"Free but not Equal": In the Wake of Trayvon Martin—American Anger and Visual Activism

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ABSTRACT: This essay highlights how one event like the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin can be a catalyst that urges deep-rooted anger to surface in many American communities. My case study consists of photographs taken at the planned demonstration from Union Square to Times Square in New York City in July 2013. The iconography surrounding the protests in the wake of the Trayvon Martin verdict is explicated, and I draw on notions of how democracy at its best is portrayed though artistic activism and dissent.

KEYWORDS: American Anger; Visual Activism; Social Media; Affect; Trayvon Martin

Introduction

Over the last year, and especially in the wake of the Trayvon Martin case, a new discussion about race relations has developed in the United States manifesting itself in popular culture and media outlets alike. There is a call for a New Civil Rights Movement according to Rinku Sin, the executive director of race forward: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation and the publisher of *ColorLines*, a magazine on race and politics. In a blog entry for the *Huffington Post*, Sin states that she hopes for "a racial justice movement; one that builds on the legacy of civil rights while bringing crucial new elements to our political and social lives" (n. pag.). The circumstances surrounding Trayvon Martin's death have sparked a nation-wide appeal for justice. Martin's plight incited anger in communities who publically condemn racial profiling and institutional racism; factors many claim attributed to the young man's untimely death (Bump n. pag.).

Trayvon Martin, born on February 5, 1995, was a 17-year-old African American high school student who lived in Miami Gardens, Florida, with his mother Sybrina Fulton. In February 2012, Martin was in Sanford, Florida, visiting his father, Tracy Martin, who lives in a gated community. On February 26th, Martin walked to a local convenient store to buy some Skittles and ice tea, but on his way home George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch captain in Sanford, approached him. Zimmerman called the police and reported seeing a "suspicious person" in the neighborhood ("Trayvon Martin Fast Facts" n. pag). Ignoring instructions from the 911 operators to stay in his car,

Zimmerman confronted Martin, and shortly thereafter an altercation ensued. Trayvon Martin was shot and killed, and George Zimmerman admitted to shooting him in self-defense.

As a result of the not guilty verdict for George Zimmerman on July 14, 2013, Reverend Jessie Jackson, a prominent Civil Rights activist in the United States, responds in an interview by *The Guardian* saying that, "the African American is free but not equal" (1:40). Speakers at the 50th anniversary celebration of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom reaffirm Jackson's statement in August 2013, and echo his concerns about race relations and progress for people of color over the last couple of decades. The *New York Times* correspondent Trip Gabriel says that the speeches, "[were] an effort to inject fresh energy into issues of economics and justice that, despite undeniable progress in overcoming racial bias, still leave stubborn gaps between white and black Americans" (n. pag.). Jessie Jackson, disappointed by the outcome of the trial, possesses the historical clout to frame the incident as a Civil Rights violation, due to his knowledge of and participation in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

Zimmerman's acquittal is an emotionally charged event as President Barak Obama explains a few days after the verdict. During his press conference, Obama says, "you know, when Trayvon Martin was first shot, I said that this could have been my son […]. Another way of saying that is Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago" (Yancy n. pag.). Because the President of the United States intuitively understands the "strong passions elicited throughout the trial" (FoxNews.com n. pag.) due to his own personal experiences expressed through narrative autobiography, and "as a black president, he has given voice to the epistemic violence that blacks often face as they are stereotyped and profiled within the context of quotidian social spaces" (FoxNews.com n. pag.). The loss of Martin's life and the not guilty verdict serves as the catalyst that sparked the nationwide demonstrations, rallies, marches, and prayer vigils in over 100 cities in the days after court case came to a close.

The following questions seem pertinent: In the context of anger and the public performance of emotion pertaining to the Martin case, how has visual activism been effective? Is new media a tool for engagement or does it "threaten the nature of democracy as we have known it, promot[ing] a kind of polarization that has already

measurably weakened the United States and its political process?" (Orvell 232) Due to personal interest in the affect and effects of Internet culture on visuality and representations of the body, I will present three photographs that show a visual cycle of emotions which begins, peaks, and dissipates, all within a very short timeframe. How can and why does one event spur a "mass reaction" (Vorpahl n. pag.), a reaction that is sparked by anger and relived on the streets? I hypothesize that these photographs have become visual markers in a timeline surrounding one event, thus aiding me to explicate how photographs depicting strong emotions serve the special function of unification, yet also allow for visual activism in the public sphere to take center stage due to the contagious spread of feeling on the Internet.

