhetoric is a rich and well-known discourse in the scholarship of communication, it has focused primarily on the rhetoric of praise and White men. Cynthia Sheard argues that "if we are to appreciate the richness, complexity of epideictic rhetoric today, we need to go beyond Aristotle's criteria to broaden…our sense of epideictic's style, function, time and place…"[326] In order for us to understand the complexities of epideictic rhetoric as it relates to not only the rhetoric of blame but dynamics of race, we must include the scholarship of Black feminism.

To move epideictic studies beyond normative rhetorics, we should listen to Karma Chavez's call for rhetorical scholars to reimagine rhetoric as nonwhite. Chavez argues that the discipline of rhetoric should be "constituted through non-normative, non-citizen, non-Western perspectives and ways of knowing and being."[327] Theorizing an activist rhetoric of blame, with the help of Black feminist work, provides new explorations of Black women's activism and

[325]Davis, "A Black Woman as Rhetorical Critic," 78.
[326]Sheard, "The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric," 770.
[327]Chávez, "Beyond Inclusion: Rethinking Rhetoric's Historical Narrative," 163.

constructs a theory from Black women's unique standpoint. If we are able to view Black women's blame as valuable and effective, we can see how their blame works to attack the systems that oppress them and empowers them to believe that they are worthy of advocacy and justice.

Future Directions for an Activist Rhetoric of Blame

While this thesis does cover multiple functions of an activist rhetoric of blame, there are areas that can be further developed. One area that was not thoroughly developed in this analysis is the ways images advance an activist rhetoric of blame. A future project could examine how visual materials are used to blame and confront systems of oppression. Although this project focused on contemporary examples, future research can analyze how Black women have employed an activist rhetoric of blame in the nineteenth and twentieth century. As stated earlier in the thesis, an activist rhetoric of blame does not only apply to Black women, but also other marginalized communities might adopt this rhetoric as well. Perhaps another avenue that can be explored is the ways marginalized groups employ this form of blame on public platforms to resist dominant hegemonic structures.

As rhetorical critics now is the time to respond to Davis's call for recovering Black women's rhetorical tradition in America because we can locate their rhetoric in the past and the present to illustrate how they respond "dialogically and dialectically" to liberate themselves and their communities.[328] Through this analysis, rhetorical critics are more informed about the ways Black women use blame as a tool for challenging systems of oppression and deconstructing perspectives that facilitate their erasure. When we consider the risk Black women take to speak on public platforms about their experiences, there is room to believe that they use blame to create

[328]Davis, "A Black Woman as Rhetorical Critic," 80.

space for their belonging in America. My hope is that we no longer view Black women's blame as problematic but rather, as essential to resisting domination and transforming society. Blame is one way they respond not only to their invisibility in dominant discourses, but to the marginalization they experience every day. Let us begin to characterize Black women's blame as productive, unapologetic, and unremitting.

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