


Spring 2020

## The Race for Time: Experiences in the Temporality of Blackness

Eboni Cymone Grooms  
*Bard College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj\\_s2020](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2020)

 Part of the [Africana Studies Commons](#), [American Politics Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), and the [Politics and Social Change Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

---

### Recommended Citation

Grooms, Eboni Cymone, "The Race for Time: Experiences in the Temporality of Blackness" (2020). *Senior Projects Spring 2020*. 241.

[https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj\\_s2020/241](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2020/241)

This Open Access work is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been provided to you by Bard College's Stevenson Library with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this work in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@bard.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@bard.edu).

The Race for Time: Experiences in the Temporality of Blackness

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
Ebony Grooms

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2020

*Dedication and Acknowledgements*

I would like to dedicate this project to the countless number of Black and Brown lives lost to the systems that oppressed them. I see you.

I would like to first acknowledge my mother, for whom I would be nothing without. Thank you for all of your hardwork and for being the person that I admire the most. You not only inspire me, but everyone you meet.

Thank you to my closest friends- Juan, Alicia, Tyler, my Village K suitmates, my Posse (ATLANTA BARD POSSE 8) and other members of my Bard family. Thank you for helping me get through college in (almost) one piece.

And finally a HUGE thank you to my advisor (though not official) Christopher McIntosh. Thank you for believing in me. Thank you for giving me the confidence to believe in myself, my ideas, and my work. It is now something no one can take away from me. Also Owen is the most adorable thing on this planet.

## ***I. Introduction***

*“Time is widely recognized as one of the most precious and finite resources required for the accomplishment of human purposes.”*

*-Elizabeth F. Cohen, The Political Value of Time<sup>1</sup>*

As Elizabeth Cohen said, time is one of the most treasured resources for the human race. This is mostly because we know how short human life can be. How we spend time and who we spend it with are important and can dictate what kind of lives we live. Not only is time very important to us, but we also are governed by time- seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, and months. Certain things are supposed to happen at certain times, like seasons and holidays. Scientifically measured time is central to many processes, industries, and lives in the U.S as well. In the realm of politics, time is essential for liberal democratic states. More specifically, durational time. Durational time is defined as calendar and clock time. “All political subjects encounter myriad ways in which their time is structured, valued, appropriated, or freed by the state.”<sup>2</sup> Time is used to give and deny rights through several processes. For example, we wait until we are 18 years old to become “adults” and have our first form of political power, prosecutors specify when crimes were committed to determine whether statutes of limitation have expired, convicted criminals are punished with prison sentences of varying durations, and elections are held on specific dates. Time plays a significant role in our lives.

Seeing how much of our time is dedicated to processes like the ones above make me think of how important time is in our lives. It seems that academic fields are starting to realize

---

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth F. Cohen, *The Political Value of Time: Citizenship, Duration and Democratic Justice* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018))

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

how important time is to their respective fields as well. Time can be important to politics in some unexpected ways. “Unequal access to free, discretionary or leisure time is politically important, for it means that those who are most time deprived are least able to gain a political voice.”<sup>3</sup> This would mean that those who are poor or suffer from economic and social disadvantages are the ones least likely to be heard politically. Politics is not the only concept that has its own temporality/time dedicated to it and has consequences.

We all have our own lives and experience time differently, however, there can be several temporalities that affect a person’s life and co-exist with each other. This polytemporality can lead to points of connection, differences, and even points of tension between different temporalities experienced by one or more people. There can be several temporalities that intertwine in a person’s life meaning that time is also non-linear. For people in the United States, we may be familiar with the temporalities of our capitalist/industrialist system. We know that for capitalism, time is “something that steadily moves in one direction...that can be owned, measured, saved, spent, or wasted.”<sup>4</sup> It is a system in which we believe that most of our time should be used for being productive in which time spent often “ blurs the distinction between work and leisure.”<sup>5</sup> In this system, we place the utmost importance and value on being productive.

Like Heidegger, I believe that time is not linear or uniform, but I also think that people do not have the same amount of time to work and live with. Time is experienced differently between individuals and groups of people and normative values of time are deeply racialized. I

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Hom, Christopher McIntosh, Alasdair McKay, and Liam Stockdale, “Time, Power, and Inequalities” in *Time, Temporality, and Global Politics*, (Bristol, England: E-International Relations, 2016)), 102

<sup>5</sup> Cohen, 108.

believe that time can be influenced by different social constructs that may include certain forms of social violence such as racism, homophobia, etc. For my essay, I will be examining the ways in which complex layering of time, polytemporality, social constructs, and history can affect how African Americans and Black citizens in the U.S. experience time. I argue that time can not only be racialized, but also stolen, and even compressed. “A broader assemblage of structural inequalities works to deny, steal, and compress the time of multiple marginalized persons, particularly racialized persons.”<sup>6</sup> I will also present the different ways in which this can manifest in the lives of African Americans and how it affects the way they interact with time and other people.