Trayvon Martin—Social Media and Black Protest Traditions

In the tradition of the African American Church, one of the most central institutions in many black communities, a strong tradition of call and response exists.[1] Call and response "within the Black Church illustrates how the history and culture of a group affects its interactions and talk. Call and response is a church tradition also used by Blacks in everyday interactions" (Smitherman qtd. in Loeb n. pag.). In this same tradition of presenting an idea and responding to it, one will notice in the photographs included in this case study that a larger historical context of Civil Rights iconography is referenced and "today speaks not only to present times but also engages in dialogue with the artists of the past, who both haunt us and challenge us to rise above the mundane" (Duggan n. pag.).

For much of his article on "The New Face of American Anger," Miles Orvell references political processes; especially the Obama election in 2008 because of the much discussed effect that social media had on the outcome of his campaign. He analyses the role that the Internet and the media environment had on President Obama's election and the spread of feelings and emotions that pitted and/or polarized individuals as well as communities against each other.

[1] For more information on call and response, see Freedman.

Fig. 1: In New York City, people in the thousands marched into Times Square and shut it down / Creative Commons—*Revolution* Newspaper.

Social media culture has had a similar affect on defenders of Trayvon Martin in that they have been given a voice, made visible, and their ideas are spreading

> […] Union Square, growing as it headed some 30 blocks north to the tourist mecca. "the amount of people here is overwhelming, it's incredible," said protester Debbie Avila, 19 of Queens. "We want equality and justice—it's not even a race thing." Gill Acevedo, 26, of the Lower East Side, added, "It's interruption—interruption so you wake up. We will continue to interrupt your lives until we get justice." (Sheehan n. pag.)

The rally and sit-in that took place at Union Square and ended at Times Square was in response to intense activity and mobilization efforts of activist who were opposed to, and appalled by, the Zimmerman verdict. Within a very short amount of time (24 hours) news spread about the rallies and the necessity to act as soon as possible so that mainstream Americans could also bear witness to "America's fraught racial history" (Bevilacqua n. pag.) and the current racial divide. By framing social media as the central gathering point to exchange ideas, develop strategies, and to enlist help, social media's purpose became a type of groupthink. The sit-in that took place at Times Square references earlier Civil Rights struggles and non-violent protests led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his supporters 50 years ago. In fact, as the not guilty verdict was reached in Florida, non-violent protest ensued in Sanford, Florida as well, and out of the longest sit-in in Florida's collective memory; the *Dream Defenders*[2] was born. What

[2] "We are diverse youth, students, and young adults fighting for a more equitable and just society. We are a new generation of influencers, artists, leaders and organizers tired of having our dreams deferred. We are the ones we have been waiting for. Through strategic non-violent direct-action, issue advocacy, civic engagement, and an unlimited creativity we build concrete power on our campuses and in our communities" (Dream Defenders Staff n. pag.).

began as an organized group of 60 students who marched 40 miles over three days in order to pressure Sanford police to arrest Zimmerman, grew into a full-fledged "event" as the not guilty verdict was made public. When George Zimmerman was acquitted, *Dream Defenders* once again took action, invading Florida's State Capitol for 31 days. "The daily, 24-hour "dream-in" was the longest sit-in at the Capitol in Florida history. Every day, *Dream Defenders* sat in Governor Rick Scott's office and demanded that state politicians work to address the issues of racial profiling, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the Stand Your Ground law central to Zimmerman's acquittal" (*Dream Defenders*: History and Mission n. pag.). This title of the proposed package of policies is titled "Trayvon's Law."

The two notions—the historical present and public memory—complement each other while adding a contextual thickness to the meaning behind the verdict of the Trayvon Martin case, and the marches that proceeded afterwards. The historical context that relates back to the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his legacy of peaceful demonstration and other such public events, is exactly what inspired so many people, black and white alike, to take to the streets. Today, the call to action by leaders in the African American community not only resonates in people's collective consciousness and their public memories[3] surrounding mass protest and the effects it can create, but that this history of dissent is being mirrored today in serious discussions on the Internet and though social media; the *Dream Defenders* being a most pertinent example thereof ("Dream Defenders, A New Generation" n. pag.). This young grassroots organization derives its name from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream Speech," and they use the aspirations of the older generation of Civil Rights veterans to redefine contemporary goals in marginalized communities. The role of photography during the Civil Rights Movement[4] in the 1960s parallels itself with the social media phenomenon, and the viral speed by which information, especially visual histories and contemporary

[3] The actual event that lives on in public memory is the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August 2013. At this event the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his enthralling "I Have a Dream" speech and was joined in company by numerous civil rights activist and popular singers. The lasting sentiment from the historic event is well explained here: "The march was an unprecedented success. […]. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's soaring address climaxed that day; through his eloquence, the phrase "I Have a Dream" became an expression of the highest aspirations of the civil rights movement" (History.com Staff n. pag.).

