

(Un)Civilized Nation: Disrupting, Redirecting, and Intervening in White Women's Racism

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## Introduction

*The lie that we are told is that white rage and white fear are legitimate and honest emotions that preserve American democracy. More often, we keep learning that white rage and white fear are dishonest impulses that lead to fascism. White rage and white fear are reactions to perceptions among white people that their power might be slipping away.*

- Britney Cooper, *Eloquent Rage*

As a white woman living in the United States, it would be easy to ignore the ways that racism and white supremacy permeate every aspect of life. The ways that racism and white supremacy permeate my body are invisible to me because whiteness is the default in this system. All other ways of being revolve around it. The task for white people, especially white women, who desire to be accomplices in dismantling white supremacy is to make an invisible system visible, turning the lens internally to extract that system from our bodies. Our bodies, white women's bodies, are the engine of this system. If we dismantle the engine, the system cannot continue to run.

In this paper, I will deconstruct the creation process of my dance film, *(Un)Civilized Nation*, and discuss the potential of movement practices to establish embodied, choreographic methodologies for disrupting, redirecting, and intervening in white women's racism. The film is a synthesis of two processes. First, I conducted a movement analysis of viral videos of white women's racial aggression. I then adapted the movement patterns from these videos into an autoethnographic reflection that examines the historical roots of this racial violence and the ways this history continues to live in my white body. The purpose of the film *(Un)Civilized Nation* and

the research emerging from its creation is to expose invisible patterns of racial violence and identify means for reprogramming these patterns of behavior in the white body.

### **We Live in An Uncivilized Nation**

In the spring of 2020, I, along with much of America, watched the latest "Karen" – a woman named Amy Cooper who would soon be dubbed "Central Park Karen" – threaten a Black man with police violence for asking her to leash her dog in a bird-watching location called The Ramble. "I'm going to tell them an African American man is threatening my life," she tells the man. These words rang in my ears for days. Something about them rang differently than the dozens of "Karen" videos I had watched in the previous two years. This white woman was stating explicitly what had been implicit in past videos. She had power over this man, and she knew that she could get her way – and take his life – by dialing three numbers on a cell phone. Her words harkened back almost 70 years to the murder of Emmett Till. Much like Amy Cooper attempted to do, Carolyn Bryant's words led to the brutal lynching of a fourteen-year-old boy over an "insult."

As the past echoed into the present, I also saw myself in Amy Cooper. I could be her. I have been her. I have used white tears to protect myself from being held accountable for racist words and actions. Moreover, I am a white woman raised in the United States, steeped in the same white supremacist system that she was. I am just as dangerous to Black people as she is. Here I am, trapped in a time warp with her, watching the past re-enact itself in the present and most likely the future if we – and by 'we,' I mean white women – do nothing.

In her book *Eloquent Rage*, Dr. Britney Cooper describes white women's "great capacity to be treacherous." White put race before gender and seek adjacency with white men to exercise

some power in the white patriarchal structure of the United States, even if it comes at the expense of their humanity (2017). Dr. Cooper writes: “White feminism has worked hard to make the world safer for white women but has stridently refused to call out the ways that white women’s sexuality and femininity is used not just as a tool of patriarchy, but also as a tool for the maintenance of white supremacy.” I see this weaponization of white femininity play out in each “Karen” video that goes viral on social media every few months. White women use their adjacency to white male power to abuse Black people and other people of color, then harness their white tears to call the same power that subjugates them to protect themselves from the consequences of their actions by threatening their victims with state violence.

The dance film *(Un)Civilized Nation* was born out of my desire to make white women’s treachery visible. How could I make visible the time-warping of American history, how the legacy of lynching continues to play itself out in the present in white women's harassment of Black people in public, and how my white body is just as trapped in this time warp as Amy Cooper's?

