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Theory of Black Racial Forgiveness:
The Expectation of Black Sacrifice

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty and the Honors Program
Of the University of San Diego

By
Kayla Nicole Weston
Political Science and International Relations
2020

On September 6th, 2018, Amber Guyger, an off-duty Dallas police officer, mistakenly entered the wrong apartment after coming home from work and fatally shot her Black unarmed neighbor, Botham Jean, as he sat in his home eating ice cream (Allyn 2019). Following this tragedy, moments after Ms. Guyger's emotional testimony and her sentencing to ten years in prison, the brother of the victim, Brandt Jean, stood up in the courtroom and addressed Ms. Guyger: "Again, I love you as a person, and I don't wish anything bad on you. I don't know if this is possible, but can I give her a hug, please? Please?" (All things considered, 2019). After Brandt Jean forgave and hugged Ms. Guyger, the judge, Tammy Kemp, wiped tears from her eyes, hugged the Jean family, and then proceeded to hug the defendant, Amber Guyger.

This instance of a Black person forgiving a white individual under an extraordinary circumstance is one that continually reoccurs. We see a similar circumstance in the shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, where a white supremacist, Dylann Roof, entered into this "historically black place of worship" and shot and killed nine people (Ali, 2019). In response to this shooting, Nadine Collier, the daughter of victim Ethel Lance, told Roof at his hearing, "I forgive you ... You took something really precious from me. I will never talk to her ever again, I will never be able to hold her again, but I forgive you and have mercy on your soul" (Ali, 2019). Not long after, two more family members of the victims stood up in the hearing to publicly forgive Roof for his actions (Ali, 2019).

These acts of forgiveness from Brandt Jean, Judge Tammy Kemp, and the families of the Emanuel Church shooting triggered an emotional outcry from the public. The social media commentary surrounding these radical acts of forgiveness displays a wide variety of conflicting

perspectives. Many people consider Brandt Jean's forgiveness as a beautiful act of mercy that provides the rest of humanity with an "incredible lesson of love and forgiveness" (Grant, 2019). For this reason, the Institute for Law Enforcement Administration chose to honor Brandt with the 2019 Ethical Courage Award (Li, 2019). Others, however, are deeply troubled by this forgiveness. One Twitter user posted, "Only thing Brandt Jean's #forgiveness has done is give racist white people a new go-to 'You people should be more like...' example to weaponize against black people when they do something horrific and racist and don't want to be held accountable" (Dav-O, 2019). In response to an ABC news article on Amber Guyger's sentencing, Preston Mitchell tweeted a reply: "The sad truth is that people will look at Brandt Jean (and others) forgiveness and continue that as the standard for Black people who aren't forgiving. Black people are historically forced to show empathy to colonizers and made to feel bad when we don't" (Mitchell, 2019).

Each comment reflects the opposing opinions over what is a nationwide tendency of Black people forgiving white people for their unspeakably violent and racist actions. While forgiveness in the traditional sense is believed by most people to be an inherently good value, there is something about the performance of these particular acts of forgiveness that goes beyond our normative understanding of forgiveness's meaning and implications. It is far too simplistic to cast aside these actions as being bad, for many of the intentions are rooted in a virtuous spirit. And yet, the discordant responses from the public who witnessed the performance of forgiveness, as shown via the twitter responses, indicates that this type of forgiveness impacts people beyond the actors directly involved in two very polarized ways. For those who see the forgiveness as virtuous and selfless, they praise Brandt Jean and the families

of the Emanuel shooting on social media for being model citizens. They share and repost the story so that others may read about the heroic act and give further appreciation. Juxtaposed to this commentary, others feel as though this forgiveness is mistakenly understood as forgiveness spoken on behalf of the entire Black community, and do not want to be compared to the actions of these actors.

Taking these reactions into account, there is something worth being explored in these instances of forgiveness. Though they can be seen as mere expressions of grace, when occurring interracially the significance behind the performance of forgiveness surpasses that of emotional, religious meaning, or even forgiveness on simply an interpersonal level. It is a significance that has yet to be fully explained by the world of academia. Therefore to understand what is occurring within these tender moments of forgiveness between Amber Guyger and Brandt Jean, or between the families of the Emanuel victims to whom were murdered by Dylann Roof, a new definition of forgiveness is needed to understand its impact, and why we should approach this performance of forgiveness with caution.

The moment Brandt Jean walked up to the podium and forgave Amber Guyger, an act the entire country witnessed, Jean participated in an act of Black racial forgiveness whether or not he intended to do so. So too did family members during the hearing for the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church shooting. Black racial forgiveness is understood as a politically significant performance of racial sacrifice following interracial harm. I argue that this performance consequently serves to restore the status quo of race relations (i.e. the maintenance of white supremacy). It should be noted that Black racial forgiveness does not necessitate, nor imply, that the actor performing the forgiving, such as Brand Jean, intends to

promote the structures of white supremacy through their forgiveness. Rather, Black racial forgiveness has the unintended consequence of reinforcing white dominance that is often unnoticed. It is for this reason why it is so important to understand its mechanisms. In addition, while hypothetically racial forgiveness can be performed by white individuals, however, the meaning would be changed. This is because the implications for white racial forgiveness lack a political significance given their status as the majority. For this paper, white people will not be included within the definition. Instead, the focus will remain on the implications of Black racial forgiveness.

By defining Black racial forgiveness in this way, it excludes all instances of forgiveness whereby the act does not involve broader, public, racial implications. We can see racial forgiveness manifest itself within the public, interpersonal and aggregate spheres, all of which will be individually explained within this thesis. I hypothesize that Black racial forgiveness delegitimizes the case for Black activism due to the norm of Black racial forgiveness labeling all other performances of civil disobedience as deviant behavior. Put simply, Black racial forgiveness undermines Black people's moral and rhetorical basis for political challenges to the racial status quo of white supremacy. Scholarly work by Juliet Hooker in her essay "Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics: From Democratic Sacrifice to Democratic Repair," and Danielle Allen's *Talking to Strangers* will help inform this argument.

By arguing that Black racial forgiveness reifies white supremacy, this paper seeks to challenge the normative idea of forgiveness' ability to repair existing relationships, and instead argues that Black racial forgiveness returns the relationship to the status quo ante of injustice and racial domination. It does so by upholding the *Racial Contract* as theorized by Charles Mills and protecting *White Fragility*, outlined by Robin DiAngelo. It must also be noted here that when

referring to whiteness throughout this paper, it is “conceptualized as a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a discrete entity (i.e. skin color alone)” (DiAngelo, p. 56). Moreover, it is also thought of as a “location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, ‘Whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p.1)” (DiAngelo, p. 56).

In this thesis, I will attempt to develop a clear understanding of the concept of Black racial forgiveness. By using other author’s argumentative frameworks, I will use their arguments and ideas to help outline what Black racial forgiveness is, and what it is not. I believe this political concept is extremely pertinent in today’s political context in which so many people are unable to see past the invisible structures of white supremacy. While developing my concept of racial forgiveness I will not attempt to prove the existence of white supremacy, for it is assumed a given fact. Rather, by developing the concept of racial forgiveness and explaining how it fits into our society today, I hope to create a debate surrounding how we use forgiveness and what it is worth.

