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Sanctioned Violence (2021-2022)

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Recommended Citation

Greenidge, Jordanne, "Sanctioned Violence (2021-2022)" (2021). *Research Inquiry*. 9.
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“Sanctioned Violence” Jordanne Greenidge (research inquiry example)

Questions to Consider For Discussion and Reflection

Greenidge’s research inquiry argues against the sharing of viral video depicting Black suffering and acts of brutality against Black people from the standpoint that sharing such images only further racializes violence, desensitizes audiences, and works to normalize such violence. When reading Greenidge’s research inquiry consider the following questions:

- In making this argument Greenidge revisits a famous example of the Rodney King video. Why do you think Greenidge uses this source to think about more current examples? How do you think about selecting sources in relation to time?
- Greenidge’s essay is connected to a number of current topics, such as racial justice, media portrayal, online advocacy, and institutionalized racism and white supremacy. What further research questions or avenues of inquiry did Greenidge’s essay raise for you?
- Greenidge effectively draws on counterarguments in this essay by anticipating that some readers might take an opposite stance. Can you identify these places in the essay? How are you thinking about counterarguments in your own research inquiry?

Sanctioned Violence by Jordanne Greenidge

The exposure that the public has had to the racializing and violence against black people under the guise of awareness and justice actually conditions them and the world to see these things in a normalized light. Elizabeth Alexander’s “‘Can You be BLACK and Look at This?’: Reading the Rodney King Video” tells about how the racialization and brutality against black people in the media reinforces old stereotypes and tropes that come with black life: crime, violence, and death. The reality is that the constant exposure to examples of black suffering, while imperative to understand in order to achieve justice for their suffering, helps to maintain the institution of white supremacy because instead of examples of injustice, brutality has become an example of what can be expected in regular life as is thus excused, as exemplified in Claudia Rankine’s “The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning.” Instead of honing in on the pain and suffering of the afflicted black bodies, deeper interpretation should be given to the violent actions done against them which is often by a white perpetrator. Inadequately dividing attention, reveling in the state of the victim instead of seeking out the perpetrator, when it comes to repetitive, targeted violence enables it in society and this is often done on purpose to hinder real change from ever coming.

The brutal murders of Eric Garner and George Floyd shook American society for a number of reasons. Viral video footage shows these black men suffering and suffocating for minutes before dying at the hands of white police officers, which sparked protests nationwide and the popularization of the Black Lives Matter movement. While solidarity and demand for racial justice is an encourageable exercise of constitutional rights, another result of these videos being so widely publicized was the normalization and politicization of such profound images.

Elizabeth Alexander's "'Can You be BLACK and Look at This?': Reading the Rodney King Video" speaks of the intentional and unintentional impacts of broadcasting violence against black people. The notion of broadcasting violence against black people with desensitization in mind is considered by Alexander in her essay, and this desensitization is a form of "control" over the minds of the public when it comes to digesting egregious violence against black people. She also mentions the conditioning these videos have on the public, conditioning them to believe that black men end up in these situations because they are "untame" and must be contained by the white man (90). These interpretations sway society to see black men as dangerous people that one must protect themselves from, which in turn sanctions these acts of violence against them, many of which happen in broad daylight with dozens of eyewitnesses, and abets white supremacy.

The general public has been accustomed to the normality of the fear of black men and often times when they are martyred, their killer insists it was out of self defense which leads to their acquittal. Black people, knowing that the world sees them in such a fixed light, have conditioned themselves to expect to be seen as threatening regardless of what they do, and thus try their best to prepare for instances in which they are faced with a person that could take their life and seemingly get away with it. This conditioning is what Claudia Rankine speaks of in her article "The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning", where she describes black mothers living with the daily fear in their hearts that they could lose their reasons to be: their sons. Rankine describes the inability for white mothers to comprehend the weight of such a daily fear, and that the sympathy offered to the mothers of brutalized black men and boys is only performative or short-lived because they have seen displays of violence against so many black males without personal fear, so they are eventually desensitized to it (1). Along with desensitization comes a lack of progression towards stopping violence against black people because focus goes to the harmed body, not to the inflictor of the violence which time after time is the same demographic. The fear of black people must be deconstructed as it enables the "white savior" complex, and this is ultimately what lands white killers getting let off. The white savior complex is the feigned caring for non-white people by white people in order to feel better about themselves. This is seen in everyday life when a white cop shoots and kills a black man then faces a social reprimanding for it, but later on in court is allowed to walk free. This happens because many white people care very much about the racial injustice on the outside and societally, but rooted deep inside is a fear of black people, and this underlying fear is what sets these cops free because they've "tamed" the supposed untamable.

It is a popular argument that the uncensored, raw footage of the beating and hurting of black people is a necessity because it's the only way that the weight and severity of it all can stand a chance at being talked about and thus fixed. Isabel Wilkerson's "An Old House and an Infrared Light" mentions the idea of a caste system being literally ingrained in every structural "bone" of the United States, and while no living white person took part in building this system, they all have experienced the benefit of it in one form or another (16). Because of this, Wilkerson sees fit that the only way to start to better the United States, with its biased and discriminatory core, is to acknowledge the problems embedded in it and to not assume personal blame when it comes to the historical wrongdoings that yielded the divided country that stands today. This includes looking sad and unjust realities in the eye, like broadcasting brutal beatings and killings of black men with the intention of instilling in Americans that this is their country where such obscenities are so frequent. While this stance is a valid one that stands the chance of bringing about an end to

racialized violence, it can cause the opposite reaction from the public, who potentially could become desensitized to seeing these occurrences so frequently. The frequency with which brutalizing black men happens should serve as a drive to bring it to an end as soon as possible, but when it is constantly shown, people turn away from harsh images and do not consume them with the level of impact that it warrants.

In conclusion, the constant depiction of black bodies in pain has been conditioning black people and the world to see them as a danger that is heavily sought after because of their constant racialization in the media. While it can be argued that a vivid image is what's needed to give the world wake up calls, it still stands that these images ingrain certain thoughts into the minds of the public, and ultimately works against the goal of dismantling white supremacy and the approbated violence that trails behind it.

Works Cited

Alexander, Elizabeth. ““Can you be BLACK and Look at This?’ Reading the Rodney King Video(s),” *Public Culture*, vol. 7, 1994, pp. 77-94.

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