### **Movement Analysis Process**

I began my research for the dance film by collecting “Karen” videos from YouTube and other social media platforms. I started with the five most recognizable “Karen” in May of 2021: Central Park Karen (Amy Cooper) in 2021, Hallway Hilary (Hilary Brooke Mueller) in 2018, Corner Store Carolina (Teresa Klein) in 2018, Permit Patty (Allison Ettl) in 2018, and Barbecue Becky (Jennifer Schulte) in 2018. Since May of 2021, I have analyzed more than 25 “Karen” videos for this project, including Soho Karen (Miya Ponsetto), Victoria’s Secret Karen (Abigail Elphick), and multiple unnamed women caught on camera.

Before performing a movement analysis of a video, I documented the location and context of the inciting incident. For example, Teresa Klein's video was captured at a bodega in Brooklyn where she accused a Black child of sexual assault after his backpack brushed against her in the crowded store. I watched each video at least twice, once on mute and once with sound. I then documented each movement the women made with a thick description of movement quality. For instance, Hilary Brooke Mueller, while attempting to keep a Black man from entering the apartment complex he lived in, repeatedly placed her body between the man and the complex's entryways, requiring him to press past her. Her upper body was lifted in a tense but mobile position, with her chin tilted upward toward the man's face. This posture was accompanied by a firm grip on the handle of her dog's leash with one hand and her grip on her phone and wallet with the other. As she moved with the man, her knees remained slightly bent with her torso bent forward at a slight angle so that she could agilely maneuver in front of him.

I also documented how each woman's movements and movement quality changed in reaction to changes in her environment, especially when she realized that she was being recorded. For example, Jennifer Schulte stands with a firm, confident stance and a tight grimace while berating a Black family having a barbecue with a charcoal grill in a local park in Oakland, California. However, when Schulte steals a Black woman lawyer's business card and refuses to return it, her shoulders slump forward in a defensive stance. She twists from side to side to avoid showing her face to the woman's camera. When the Black woman refuses to leave her alone until Schulte returns her card, she begins to run, crying hysterically and covering her face with her hands, screaming into her cell phone that she is being harassed. Similarly, Abigail Elphick behaves aggressively toward the Black woman recording her, chasing her through the store with brows furrowed and torso bent stiffly forward, grabbing violently for the woman's phone.

However, when other white women approach her to comfort her, Elphick slumps forward and sobs into her hands to make herself seem vulnerable.

After documenting the women's movement and movement qualities in each video, I compiled a list of commonalities between each "Karen's" performance. Common movements at the beginning of the videos included pointing, wide-legged stances with the hands placed on the hips, shifting from side to side, pacing, and leaning into Black victims' faces. Common movements after the white women realized they were being recorded included a sinking contraction of the torso, retreating and attempts to hide behind structures, placing a hand over their heart, placing a hand over their face, and crying performatively. Generally, the women's movement was confident at the beginning of the videos. The women tended to move fluidly on gently bent knees with erect torsos, shoulders pulled back, feet planted solidly into the ground. When the women recognized that they were being recorded, their movement qualities shifted in one of two ways: vulnerability or aggression. In the first, the women appeared to wilt, contracting their torsos and slumping forward. Their movements slowed or became timid. The women's movements expanded and became forceful and heavy in the second. They moved quickly, covering a lot of ground.

If the white women in the "Karen" videos made a public apology, I also performed a movement analysis of these interactions following a similar analytical process. I found that, generally, the women's behavior followed one of two trajectories. The women either became stoic, like Hilary Brooke Mueller, or cried, like Alison Ettl. Mueller sat almost motionless, shoulders back and erect, her voice monotone. On the other hand, Ettl expressed her emotions freely, twisting her face and crying for the camera.

I primarily found that the conflicts took place in public or shared spaces about who had the right to be present and what they were permitted to do in that space. The white women became enraged when the Black people they confronted established their right to be present in the space or contradicted the white women's desires for how the Black people or person interacted in the space. The women tended to make sudden shifts in their performance when they realized that their behavior was being recorded, becoming more aggressive towards the Black people they were harassing or performing vulnerability. Also striking in the videos is that the women's words tended to contradict their body language. Women often expressed fear or discomfort while simultaneously invading Black people's spaces. One of the more egregious examples of this behavior is in the case of Amy Cooper. She repeatedly screams, "There is an African American man. He is threatening myself and my dog," while her body is relaxed enough to pull down her mask and maintain a vice-like grip on her dog's collar.

