**File: Crenshaw BSA.mp3**

**Duration: 1:16:05**

**Date: 26/04/2018**

**Typist: 683**

START AUDIO

Moderator: Hi, everyone. I’ll keep this brief because we’re here to hear Kimberlé, but it’s just to give a little bit of an introduction. Kimberlé Crenshaw is a professor of law at Columbia Law School and also University of California, Los Angeles, and works in the areas of civil rights, black feminist legal theory race, racism, and the law. Her work has appeared in the ‘Harvard Law Review’, the ‘National Black Law Journal’, the ‘Stanford Law Review’, ‘Southern California Law Review’, etc.

Alongside this very important academic work, Kimberlé is very much a public intellectual. She has worked on and been involved in civil rights movements in Brazil and in India, and has influenced judicial change in South Africa, equality frameworks in the UN. She is the Cofounder and Executive Director of the African American Policy Forum and is a key figure in the ‘[She Says Her Name 0:00:56]’ movement in the US, which is seeking to share, [really] recognition of the numbers of black women and girls killed by the police.

Her work has been recognised with many awards. For example, she’s been twice named the ‘Professor of the Year’ at UCLA, has received the ‘Lucy Terry Prince Unsung Heroine Award’ and has been presented by the Lawyers’ Committee on Civil Rights Under Law, the ACLU Ira Glasser Racial Justice Fellowship, and the ‘Outstanding Scholar Award’ from the Fellows of American Bar Foundation. So, we’re very, very privileged to have Kimberlé with us today, and I’m going to let her begin her speech. Thank you, Kimberlé. (Applause)

Kimberlé: Good afternoon. I had to take a moment because my body has no idea what time it is. (Laughter) It’s such a pleasure to be here and to see more faces than I anticipated that I actually know. As some of you know, I’ve kind of viewed coming over here as an escape from the US, but then it turns out that you all have some of the same problems we do, (Laughter) so this is an excellent opportunity for us to compare notes. My talk is basically designed to compare some notes about what has happened in the US, and the role of intersectionality and critical race theory in thinking more critically about what has happened.

Before I move on, I want to thank Janice and all the members of the BSA Events team for doing everything possible to make this possible for me to be here. I want to share that this is a memorable occasion for me on a more personal note, as well. This is about the 50th anniversary of my first public address. As some of you who’ve been following United States politics probably know, 50 years ago last week Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis, where he had travelled to support the sanitation workers there.

That following day, I was reeling from the news about this, having witnessed the agony of my family upon learning that the life of this visionary had been so viciously snuffed out. I was a second grader at the time, but I’d never experienced such wrenching grief in my life. The sobs, the anger, the despair that came over my family in waves throughout the wretched evening have been permanently etched into my consciousness.

The next day, the schools had let us all out to attend a hastily organised memorial. Ours was at the Jerusalem Baptist Church in Kenton, Ohio, and there we students, from kindergarten to high school, were crowded into wooden pews to talk about the legacy of Dr King’s life. Organisers asked if any of us had anything to say, and so for a moment, and then another moment and another moment, their query was met just with silence – a long, long painful silence.

To me, to sit through this silence, on top of that tragedy, was just more than I could bear. Perhaps that long night of grieving was still raw in my heart, but, before I thought better of it, I was on my feet. I cannot remember exactly what I said in church that day, something about picking up the torch and completing Dr King’s journey, following his footsteps. I’m sure it was something that I’d heard from my family. It was much more of a primal cry for justice than anything that had been thought out.

By the time I got home, my parents had heard about my little speech in church. Through their tears, they held me close and affirmed that we didn’t really have any choice but to pick up where the martyred king had fallen, so in the intervening years my work has centred on making real some of Dr King’s less-known frameworks. Perhaps most significantly is his powerful indictment of the idea that American democracy is basically a promissory note – one that had guaranteed equality but had come back to us marked ‘insufficient funds’.