Racial forgiveness is not an explicit term that is found in literature, nor are its implications for the maintenance of the racial hierarchy. Nonetheless, as this thesis will demonstrate, its presence remains a fact within our society. For this reason, the literature on moral and critical race theory in addition to themes of sacrifice will be used to understand the implications of Black racial forgiveness and how it manifests.

To begin, Black racial forgiveness is understood to be a subset of political forgiveness, as understood and defined by the conditions outlined by P.E. Digeser in *Political Forgiveness*. Traditionally, the act of interpersonal forgiveness is one we are most familiar with, and is understood to be a “set of performances that releases people from their past actions” (Digeser, p. 11). Generally, the grounds for this normative forgiveness are rooted in the intent to release the emotional weight burdening each actor involved and done out of earnest to move forward with a new relationship that is now free from all previous “wrongful actions” and “unbearable debts” (Digeser, p. 11). When comparing this form of forgiveness to political forgiveness, a few key differences exist.

The concept of political forgiveness is rooted in an “agency-based conception of politics” with the belief that in politics, “actions are more important than sentiments” (Digeser, p. 35). Therefore, the intent behind political forgiveness is not rooted in religious beliefs nor is it in search of an emotional release. Rather it can be thought of as a utilitarian contract between two actors in which the victim agrees to release the transgressor's debt with the goal being to restore the relationship to the status quo ante (Digeser, 2001). Political forgiveness is distinct from other forms of forgiveness because the motives and sentiments are considered to be irrelevant, for the “actor is pursuing a desired end by publicly subscribing to a set of moral practices and rules” (Digeser, p. 4). Therefore, rather than being an emotional release, political forgiveness is better understood as a contract to forgive (Digeser, 2001). A contract, meaning that the forgiver agrees to put the past behind and the debtor acknowledges the debt is resolved, thus enables a new path forward.

The objective and purpose of political forgiveness is to invite the “process of reconciliation, even if an ultimate state of reconciliation is never obtained” (Digeser, p. 69). If the debt is released and the process of reconciliation is unable to be achieved, political forgiveness is still understood to be successful. For political forgiveness to occur and be successful, the following conditions must be in place; a relationship must exist between the actors and debt must be owed from one actor to another. This debt can be of moral, financial, or legal significance. Next, the debt must be relieved by an actor with the authority to forgive. Lastly, the forgiveness must be conveyed with the proper signals. This includes being in a public setting and clearly stating the intent to forgive so that all participants understand the debt is pardoned. After one has been politically forgiven and the above conditions are met, the debtor is now considered to be on an equal footing because the past is considered to be reconciled even though one can still harbor resentment towards the transgressor. The transgressor's civic standing is also restored, for the public acknowledges that the debt can no longer be held against the victim.

According to Digeser, the “success of this act is independent from its motivations” (Digeser, p. 24). Therefore, “the emotional or internal states of forgivers are largely irrelevant to the act of forgiving,” which is distinct from all other forms of forgiveness (Digeser, p. 20). Thus, just as Digeser compares the capability of humans to exercise forms of “self-control, civility, manners...” in certain situations that require separating our emotions from our actions, we are also capable of separating sentiment from the act of forgiveness (Digeser, p. 24). Digeser acknowledges the power some actions evoke when associated with strong emotion, such as a courageous act for the sake of love, yet in the context of politics, he believes this normative interpersonal forgiveness is not useful (Digeser, 2001). This is because we are unable to see “into

the recesses of the human heart” (Digeser, p.25). If forgiveness in politics requires an emotional release from the forgiver for the act to occur, due to being unable to see into the “human heart,” we will never know whether the transgressor truly has been forgiven by the victim (Digeser, 2001, p. 25). This is why political forgiveness as a political concept is useful for achieving effective reconciliation in politics because once someone is politically forgiven, it is a definite action that requires no foresight from either party as to whether the forgiveness genuinely came from the heart.

It should also be noted here, that a person can hold onto their resentment while participating in political forgiveness. Digeser does not explicitly outline this in his text, however, it is likely he supports this view because he never states that political forgiveness is an exclusive act. This means that one can both politically forgive, while also emotionally or religiously forgiving an actor – for these are conceptualized as separate acts with different intent. Furthermore, when conceptualizing political forgiveness, it is important to think of it only in terms of the utilitarian set of conditions outlined above. To reiterate, it is in line with an “agency-based conception of politics,” so the political concept should be thought of as more of a transaction rather than a self-enacted action (Digeser, p. 18). Therefore, I believe Digeser would contend that political forgiveness can exist alongside forgiveness that is motivated by one’s emotional motives or religious traditions. The same goes for the emotional forgiveness of a political wrong. Just because it is a political wrong that is being forgiven does not necessitate that it be political forgiveness from the forgiver. If the conditions for political forgiveness are not met -- for example, a girl named Katie interpersonally forgiving her local

Congressman for his lack of response to her petition -- then it can simply be an interpersonal form of normative forgiveness with no political forgiveness involved.

To further clarify the concept of political forgiveness, we can turn to the fictional example of a man named Michael Scout who is choosing to forgive his neighbor Pam Brown, a woman who hit his car earlier in the week and failed to tell him about the damage. The first aspect of political forgiveness is met, for there exists a relationship between two parties. Moreover, there is also debt that is owed to Michael on behalf of Pam for her wrongful behavior, therefore the third criterion is established. Next, for Michael to politically forgive Pam he must be of appropriate “standing” to obtain the authority to forgive her. Given that Michael is the victim of Pam’s action, this gives Michael the authority to forgive her according to Digeser’s outlined conditions. It is important to note regarding authority, that Digeser does consider vicarious forgiveness to be included in his conception of political forgiveness. He argues that while the victim should be given the first opportunity to forgive politically, others can obtain the authority to forgive if the victim is “unwilling or unable to forgive” (Digeser, p.91).

To continue, when Michael performs the act of forgiveness, he chooses to do so at the local city council meeting. During this meeting, he clearly conveys his intent to forgive Pam so that both she, as well as the other community members, understand Pam’s debt is now forgiven. By making his forgiveness “publicly verifiable,” Michael allows for a common understanding of the situation (Digeser, 2001, p. 57). Juxtaposed to normative forgiveness, if one is simply using forgiveness to free themselves of resentment, then for Michael to successfully forgive Pam he does not need to communicate the idea clearly to her or anyone else because he would only need to “free oneself of resentment” (Digeser, 2001, p. 29). Moreover, by making his forgiveness clear to the public, the last element is established -- carrying out the proper signals of forgiveness

-- for he conveyed it with the “force” needed to ensure complete clarity of the situation to everyone involved (Digeser, 2001, p.28).

Digeser refers to this final step in the process as the “uptake” (Digeser, p. 29). In his argument, he states that if the debtor does not understand that they are forgiven, then the “full political character of the act cannot be realized and the possibilities for restoration are abridged” (Digeser, p. 29). Another way one might think about it is, “the actions of a jailer, who releases a criminal without informing her that she has been pardoned may just as easily be interpreted as corruption, a setup, or a mistake” (Digeser, p. 29).