Because these white women's behavior patterns in the "Karen" videos are so similar, it is appropriate to characterize these incidents as performances. According to Erving Goffman, we are trained to perform standards of behavior that maintain the moral and social standards of the social status of our group (1959). On the one hand, these white women are engaging in a "political drama" of dominance over Black people that they have been trained to exercise through implicit and explicit social education, as noted by authors like Dr. Britney Cooper (2017) and Dr. Stephanie Jones-Rogers (2019). However, these women also understand that this dominance is supposed to be exercised implicitly. Recording their reactions threatens their protected social status as the "damsel in distress" (Hamad 2019). So the women must take "corrective action" to preserve their perception within their group (Goffman 1959).

### **Historical Connections for "Karen" Behavior**

These women's performance of whiteness has roots in the intentional creation of the social group called "white people" in the colonies of Virginia and Maryland in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1664, Maryland established the first anti-miscegenation law using the term "white" to prohibit marriages between "freeborne English women" and enslaved African men through banishment and the enslavement of any children born of the marriage (Battalora 2021). After the eruption of Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 and 1677, when British and African indentured servants and workers joined forces to demand the redistribution of colonial wealth and the right to steal land from the local Native American nations, the landed gentry needed the means to protect themselves from future threats to their power and an endless source of labor to grow their wealth. As a result, colonial governments began to pass laws distinguishing English people, now called white people, of all classes from Native American non-citizens and "Black" or "mulatto" enslaved African people. These laws established the permanent enslavement of African people. They stripped free Black people of the right to vote, hold office, own property, own weapons, and defend their families against violence from white people. In addition to increasing the payment to freed white indentured servants, these laws also granted white people the right to exercise authority – including violence – against Black people (Battalora 2021).

In 1691, the Virginia General passed a new anti-miscegenation law – "An act for suppressing outlying slaves" that further limited the intermarriage of white and Black people in the colony:

*...Be it enacted by the authoritie aforesaid, and it is hereby enacted, that for the time to come, whatsoever English or other white man or woman being free shall intermarry with a negroe, mulatto, or Indian man or woman bond or free shall within three months after such marriage be banished and removed from this*



dominion forever, and that the justices of each respective countie within this dominion make it their perticular care, that this act be put in effectuall execution. *And be it further enacted by the authoritie aforesaid, and it is hereby enacted,* That if any English woman being free shall have a bastard child by any negro or mulatto, she pay the sune of fifteen pounds sterling, within one moneth after such bastard child be born...(as quoted in Battalora, 2021, 33).

The law also linked a child's enslaved status to its mother's. A similar law was passed in Maryland in 1692 and quickly became a legal standard in every southern colony.

Although the law was written to be enforced against white men and white women, it was mainly enforced against white women in practice. Battalora writes: "While whiteness promised a superiority for all thought to be in its confines, it was never a fulfilled promise for women. For them, white supremacy was enacted in an environment of patriarchal authority and therefore could only be solidified by white men" (2021). In effect, white women were desexualized and made an engine of the new system of white supremacy. Their job was to produce white children to supply a steady stream of poor white laborers to maintain a buffer class for the wealthy white elites. Simultaneously, they were to produce a study stream of white male heirs to inherit the fortune made through the labor of enslaved Black people.

The establishment of white women as the engine of white supremacy places them on a pedestal: an object easily defiled by sexual contact with the inferior class of Black people. Ruby Hamad writes: "And so 'white woman' as an archetype was one of racial purity, Christian morality, sexual innocence, demureness, and financial dependence on men all rolled into one. To step off this pedestal meant no longer being regarded as 'woman;" (2019). As a result, in the past or the present, white women generally cannot exercise power against white men. However, they

can exercise power over Black people. Historically, one of the groups over which they most easily can exercise their power is Black men, characterized by white supremacy as having an animal-like sexual drive.