[4] Mr. Julian Cox, the curator of photography at the High Museum, said, the importance of photography could not be overstated in raising public awareness of the events. "That was definitely understood by the leaders," he said. "I cannot emphasize enough how well prepared they were, how they understood almost immediately how they could use the medium to advance their cause" (n. pag.).

stories of the human condition spread. Miles Orvell comments on affect in photographic content and the addictive nature of Internet use by saying, "the images … [they] act on the viewer in a way to solidify feelings, to bring those feelings to a higher pitch of intensity, to root them in an image that is indelible and fixed" (222).

In figure 1., we see a particular moment that is captured by the photographer. Where the crowd is angry, yelling, and chanting in the type of call and response manner that was previously discussed. Orvell's explanation of the physical expressions of anger, i.e., the wide-open mouth is clearly portrayed in this photo, in which the crowd is depicted in a fervor; anger and outrage are expressed at the height of the Martin—Zimmerman controversy. At the same time, the stylized cropping and dense mass of people only reproduces the claustrophobic feeling that injustice creates. It makes the viewer want to yell! The bodies of the people are not the focus in this image, the faces and arms, and posters are. The frame is cut wide in the foreground and the background narrows, which only highlights the overcrowded effect that the street reveals. Still, one might question which concrete events actually occurred, to create such tensions in so many Americans? These events lead to such a large and vocal demonstration that evidently crosses both gender and color lines. The United States Supreme Court stripped down Affirmative Action laws and the Voting Rights Act of 1965[5] as well as instituted new voter ID laws. Lawmakers are accused of making it difficult if not next to impossible for some people to vote. In addition to passing voter ID laws and other legislation of the like, the Democratic Party along with notable Civil Rights institutions such as the NAACP have been launching a counter strike.

Lastly, there have been numerous shootings of unarmed black teenagers and men like Trayvon Martin, Nat Turner, and Jordan Davis, amongst others, in which the alleged perpetrators were not black and have been set free. Due to the lack of media attention, except for some newspapers that discuss minority topics of interest, cases like Trayvon's have been virtually ignored by mass media. One onlooker at the Time Square rally said, "we march because Trayvon Martin has joined Emmett Till in the pantheon of young black martyrs" (Gabriel n. pag.). Therefore, Trayvon Martin represents the black body as a symbol of all black people who are being marginalized or misrepresented in

[5]President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, guaranteeing African Americans the right to vote. The bill made it illegal to impose restrictions on federal, state, and local elections that were designed to deny the vote to blacks (History.com Staff n. pag.).

the mainstream media, just as Jessie Jackson might embody the hopes and dreams of Martin Luther King's wish for a collective future, where all people live in harmony.

In correlation to the photograph (fig. 1.), all of the pent-up emotions concerning the state of black America are visible in a physical and very public manner. These persons are following in the tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr. while chanting, 'No Peace, No Justice,' and one bears witness to the consequences of anger that lies dormant or is unable to fully surface until one event sparks the fire. That usually leads to a polarization of communities along party lines, color lines, and along economic lines. Some feel as though they have been marginalized or as if they are invisible. What is notable though is that a huge number of non-black Americans are sympathetic to the trials and tribulations that people of color face. They, too, took to the streets to demand the fair and just treatment of all Americans, regardless of their color. In fig. 1., we can see how diverse the crowd actually is—a myriad of brown hues, pinks, and peaches, light skinned and dark peoples.