Following the “uptake,” Pam is now politically forgiven, regardless of whether Michael continues to be angry with her (Digeser, p. 29). By Michael seeing his relationship with Pam as one that is “worthy of respect and repair,” he politically forgave her to invite the possibility of restoration (Digeser, p. 28). While Michael did not receive rectificatory justice in terms of receiving what is owed, such as Pam paying for his car to be fixed, he did allow for the possibility to restore his and Pam’s relationship to being civil neighbors – the status quo ante. Thanks to Michael publicly affirming his forgiveness to the public, he sent a “message to others to invite a process of reconciliation” (Digeser, p. 5). The public is now aware that Pam is forgiven and can, therefore, move on from the resentment they may harbor towards her. The contract to forgive is now established because the past is settled, the debt is successfully released and the opportunity to establish a “civic friendship” is restored (Digeser, p. 69).

This concept of political forgiveness, Digeser argues, offers us a solution when rectificatory justice cannot occur. Thanks to its “reconciliatory effects,” Digeser promotes the idea that political forgiveness can provide a similar “state of peace” or sense of good that justice provides and can be used to create a “larger harmonious political system” (Digeser, p. 65).

Now that political forgiveness is clearly defined, we must return to the original argument, Black racial forgiveness is a form of political forgiveness. This is because for it to be an act of racial forgiveness, it must be a politically significant performance of racial sacrifice that is in the service of maintaining white supremacy. The act of Black racial forgiveness as I define it meets several of the conditions outlined by Digeser including the existence of a relationship, a debt being owed between the actors involved, the ability for the act to restore the transgressor's civil standing, and the condition that one must not emotionally forgive the debtor for the forgiveness to be successful.

Moreover, while Black racial forgiveness is political and Digeser's framework sets up some of the conditions for the act succinctly, Black racial forgiveness does not conform concisely to Digeser's argument. To begin, racial forgiveness diverges from Digeser's definition of political forgiveness because it is not exclusively a public act, for it can occur in interpersonal interactions and be applied to an aggregate group. While the proper signs and force are still necessary to ensure every party understands that racial forgiveness occurred, it does not need to be verified by the public to still facilitate the maintenance of white supremacy. Private interpersonal forms of Black racial forgiveness occur when the forgiveness of a white transgressor allows them to continue their dominance of white supremacy in other public settings. Therefore, while this interaction is inherently private, racial forgiveness remains politically significant because its implications go on to affect other people's lives in various public settings.

Furthermore, both interpersonal and public forms of Black racial forgiveness can transform into "non-random aggregate" forgiveness when a larger group is affected by the act of racial forgiveness and the transgression itself (Digeser, p. 112). To further clarify this concept,

this phenomenon occurs when the victim of an act is a “member of a nonrandom aggregate,” meaning they are a part of a group that is united by a defining feature, such as religion, race, or gender (Digeser, p. 113). Thus, the specific harm that is being forgiven must be a wrongdoing that “reverberates to all those who share the ascribed characteristic of identity” (Digeser, p. 112). When racial forgiveness involves a nonrandom aggregate group, the initial transgression that is being forgiven must be directed towards an individual who shares a characteristic with a larger group to whom feel the harm is “distributed throughout the group” (Digeser, p. 112). In the case of Amber Guyger, while her actions did not pose an immediate threat to every Black person, her racially charged actions are seen as a threat to members of the Black community and an “offense,” to all members of the community (Digeser, p. 114). Therefore, this question of who can forgive in situations where the forgiveness involves broader meaning for an aggregate group is still considered Black racial forgiveness.

Lastly, and most significantly, in political forgiveness, a key feature of its intended effect is to return the relationship to the status quo ante so that both parties may move forward with the past now reconciled. When applying this to Black racial forgiveness, it implies a disregard for the historical past of racially motivated wrongdoings and results in returning the relationship to the status quo of inequality and injustice. Therefore, the model Digeser describes no longer can be viewed with the same optimistic virtues. The effects of racial forgiveness unlike political forgiveness, do not allow for the “restoration of the civil and moral equality of transgressors and their victims” (Digeser, p. 28). When equality never existed in the status quo ante, this after then only serves to restore the relationship of white supremacy to its original standing.

According to Digeser, political forgiveness’ purpose is to invite reconciliation through the creation of a relationship of trust by releasing one’s debts and returning the relationship to the

status quo ante (Digeser, 2001). However, when the actors performing the political forgiveness are interracial and the contract is with a debtor who is white and a forgiver who is non-white, the stage in which the contract is entered into is no longer equal. Thus, for Digeser's political forgiveness to occur, it depends on a neutral contract from the onset of forgiveness.

We can use an example here of a couple that is fighting. If one partner politically forgives the other, that is great. They are now no longer fighting and can move on with the relationship. However, let's say that the status quo ante of the relationship is toxic, and before the fight occurred one partner frequently abused the other. In Digeser's conceptual architecture, his argument only is beneficial when a healthy relationship existed before political forgiveness, so that the status quo ante is something that is valued and worth of repair. For Black racial forgiveness, the preexisting relationship is the later example of toxicity. Black racial forgiveness as political forgiveness is, therefore, unable to return the relationship to a healthy one, if a healthy relationship never existed prior. Rather, it returns the relationship to the preexisting racial contract of white supremacy. As expressed, Black racial forgiveness is indeed political concerning many of the conditions outlined by Digeser, however, because the existence of white supremacy presupposes the act, Digeser's argument has a different meaning when the status quo ante of the relationship is white dominance.

This status quo ante of white supremacy that distinguishes Black racial forgiveness from political forgiveness can be better understood as a racial contract. This paper will adopt the concept of white supremacy as understood by the framework of Charles Mills' theories in the *Racial Contract* to help support this argument. According to Mills, white supremacy exists in our society as a "political system, a particular structure of formal or informal rule..." (Mills, p. 3, 1997). One way we can understand the creation of its power in our political systems and reach of

influence is by theorizing a state of nature in which the government and contract were first formed. A contract containing political, moral, and epistemological meaning, these layers of influence are bound together to form what Mills refers to as the “Racial Contract.” The racial contract is Mills’ way of explaining the creation of our society, and a tool to critique our social psychology and expose the functions of a government that helps to create mass inequalities and overall “racial domination” (Mills, p. 6, 1997). It is this racial contract that preexists and undermines the neutral contract contended by Digeser’s argument when applied to Black racial forgiveness.

According to Mills’ the only way in which we can tackle the racial injustices in our country is by theorizing the formation of our government so that we can better understand how it operates today. It is only after this reflection that he believes we can form a new contract that truly places everyone on equal grounds. A contract that is created with input from the voices of many, no longer solely just of voices of the privileged. Mills’ theories help to supplement why conceptualizing Black racial forgiveness as purely a form of political forgiveness is problematic, by taking into account the preexisting sociopolitical realities that prevent the relationship from returning to one on equal grounds. By understanding how racial injustice is created and maintained, it also helps us to understand why the roles of who is forgiven and who is the forgiver are determined far before Brandt Jean made his decision to step up to the podium that day to forgive Amber Guyger.

Distinguished from other social contract theories, the racial contract is an agreement that is only constructed between members of one racial group – a group who believe themselves to be the only people who “count” (Mills, p. 3). Therefore, the rules of the contract do not apply to those who are nonwhite with “inferior moral status” and no “civil standing,” nor are they

considered to benefit from the Contract itself (Mills, p. 11).