The legacy of colonial anti-miscegenation laws echoes in the twisted history of lynching in the United States. In Chapter 5 of her book *White Tears, Brown Scars*, Hamad further states: “When white women made rape accusations against Black and Brown men, they were lying, and white men knew they were lying” (2019). Further, these laws laid the groundwork for a “ruse for justifying racial violence.” False rape accusations and other accusations of violence or harassment against Black and Brown people allowed – and allow – white women to exercise power they do not otherwise have.

One of the most notable cases of this violence is the murder of Emmett Till. Years after Till’s death, Carolyn Bryant would admit to historian Timothy Tyson that her claims that Till attempted to assault her were false. Further, evidence from court filings shows that her story changed multiple times. She first told her family that Till merely “insulted her” but added salacious details of an attempted assault as she prepared to testify in her husband’s murder trial (Tyson 2017). In her interview with Tyson, Bryant would say: “Nothing that boy did could ever justify what happened to him” (as quoted in Tyson, 2017). However, her admission and apparent contrition are too little too late. One must wonder if, in 1955, Bryant knew that her words would be a death sentence for a fourteen-year-old boy – and if she even cared.

“Karen” videos are steeped in the violent legacy of lynching. The women they capture are performing power established by centuries of callous destruction of Black and Brown bodies. While these women appear to revel in a moment of domination, the Black and Brown people they attack live under the weight of a system designed to kill them for existing. Just as Carolyn

Bryant behaved with total disregard for Emmett Till's life – and likely intentional malice – the white women in these “Karen” videos seem oblivious at best or apathetic at worst to the potential life-ending consequences of calling the police on Black and Brown people in a nation built on the consumption of their bodies.

In the words of Ruby Hamad: “Tears are the form and function of patriarchy – the vanguard of whiteness.”

### **The Creation of *(Un)Civilized Nation***

The development of the dance film *(Un)Civilized Nation* began with autoethnographic improvisational research of my implication in the actions of Amy Cooper and women like her. I observed that my initial reaction to watching Cooper and the women in other “Karen” videos was to attempt to distinguish myself from these women. “I’m not like *those* women,” my thoughts would go, “I’m one of the *good ones*. I’m an *ally*.” However, I am a part of the same system that produced Amy Cooper. I wanted to understand what it was like to be her. To this end, I studied Amy Cooper’s movements and learned to perform them as accurately as possible. As I performed her movements, I could sense rage and indignation rising in my chest as my shoulders and neck tensed and my fists and jaw clenched. How often had I felt this same sensation when confronted about my behavior? Where does this rage come from?

With these questions in mind, I began to explore Carolyn Bryant’s movements on the day that she claimed Emmett Till attempted to assault her, as recorded in her lawyer’s notes and court testimony (2017). I mimicked her pulling her hand away from Till’s supposed grasp in disgust when he paid her for his candy. I imagined her running back and forth behind the grocery store’s counter to avoid being grabbed by Till, who she claimed was laughing and mocking her

as he chased her around the store. I imagine her running to her home to tell her husband, crying, about this alleged, traumatizing event. Using these images, I created sequences of movement dramatizing Bryant's story.

As I explored these movements, I sensed the fear that Bryant claimed to have felt. Her heart pounded in her chest, breath caught in her lungs, palms sweating. After all, she would have been told from when she was a little girl of the danger posed by animalistic Black men and boys. However, I also know that witness reports from Emmett Till's friends about Bryant's interaction with Till say that she chased him and his friends off her property with a pistol (Tyson 2017). I then explored these movement sequences with the malice reported by Till's peers. Bryant, to them, did not seem scared. She wanted blood. I explored performing the movement sequences of the flowing, effeminate movements of a "damsel in distress" with aggression and hostility.

Finally, I knew that I needed to explore the consequences of the behaviors of women like Carolyn Bryant and Amy Cooper. I studied the movements of acts of violence of the police against civilians, including the police assault on protestors on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in 1965 and police assaults on the Black Lives Matter protestors in 2020. I experimented with performing actions of beating, choking, and shooting repeated in these videos and created sequences merging movements from the past and the present. Like Bryant's movement, I explored performing these movements as a "damsel in distress" might when retelling her story.