Theorizing Affect—Public Performance of Feelings and Visual Activism

Miles Orvell also discusses the psychology of "New American Anger" within a framework of its motivating sources. Anger stems from both fear and perceptions of injustice (Orvell uses the word "unfair"), and according to the *Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology*, "[anger] is one of the primordial emotions, along with fear, grief, pain, and joy. It [anger] is usually caused by the frustration of attempts to attain a goal, or by hostile or disturbing actions such as insults, injuries, or threats […]" (n. pag.). These two words, when felt, cause strong emotions and can be motivated by "people, not ourselves, [who] receive something that they do not deserve" (Orvell 229). When comparing motivational sources of anger, we need to keep in mind that fear of the black man or the black body has a historical context that dates back to slavery and misogyny. The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia describes the 'Brute Caricature' as an invention by white supremacy which

> portrays black men as innately savage, animalistic, destructive and criminal – deserving punishment, maybe death. […] The *'terrible crime'* most often mentioned in connection with the black brute was rape, specifically the rape of a white woman. (Pilgrim n. pag.)

While the age of such outright racist thought is primarily over, the black man still has to live with the remnants of his stereotyped path, which is perpetuated in contemporary Hollywood films and in other mediums of popular culture (Hughey 550). A prime example of such stereotyped characters in "films and TV shows [that] tend to (1) reinforce racial boundaries; (2) bolster the racial status quo; and (3) present a felicitous view of racial affairs" (Bonilla-Silva 180) is "*The Blind Side* (2009), portrayed as an anti-racist film, [it] reproduce[s] the racial order of things" (Bonilla-Silva 179). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, a professor of sociology at Duke University, further elaborates on "watching whiteness" as he coins it, since "when minorities appear in mainstream movies, they still play mostly stereotypical roles (e.g., thugs, buffoons, and angry people)" (Bonilla-Silva 179).

Fig. 2: Mario Tama / Getty Images News –Thousands Fill Times Square to Protest Zimmerman Verdict.

This fear also has a direct correlation as to why the protests took place. Many Americans, who identify with Trayvon Martin recognize that although overt racism is rarely seen, the other less obvious forms of prejudice and biases are happening and are real.[6] Fear also leads to rash actions and to a certain type of passion or outrage. In the

[6] "Scientists agree there's little doubt that hate-filled racism is real, but a growing body of social science research suggests that racial disparities and other biased outcomes in the criminal justice system,

case of Trayvon Martin, the political left and its sympathizers found the verdict to be unfair. As Orvell concurs: "The other major source of political passion is our sense of outrage when things are perceived as unfair" (Orvell 229). These motivators are in a constant state of flux, playing back and forth—undulating between fear, outrage, and hope (that justice will prevail). In fig. 2., we see and immediately feel what the woman centered and elevated feels. Her emotions are transparent, contagious, and raw. Even though she is in the midst of a huge crowd, in one of the largest and loudest cities in the world, we **'hear'** her. With New York City, and especially Times Square as her backdrop, the bright lights of consumerism frame the woman. Times Square is a mecca for tourists, and is the advertisers' safe haven. NYC, 'the city that never sleeps,' displays its most valuable merchandise at Time Square and on Broadway.

If one were to examine again the cropping and production of the photograph, we notice that the heads of her onlookers are not visibly clear, but mostly are unfocused, looking downward, and in doing this propel the elevated protagonist into the limelight. The sheer fact that she is elevated above the crowd in an almost angel-like pose with her arms raised to the heavens, well, one can assume that she is either praying for justice, praying for a voice, or both. The audience is looking up, captivated by her presence and perhaps even for what she represents: hope. In this way, like Orvell says, "[…] the image, once put on the Internet, immediately acquires[d] a fee-floating quality of its own, open to adaptation and interpretation […]" (222). Because of the history and public memory surrounding the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and the re-awakened awareness for the new civil rights movement taking place presently, the fight for equal representation on every level is the motivation behind the protests.[7] The main goal of these protests that are taking place on a national level

> is a demand for justice. What binds together each distinct rally, and each individual protester, is a shared belief that Zimmerman's acquittal is an injustice that requires rectification. However this much is obvious; the protests themselves

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in medicine and in professional settings can be explained by unconscious attitudes and stereotypes. Subtle biases are linked to police cadets being more likely to shoot unarmed black men than they are unarmed white men. (Some academics have also linked the research into unconscious bias to the Trayvon Martin case.)" (Vedantam n. pag.).

[7] As stated on the School of Media Theory Blog from the University of Chicago's website, "Collective consciousness is a term much needed by media theorists because it postulates one, if not the, effect of media—whose broadest primary function is to carry/transmit/interpret/reify messages/information from one site to another. Present media theorists sometimes link the notion of collective consciousness to signal the Internet as a major intermediary in the creation of a truly global society" (Piepmeyer n. pag.).