That work was all the more difficult and urgent in the retrenchment of the ‘80s and ‘90s, when an answer came back from the Supreme Court – namely in the language of Justice Scalia, who said that that debt had been paid. There were no longer any creditor races. Nor were there any debtor races in the United States. There was just one race, and we were all called ‘Americans’.

These competing frames summed up the heightened struggle around racial reform that unfolded in those 50 years since – a frame that eventually took the diminished overrepresentation of those who are racially and gender privileged across American institutions as itself an offence against the Constitution. Diminishing that overrepresentation became the centre of much of what circulates as civil rights litigation in the United States.

It was against, then, this framework and the defence of Dr King's original vision that critical race theory lodged its critique not only of American inequality but also of the role of law in insulating it. So, that memory and that history was particularly searing last week, as the anniversary of King's death was commemorated in the midst of what I consider to be the most profound unravelling of the racial justice agenda since the demise of Americans’ experiment with inclusive democracy in the aftermath of the Civil War.

These days in the United States, it’s almost impossible, then, to recapture that sense of hope and the invocation of Dr King's legacy that accompanied the election of the very first African American President. We had reached, according to some pundits and celebrants, the ‘Promise Land’. Dr King's dream was superimposed on this historical moment and [one to 0:07:51] which the hopeful term ‘post-racial’ was attached.

Race and racism were over, many pundits breathlessly declared, “Or at the least nearly so,” said many others, but, rather than a thorough repudiation of racism and the re-centring of King’s vision, post-racialism turned out to be merely a performance, a repudiation of a certain kind of race talk, not all race talk and not all racism.

Post-racialism eventually signified a set of agreements about whether, how, and when Americans would talk about race. When we did talk about race, there seemed to be some kind of embargo placed on how and what would be discussed. Race could be talked about as a signifier of difference and a signifier of inequality, but discussing racism itself as a producer of that difference in equality was off the table.

I like to think about this using a pretty simple formula. First, you have racial difference, which is often a point of departure in debates about racial inequality, so unemployment, mass incarceration, the achievement gap – all clear points of racial inequality – are blamed on social or cultural difference: family structure, lack of work ethic, or even listening to hip-hop music. Such discourses were not only barred from public debate during this so-called ‘post-racial era’; genuine discussions about racial power were also embargoed.

What we wound up with was a post-racialism that meant race talk without racism, and it was an agreement that the first black president largely accommodated, if not sometimes even championing. As it happened, then, the shelf life of even this limited commitment to post-racialism was far shorter than its cheerleaders suppose.

A mere eight years after white voters tossed the historic breakthrough of 2008 into the dustbin of history, the symbolic breakthrough of Obama’s election gave way to a new political order that is anything but post-racial. White voters across gender, class, and region overwhelmingly rallied to the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump – a leader whose racism, sexism, and Islamophobia was amplified in word and in deed.

For most of those who simply follow the top headlines, it does seem impossible to understand how quickly and fully this reversal of the forward momentum has taken place. Beyond, though, the shocking election of this president is a continuing crisis that separates many who oppose this regime into warring camps around the question of identity politics.

So, our capacity for opposition has been undermined by misdirected blame and, for some, a longing for a period before identity politics, a [path 0:11:19] that was somehow more true to American ideals than all of this talk about diversity and, importantly, all of this talk about intersectionality.

Even for those deeply worried about the rise of Trump and the politics of hate, resentment, and violence, there is a sense that perhaps we just don't have time or the luxury for intersectionality. To me, this is what is truly bone-chilling about what is unfolding in the US. It represents a new and surprising target in the blame game – the so-called ‘identity politics’ and intersectionality that now are thrown into the pyre of illicit social justice frameworks by liberals and progressive allies.

Pundits both inside and outside the academy have cast the emergence of Trumpism and its support for white nationalism as the inevitable consequence of an ill-begotten pandering to identity politics. These critics have argued that too much attention to diversity, too much attention to antiracism, to feminism, to Muslims, to immigrants, to marriage equality, to trans rights, have created the backlash that propelled this self-professed, pussy-grabbing, race-baiting Islamophobe to the White House.