---

<sup>6</sup> Rahsaan Mahadeo, “Why Is the Time Always Right for White and Wrong For Us? How Racialized Youth Make Sense of Whiteness and Temporal Inequality.” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 5, no. 2(2018): pp. 186

## II. Temporality of Blackness

### *Slavery: The Beginning*

*“Our problem is one of complete captivity from birth to death, and coercion as the starting point of our interaction with the state and with ordinary white citizens.”*

*- Frank B. Wilderson III<sup>7</sup>*

In the United States, the temporality of Blackness has been intertwined with the temporality of whiteness for a very long time. This deep intertwining begins with the Atlantic slave trade and in the continent of Africa. However, the slave trade itself has is comprised of a complex web of temporalities that didn't begin in the New World. It started with the disturbing of life caused by slave catchers in the in-lands of Africa. They then moved the newly captured slaves to the coast, where they faced a newer and bigger problem- the Middle Passage. On the slave ships, there was a whole new set of temporal frames that plagued the journey- “those derived from local political histories of war and slave-raiding; a cultural cycle of social death and rebirth, the ethnic and political disorientation of capture and separation eventually giving way to new identifications with “shipmates” and “fictive kin”; a biographical culmination of lifetime fears of capture, kidnapping, or simply of falling through the cracks in the protections of patronage and kinship; the metaphysical horror of a “middle” passage that some must have thought would never end and others might only have recognized as a trip across the “*kalunga*” the body of water which separated the world of the living from that of the dead- a flight from time measured in the gradual physical deterioration of the worldly body.”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> iMiXWHATiLiKE., 6

<sup>8</sup> Walter Johnson, “Possible Pasts: Some Speculations on Time, Temporality, and the History of Atlantic Slavery,” *Amerikastudien/ American Studies* 45, no. 4 (2000): pp. 489

When Europeans went to Africa to take the natives from their home to become enslaved in Europe, America, and the Caribbean, they were essentially not valuing the time or space of the African people. This goes along with the idea most Europeans had at the time that their bodies, time, and space intrinsically held more value than the people they were taking/stealing. They were snatched from their own temporalities, which included their histories, political struggle/war, and even their own definition of slavery. and forced to live in someone else's. The idea that they were progressive and modern and those in Africa were "savage", backwards, behind, and had no proximity to whiteness. The "present" in Africa was considered to be the Europeans' "past". This thought made the Europeans adopt some kind of temporal dominance over those captured which they used as an excuse for "colonial domination and exploitation". All of this may be happening at the same time or different times, or maybe overlapping with each other.

Fast forward a bit to the year 1619, when the first of the forcefully relocated and newly enslaved people from Africa arrived in Jamestown, Virginia. After experiencing the slave market, another complex temporal experience where they would probably be separated from those they were on the journey with and sold to slaveholders to work on a plantation.

The enslaved were considered property of those who owned them, therefore ALL aspects of them were owned, especially their time. As objects, they weren't allowed to have lives that didn't revolve around those who owned them. The slaveholders literally would define the day for their slaves and would enforce it with violence. The slave's time was set out by the slaveholder- what tasks they would do and how long they would do them and there were severe consequences for those who were late, came up short, or quit early. They were beaten, starved, and



manipulated into “matching the daily rhythms through which their owners measured progress.”<sup>9</sup> Slaveholders even had control over calendar time. They would have schedules and calendars that enforced a cycle of planting, growing, and harvesting timed around their crop cycles and commercial plans.<sup>10</sup> Slaveholder even had a hold on their slaves’ biological time. They would schedule the reproduction of new slaves and controlled the amount of years enslaved women could nurse. “They infused their slaves’ lives with their own time-through the daily process of slave discipline, the foreign, the young, and the resistant were forcibly inculcated with the nested temporal rhythms of their enslavement.”<sup>11</sup> However, the enslaved would find ways to turn time back against their slaveholder. They would pretend to be sick, work slowly, and disappear and run away. Not much later in history, we see that this continues through events like Nat Turner’s Rebellion in Virginia in 1831 and the maroon wars in Jamaica.

This period of history has left an imprint of the soul of the United States. Slavery’s impact on the U.S. can be felt economically (because it provided the economic foundation for the country and some institutions still benefit from the selling of slaves for money), politically (especially in the South), and socially (from old socially accepted norms that affect the way society view African Americans). Slavery has also had a huge impact on the collective memory of African Americans in the U.S. and affects the way all Black citizens live and exist in the U.S. It is impossible to talk about the temporality of Blackness without the having a conversation about slavery. This is because no matter what we do today, something will always connect back to an idea, concept, or memory related to slavery.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.,490

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,491

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

However, it has not been easy trying to explain how it affects us because it's such a complex form of violence.

“...in a nutshell, every other group lives in a context of violence which has what I would call a sort of psychological grounding wire, which means that they can write a sentence about why they are experiencing that violence. Native Americans can write a sentence that says “I'm experiencing violence because this is an ongoing tactic within a strategy of colonization”. White feminists can say the same, that “this is an ongoing tactic within a strategy of patriarchy”. **For a Black person to try and emulate that kind of interpretive lens, the problem becomes a lot bigger.** For us this is the ongoing tactic of a strategy for human renewal. The violence against us becomes a tactic within a strategy to secure Humanity's place. It's not a tactic in an ongoing strategy to take our land away, or to take our rights away. **We never had any rights.**”<sup>12</sup>

After this section, Wilderson goes on to talk about the “external superviolence” that Black people live and exist in in the U.S. According to Christina Sharpe, we live in an external superviolence that exist in the echoes, reverberations, and derivative oppressive regimes that have emerged in the aftermath of chattel slavery.”<sup>13</sup> In her book, to express how these things affect Black life in the U.S., Sharpe uses the multiple definitions of the wake as metaphors to explain how these echoes of slavery affect the different ways in which Black life is lived and how disorienting it all is.