> are called 'justice for Travyon', social media has been alight with the hashtag #justicefortrayvon, and the catch-cry 'No Justice! No Peace!' has echoed throughout the country. (Dickson n. pag.)

In fig. 3., the public presentation of emotion is impossible to ignore exactly because the protestors are reenacting a 1960s style sit-in of passive and peaceful resistance that 50 years ago "helped to ignite a youth-led movement to challenge racial inequality throughout the South" (*Freedom Struggle: Sitting for Justice* n. pag.). Here again we see the relevance of Dr. King and the lasting affect that public memory has on populations (cf. Blair 113). Americans in general are aware of the non-violent protest that King instigated and perpetuated in the hope of equal rights and more visibility for people of color. Given that the mass of people at the Times Square venue in New York City was organized in one day, the reader assumes that the spread of accurate information is vital for such a huge undertaking. On another level, one also witnesses how quickly feelings spread from one person to the next, which then leads to physical action—a taking back of the streets if you will. Through the contagious spread of emotion, and the clicking of "like" and "share" buttons on various social media platforms; time, dates and all the organizational work was completed rapidly and efficiently at low cost, and this efficiency becomes a huge benefit for the spreading and promotion of one's ideas. Because of the passion with which people spoke to their like-minded peers (groupthink), they were able to spread their feeling of urgency throughout the web. Jose van Dijck, author of *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, comments on this very subject matter.

> Subjectivity and affectivity constitute each other in a constant feedback loop between self and others, where the narration of experiences, memories and feelings of others contribute to the formation of self. Media, as Gibbs contends, introduce a powerful new element in the state of affairs: they literally and metaphorical act as amplifiers of affect while dramatically increasing rapidity of communication and audience reach. (56)

Also in the photograph depicting the sit in at Times Square (fig. 3.), in comparison to figs. 1. and 2., the reader can see that the tone of the rally is not static, but ever changing; from moments of calm, to outrage, and to self-determination in the type of "feedback loop" that van Dijck explains. In fig. 3., one notices that as the day winds to an end and people have been allowed to vent and voice their opinions, they sit down, still determined to show their discontent with the legislative decision to release George

Zimmerman, but take their lead from MLK Jr. and his effective and non-violent sit-ins. Because of this, the anger recedes and a dialogue begins. Real people, existing outside of our virtual world have achieved something astounding. By communicating online and creating momentum around one topic, people have given representation to all of those who were not present (cf. Squires). They have walked and sat next to each other and in the end even without creating legislative changes, they might have raised enough public awareness to affect their local and state representatives final decisions on issues concerning racial profiling, stand your ground laws, etc. The backdrop of Time Square again plays a crucial role when explicating the aesthetics of the photograph. The image is cropped, but streetlights and signs are still visible; like the FOREVER sign in the upper left corner. It in some ways echoes the beliefs of the rally participants. They have proclaimed that they will not bow down, nor forget Trayvon and all that he represents. Many people sitting are quiet, but are still connected with the outside world via their cell phones. We see heads bowed down, presumably writing text messages, and a few arms raised taking pictures of the scene. The one man in the middle of the image is wearing an infamous hoodie, which became *the* symbol of racial profiling during the trial.

> […] it is Trayvon Martin who is wearing the hoodie, a piece of "racialized" attire that apparently signifies black criminality. Zimmerman later said: "Something's wrong with him. Yep, he's coming to check me out." (Yancy n. pag.)

The hoodie is a reference of great importance, especially at the beginning of the prosecution of George Zimmerman. Countless Americans were outraged at the stereotyped black male who was presumed to be a threat based on the type of clothes he chose to wear. George Yancy again sheds light onto the subversive nature of Zimmerman's comments about clothes dictating behavior:

> A black young male with "something" in his hands, wearing a hoodie, looking suspicious, and perhaps on drugs, and there being "something wrong with him," is a racist narrative of fear and frenzy. The history of white supremacy underwrites this interpretation. Within this context of *discursive violence*, Zimmerman was guilty of an act of aggression against Trayvon Martin, even before the trigger was pulled. Before his physical death, Trayvon Martin was rendered "socially dead" under the weight of Zimmerman's racist stereotypes. (n. pag.)

My mission in relation to figs. 1-3 is to show the vast range of emotions depicted in the photographs due to the not guilty verdict, and the verdicts affect on communities in one

city, and how social media fuels anger, and encourages hope, while simultaneously serves as a platform for visual activism. I tried to stay in line with Erica Doss's advise for analyzing affect. She suggests that one, "[…] recognize[s] how discourses of personal and public experience shape and structure cultural meaning, and is increasingly considered a viable analytic tool in art history" (9).