The way out of this debacle, by the likes of these pundits, is to repudiate identity politics and to return to the good old days, where our common identity as Americans held the nation together.

I have to confess, these good old days are hard to find behind all this business of enslaving and segregating black people, colonising Mexican people, exterminating native people, excluding all Chinese people, denaturalising South Asian people interning Japanese people, institutionalising disabled people, criminalising queer people, domesticating women, and institutionalising the rape and forced reproduction of black women.

All of these practices were perfectly consistent with so-called American values and with American law. The effect, in effect, blaming identity politics is to say that the people who believed that it was legitimate to struggle against these abuses, as aggrieved peoples, have only themselves to blame for the crises unfolding in the Republic today.

It seems now, then, that the response to the rise of ethno-nationalist right-wing politics among some in the intelligentsia is not more social justice agitation but less. Thus, identity politics, along with its bionic and dangerous offspring, intersectionality, are the rogue forces in the discursive scene – forces that have to be disciplined if sanity is to prevail in 2018 and beyond.

The consequences of this discourse for the coalition – the majority of American voters, I might add, who voted for Obama and for Clinton – are profoundly disturbing. The most visible subjects of intersectionality within the US political discourses –black women – are particularly entrapped by the simplistic and ahistorical analysis.

This penalising is not only ill-conceived and misdirected, but unpacking it reveals an ambivalence and [uninterrogate 0:15:10] baselines within post-racialism that I contend contributed to the rise of Trumpism. This analysis threatens to silence and disempower the very same constituents who voted overwhelmingly – overwhelmingly – against this dangerous turn in American history, the ones who resisted scapegoat politics, the ones who saw the anger, the incompetence, the American horror story on instant replay; the group that scored a 96% on getting it right and voting against the current occupant of the White House: black women.

Of course, by the lights of Trump’s apologists, it wasn’t racial backlash that fuelled this turn, but it was legitimate anger about the economic and social losses that were ignored by mainstream politicians. But, even by this measure, if it was truly explanatory, it should have been black women voting for Trump in droves.

Single black women in their prime working years between 39 – 36 and 49 – now have a median net wealth of less than $5, compared to $42,000 for white women of a similar age. In fact, the median net wealth for all working-age black women is only $100. Black women have less wealth than both their black male and white female counterparts, yet they’ve been consistently left out of the conversation about the economic and social crises in their communities.

From discourses on a host of social ills, from wealth erosion and income deterioration, to sexual assault, police violence, punitive public policies and mass incarceration, whatever the topic or issue, whether framed as race, gender, or class injustice, women of colour seem to have fallen out of the conversation.

So, if any constituency had reason to become exasperated with conventional politics, to have felt ignored and overlooked, it might have been black female voters. Yet the lessons that might be learned, and the agendas that might be corrected, if their interests and visions have been centred, have not happened, in part because those who hoped to reactivate this very constituency in the next election cycle have set their actual agendas and issues aside.

So, the question we must confront is why this problem continues and what can be done about it. With a more decidedly focused intersectional prism that repositions black women as an important subject, I want to suggest that, because black women's stories of resistance have been buried and largely forgotten, interests of countless constituencies have also been imperilled.

I call these ‘intersectional failures’, where researchers, policy and analyst advocates, and others, fail to recognise the interconnections and the compounding of various forms and structural impression, in favour of singular and often superficial understandings of race, gender, and class. These conditions, amplified by historical amnesia, have set the stage for the weakened position that forces of social progress are facing today.

Contending with them requires a reorientation of the way identity politics are conceived, and a re-grounding of intersectionality, attending particularly to the political context of intersectionality’s subjects in the US: black women. In significant part, the intersectional failures that I elevate here are conceptual and political failures, amplified by both the popularity and the misconstruction of intersectionality, along with the political marginality of black women.

