



The Consumption of Black Death

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Purpose Statement

By situating and analyzing the consumption of police brutality videos involving a Black victim within the historical context of legacies of violence during slavery, spectacle lynching, and the production of lynching postcards, this research attempts to complicate the dominant cultural idea that the circulation of these videos is overwhelmingly positive. This research aims to explore how systems of oppression such as white supremacy, capitalism, and anti-Blackness allow and encourage violent videos documenting the murder of Black people to circulate on social media sites and news channels despite their horrific and explicit content.

Research Questions

How has the United States' legacy of violence during chattel slavery, spectacle lynching from 1882-1968, and the selling of lynching photography influenced the modern-day circulation and exploitation of videos documenting deadly police violence against Black people? How do systems of oppression such as white supremacy and capitalism contribute to the viral circulation of these violent videos on social media sites and news channels and their ability to remain publicly accessible despite their horrific and explicit content?

Methodology

- Qualitative historical analyses
- Critical race theory framework
- Critical comparative analysis

Background

- *The Legacy of Slavery*
 - Violence against enslaved people as a “sport” (Blum 311)
 - Frederick Douglass recalls violence enacted by slaveholders to frighten the enslaved into submission (Douglass 46)
 - Violence as a strategy to protect wealth and promote capitalism
- *Lynching and Lynching Postcards 1880-1968*
 - Spectacle lynching as a sport (Lynching Allen et. al 26)
 - 1882-1968: 4,742 Black people lynched
 - “The execution became public theater, a participatory ritual of torture and death, a voyeuristic spectacle prolonged as long as possible for the benefit of the crowd” (Allen et. al 13)
 - Typically ended with a photographing of the mutilated dead body of the victim or victims (Hale 992)
 - The distribution of postcards became a way to memorialize, sell, and circulate violent images of Black pain and trauma to White audiences across the United States



“This is a photo in which the lynched people were removed in order to shift the perspective to the white participants in the lynching — challenging the “spectacle” often made of Black suffering, often perpetuated in our news cycles” (Rankine)

Major Findings

1. Lack of censorship of police murder videos with Black victims (CNN 2021)
 - Ashli Babbit vs. George Floyd, Eric Garner, and Philando Castile
2. Increased numbers of views on police murder videos with Black victims
 - James Boyd
 - 1,433,567 views, uploaded on Mar 25, 2014
 - George Floyd
 - 13,437,062 views, uploaded on June 1, 2020
3. Racial Capitalism
 - Corporations continue accumulating capital by making anti-racism statements
 - Nike anti-racism statement
 - Do not offer equal opportunity
 - 4.8% of Nike directors are Black; 72.7% of Nike directors are white
 - Gibbes Museum of Art in South Carolina
 - Jewelry collection entitled “Wear Their Names”

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