Later I discuss the different ways Black life is affected by this, but now I want to talk about the temporal aspect of the disorienting nature of living in the wake. Both Wilderson and Sharpe mention that the violence that was experienced during the Atlantic slave trade has continued beyond the abolition of slavery and is continued through several social and political systems in the U.S. This would mean that the very existence of this violence is atemporal. We are experiencing the same problem our ancestors faced in the 16th century. As technology

---

<sup>12</sup> iMiXWHATiLiKE, 8.

<sup>13</sup>Mahaliah A. Little, “In the Wake: On Blackness and Being by Christina Sharpe (Review),” *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men* (Indiana University Press, December 12, 2017), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/679420/summary>

advances and laws pass, the problem remains the same. After the abolition of slavery, we see that the state finds other ways to reimpose itself on Black life. Instead of controlling our bodies, they seeked to control aspects of our time. African Americans are experiencing a type of violence that is atemporal in nature. It has been such a big and constant part of our existence in the United States and it seems that it is so constant that people seem to think it has disappeared. However, the systematic violence that we experience doesn't seem to be affected by time at all and is always there. However, we don't *want* to constantly live in trauma and violence, which, unfortunately, many people seem to think that we do. While living in it, we are forced to constantly process not only the trauma, but the forms of violence that causes it. Not only is this violence and trauma atemporal, but it is also cyclical. We are forced to relive and process it (with viral, explicit videos of police killings of unarmed Black citizens) almost if not every day. In this cyclical process, our time is not only being taken because of the processing of the different forms of violence forced upon us, but we are also adjusting our position in time. We adjust our position in time when we think about how all of the information we receive affects us and how we take that information into account when we figure out how to act/proceed in the future in society.

### ***Childhood Lost/ Fast-track to Adulthood***

The racialization of temporality does not only affect Black adults; it has several implications for Black children as well. The racialization of temporalities affect many areas of life for Black children. Notably, it can result in the loss of childhood and innocence for them. This is caused by the social phenomena that Black children appear older and more adult-like

compared to white children of the same age. This “adultification” is especially seen in Black children from the ages of 5-14.

“Adultification” of Black children today can be traced back to the history of the treatment of Black children in this country during slavery. Black children were expected to start working for their masters as young as two and three years old. “Subjected to much of the same dehumanization suffered by Black adults, Black children were rarely perceived as being worthy of playtime and were severely punished for exhibiting normal child-like behaviors.”<sup>14</sup> Also reminiscent of slavery, in Christina Sharpe’s book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Sharpe says that Black girls were “never really a girl; at least not ‘girl’ in any way that operates as a meaningful signifier in Euro-Western cultures; no such persons recognizable as ‘girl’ being inspected, sold, and purchased at auction in the ‘New World’.”<sup>15</sup>

A study from Georgetown Law’s Center on Poverty and Inequality found that Black boys are more likely to be misconstrued as older, viewed as more guilty of suspected crimes, and more likely to face police violence if accused of a crime.<sup>16</sup> They also found that Black girls are perceived as needing less nurturing, less protection, less support, and less comfort than their white peers.<sup>17</sup> From the study, we also see that people think that Black girls are more independent and know more about adult topics such as sex.<sup>18</sup>

“Even seasoned police officers sampled in the study consistently overestimated the age of Black adolescent felony suspects by approximately 4.5 years. In addition, these officers assigned greater culpability to Black male felony suspects than to white felony suspects—whom they estimated as younger than their actual age.”<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia Blake, and Thalia Gonzzlez, “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls Childhood,” SSRN Electronic Journal, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3000695>)

<sup>15</sup> Sharpe,

<sup>16</sup> Epstein, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 4

When the same test was conducted using white felony suspects, the officers estimated their age as younger than their actual age.

This temporal inequality leads to several real life consequences. In the educational system, this can lead to harsher punishments from educators and the school resource officers. This may result in more detentions and in and out of school suspensions. In contrast, their white peers may use this time for dedicated after-school activities, mentorship programs, or even helping their families with certain life responsibilities. When educators have this unconscious bias in the classroom, they often associate Black girls' behavior with stereotypes of adult Black women, which can reinforce, for them, the idea that Black girls are more mature and have more life experience than they really are and have. The association of these stereotypes on them can also lead to the hypersexualization of these young Black girls.

There are also several consequences when this unconscious bias is found in the juvenile justice system. Black girls are faced with more punitive treatment when it comes to arrests and prosecutions. Research shows that prosecutors exercised discretion to dismiss, on average, only three out of every ten cases for Black girls, but dismissed seven out of every ten cases involving white girls.<sup>20</sup> “Black girls consistently receive more severe dispositions even after accounting for seriousness of the offense, prior record, and age.”<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, “adultification” can also be seen in cases of police brutality. On November 22, 2014, a Cleveland police officer shot and killed 12-year-old Tamir Rice for playing with a toy gun that looked real. He was shot within two seconds of the police officer

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.,12

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

getting out of the squad car. The officer who called in the shooting on the radio said, “Shots fired. Male down. Black male, maybe 20.” Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy, was mistaken for a 20-year-old man. Because Rice was misperceived as older, the level of threat the officer felt was also misperceived and the boy was killed as an effect.

This “adultification” not only dehumanizes Black children, but it also ultimately robs them of their innocence and ability to properly mature as an adult. By this I mean, they can’t afford to go through the life process of making mistakes and then learning from them. If they make the exact same mistakes as their white peers, they might end up suspended, in jail, or even dead. The time that belonged to these Black youth is practically being stolen from them and is affecting the way they live and think about their lives. This also affects the way Black parents communicate with their children concerning their survival. Black parents have to take time to have these hard, **necessary** conversations with their children, while White parents may think it’s optional.