Let me share two stories that elevate both of these tendencies. With so much at stake, it heightens even more the exasperation I often feel in recent months when I’ve been asked to defend intersectionality against a variety of criticisms. The common denominator, for the most part, seems to reflect very little literacy about intersectionality at all. An all-too-typical example of this is an interview that I gave for an academic trade publication. I won’t mention the name, but it is one that is widely read in the United States.

Intersectionality has been around since 1989, yet this is the first time this publication deemed it newsworthy. This was in 2017. I learned that there were intersectionality wars, (Laughter) but, surprisingly, the frame was not a reference to, for example, the struggle to elevate and address state violence against black women. That's part of an intersectionality war, or the exclusion of women of colour from policy discourses on racial inequality. That's part of an intersectionality war, or the particular ways that immigration discourses overlook some of the consequences of status in security for women.

Nor was the war about the housing crises, in which black women have been disproportionately evicted due to the intersections between rising housing prices, falling wages, and the decline of public housing. Nor was the interview an opportunity to press on data that had emerged from town halls across the country about the socioeconomic status of women of colour – the fact, for instance, that, when it comes to sexual violence, the astronomical rates of violence faced by native women are so high that political intervention has been framed in terms of not if it will happen but when it will happen.

Or the reports about the Justice Department, about the Baltimore Police Department’s abuse of women who are poor, who are trans, who are homeless, who are chemically dependent or involved in sex work. Nor was the intersectionality war about Oklahoma City, where a police officer was tried and convicted of raping 8 women and sent to jail for 263 years.

None of those wars, apparently, were the point of the story. Nor was the conversation a more nuanced investigation of intersectional politics within our troubled coalition. It was not about the mainstreaming of marriage equality and the way that marginalised families and people who could not be brought into the idea of the couple next door with a twist were being left behind. Or how racial justice discourse has mysteriously, in the age of Obama, jettisoned all discourse about structural inequality, and women along with it – the political constituency that was most active in making his presidency possible.

No, none of these issues prompted that interview. Instead, it was to seek my response to critiques that intersectionality itself was the problem. (Laughter) The allegations included are so-called [caste 0:22:56]-producing reversal of the privileged into the status of pariahs, its tendency to inspire religious zealotry, its pseudo-academic pretence, and so on and so forth. There was zero interest in the people or the issues that were erased by conventional knowledge and policy frames.

The objective of the interview was not to escort the subjects of intersectionality into the town square. The point was to pull over the vehicle that carried them, to interrogate an idea that fit the description of a dangerous interloper into the gated community of legitimate academic discourse.

The interview was not styled to attend to the power that intersectionality draws attention to, but was instead an expression of the very power that intersectionality seeks to disrupt. The interrogation of intersectionality is amplified by the taken-for-granted irrelevance of intersectional subjects, discourses, and proponents.

The second example of this tendency is a little bit more humorous and related to the discrediting of those who tried to sound the alarm against Trump during the primaries. I think, even given our different national contexts, you might recognise this particular guy that I’m about to show. Let me set this up. It was part of a larger piece that thought to dismiss early critics of Trump – critics like Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, Noam Chomsky and Eve Ensler – framing them as, simply, ‘a bunch of rabid lefties’. I was watching when this came on, to my surprise.

[Video plays 0:24:45 - 0:25:40]

I want you to note a few things. Note that the scathing, disqualifying, scandalous critique of my assessment of Trump, a reason to disregard any alarm that might be rung by me, or anyone associated with me, was that I have agitated for gender equity in the President’s racial justice initiative, ‘My Brother’s Keeper’.

If that wasn’t enough, it was buttressed – jetlag – by the fact that I'd assist Anita Hill’s defence team, as if standing out for black women and girls in either one of these contexts was so completely indefensible that nothing more needed to be said to utterly destroy my credibility.

This would not be the last time [that 0:26:30] O'Reilly or any others would denigrate black women in defence of Trumpism. O'Reilly, while listening to a video of Representative Maxine Waters, claimed, “I didn’t hear a word she said. I was looking at the James Brown wig.” Or, more recently, Maxine – also an influential critic of all things Trump – Trump has called her repeatedly in rallies ‘a very unintelligent person’.