Performing these movements made me physically ill. I am horrified and disgusted by the actions of Carolyn Bryant and Amy Cooper and the violent, life-ending consequences of their behavior. I was more disgusted by how easily I could perform these movements: how easily I could transform myself into a demure "lady" like Bryant and how easily I could learn to reproduce the action of a police officer beating a man unconscious with a baton. Re-enacting the

behaviors in my own body made me kinesthetically aware of how the legacy of racial violence facilitated through white women lives in my body. I could feel the quiet power of white women's tears vibrating under my skin. My body felt like a ticking bomb as I reckoned with the violence I was capable of. Like Amy Cooper, I am implicated in this legacy and the white supremacist system that produced it. The dance film that I created served to make this historical time warp of racist violence visible to other white people.

The film that emerged from this process tells the story of a white woman suspended in time. She gradually reveals that she is responsible for the death of a Black person. Though she tells and retells the event's story, she cannot accept the weight of her actions or her guilt, leaving the cycle of white supremacist violence to continue.

#### ***A Description of (Un)Civilized Nation***

Shot in black and white, *(Un)Civilized Nation* opens with a white woman sitting down at a table facing the camera. She is dressed in a floral, A-line party dress and a pearl necklace, with her hair pinned elegantly behind her ears – an ensemble reminiscent of the 1950s. The environment around her is stark: the table and the wall behind her are empty. She appears to be giving an interview. As she settles in her seat, her eyes look away to the right, shifting uncomfortably.



*A woman in a floral dress sits at a table, looking over her right shoulder.*

Continuing to avoid the camera with her gaze, she gingerly places her hands on the table, then shifts again to rest her chin on her hands. She slowly turns her head to look at the camera before diving forward onto the table opening her palms. She gathers her hands back into her chest, sitting up suddenly. This time, she forcefully opens her palms to the ceiling in an explanatory gesture, rotating her flexed arm left and right with her elbow planted firmly on the table. The sound of a heartbeat slowly fades up as her movement intensifies. She begins moving her arms and torso forcefully, drawing on the table with her palms and index finger as if drawing a map. Finally, she drops her head back to the table and raises her hands in a prayer position in front of her bowed head.



*The woman lays her head on the table and raises praying hands over her head.*

Her fingers then curl around each other as if she is begging for forgiveness. She sits up, forming a cross with her forearms, and passes it desperately in front of her face. She swipes her hand across the table then withdraws forcefully, pressing her palms to her forehead as she contracts her torso, gripping the table and grimacing as if in pain. She collapses into herself, dragging her hands back into her lap before regaining composure.

The film fades to a black and white scene of the same woman under a gazebo in a public park. There is a sudden sound of running feet. She appears to be re-enacting an event. The woman runs forward to the edge of the gazebo only to stop abruptly. Her torso leans forward over a deeply bent knee, and the other leg extended elegantly behind her as she presses her hands down and lifts her chest. She sweeps backward, pulling her hands into a pleading gesture as if asking someone not to follow her. She puts her hands in front of her face as she twists to pull one leg across her body to rotate away from the invisible person attempting to follow her. She runs in a circle as if being chased until she stops again in a deep lunge at the front of the gazebo. Her arms sweep elegantly in front of her face, appearing to attempt to defend herself or call out for help.



*The woman leans forward in a deep lunge, covering her face with one hand and reaching the other above and behind her.*

The film fades back to the interview scene. This time the heartbeat sound grows louder and faster. She repeats the same gesture sequence as before, but this time more fervently, desperately. She seems to be pleading or begging with an unseen audience, fear and despair intermingled on her face. New gestures emerge in the repetition. The woman throws her head back in the chair then quickly throws herself forward, clutching at her neck as if she cannot breathe. The heartbeat continues to grow louder and faster.