This loss of childhood does not only affect the way Black children occupy time and space socially, but it also affects the way Black youth think about the temporal relationship between them and their white peers. When these Black children have these adult characteristics forcibly attached to them and their bodies and actions, they lose their current, younger age and the experiences and behaviors associated with that age. From this loss of time, we can see a jump in time and sliding of temporality that causes them to age in the eyes of society. Despite all of the societal implications this has, we have yet to ask the question of whether these Black children are aware of this happening to them and if they do, how do they feel about it?

### ***What Do the Youth Think About All of This?***

Often we only see what's happened to Black children and the trauma that they go through, but we rarely get to sit down and ask them if they see and understand the bias that people have against them. In an article written by Rahsaan Mahadeo, he sits down with sixteen and seventeen-year-old teens of color to show how some youth of color view their white peers. Mahadeo interviewed a few teens from Run-a-Way, a multi-service center that provides support to youth in crisis that is located in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. The ages ranged from 13-17 and most identified as African American or Black, mixed race, Native, and there was one teen who identified as Latino. In answering the questions Mahadeo posed to them, the teens also got to share their thoughts on how they experience racism and what they think of the temporal inequalities they see between them and their white peers.

I agree with Mahadeo when he states that there is a certain cognitive labor that is attached to being Black in the United States. "To assert that black people's survival depends on their understanding of "white culture and white life" is not hyperbole. The legacy of slavery and its afterlife, in the form of contemporary social death makes survival paramount for black people."<sup>22</sup> I think the youth of color from this article also agree and understand this concept. From the interviews, Mahadeo found that most of these teens think that time has been deeply racialized. He found that they think their white peers have more time to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities.

---

<sup>22</sup> Mahadeo, pg. 189

They all expressed, in different words, that they thought the time they had was compressed in one way or another compared to their white peers. They also believed their white peers had opportunities structured, such as employment and education, in their favor and it adds on to the privilege they already have. The teens expressed that not only did these opportunity structures benefit their white peers the most, but social structures as well. This includes intergenerational wealth that they believe white teens got from their families. It was also their belief that all of these factors caused their white peers to have the benefit of the luxury of extra time. The teens of color believe that the free time that was afforded to the white teens, was time that they used to work harder physically and mentally. They said, it was almost as if they were “racing against white time.”<sup>23</sup> They felt as though they had temporal restrictions and restraints. This was pointed out when the teens suggested they were starting their adult lives from different and uneven starting points than their white peers. They also knew they would face more obstacles in life and to get to success than their white peers, who may be able to achieve success quicker due to the fact that most had a straight-forward path because of family connections and income. In addition to the concepts the teens noticed, I know that they, and people of color in general, lose time through the physical, psychic, and emotional labor required to process racialization and racism.

Dominique, a sixteen-year-old that identifies as Black and transgender, brought up the idea that time could be heteronormative, and not only manmade, but made by white people. They were not the only one to think that white people have a better relationship with time. When asked if they felt like time itself is a “white people thing”, Dominique replied, “Yes definitely!

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 192



Because... we don't have enough time to live... I wish everything could be 24 hours because that way the party doesn't end."<sup>24</sup> Dominique and other teens also noted that they felt that their white peers have some kind of ownership of time. To explain what Dominique was saying, Mahadeo writes, "The temporal constraints of whiteness force Dominique and other Black youth into more than a race against time: they are also racing to survive." This is a very common feeling amongst Black people from urban environments that are poor when they think about how they survive, living from paycheck to paycheck. One teen, Rahim, even felt that he had to work "100 percent harder" to achieve some kind of equalness with his white peers and felt like his white peers are always ahead and he and his Black peers are left behind and have "less time to do more".<sup>25</sup>

What surprised me was how much the teens at Run-a-Way knew about the theory of the temporality of whiteness and how aware they were of their own temporal location in relation to their white peers and citizens not of color.

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.,190

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,193

### ***III. Temporality of Police Shootings***

*“Now it goes for our post-colonial comrades, etc. -- is not ready to think about the way in which policing affects Black people. And so what we have to do is ratchet-down the scale of abstraction, so that we don’t present the world with the totality of our relation to the police, which is that we are policed all the time, and everywhere.”*

- Frank B. Wilderson, III<sup>26</sup>

“Policing -policing Blackness- is what keeps everyone else sane.”<sup>27</sup> Americans treat Black time as a sacrifice for other citizens’ time and acts as “a form of psychic health and well-being for the rest of the world.”<sup>28</sup> This concept came about from the global belief that Black bodies are perceived as threats which results in the policing and surveillance of the Black body at all moments, on purpose and unconsciously. This affects the way Black people, citizens or not, interact with the police.

#### ***Shooting of Harith Augustus***

On July 14, 2018, Officer Dillan Halley of Chicago Police killed Harith Augustus, a 37-year-old barber during an investigatory stop on 71st Street in the South Shore neighborhood of Chicago. They stopped him believing that he was armed. Indeed Augsutus was carrying a concealed weapon. However, in 2013, Illinois passed the Firearm Concealed Act, which states that “an individual with a valid license to carry a concealed firearm may lawfully carry a loaded

---

<sup>26</sup> iMiXWHATiLiKE, 5

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.,7

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 7

or unloaded handgun partially concealed on or about his or her person.”<sup>29</sup> A person cannot, however, knowingly carry a firearm.