Mills goes further to understand white supremacy as a political system. He claims that in the “pre-political” state, white men are considered to already be “sociopolitical beings,” (Mills, p. 13). Therefore, as the state and its political institutions are created, the motivation is not to protect each citizen, as proposed by Hobbes, but rather the systems are designed to “maintain and reproduce this racial order, securing the privileges and advantages of the full white citizens and maintaining the subordination of nonwhites” that already exist in the state of nature (Hobbes, 1978) (Mills, p. 14). In this conception of white supremacy, those who are white are responsible for upholding this whiteness. If they do not maintain these responsibilities, they are considered to be in “dereliction of their duties as citizens (Mills, p. 14). Therefore, Mills states that “from the inception, then, race is in no way an ‘afterthought,’ a ‘deviation’ from ostensibly raceless Western ideals, but rather a central shaping constituent of those ideals” (Mills, p. 14).

Concerning the moral contract, Mills contends that the political contract “codifies” a set of moral codes that value whiteness in the “state of nature” (Mills, p. 14-15). Moreover, the moral contract is simply the establishment of these moral codes into the foundation of society “by which the citizens are supposed to regulate their behavior,” and consequently, maintain the institutionalization of white supremacy (Mills p. 10). Mill’s moral contract contradicts the traditional philosophy of a social contract where all men are considered to be free and equal in the natural state (Mills, 1997). Under the racial contract, since it excludes nonwhite participation, “natural freedom and equality” is restricted to only white people, for those who are nonwhite are considered to be born “unfree” and “unequal,” with the inability to ever change this (Mills, p. 16). Thus, Mills uses this to conclude that the “Western moral and political thought” only applies to those who are white, whether done intentionally or not (Mills, p. 17).

The last component of Mill's racial contract which will be the main focus for this thesis is the epistemology of ignorance. According to Mills, the norms in the racial contract are guided by an epistemology that uses blindness or ignorance of race to determine "what counts as moral and factual knowledge of the world" (Mills, p. 17). In his argument, he states that white people learn to see the world mistakenly, and these perceptions are later validated by "white epistemic authority" (Mills, p.18). He further argues that it is through these "global cognitive functions" that are produced both psychologically and socially, which create the "white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race" (Mills, p. 19). It is this ignorance that allows for the structures and norms of "white polity" to continue (Mills, p. 19). This is because when this white epistemology is used to tell what is right and what is wrong, it results in the outcome of white people not being able to see the truth of the role race plays in the world around them, and instead live in an "invented delusional world, a racial fantasyland a 'consensual hallucination...'" (Mills, p. 18). Thus, a condition of whiteness in the racial contract is that it "precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities" (Mills, p. 18).

This ignorance or lack of foreknowledge of what is occurring will gain more significance with the support of Danielle Allen's theories on sacrifice and how they relate to Black racial forgiveness. In Danielle Allen's book *Talking to Strangers*, Allen argues that sacrifice is an inevitable and essential part of democracy (2004). This is because society's citizen's interests and views will always contradict in some way (Hooker, 2016). Consequently, any political decisions made will always result in some who lose and those who win. As a result, Allen says "citizens thus have to learn to reconcile themselves to the experience of losing" (Hooker, p. 451). Built on the utilitarian notion of accepting some "political loss" for the sake of benefitting the whole

community, Allen argues that preserving democratic stability can only be achieved by some acceding their decisions for the sake of a “collection democratic action” (Allen, p. 28-29).

In an ideal democracy, Allen argues these losses will be distributed equally among the population as the democratic institution and the decisions made by it, continue to evolve (Allen, 2004). Thus, those who bear the burden of these effects will continue to change alongside it so that not one single group will continue to lose as a result of collective action. Danielle Allen recognizes that this is merely a dream of what democracy should and could look like, however, it is not yet a reality due to the sacrifice in our society resting only on the shoulders of a few.

This foundational argument made by Allen in her book begins with the story of Elizabeth Eckford and the confrontation following the desegregation of Central Rock High school in Little Rock, Arkansas. On September 4th of 1957, a famous photograph of Elizabeth depicts her walking away from an angry mob of white people cursing at her and wishing her dead as she carries her books back to the bus stop (Allen, 2004). This photograph was taken moments after the Arkansas National Guard disallowed Elizabeth from entering her school on the first day of class (Allen, 2004).

Allen uses this photo to portray the power of human habits. She argues that in this photo, both Hazel and Elizabeth are not participating in unusual acts (Allen, 2004). For Hazel, she and the other white people in the photograph are practicing the exclusionary habit of keeping the public spaces to themselves (Allen, 2004). For Elizabeth, she too is “acquiescing to such norms and to the acts of violence that enforced them” as done by many other Southern Black citizens in the South (Allen, p. 4). Thus, by capturing each set of norms that are found in the public sphere - dominance and acquiescence -- this photo “stripped away idealized conceptions of democratic life and directed the eyes of citizenry to the ordinary habits that in 1957 constituted citizenship

despite the standing law” (Allen, p. 4).

Going further, according to Allen, political order is governed not only by our political institutions but by “deep rules” that “prescribe specific interactions among citizens in its public spaces...” (Allen, 2004, p. 10). Another way we could think about these rules are a set of moral codes, as discussed by Mills. For Elizabeth, Allen argues that these rules or habits she formed as a result of her Black identity includes the habit of sacrifice for the sake of stabilizing the public sphere - a ritual that is not part of Hazel Bryant’s identity (Allen, 2004). Allen uses Elizabeth as a potent example for her overarching argument: Black Americans inequitably make sacrifices in their social roles to ensure a more stable political institution - whether done intentionally or not. In her example, Allen hopes to show that Elizabeth’s “peaceful endurance of racial violence was a form of civic sacrifice” (Hooker, p. 453). For she is just one example of the “political heroism of ordinary African American Americans” (Hooker, 453). Allen believes this habit of sacrifice over time embedded itself into the role and identity of Black citizenship. With this knowledge, Allen believes it can be used to help form the “basis of a new approach to citizenship” - one that recognizes and appreciates this heroism (Allen, p. 114).

In conversation with Allen, Ralph Ellison agrees that the Black sacrifice Elizabeth participated in is a sacrifice, but he also argues it is done for preserving one’s safety. In *Talking to Strangers*, Ellison remarks that Black parents must “teach their children that the political and legal worlds are imbricated in a social context (sometimes of terror) that constrains the possibilities for action supposedly protected by law” (Allen, p. 30). This is because Black citizens in the U.S. “had a special duty to sacrifice the need for revenge (Hooker, p. 453). In this view, Black adults learn and must then teach their children how to meet “racial terror with nonviolence in order to preserve their own lives,” and prepare for the sacrifices they will

inevitably be asked to make (Hooker, p. 453). Ellison says the photograph taken of Elizabeth marked a day “we learned about forbearance and forgiveness in that same school, and about hope too. So today we sacrifice, as we sacrificed yesterday, *the pleasure of personal retaliation in the interest of the common good*’ WS 342” (Allen, p. 29). Through this process of sacrificing this retaliation, Ellison believes Black citizens acquire “extra knowledge about the nature of democracy,” for they know what it is like for their social and political worlds collide (Allen, 2004, p. 116).