*The woman clutches her chest as if she cannot breathe.*

The viewer is suddenly transported back to the park and the gazebo. The footsteps' sound returns, this time with the faint sound of traffic noise. The woman re-enacts the same chase sequence as before, but this time, instead of pausing to cover her face, she seems to re-enact fighting back. The woman pulls back, standing with her weight balanced between two feet, jerking her arm into a right angle and stabbing a pointed index finger toward the ground. She circles her arms and legs until she appears to straighten and face her invisible assailant, re-enacting locking a car door. She draws her arms into her chest as if protecting a purse and runs in



a circle again. Facing the back of the gazebo, the woman appears to peel open an invisible curtain as if to peer out of a window before miming the dialing of a number on a cell phone.



*The woman confronts her invisible attacker.*

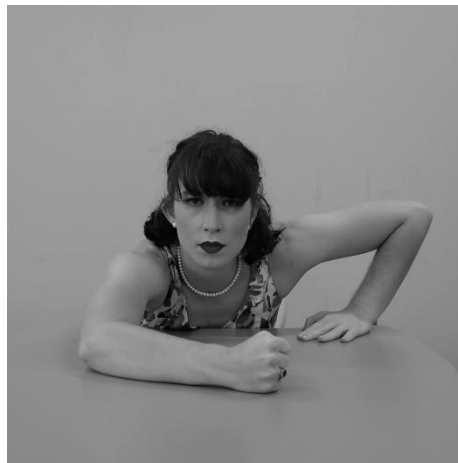


*The woman peers through an invisible curtain.*



*The woman dials her cell phone.*

This cycle repeats twice more. We see the woman repeat her pleading gesture sequence ever more emphatically, at one point slamming her fist down on the table as if in a furious attempt to be heard. The sound of the heartbeat continues to grow louder and faster. Each time we see the woman in the park, she repeats the chase sequence but continues to add to the "end" of her story. In the eeriest of gestures, the woman lowers her hand from her ear as if lowering a cell phone after a call, only to point her hand directly in front of her, as if aiming a gun at the person that has been chasing her as the footsteps and traffic noise grow louder and louder.



*The woman pounds her fist on the table.*



*The woman aims her hand like a gun.*

The viewer is blinded by a flash of color. The woman appears under the gazebo again; however, this time, she does not appear vulnerable. Instead, she stands tall, feet spread wide apart, her jaw locked and her eyes glaring at the unseen person in front of her. The viewer then hears the voice of Amy Cooper repeating in a loop:

I'm gonna tell them there's an African American man threatening my life...Excuse me...I'm sorry. I'm in The Ramble. There is a man. African American. He has a bicycle helmet. He's recording me and threatening me and my dog. There is an African American man. I am in Central Park. He is recording me and threatening myself and my dog...I'm sorry! I can't hear very well either! I am being threatened by a man in The Ramble! Please send the cops immediately!

The woman re-enacts Amy Cooper's confrontation with the man in The Ramble in Central Park, driving forward, pointing, and then falling back, seeming to dial '911' on an invisible cell phone. She contracts at the waist as she holds the invisible phone to her ear, appearing to wrestle an invisible dog. As Amy Cooper's voice continues to loop, the woman again performs the sequence

of confronting her assailant, locking a car door, running into a house, and calling the police. Suddenly, the woman begins re-enacting images of police violence, pantomiming, beating a person with a baton, holding a riot shield, and choking a person. The woman then pivots to her knee, firing a gun. As the woman stands, she walks to an invisible, fallen victim before stomping them into the ground.

The screen goes black as Amy Cooper's words continue.



*The woman charges forward, pointing in her victim's face.*



*The woman contracts forward, yelling into her cell phone and choking her dog.*



*The woman beats the victim.*



*The woman shoots the victim.*

The viewer returns to the opening scene in black and white. In silence, the woman repeats her pleading, apologetic gestures. When she finishes, she rests her clasped hands on the table in front of her. She slides them meekly off the table onto her lap. Her gaze drops to the floor as if ashamed to look into the camera. After a pause, the woman adjusts her dress, stands up, and walks out of the frame, leaving her empty chair behind.