The shooting prompted protests in the area that night that continued into the next day. Also during this time in Chicago, people were waiting for the murder trial of Officer Jason Van Dyke, who killed 17-year-old LaQuan McDonald. In order to try to suppress protests during this tense time, the Chicago Police Department released a statement later the day of the shooting that stated:

“The officers approached a male suspect exhibiting characteristics of an armed person, when an armed confrontation ensued resulting in an officer discharging his weapon and fatally striking the offender.... A weapon was recovered at the scene.”<sup>30</sup>

Along with the statement, they released both edited and unedited clips of video footage from the incident, titled “Aggravated Assault to a Police Officer”. Chicago’s police superintendent said that the footage “speaks for itself”, and that Augustus’ death was the result of a justifiable “split-second decision”.<sup>31</sup> The video in question was the footage from only one of the 4 officers on the scene. We see one officer, Officer Megan Fleming, reach for Augustus when he was getting something out of his wallet, which we later find out was his State of Illinois Firearm Owner’s ID card. In the police report, Officer Fleming states that she was reaching for him to arrest him. She reached to arrest him despite not verbally saying she was, which is required by law for any arrest. After she misses his arm, because he pulls away when she reaches for him, two other officers reach for him but they miss as well. Officer Fleming’s grabbing and attempted

---

<sup>29</sup>“Open Carry in Illinois,” Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, December 11, 2019, [https://lawcenter.giffords.org/open-carry-in-illinois/#identifier\\_3\\_739](https://lawcenter.giffords.org/open-carry-in-illinois/#identifier_3_739)

<sup>30</sup>Jamie Kalven and Eyal Weizman, “How Chicago Police Created a False Narrative After Officers Killed Harith Augustus,” The Intercept, September 19, 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2019/09/19/harith-augustus-shooting-chicago-police/>

<sup>31</sup> “The Killing of Harith Augustus,” Forensic Architecture, September 18, 2019, <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-killing-of-harith-augustus>

arrest was unwarranted, because Augustus was fully cooperating with the police. During the edited version of the footage, they froze the next frame which showed that Augustus was carrying a handgun on the waistband of his jeans. The video then goes on to show Augustus with his hand on the waistband of his jeans while also fleeing from the police. The video made it seem as if he was reaching for his gun and getting ready to shoot the officer. However, we don't know if he was reaching for his gun, or pulling up his pants, which were falling because of the physical altercation



that was taking place between him and the officers. While turned away from the police, Officer Haley shoots him 4 times and Augustus falls to the ground. After shooting him, Officer Haley falsely reports on the radio, "Police shot. Shots fired at the police." Yet none of the officers on scene were shot and Augustus never released his weapon.

The day after the shooting, a local activist submitted a Freedom of Information Act to request "all dash cam, surveillance cam footage" as a part of the investigation into the officers involved with the shooting.<sup>32</sup>

The day after the CPD's statement on the shooting was released, the Fraternal Order of the Police released a statement saying,

"This bias and self-generated hysteria by the media demonstrates a profound indifference to the burden of a police officer being involved in such an incident, even when, as in this case, the shooting is text book legitimate.... Officer stopped an individual with a gun. The offender pulls it and gets killed."<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

This statement is not entirely true. At the end of the unedited video when Augustus is lying on the ground dying, an officer is seen pulling a *securely fastened* gun from the waistband of Augustus, meaning that he, in fact, did not pull his gun out of its holster like the report above said.

Additional footage (bodycam and dashcam) requested by the community through the Freedom of Information Act was not released until August 30, 2019, more than a year after it was requested.

### ***The “Split-second Decision” and Temporality of Encounters with Police***

At the press conference for the Chicago Police Department, the superintendent said that Officer Haley’s split-second decision was justifiable and the result/consequence of his decision was Harith Augustus’ death. This split-second decision is the most important and most critical moment in situations like these. The nature of the split-second decision is that it can never be wrong. This is because when the moment arrives, all matters of deliberation and considering the right and wrong choices doesn’t happen. Therefore, when making a split-second decision, right and wrong don’t apply to your decision. Despite the seemingly unbiased nature of split-second decisions, they can be the exact opposite. I argue that this is the moment where time is racialized the most, which is unfortunate because this is the moment where this matters the most. As we can see from the killing of Harith Augustus, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Rekia Boyd, Alton Sterling, and countless others, it is a decision that can mean life or death.

The racialization of time in a split-second decision manifests in the time the decision maker gives to the person or situation they are in. Race (which can also translate to threat level-see footnote)<sup>34</sup> determines how much time the decision maker, or in this case the police officer(s), gives to the people or person they are encountering. In police encounters with Black people, the Black person is almost always considered a threat. Because Black people are considered more of a threat, police will generally give less time when reacting to them. This includes less time to explain themselves, less time for the police to piece together things on the scene (shooting of Jonathan Ferrell<sup>35</sup>), less time to calm down at the scene, etc. It has also been shown that Black people who are disabled or mentally ill are given even less time (shooting of Anthony Hill)<sup>36</sup>. Police officers not giving the Black people they encounter time to do all of the points stated above due to the lack of time is usually associated with humanity. The temporality of humanity usually includes a moment of consideration and a moment taking into account that you could be wrong. We are usually living in the temporality of humanity at all times and this allows us to interact with each other in a civilized manner. However, when a split-second