Returning now to Allen’s arguments on habits, Allen says from the time we are young we all take part in these human rituals that ultimately help to form our identity and “initiate people into the symbol world, ideals, and political structure of their community” argues Allen (Allen, p. 27). She goes on to say these rituals, in turn, help to “solidify social order” and influence our views of political institutions and our roles within them (Allen, p. 28). Thus, if sacrifice becomes part of one’s ritual beginning in childhood, just as it is argued to be for Elizabeth, Allen believes that this influences how one views their standing and role in the political and social realms of society. We can think about this phenomenon hypothetically; if you are taught from the time you are young that your habits must include sacrifice, it would be instinctual for you to make a sacrifice when you’re faced with either the threat of racial violence, such as Elizabeth was, or to acquiesce when addressing someone whose juxtaposed habits include the role of dominance. Furthermore, if there is a prospect of you being honored for abiding by these prescribed habits and the dominant group reassures and validates these actions, then this sacrifice becomes even more enticing.

While this reoccurrence of sacrifice is acknowledged by Allen to be unequally burdened on the shoulders of Black Americans and conditioned within their habits, she Allen remains firm

in her argument that this sacrifice is nonetheless an inevitable and essential part of democratic life. She finds virtue in this “democratic sacrifice,” and goes on in her book to theorize what our ideal democracy would look like when more legitimate forms of sacrifice are included.

She argues that there are several attributes to creating the ideal, legitimate, and equitable sacrifice needed for a Democracy. The first being foreknowledge, or the realization of the status quo of inequitable sacrifices made by some citizens for the sake of the greater good. Without the recognition that the burdens of sacrifice are not divided equally among all citizens, there is no hope for this status quo to change. Next is consent to the sacrifice. Allen states that the defining feature between a “sacrificer” and a victim, is that the sacrifice is consented to or given “knowingly” by the sacrificer, while a victim does not understand or recognize what they gave up (Allen, 2004, p. 29). Therefore, those who sacrifice willingly understand what is being given up and still consent to forego those interests. Furthermore, to be legitimate the sacrifice must not always be undertaken by only one party. To have an “equality of sacrifice,” “those who promote sacrifices for others should also expect to bear themselves...” (Allen, p. 110 & 111). Following this statement then, Elizabeth’s sacrifice only transitioned from a “symptom of domination into an equity” when citizens across the country recognized her sacrifice and would “reciprocate her self-sacrifice by accepting changes to their political regime” (Allen, p.155). If this reciprocation does not occur, however, the domination can be expected to continue.

The last attribute of legitimate sacrifice is that the performance should bring about the prospect of honor, and most importantly, reciprocity. Allen believes that allowing legitimate sacrifice to be thought of as honorable and a gift that should later be reciprocated towards that person, can “rejuvenate political friendships” by bringing about a sense of mutual obligation between parties (Allen, 2004, p. 111). For this to occur, Allen states that a sacrificial first step

must be taken by someone, so the receiver of the sacrifice feels as though they are receiving a gift (Allen, 2004). These so-called “signal sacrifices” are then repeated until it generates a “goodwill” amongst the receiving parties that causes them to reciprocate the sacrifice later. It is this pattern of sacrifice and reciprocity that proceeds to build a relationship of trust that did not exist before and forms a new “equitable” relationship that is now free from self-interest (Allen, p. 155). The people who make these signal sacrifices are those that “have in the past been and will again in the future be willing to accept decisions that benefit themselves less than others” (Allen, p. 155).

This signal sacrifice Allen refers to is intended to send a message to others that you are willing to set aside your self-interest for the sake of creating a friendship or establish a relationship of trust. In this argument, she is relying on the recipient to be an empathetic or rational actor that is willing to acknowledge this gift as an honor and will later reciprocate it in the future to ensure the friendship is maintained or created. The steps Allen outlines are intended to create new “healthy modes” of citizenship that will cause the diseased part of inequitable sacrifice in our democracy to die off. As more people choose to commit legitimate sacrifice, Allen believes it can turn into a “political weapon” (Allen, p. 116) A weapon with the ability to “agree, to sacrifice, to bear burdens to force contradictions in the citizenship of the dominated, until this citizenship caves in upon the rottenness of its inherent ills” (Allen, p. 116).

For these reasons, I believe Allen would approve of the actions taken by Brandt Jean in the Dallas courtroom. His forgiveness is a signal sacrifice done in commitment to forging an equitable relationship built upon a new foundation of trust, love, and faith. We can hear echoes of Allen’s arguments in media spotlights such as the statement heard around the world in 2016, “When they go low, we go high.” In an interview with the New York Times, Michelle

Obama discusses how she intended this statement as an encouragement for others to move forward with action instead of lingering over the pain; “It means that your response has to reflect the solution. It shouldn’t come from a place of anger or vengefulness. Barack and I had to figure that out. Anger may feel good in the moment, but it’s not going to move the ball forward.” (Bruner, 2018). This solution Michelle Obama is referring to is using the prospect of a hopeful and brighter future, as a tool to set aside indifference in the hope that others will see the sacrifice made for the sake of the greater good and reciprocate the same respect.

Sharing in commonality, within Danielle Allen’s argument, Brandt Jean’s speech and Michelle Obama’s quote “when they go low, we go high,” reciprocity in each scenario is the foundation in which the action stands upon. If the action is not reciprocated, each of the models falls apart. For Elizabeth’s sacrifice at Central Rock High School, as noted earlier, without political change (reciprocity) occurring in response to her signal sacrifice, her act would stay a “symptom of domination” (Allen, p. 155). In the case of Michelle Obama’s quote, if one continues to go high while others choose not to, then that is setting the acquiescent side up for the continual loss. Thus, while Allen’s contributions are successful when approaching sacrifice from a bird’s eye view, her argument falls short by failing to address the preexisting sociopolitical pathologies in play that prevent reciprocity from happening in the daily lives of those living under our Democratic institution. It must be noted that I am not arguing that her model is wrong, however, by not taking into account certain situations where reciprocity does not occur, her model inadvertently promotes the practice it is trying to prevent under the guise of doing something good. One scenario where this occurs is when applied to Black racial forgiveness.

In this paper, Black racial forgiveness can be understood as a way habitual sacrifice

manifests itself because it is also a form of peaceful acquiescence from a subordinated group that is learned. In general, Allen's model when applied to many situations can provide significant value to our society by helping to form new relationships and creating a platform for the sacrifices made in our society to be recognized, honored, and reciprocated. Nonetheless, while her vision is beneficial, those who are non-white must be cautious about the types of sacrifices that are engaged in and promoted. If acquiescence in the form of forgiveness is considered a virtue to restore community relations as a whole, and Allen's "vision democratic citizenship demands of racially subordinated groups that they pursue political projects aimed at making the entire political community more just and free," we must then consider, could "fulfilling such obligations could come at the expense of their own interests and claims to justice?" (Hooker, p. 454). I argue when placing Black racial forgiveness and its implications in the context of Allen's framework, the effects reinforce the racial dominance of white supremacy that the sacrifice is intended to break down under Allen's model.

Allen's framework does not allow for the intended consequences when applied to Black racial forgiveness in two ways. The first way being because Allen sets the condition that foreknowledge of the sacrifice is necessary for the sacrifice to be considered legitimate (Allen, 2004). This is so that the recipient of this gift is aware that they are receiving a gift from the other actor (Allen, 2004). When Black racial sacrifice occurs, however, often the actor who made the sacrifice is unaware they are making a sacrifice because the act is ingrained within the learned social habits passed down from parents and further impressed upon them from the sociopolitical climate. Therefore, while the Black actor may consent to the act of forgiveness itself, there is a problem when the impact of forgiveness is not understood or consented to. This thesis will help illuminate some of these specific consequences of sacrifices further along in the

paper. I hope that with this knowledge, the actors if they choose to forgive, will understand the entire scope of its implications, and raise caution for others.