*An empty chair and table.*

## **White Body Supremacy and Historical Trauma in the White Woman's Body**

Almost a year after completing *(Un)Civilized Nation*, I am still processing the behavior that I observed in my analysis of "Karen" videos and my experience of embodying the legacy of violence shared by Carolyn Bryant, Amy Cooper, and me. In the intervening months, I have begun to investigate deeper themes from this initial research.

First, after re-reading my analysis notes, I observed that each "Karen" incident followed a similar trajectory and that each woman moved and behaved in nearly identical ways. Every incident began with a conflict over public or shared space, escalated to an argument in which the white woman attempted to intimidate the Black person or people into behaving the way she wanted, and ended with the white woman threatening state violence by calling the police. These incidents are so similar that, to me, this behavior appears unconscious, as if, at some point in the interaction, the women go on "autopilot" and deliver a performance of white fragility from muscle memory.

Second, I remain disturbed by the incongruity between the women's words and their actions. In almost every video, a "Karen" would claim to be uncomfortable, afraid, or threatened; however, her behavior communicated the opposite. Their voices were either soft and monotone or aggressively loud. Additionally, their movements did not indicate fear or discomfort. Instead, the women would move toward, sometimes even charge, the very people they claimed were threatening them.

These observations seem to fit the historical trauma of white body supremacy described by Resmaa Menakem in his 2018 book *My Grandmother's Hands*. Menakem writes: "What white bodies did to Black bodies they did to other white bodies first" (57). White bodies carry

the historical trauma of the brutality of their European ancestors, passing it from generation to generation. Additionally, white bodies also experience the trauma of “moral injury” through their brutalization of Black bodies. Because white people generally have not done the work of healing these traumas, they continue to enact direct violence on Black bodies and deflect their responsibility through behaviors like defensiveness, microaggressions, and acts of fragility, like crying (Menakem 2018).

White women are further traumatized by the impacts of patriarchy. As noted earlier, the system of white supremacy was established through the control of white women’s bodies, stripping them of agency and making them a means of producing white children to maintain the system of white supremacy. Dr. Britney Cooper and Ruby Hamad note that whiteness only affords white women limited protection. Hamad states that white women's tears stop working when the person she is accusing of harm is a white man and that poor white women are less likely to receive support than “respectable” middle- and upper-class white women (2019). Similarly, Cooper writes: “The obsession with curtailing reproductive freedom in this country is about forcing white women to be hyperproductive in service of reproducing a White Republic” (2017).

The past echoes into the present.

### **Conclusion**

The above observations do not serve to excuse the harmful behavior of white women, rather provide an additional context for the work that white women must do if we are to be accomplices in dismantling white supremacy. White people are not separate from the system of white supremacy. We may sit at the top, but we, especially white women, are integral to the

continuity and maintenance of the system. Menakem, and many other embodied social justice practitioners, frequently speak about white people's need to lean into "clean pain" – the process of metabolizing trauma to "mend and build capacity for growth" (2018). He further writes: "What we call rage is actually unmetabolized annihilation energy" (26). If white women cannot deprogram the trauma of white body supremacy that they carry in their bodies, they will continue to inflict that trauma onto other bodies.

Just as I attempted to make visible the time warp of historical violence perpetuated by white women, I want to make visible the process of deprogramming white supremacy from my white body. My current project, *Purging: Deprogramming White Supremacy in the White Body*, engages this objective through embodied, autoethnographic archiving of the process of unlearning and deprogramming white supremacy. Through practices like therapeutic body mapping, autoethnographic improvisational research, and narrative investigation, I hope to destabilize the power of the white body by placing it on display in one of its most vulnerable states: healing pain and metabolizing shame. The goal of this project is to develop a system of practices that can transform into community programming and liberatory performance practices that engage white audiences in the process of metabolizing the harm done to our bodies by white supremacy so that we will no longer do harm to the bodies of Black people and other people of color.

The past can only echo into the present as long the wound that causes the screaming is left unhealed.



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