---

<sup>34</sup> An article from Keith Payne at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill states that there were several experiments that took place that show there is a wide-spread bias against Black people and the increased level of threat attached to them compared to white people. They used an experiment that exposes the visual discrimination between guns and harmless objects like hand tools. For the experiment, they flashed a human face before an object appeared- some were white faces and others were Black- and asked a person to identify the object with the face. The experiment showed that in snap-judgements, people falsely claimed to see a gun more often when the face was black than when it was white. This is what the author called a “weapon bias”, which I think speaks to how threatening people think the Black body is. B. Keith Payne, “Weapon Bias,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 15, no. 6 (2006): pp. 287-291, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2006.00454.x>

<sup>35</sup> The shooting of Jonathan Ferrell happened on September 14, 2013 in Charlotte, South Carolina. A woman called the police when Ferrell was banging on her door. However, he was banging on the door because he had just badly crashed his car and sought help from the nearest house. Three officers responded to her call. When they got there, Ferrell ran towards them to try to get their help. If the officers had taken a moment to observe the scene, they would have noticed that his car crashed and Ferrell was hurt and looking for help. One officer tried to tase him but missed and then Officer Randall “Wes” Kerrick shot Ferrell 12 times. Officer Kerrick was charged with voluntary manslaughter, and was later indicted on the same charge.

<sup>36</sup> In Chamblee, Georgia, Officer Robert Olsen shot and killed Anthony Hill, a mentally ill, Black veteran. Hill was naked and clearly unarmed. In January 2016, Officer Olsen was indicted on two counts of felony murder and one count of aggravated assault. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison on November 19, 2019.

decision is made, either out of fear or anger, the temporality of humanity seems to go out of the window. When the moment was approached in the shootings that was mentioned above, that was the moment in which the victims were dehumanized and treated like animals. If one were in a threatening situation with an animal, there is no moment to hesitate and attack because it might cause you harm. This ill concept has been applied to a countless number of Black bodies and should not be applied when interacting with humans. Insane levels of fear and maybe anger are affecting the way and the quality of the police work being done in the U.S.

---

During these deadly, and even non-deadly, encounters with police, there are several things that may go through a person's head. Minorities more often than not may feel like they have to adjust their behavior and actions in response to the presence of an officer. However, when a Black person in the U.S. experiences this moment, it is a unique experience that I find to be very interesting temporally. In the moment of encountering police, a Black person may have many racing thoughts. While thinking about what to do in the present, one simultaneously thinks about the consequences of their actions and behaviour (the future) AND the past. The past they are thinking about includes past encounters with the police that they personally experience (which may be good or bad), instances of police violence against the Black community in the modern world (either through personal experience or through the media), or the heavy feeling of remembering the trauma our ancestors went through in the past on behalf of the state. The last feeling I mentioned is the strangest. As you are experiencing this police encounter, you don't realize you've had these thoughts until after it is over and you are a survivor.

Another aspect temporally interesting in encounters with police that Black people experience is the tempo of the moment. “Tempo is defined as the pace of life....It represents a flow of energy in time and in relation to the environment.”<sup>37</sup> In these encounters with the police that Black people in the U.S. have experienced, I believe that there is a tempo change. The tempo can change in a matter of moments based on the behavior and actions of the different parties involved. I argue that in most of these encounters Black people have with police, the tempo of the situation exponentially increases and speeds up. This action can be attributed to things like, the split second decision of the officer mentioned earlier and the complex temporal layers and thoughts that Black people experience in these moments. The tempo can also speed up from the actions and behavior of bystanders also in the moment. Another moment the tempo of the situation may change is when a person first encounters/sees the police. This can happen even before engaging with officers. There may be a feeling of sudden anxiety, which may slow the tempo of the situation. Although people in the U.S. have a general feeling of anxiety towards the police, it is mostly experienced among the population of color.

### ***Disenfranchised Grief Through A Temporal Lense***

After a Black citizen is killed by police, the first thing people often think of is what will happen to the officer(s) that were involved in the shooting. Unfortunately, there aren't many punishments given. Although citizens would like for the officers to be charged and put into jail for murder, they mostly end up on paid leave or fired from their police department, to only find a

---

<sup>37</sup>“Time Use, Tempo and Temporality,” Laboratory For the Study of Complex Human Activity and Participation, accessed April 2, 2020, <http://chap.haifa.ac.il/time-use-tempo-temporality>)



job in another one in the same state. What people fail to see, however, is how the actions of a police shooting can affect the grieving process of those close to the victim. The families of the victim and the community the victim was a part of are processing the wrongful and sudden death of the victim. According to Baker et al., the grieving families are considered co-victims of the homicide committed by police.<sup>38</sup> The dominant political present and society does not see them this way OR see them as grievers, however. This leads to the time associated or given to the process of grieving. I argue that the time of the grieving process for the families and communities of Black citizens is racialized through the concept of disenfranchised grief.