To continue, Black racial forgiveness is different because the one receiving the gift of the sacrifice is a white individual, as defined within the condition of racial forgiveness being between interracial actors. Thus, according to my definition and following along Allen's model, the white actor would need foreknowledge of the Black sacrifice being made and see themselves as a recipient of a gift that they will reciprocate. The problem with this picture, however, is that the act of Black racial forgiveness is seen as normative sacrifice within our Democracy. Thus, the white actor will not see racial forgiveness as a gift but rather an expected role that is being properly fulfilled as a result of the functions of white supremacy. This idea of expectation concerning Black racial forgiveness will be analyzed in more detail with the help of arguments from Robin DiAngelo further along in the paper.

Secondly, Allen's framework cannot be applied because Black racial forgiveness as a sacrifice is not an effective form of civic idealism due to it being inherently non-reciprocal. This I argue, is due to the existence of white fragility, as theorized by Robin DiAngelo. White fragility is defined as a "state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves (DiAngelo, p. 54). These defensive actions may include outward displays of guilt, anger, fear, that serve to "reinstat[e] white racial equilibrium" (DiAngelo, p. 54).

According to DiAngelo, white fragility is created by white individuals living within an "insulated environment of racial privilege" that allows them to be protected from stress due to confronting racial realities (DiAngelo, p. 55). Moreover, given this constant protection it, in turn, creates an expectation for this so-called "racial comfort" while simultaneously "lowering the

ability to tolerate racial stress” (DiAngelo, p. 55). Returning to Allen’s argument regarding foreknowledge of the sacrifice, due to the existence of white fragility, it is unlikely the racial implications of receiving the gift of sacrifice would be able to break through this barrier that is created out of the need to avoid racial triggers. Therefore, while the forgiveness may be understood and valued, the action will not be seen as a sacrifice that is racially and socio-politically significant when there is a lack of acknowledgment of the role race, and whiteness plays in the world.

White fragility in the context of this paper will be later used to help support the expectation of racial forgiveness by contemplating the inverse effect, what happens when Black racial forgiveness does not occur? By foregoing Black racial forgiveness, it triggers white fragility because a person of color chose “not to protect the racial feelings of white people,” and therefore challenges their need for “racial comfort” (DiAngelo, p. 57).

Now that Black racial forgiveness is defined and the scope of both what is and what it is not is narrowed, we must turn to why it matters. Returning to my original hypothesis, I argue early on in this paper that Black racial forgiveness makes the case for reparations and civically disobedient behavior problematic because it undermines Black people’s moral and rhetorical basis for political challenges to the racial status quo of white supremacy. This is what we will now focus on.

To bring back the question posed earlier towards Danielle Allen’s arguments, could “fulfilling such obligations come at the expense of their own interests and claims to justice?” (Hooker, p. 454). This critique is proposed by Juliet Hooker, author of the essay “Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics: From Democratic Sacrifice to Democratic Repair” (2016). I will be using her literature to help create the backbone of my concluding

arguments on Black racial forgiveness' impact on Black activism and consequently why we must approach Black racial forgiveness with caution. The purpose of Hooker's essay is to challenge the "undue democratic sacrifice" that Allen offers in her argument, and in turn, explain the burdens associated with Black citizens being held as a form of "democratic exemplarity" (Hooker, 448).

In her essay, Hooker is quick to call into question Danielle Allen's theoretical framework. Hooker contends that Allen's example of Elizabeth's "peaceful acquiescence" and her persuasive words that turn these "perpetual losses" into forms for "exemplary citizenship," ultimately fails to challenge the inequity of loss, and instead serve to allow these losses to continue (Hooker, 2016, p. 452). Hooker contends that since the reciprocity Allen's argument rests upon will never occur following a Black sacrifice, it, therefore "calls into question not only the integrity of U.S. democracy but also the kinds of democratic obligations that can be fairly placed upon black citizens as a result" (Hooker. P. 449). Going further, she poses this important question to readers, "when other citizens and state institutions betray a pervasive lack of concern for black suffering (which in turn makes it impossible for those wrongs to be redressed), is it fair to ask blacks to make further sacrifices on behalf of the polity?" (Hooker, p. 449). In Allen's argument, while she believes inequitable sacrifice is illegitimate, she hopes that through continual signal sacrifices reciprocity will kick into gear and mutual obligation will occur. Hooker challenges this by asking Allen to draw a line in the sand and consider at what point does it become "unjust" for us to expect this "peaceful acquiescence?" (Hooker, 2016, p. 454). Moreover, by Allen arguing that these sacrifices are politically exemplary, as reflected in the awards given to Brandt Jean for his forgiveness, Hooker warns of the dangers of these acts. She states that by framing the sacrifice of "democratic loss" as exemplary, it consequently "demands

a kind of civic sacrifice of blacks that is not expected of other citizens” (Hooker, p. 455).

Folded within this expectation for Black citizens to make these sacrifices comes the question, what happens when the peaceful acquiescence of forgiveness does not occur? To this, Hooker uses the example of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) and discusses people’s common criticisms of it. One of which is its “failure to emulate the political exemplarity of the civil rights movement of the 1960s” (Hooker, p. 456). Others say Black activists are “failing to follow the (alleged) disciplined adherence to non-violence of earlier antiracist struggles, for not embodying black respectability, not adopting a visible hierarchical leadership structure, not formulating clear policy goals, etc.” (Hooker, p. 456). The difference between the civil rights movement and these protests, Hooker argues, is that these protests are not aimed towards submitting innocent bodies to violence to reveal to the white audience the monstrosities that are occurring. Thus, the people who make the comments against the BLM movement are those unwilling to stand behind a movement where there is no “willing sacrifice” on behalf of the Black population to achieve political change.

We can see this “demonization” of Black protestors following the death of twenty-five-year-old Freddie Gray who suffered a fatal spinal cord injury as a result of police brutality during the Baltimore protests. (BBC, 2016). While these protestors were simply demanding answers and justice, some called them instead “unlawful riots” which undermines the purpose of the protests (Hooker, p. 459).

This willingness to compare modern Black activism to the civil rights movement and to consequently demonize them stems from a commonly romanticized narrative of the civil rights movement, says Hooker (2016). In these narratives and teachings, she states that often the intra-racial disagreement amongst Black activists who did not unanimously agree “how best to pursue

racial justice” or the “efficacy of non-violence” is skipped over (Hooker, p. 457). Furthermore, by making this movement the standard in which we compare other forms of Black activism, it serves to “pre-emptively delegitimize” and discount other forms of action based on false notions of the movement itself (Hooker, p. 457).

This peaceful acquiescence from Black activists as understood through the lens of the romanticized image serves as a standard by which all Black activist performances are now critiqued against, argues Hooker (2016). She argues that it “places a burden of responsibility for repairing racial wrongs upon those who are already most harmed by racism,” all while it “rests on misguided assumptions about how to achieve racial justice that might prevent the dismantling of white supremacy in the long run” (Hooker, p. 457). Finally, it requires a Black innocence and sacrifice that some are unwilling to make. She uses this comparison to the civil rights movement to show how innocence is now a requirement for white individuals to accept the racial injustice occurring (Hooker, 2016). Considering this to be a true statement, it consequently serves to shift the discussion of the movements away from the injustice that is occurring, to a question of whether the person is deserving of justice based on their Black innocence (Hooker, 2016). A peaceful acquiescence is needed for their actions to be considered legitimate or worthy of “white empathy” (Hooker, 2016, p. 30).