It’s doubtful whether Trump or O'Reilly could have gotten away with such comments, even against political opponents who were black men – leaders like Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton. Many things are said about them, but a direct attack on their very intelligence is something that seems to be reserved for African American female leadership.

These remarks point to how little political capital black women and girls actually have in our culture – a fact that is entirely disproportionate to their level of political participation. In both the 2008 and 2012 elections, black women turned out in historically high numbers, surpassing all other race and gender groups, a phenomenon that was crucial – crucial – to the Democrats’ success in the White House and Congress.

Most recently, they handed victories to Democrats in southern states of Alabama and Virginia, and this is to say nothing about their leadership within political institutions and grassroots organisations. Still, the fact that standing up for or speaking as a black women is self-discrediting reveals how normal it is for black women and girls to be afterthoughts across the political spectrum.

This is the consequence of a kind of power that has remained unmarked for far too long, and I’ll name it: racist patriarchy. It is practised both by a wide political constituency that accepts this discrediting at face value, but also by those within our coalition that fail to contest these concerns. These intersectional failures then normalise the exclusion of women and girls and undermines the political capital of political communities.

I want to go further, though, by positing that intersectional failures within our community contribute to the condition of Trump’s possibility. For this we have to take a visit to the Supreme Court that decided at least two cases that I believe history will likely show played a significant role in handing the White House to Donald Trump.

Consider two cases: Citizens United that eliminated campaign finance laws to protect our electoral system from becoming a wealth-based democracy, and Shelby versus Holder, a case that effectively eliminated the ‘Voting Rights Act’. Both of these cases were decided by 5-4 majorities.

The fifth vote in these cases, and the fifth vote in countless others that have rolled back civil rights enforcement, labour laws, criminal procedure protections and so many other rules, is a fifth vote that was made possible by one person: African American Clarence Thomas, who replaced civil rights giant Thurgood Marshall on the Supreme Court.

My point here isn’t to moan how far we’ve fallen from the heights of Thurgood Marshall. My point is to question what role intersectional failures played in installing this particular fifth vote to the Supreme Court. Here we come to Anita Hill, a case study in intersectional failures.

Before Anita Hill came forward, African Americans, many of them heeding the warnings of Thurgood Marshall that being black was no guarantee that any nominee would lift up civil rights, were split at best on whether they supported this Bush appointee.

He had been groomed to be precisely what he turned out to be: a vote to dismantle key decisions that emerged from the civil rights revolution. But, after Anita Hill came forward and Thomas declared that he was being lynched by the Judiciary Committee, millions of black folks and liberal supporters changed their mind, coming over to his side in droves.

They called Anita Hill a ‘traitor’, a black woman acting as though she were white, by acting as though she had never encountered such a thing like that before. This was considered by some to be an obvious lie since, in their view, her testimony revealed only an African American, down-home courting style that any real black women could have easily handled. In other words, sexual harassment was a white woman’s hang-up.

Noted scholar Orlando Patterson [lifted this 0:31:36] specious argument to an actual cultural difference, arguing in the pages of the ‘New York Times’ that Hill’s complaint was ‘disingenuous at best’. Here’s the moment where intersectional amnesia set in. This argument that sexual harassment was not a black woman's thing reflects an astonishing failure to conceptualise that sexual harassment had been a condition of black women's work since they arrived on American shores. This is the reason why black women were overwhelmingly the initial plaintiffs in lawsuits that actually created this area of law for all women.

As a consequence of silencing black women’s struggles of sexual autonomy, antiracist forces actually contributed to the elevation of Clarence Thomas, by shoring up his lacklustre support among many southern senators who relied heavily on black constituencies for re-election. This intersection of ignorance made black communities complicit in creating a Supreme Court that's gone on to undermine civil rights infrastructures and the community at large.