Disenfranchised grief is “a loss that is or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially accepted”.<sup>39</sup> This is a common feeling amongst families that have lost a loved one after violent contact with the police. Disenfranchised grief is a result of several racialized concepts that are popular in the dominant political present. First is the normative social construct that the police are here to protect and serve the citizens of the United States. Because people believe this, the death of the victim by police would imply the criminality of the victim and make people believe that the death of the victim was a minor loss or it was for the greater good of society, which is one of the main causes of disenfranchised grief. The Baker et al. article even found that poor Black parents were treated less favorably by the police in comparison to white families, which derives from the concept of them thinking the victim “deserved” to be shot.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> David Baker, Dana Norris, and Veroniki Cherneva, “Disenfranchised Grief and Families’ Experiences of Death After Police Contact in the United States,” *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 0, no. 0 (June 2019): pp. 4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222819846420>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 11

The feeling of disenfranchised grief is exacerbated by the slander-like language used by the media when reporting a police-involved shooting. Referring to this, Melina Abdullah, a professor at California State University and a local Black Lives Matter organizer says, “First they kill our bodies, then they kill our characters.”<sup>41</sup> Media outlets “kill our characters” and criminalize victims of police shootings by bringing up past criminal records, which, along with the previously mentioned actions of the CPD in the Harith Augustus shooting, help create false narratives that further negatively impact how the public sees the death of the victim and feelings of disenfranchised grief. What the media says also complicates the relationship/memory of the victim that the victims’ families have, which further causes disenfranchised grief.

The invalidation of their grief by the media and the dominant political present forces Black families to grieve privately. “Marginalized sections of society are expected to not only have to fend for themselves in the face of life’s tragedies but are also supposed to do it without being seen by the dominant society.”<sup>42</sup> The apathetic and indifferent nature of society towards Black citizens killed by violent encounters with police cause added trauma and lead the families of the victims to feeling like their emotions are suppressed and entrapped. Black families ultimately feel like their grief is complex and misunderstood by society and describe their grief as an ongoing process.<sup>43</sup> They feel as though they have to follow different rules of grieving than everyone else and are made to feel guilty for grieving for their loved one.

I realized that the social constructs that surround the process of grief for families that have lost a loved one to police violence racializes time for the bereaved families. Society has racialized the time used in the process of grieving for these Black families. The result of the

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.,10

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 7

racialization of time is a temporally altered process of grief. This was mentioned before when the families mentioned that they felt their grief was ongoing and they were given different rules to grieve from other people. These rules put a limit on the amount of time they have to grieve, which actually makes it feel like the grieving process was ongoing. Other things also contribute to Black families thinking their grieving process as ongoing. Black families that attempt to get justice for their loved ones by fighting for accountability for police and try to grieve at the same time, which is not socially accepted and is met with indifference and apathy, are met with an even more complicated and emotionally taxing grieving process. It may also make them feel like the grieving process is being elongated. Withholding information, dashcam footage, and bodycam footage, as seen in the Harith Augustus shooting, from the family and the community can also lead to the elongation or delay of the grieving process because questions from the family or the community were left unanswered.

A small amount of attention was brought to the problem of disenfranchised grief for Black families who lost a loved one from contact after police after the death of Erica Garner, daughter of Eric Garner. She died at 27-years-old from an asthma attack-induced- massive heart attack. After her father's death in 2014, she got involved in activism, specifically in police reform and focused on use of force during arrests. In interviews, she repeatedly talked about the frustrations and physical toll of representing her dad, her activism, and being a central figure in the conversation on police reform. From the New York Times article reporting her death, a quote for Erica Garner says:

“I’m struggling right now with the stress and everything,” she said. “This thing, it beats you down. The system beats you down to where you can’t win.”<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Vivian Wang, “Erica Garner, Activist and Daughter of Eric Garner, Dies at 27,” *The New York Times*. December 30, 2017

#### ***IV. Conclusion***

Black time in the U.S. is constantly being stolen, compressed, etc., through many different socially constructed ways, and several lives were and are still being lost from the manipulation of the time they had in their lives. Unfortunately, the antiblackness that is the common theme in all of the experiences I've written about is, as Sharpe puts it, "as pervasive as climate."<sup>45</sup> However, Black citizens are taking action in order to not only reclaim their time, but also the time of those who died. Black citizens are also fighting for their right to exist in this country freely and fighting for those who didn't get the chance. The idea of reclaiming time is not a new idea, but it was brought to the light by the U.S. Representative for California Maxine Waters. She was made internet-famous by her saying, "Reclaiming my time." She first said this in a House Financial Services Committee meeting in response to Treasury Secretary Mnuchin's testimony about the state of the international finance system. When Waters asked Mnuchin why his office had not responded to her letter asking him about President Donald Trump's financial ties to Russia. Mnuchon didn't give her a straight answer and tried to deflect her question with "platitudes and compliments"<sup>46</sup>. It turns out he was deflecting to run out the clock on Water's questioning, so he didn't have to answer the question. Waters noticed and shut him down by repeating the phrase "Reclaiming my time." This phrase is actually an invocation of House rules. The phrase reclaims the time the member yielded to another person. Rep. Waters saw that Mnuchon would waste her time, so she took it back.

---

<sup>45</sup> Sharpe, 106.

<sup>46</sup> Christine Emba, "Opinion | 'Reclaiming My Time' Is Bigger than Maxine Waters," The Washington Post (WP Company, August 1, 2017), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2017/08/01/reclaiming-my-time-is-bigger-than-maxine-waters/>

For me personally, this was a big moment. Here she was, a Black woman that was a powerful member of the House Financial Committee, that was telling a white man in front Congress that she was reclaiming her time. The metaphor of the situation was obvious to me. It was a moment women and people of color could look at and see that she was and that they too could reclaim their own time from a system that feels like it's designed to take it. It was truly an inspiring moment for many and people took to the internet to express their thoughts on what they thought was conversations that should have happened a long time ago.