By arguing this romanticized image is used by reactionaries to reject calls for racial justice, we can see how acts of Black racial forgiveness are doing a similar thing. We can contemplate this argument by considering the alternative to Brandt Jean’s forgiveness. Consider whether instead of hugging and forgiving Amber Guyger, Brandt Jean instead gave an impassioned speech that critiqued the police brutality, systemic injustices, and loose gun culture in the United States that led to his brother’s death. It is highly likely in this scenario that Brandt

would not be received or praised by the same crowd that gave him the Ethical Courage award. In this situation, Brant would be directly challenging the existing status of racial comfort. Therefore, according to DiAngelo's theory, this racial stress will cause a white backlash to restore the status quo of white domination. In this case, when the colorblindness of the white epistemology is confronted with the implications of the white race as expressed through Brandt Jean not acquiescing, it is a direct challenge to the moral, political, and epistemological contracts at hand. Action must, therefore, be taken to restore the white equilibrium at stake.

Returning now to the arguments of Robin DiAngelo, his framework will help to further support the ideas brought up by Hooker. By applying his arguments of racial comfort and white fragility to the context of Black racial forgiveness I use his theories to support the expectation of Black racial forgiveness as a result of its efforts towards maintaining the white equilibrium. DiAngelo begins his arguments by clarifying that the modes of white fragility that seek to restore the white equilibrium should be conceptualized as a response that is created and reinforced by the constant "social and material advantages of whiteness" (DiAngelo, p. 248). These advantages were referenced by Mills in his political and moral contract. He argues that the backlash is consequently done in earnest to make up what is lost via the challenge to racial comfort (DiAngelo, 2016). This action is not always made consciously but rather one that is done automatically or out of instinct.

This instinct he states is a result of the insulated environment that white privilege people live in – an environment that does not allow for a "tolerance for racial comfort" to be built (DiAngelo, p. 60). Given this constant exposure to an isolated environment, norms are created that expect this racial comfort to continue. Black racial forgiveness, I argue, is one expectation that helps to maintain and restore white comfort.

In DiAngelo's argument, he highlights several specific situations that pose as triggers for the racial stress that disrupts existing racial comfort. These triggers include; 1). "people of color choosing not to protect the racial feelings of white people in regard to race (challenge to white expectations and need/entitlement to racial comfort) 2). Being presented with a person of color in a leadership position (challenge to white authority)" (DiAngelo, p. 247). When the expectation of Black racial forgiveness goes unfulfilled, each of these triggers occurs simultaneously. This is because when forgiveness does not occur, the racial feelings of the white transgressor are not being protected due to their victimization being openly denied in a public setting. Moreover, referring back to previous sections, Black racial forgiveness is a type of political forgiveness, meaning there is a debt owed to the victim on behalf of the transgressor. Therefore, at this moment when the white victimization is in question, the person of color in this instance holds a role of power over the white offender by being able to choose whether to restore their civic status or not. Thus, by choosing to restore this status and return the environment to the status quo ante of white racial comfort, the person of color will be rewarded for doing so. Subsequently, other white people will also support the act of forgiveness with praise to further reaffirm the status of white domination and allow for the structures of the white polity to continue.

Going further with this idea of victimization, another way we can think about this is how white people "have historically been the winners in U.S. democracy" which "shaped their political imagination" (Hooker, p. 455). Thus, by living with a "political imagination not shaped by loss" it further increases their expectation to come out as winners, or in the case of Black racial forgiveness, expect their debts to be forgiven (Hooker, p. 455). By not receiving this forgiveness, not only is the civic status not restored but the debt will still be owed to a person of color and there the equilibrium remains unbalanced.

Returning now to Juliet Hooker's arguments and their relation to Black racial forgiveness, Black racial forgiveness is used as a tool for comparison for Black innocence. This, as a result, dictates how white people respond or empathize with the Black victim as determined by whether their response is deemed acquiescent, innocent, or respectable enough to earn white empathy. As discussed with the help of DiAngelo, this respectability politic is used to restore the white equilibrium that is lost. Thus, when forgiveness does not occur, a backlash occurs. Now that these ideas are established, I offer a new way Black racial forgiveness undermines the case for Black activism in addition to its mechanisms that restore white supremacy.

I argue Black racial forgiveness ultimately serves as a catharsis to other Black activist movements. At the end of Hooker's essay she makes a powerful statement: "In the tragic political trap created by the transmutation of black sacrifice into democratic exemplarity, there is very little room for blacks to express outrage at injustice, or to enact a politics of defiance of their expected status as peaceful democratic losers" (Hooker, p. 462). It is in this little room for a political movement that she describes, where my argument settles. Danielle Allen, Digeser, and DiAngelo's arguments all help to establish that reciprocity is not an aspect of Black racial forgiveness, nor is the prospect for receiving justice for a racial transgression. Thus, when those who seek other means of justice and defy the expectation for forgiveness, white backlash is likely to demonize these actions. What has yet to be touched on, however, is when Black racial forgiveness occurs, and how this affects the Black protestors who continue to demand justice despite the forgiveness already occurring. This is where that little space Hooker outlines, begins to shrink even more.

DiAngelo's arguments address the backlash that occurs when white expectations for comfort are not met. When Black racial forgiveness is deemed an exemplary sacrifice that is

expected and a person follows through with it, those who are left still protesting for rectificatory justice are met with increased hostility. In this scenario, there is an urge from white people to both encourage the performance of forgiveness for its efforts to restore the balance of white domination, while simultaneously dampen the efforts of Black activists who continue their efforts. This is because they serve as racial stress triggers. Thus, with each of these pressures forced on either side, it maliciously affects Black people's rhetorical and moral basis for calls to action because they will now be seen as illegitimate and unjustified in their behaviors due to the victim choosing to forgive the white transgressor.

Furthermore, when Black racial forgiveness already occurs, it serves to add fuel to the fire for the white individuals who are now able to call these performances unnecessary, spiteful, or vengeful. This is due to the rationalization that if the victim can forgive, so should everyone else. Consequently, the activism is then seen as merely a series of unjustified acts that ignore the virtuous and more respectful path forward that forgiveness offers. In this instance, the historical, social, political, and racial context of the performance is being ignored. As a result of this perspective, the legs of Black activists are cut out from under them through this delegitimization due to the white audience's epistemological ignorance that ignores the racial and political implications of the performance.

Moving now to my second argument. Shown at the beginning of this paper, a twitter user commented: "The only thing Brandt Jean's #forgiveness has done is give racist white people a new go-to 'You people should be more like...' example to weaponize against black people when they do something horrific and racist and don't want to be held accountable" (Dav-O, 2019). In this tweet, the user is expressing his reluctance to being compared to Brandt Jean's actions, and in turn, how he feels that he is held to a standard created by the forgiveness and imposed on the

Black community. It is his reaction and frustration that I aim to highlight as my second implication for Black racial forgiveness and that is the need for peaceful acquiescence if forgiveness is not followed. To support this point, a quote used by Hooker and originally written by Dora Apel depicts the important relationship between the portrayal of Black passivity in social media when engaging in political activism.