White feminists, while supportive of Anita, were also not blameless in this moment, for their feminism repudiated the racial concerns that underwrote this painful drama. They argued that race had nothing to do with it, or, in any event, race actually trumped gender, denying the exceptional vulnerability to harassment and the tragic choices that black women had to face to come forward.

The upshot, then, was a painful, painful chapter in history that has yet to shift the way that antiracism and feminism are too often put at odds with each other. That fifth vote represents the wages of intersectional failure that continue to pay dividends to the forces of American retrenchment.

The voting repression that was unleashed by the gutting of VRA, and the green light that was given more broadly, led to the disenfranchisement of millions of people, including black women, like 100-year-old Grace Hardison, who was removed from the voting roll, simply because her mail was returned undeliverable, despite having voted consistently for decades; or Gladys Harris of Wisconsin, who misplaced her driver's licence just a few days before the elections. Despite having three other forms of identification, including her Medicare card, Social Security, she was unable to vote.

Two hundred thousand voters without the needed identification in Wisconsin alone, significantly more than the 20,000 votes that constituted trumps margin, a victory in that state, were pushed away from the polls. There were even some women, like Sammie Bates in Texas, who, on $200, $300 per month Social Security checks, had to choose between buying a birth certificate she needed to vote, and actually feeding her family. With such profound consequences, it seems abundantly clear at this point that intersectionality matters.

I’ve been talking about intersectionality and framing it around the question of failure. Now let’s step back for a moment just to offer some basics about intersectionality. Intersectionality is a frame. It’s a way of looking at things, as frames are. Frames tell us what we need to know about a problem, about a scene, about a social dynamic, and what needs to be done about it, but, despite my saying it, I think what really helps me explain a frame are these friends of mine. They travel with me everywhere I go, because they help make the point.

These cows are sick. Who is responsible for the sick cows? When I'm in \_\_\_[0:35:53] [responsible] audiences in the United States, people usually call out, “The farmer,” and, pretty much everywhere I go, everybody says the same thing. It is a recognition that the way we see a problem, the way the problem is framed often prompts culturally relevant responses about what kind of problem it is and who should do something about it.

If you change the frame, the answer is obviously going to be something different, right? We’re going to think differently about responsibility, attribution of causality, what the consequences might be of us failing to become involved in this particular frame.

If we think of the first frame as simply a way of thinking about social inequality, the answer to that – who is responsible? – is the people themselves are responsible. If we ask, “What are the causes of it?” it could be anything from failure to defer gratification, failure to create the appropriate family structure, failure to read to their kids at night, right? These are all the ways in which dis-ease as social inequality are framed within a very limited, individual, culturally specific framework.

This second framework we might see as an institutional, structural, and intersectional framework. It understands that inequality takes place in an environment of a variety of toxins, both historically produced and reproduced in a contemporary moment. If we think about the earlier frame as a failed frame, and the second frame as a broader intersectional frame, it helps us understand intersectionality more broadly as a frame.

The necessity that was the mother of intersectionality’s invention was an effort to think about inequality through a more nuanced approach to race and gender inequality. I encountered the need for this in trying to think through cases in which African American women were challenging employment regimes that excluded them – and only them – as opposed to excluding white women and black men.

Emma DeGraffenreid was a black woman who sued her employer for refusing to promote her to far more lucrative jobs, yet the court repudiated her argument by saying that she couldn’t prove race discrimination, because General Motors did hire and promote men, black people, although all the black people were men. She couldn’t prove gender discrimination, because General Motors did hire and promote women, although all the women were, in fact, white.

The fact that only black women had to combine these two causes of action to fully tell their story didn’t dissuade the court from thinking that allowing them to do so constituted preferential treatment. It was giving them something that other people couldn’t do. If black men couldn’t take two bites of the apple, or white women couldn’t take two bites of the apple, it was reverse discrimination to allow these black women to do the same thing.