There are also other ways that groups of people can reclaim their time. Specifically, Black Lives Matter's use of disruptive tactics in protesting. An example of disruptive tactics would be blocking some form of a public road like highways and intersections. Tactics like this give the power to the protestors and disrupts the status quo. This can also be seen as a way to reclaim time by interrupting the time of the status quo. I also think it tells the people looking and watching that the protestors don't care about their time, just as the country and society doesn't care about the protestors' time.

Going back to the teens of color of the youth center Run-a-Way in Minneapolis and Minnesota from chapter 2 that believed their white peers are generally ahead of them temporally. The teens actually found a way to reclaim the time they felt it would take to catch up to them. Mahadeo pointed out that the teens reversed the popular belief that white people are associated with the temporal concepts of modernity and progression. They did this by expressing that white people and white culture is uncool and outdated and are therefore "behind" them culturally. They took into account "fashion trends, musical tastes, social media content (e.g. Twitter trends,

memes, Vinez)”<sup>47</sup> and considered them as “(temporal) status symbols, with time and temporality inscribed on material and immaterial culture.”<sup>48</sup>

Another way the African American population has tried to reclaim not only lost time due to social and political systems and beliefs, but also lost lives that have suffered at the hand of said systems. The subject of reparations has floated around the country and conversations in the Black community on social media. Former Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.) had introduced bills concerning reparation for slavery in every Congress since 1989, but it was never really given any attention.<sup>49</sup> However, a bill was introduced to Congress in 2019 by Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee to create a commission to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans.<sup>50</sup> It has gained support from Democrats like Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii) and former 2020 Presidential Candidates Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.). So far, the bill has only been introduced, but we don’t know what the future holds for it.

People of color in the U.S. are constantly finding new ways to reclaim the time the dominant political present has stolen from them through various social and political systems permeated with antiblackness. The methods the Black community use to reclaim time are both big and small, but they all have the same goal and that is to fight for the right of the individual and the community to exist and live full lives not filled with fear and intimidation.

---

<sup>47</sup> Mahadeo, 194

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Mike Lillis and Scott Wong, “Reparations Bill Wins New Momentum in Congress,” TheHill, April 4, 2019, <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/437286-reparations-bill-wins-new-momentum-in-house>

<sup>50</sup> Jackson Lee and Sheila, “H.R.40 - 116th Congress (2019-2020): Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act,” Congress.gov, June 19, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/40>

## Bibliography

- Baker, David, Dana Norris, and Veroniki Cherneva. "Disenfranchised Grief and Families' Experiences of Death After Police Contact in the United States." *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 0, no. 0 (June 2019): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222819846420>.
- Emba, Christine. "Opinion | 'Reclaiming My Time' Is Bigger than Maxine Waters." *The Washington Post*. WP Company, August 1, 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2017/08/01/reclaiming-my-time-is-bigger-than-maxine-waters/>.
- Epstein, Rebecca, Jamilia Blake, and Thalia Gonzzlez. "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls Childhood." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3000695>.
- Hom, Andrew, Christopher McIntosh, Alasdair McKay, and Liam P. D. Stockdale. *Time, Temporality and Global Politics*. Bristol, England: E-International Relations, 2016.
- iMiXWHATiLiKE. *iMiXWHATiLiKE*, October 1, 2014.
- Johnson, Walter. "Possible Pasts: Some Speculations on Time, Temporality, and the History of Atlantic Slavery." *Amerikastudien/ American Studies* 45, no. 4 (2000): 485–99.
- Kalven, Jamie, and Eyal Weizman. "How Chicago Police Created a False Narrative After Officers Killed Harith Augustus." *The Intercept*, September 19, 2019. <https://theintercept.com/2019/09/19/harith-augustus-shooting-chicago-police/>.
- Lee, Jackson, and Sheila. "H.R.40 - 116th Congress (2019-2020): Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act." *Congress.gov*, June 19, 2019. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/40>.
- Lillis, Mike, and Scott Wong. "Reparations Bill Wins New Momentum in Congress." *The Hill*, April 4, 2019. <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/437286-reparations-bill-wins-new-momentum-in-house>.
- Little, Mahalia A. "In the Wake: On Blackness and Being by Christina Sharpe (Review)." *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*. Indiana University Press, December 12, 2017. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/679420/summary>.
- Mahadeo, Rahsaan. 2018. "Why Is the Time Always Right for White and Wrong For Us? How Racialized Youth Make Sense of Whiteness and Temporal Inequality." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 5 (2): 186–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649218770469>.
- Payne, B. Keith. "Weapon Bias." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 15, no. 6 (2006): 287–91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2006.00454.x>.
- Wang, Vivian. 2017. "Erica Garner, Activist and Daughter of Eric Garner, Dies at 27." *The New York Times*. The New York Times. December 30, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/30/nyregion/erica-garner-dead.html>.



“Open Carry in Illinois.” Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, December 11, 2019.  
[https://lawcenter.giffords.org/open-carry-in-illinois/#identifier\\_3\\_739](https://lawcenter.giffords.org/open-carry-in-illinois/#identifier_3_739).

“The Killing of Harith Augustus.” Forensic Architecture, September 18, 2019.  
<https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-killing-of-harith-augustus>.

“Time Use, Tempo and Temporality.” Laboratory For the Study of Complex Human Activity and Participation. Accessed April 2, 2020.  
<http://chap.haifa.ac.il/time-use-tempo-temporality>.