The submissive hands up gesture of black protesters facing a militarized police force is meant to appeal to liberal sympathies by showing that they are “respectful” and law-abiding, suggesting the opposite of “uppity.” [In the 1960s] . . . images of blacks offering no resistance to police violence were selected by white editors because it was easier to gain white liberal sympathy by visually defining racism as excessive acts of brutality, from which moderate and liberal whites could distance themselves, while at the same time their racial anxiety could be quelled by the picturing of black nonresistance.” (Hooker, p. 461).

In this section, Apel is arguing for a “racialized visual economy” in relation to how Black protestors are viewed in images. I use her statement to highlight the relationship between non-resistant Black protests and the use of their images by white people who need to quell the “racial anxiety” invoked by non-forgiveness. One popular image that does so circulated in 2014. It depicts the late Devonte Hart hugging a riot police officer with tears flowing down his cheeks while he attends a protest following the court ruling on the death of Michael Brown. This image went on to circulate on media channels such as Reddit, ABC News, CBS News, Fox News, NBC's "Today" Show, and "Saturday Night Live" (Jr., 2018). These images, Apel argues, are used to gain white sympathy by depicting a form of non-resistance or acquiescence that is not a racial trigger for sympathizers. What does the opposite, however, are images and rhetoric of resistant forms of Black protests. It is when Black activism is non-acquiescent, that it directly collides with white racial comfort.

When these resistances occur and Black forgiveness does not, the performance of Black resistance and the powerful message or calls to justice they aim to send will be undermined by

the fact that forgiveness is set as a precedent to be compared to and expected. In these instances, I argue backlash follows this non-acquiescent Black activism specifically because it is being compared to Black racial forgiveness and used as a comparative norm to question the efficacy of these more radical performances. Thus, instead of receiving the message that the acts send, the focus instead will be, why can't you just forgive like Brandt Jean?

Furthermore, the more radical these acts are, radical meaning the further from acquiescence, they will also be seen as violent. DiAngelo states that "Whites often confuse comfort with safety and state that we don't feel safe when what we mean is that we don't feel comfortable" (DiAngelo, p. 61). He goes on to say that this result "trivializes our history of brutality towards people of color and perverts the reality of that history" (DiAngelo, p. 61). By describing non-acquiescent Black activism as "unlawful riots," this choice of words invokes a feeling of fear and violence. According to DiAngelo's argument, however, these words are simply a reaction to the discomfort the actions impose upon white people, rather than stemming from an actual fear. Thus, the further white people are pushed by racial stress, the more they will confuse these so-called radical acts as violent which discredits the participants and the calls for the justice they are trying to make.

When reading my offered definition and analysis of Black racial forgiveness, perhaps the most common critique will be by those who stand by Brandt Jean's forgiveness and claim that there is nothing wrong with his act because forgiveness in any sense is a virtue. To this, I contend that to see Black racial forgiveness as non-problematic, one must first be unable to look past the white epistemology of ignorance. To fully grasp this concept there must be a foundation that recognizes or acknowledges the institutional and social mechanisms of white supremacy that make up the current status quo. In short, a recognition of the power of whiteness. White

supremacy is taken to be a fact in this paper. Furthermore, those who are unable to see why Black racial forgiveness is problematic are ignoring the long history of privilege and socialization that led to this movement of forgiveness. It is denying the idea that race shapes how Brandt Jean or the numerous other victims of police brutality such as Ahmaud Arbery are denied their proper right to justice.

Therefore, while some white people may recognize “Whiteness as real,” it will often go only be seen as “the individual problem of other “bad” white people” (DiAngelo, p. 59). In DiAngelo’s work, he discusses how white people tend to see their experience as universal (DiAngelo, 2016). He states this leads to colorblindness by denying the importance of race and whiteness play in the world. This will lead many reasonable people to perhaps use this individualistic perspective to claim that this forgiveness, while under extraordinary circumstances, is what any reasonable and merciful person would, and should do regardless of the racial and political implications at play.

Finally, with these added complications and implications taken into account, this leaves us with the question of what the right course of action is. In this paper, the concept of Black racial forgiveness is shown to create an expectation of Black sacrifice that is both an exemplary form of citizenship, while also being non-reciprocal. It also is revealed to reinforce the mechanisms of white supremacy by existing within the white epistemology and maintaining racial comfort. When Black racial forgiveness does not occur, it serves to delegitimize any claims for justice from Black activists by being a catharsis and a tool for comparison.

To first address Black racial forgiveness as an exemplary sacrifice, the goal of this argument is not to deter all Black people from forgiving white people for their transgressions, even if they are socially, politically, or racially significant. My intention with this project is to

shed light on something most people recognize is happening but are unaware of its effects. For this reason, I am not arguing to stop all forms of forgiveness, however, I am hoping to express the need for caution and to view forgiveness with a critical eye when there is a political meaning and racial meaning behind the act.

To help this point along we can return to the example of Brant Jean. The forgiveness he participated in was emotional, religious, and political forgiveness. The intent of my argument is not to say that Brandt should not forgive Amber to fulfill his emotional needs, nor is it to criticize his personal choice to carry out his religious teachings. The problem is that Brant Jean simultaneously participated in Black racial forgiveness in a public setting. Due to Brant Jean's identity as a Black male, the people who celebrate and promote his actions are participating in mechanisms of white supremacy and will never reciprocate the same forgiveness. His actions will go on to reverberate and have consequences far beyond his intended act, whether he did it out of the kindness of his heart or not. For this reason, we must approach interracial forgiveness when it's politically significant with caution. I am not critiquing emotional or religious forgiveness, rather the third hidden aspect, Black racial forgiveness.

The second effect of Black racial forgiveness's impact on Black activism is a bit more challenging to solve. My hope for this essay is to show the challenges Black activism faces in light of the expectation for acquiescence. I will not pose a solution for this, however, Juliet Hooker at the end of her essay does suggest an interesting perspective. She states:

“Riots (for lack of a better term) might thus constitute a form of democratic repair for African Americans, not because they are a solution to structural problems and institutionalized injustices, but because they allow black citizens to express their pain and make their losses visible to a racial order that demands that they sacrifice both by not expressing anger and grief at said losses, and also by peacefully acquiescing to them.” (Hooker, p. 463).

I agree with Hooker's sentiments. Though this thesis discusses Black activism in conversation with the tendrils of white supremacy that prevent awareness, appreciation, or even empathy for the injustices these acts seek to show, this idea of riots Hooker proposes does address one major unanswered challenge brought up in this paper by Danielle Allen. Though radical acts of Black activism face significant problems with white empathy and will most likely not solve them due to the problems this paper argues, Hooker suggests they are a way to combat the exemplary act of sacrifice Danielle Allen suggests. Riots, she suggests, enables the Black community to feel the raw emotion one is entitled to feel when your friends and family are allowed to be killed with little to no consequences. Thus, instead of being expected to put aside these emotions and forgive for the sake of democratic stability or to show peaceful acquiescence so white people remain comforted, these performances express the raw grief that the public sphere does not allow or condone.

In the end, I chose to create this new concept because it is one that challenges our most visceral beliefs as humans on radical love, faith, race, and the norms our Democracy operates under. I hope that when the next time you hear or read about a story on the news where Black innocence and forgiveness are highlighted, the topics of this paper will allow you to acknowledge the implications it carries for the victim, the transgressor, and the contract of white supremacy it rests upon.

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