Fig. 3: Mario Tama / Getty Images News—Trayvon Martin supporters sit in New York City's Times Square on Sunday after marching from a rally for Martin in Manhattan. [8]

IV. Conclusion

Robin D.B. Kelley first re-introduced the term polyculturalism during the first decade of the twenty-first century explaining that:

> we are 'polycultural' and I'm talking about all peoples in the Western world. It is not skin, hair, walk or talk that renders black people so diverse. Rather, it is the fact that most of them are products of different 'cultures' – living cultures, not dead ones. These cultures live in and through us everyday, with almost no self-consciousness about hierarchy or meaning. (79)

Based on Kelley's observations on the makeup of western civilizations and the integration of black people therein, the necessity to acknowledge the intercultural

[8] And then there are social media, which have been playing an outside role in the public debate about Martin and Zimmerman all along. In the aftermath of the verdict, Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr gave everyone who felt something about the verdict a place to vent, or bicker, or celebrate (Hu n. pag.).

nature of the United States in the larger discussion of race relations should be addressed.

While keeping in mind the wishes and dreams of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., one might see how Kelley reflects deeper messages of commonality between cultures, collective consciousness that crosses racial and cultural lines, and national identity. Martin Luther King Jr., a man with a very similar message, has been at the epicenter of public memory through the summer of 2013. King is a most respected and epic figure in the American imaginary, but the significance of his role in the Civil Rights Movement and his teaching on non-violent protest are especially pertinent since August 2013 marks the 50th anniversary of his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. King gave his seminal speech on August 23, 1963. The photographs depicted in this paper allowed for me to achieve the goal of looking at social media in terms of how it can spread information rapidly, give a voice to the 'invisible' minority, and share what is being felt on the streets through the public performance of feelings. The photographs themselves are also aesthetically dynamic in terms of production, cropping, religious iconography, historical relevancy to MLK, Jr., etc. The photographs are also visually kinetic in that when so many people are depicted in such small stagnant places like a street corner or plaza, the space almost seems to sway or move when stared at long enough.

The summer of 2013 has been a time of transition, where new momentum through demonstrations and constant chatter on social media (twitter, Facebook, tumblr) creates the desire to discuss race relations in the United States. These discussions are not happening only on an academic level, but these themes have permeated the sometimes tough veil of popular culture and its platforms. Focusing on demonstrations as the physical metaphor for the mental (psychic) and legislative changes necessary is the outcome of visual activism as it pertains to public displays of emotion. Orvell's example of Town Hall meetings and their original "mythic representation" (228) explain why. One could argue that not only do Town Hall meetings stand for "direct democracy" (Orvell 228), but that demonstrations also represent democracy at its best. Not only do protests and demonstrations have a long and respected history in the United States, but they are seen as the epitome of the democratic process at work.

The 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Walk on Washington" and the "I have A Dream" speech, celebrated nationally, on August 28, 2013, encouraged many Americans, from every walk of life, to prepare themselves in one way or the other for the 50-year milestone, which changed the makeup, discussion about and politics surrounding race and racism in the United States. Memories of MLK Jr. might vary in the American imaginary, but the sentiments are undeniably there. The Gallup Poll, published in 1999, reveals that Martin Luther King, Jr., is the second most admired person in the United States, second only to Mother Theresa.[9] It is with a nostalgic heart and mind that many Americans of color have started and continue to evaluate their advances in society over the past 50 years. Lawrence D. Bobo, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2006 and the W.E.B. Du Bois Professor of the Social Sciences at Harvard University, said very eloquently:

> Perhaps the strongest general declaration one can make at present is that we stand somewhere between a Jim Crow past and the aspiration of a post-racial future. (32)

Lastly, I would like to conclude with the question that I posed at the start. Social media does give voice to many people regardless of their appearance, their financial situation, and it is a platform where people talk, argue and agree. I maintain that visual activism is effective to a certain extent, therefore, unlike Orvell, I view the Internet, along with all of its vices also as an effective tool that opens lines of communication and explanation rather than as a hindrance or danger to democratic processes. It provides people who would otherwise be invisible with the chance to voice their opinions, to be seen and heard. Actually, maybe the spread of ideas is not viral, but instead creates a wonderful and "*prevailing buzz!*" (Griffin 215).

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