So, intersectionality was an effort to try to think of an everyday conceptualisation to allow courts to see what they apparently were not able to see: the way that race and gender structured the workforce, and the way that that structuring actually created particular kinds of vulnerabilities for those employees, or would-be employees, who were situated to receive the impact of both of those policies – the race policy, as well as the gender policy.

But the problem isn't just the intersectional vulnerability that happens when all of these structures overlap. The problem is that, when these things overlap and create certain harms, those industrial interventions, those political constituencies that are supposed to be responsive to the way racism is experienced, or sexism is experienced, have frequently not shown the capacity of understanding what that experience looks like when it’s interacting with other forms of vulnerability.

To use the analogy of the ambulance that shows up when an accident happens in an intersection, antiracism/feminism had the tendency to simply back away when the skid marks didn’t prove that the problem was caused exclusively by gender discrimination or exclusively by race discrimination. Intersectionality was simply a way to draw attention not only to the structural dimensions of harm but the discursive and political abandonment of those who were harmed in the intersection, and the consequences of that abandonment.

Let’s go back to O’Reilly’s incredulity surrounding my gender equity critique of ‘My Brother's Keeper’, the President’s racial justice initiative. MBK was meant to be a response to the President’s assessment that boys of colour were facing a particularly hard time and needed special efforts to lift them up.

The programme was further based on statistics that show that black boys who were, for example, born to single moms, were more likely to be poor, more likely to go to under-resourced schools, with less experienced teachers, more likely to underachieve in school, and less likely to have positive outcomes overall.

The question that was never asked was: more likely than whom? According to research, certainly not more likely than their sisters. In fact, research found that what was being framed as an exclusively male problem was more accurately a race problem – one that impacted youth across gender. Yet girls were left out by many of the supporters, and framed instead as trickle-down recipients in the long run of the President’s efforts to create better citizen workers, better husbands, and better fathers.

Not only did this bring forth a 50-year-old racial justice agenda for black Americans that turned exclusively on the model of a male [single-earner family 0:42:51] wage, an idea that’s been an eclipse among other progressive social discourses for the last 10 years, it also normalised the desperate socioeconomic situation of millions of women of colour, those struggling to raise families with few benefits and forced to pay a higher percentage of their incomes for housing and food than other constituents.

In fact, housing and income security are two devastating conditions facing black women today and their families. It has everything to do with the statistics that the President was so concerned about, yet the emphasis on the programme was solely on trying to reconstitute the single male wage-earner family model.

As Gary Peller notes, only by freezing the social background in which females were paid less for work than the same work, shut out of jobs, and in which no childcare was provided, doesn’t make any sense that antipoverty programmes should focus only on black males. Given their role as principal, if not exclusive, wage earners for the majority of black families, a family first racial justice policy that was really focused on the black community would have addressed the vulnerability of women as well as men, mothers as well as fathers, daughters as well as sons.

I want to share that these erasures are not incidental or accidental. They are foundational to today's post-racial discourse, in which the fear of and fear for black men drives the discourse and creates a coalition between those forces that are afraid of them and those who fear that their lives are going to be lost. Yet the conditions that are elevated are framed as individual and culture, rather than structural and institutional.

This framework follows that formula that I outlined above, by locating inequality and cultural difference – cultural differences that are in turn rooted in gender relations. Taken out of the equation are structural and historical inequalities, legal rules, and the maldistribution of property and wealth.

Not only, then, does this framework reinforce the basic legitimacy of the status quo, but it affirms rather than challenges beliefs among the majority of white Americans that racism is a thing of the past. In fact, studies show that many white Americans believe that whites are frequently subjects of racial discrimination. These assumptions are further buttressed by the common move made in post-racialism to equate the anger and suffering of the white population to the centuries-long disadvantages faced by people of colour.

MBK and other male-oriented frameworks elevate the plight of young men of colour who lack role models and father figures, but at the cost of reinforcing patriarchy and white supremacy. This culture-first orientation reinforces beliefs that societal attentiveness to race inequality constitutes a racial hand-out to minorities and reverse discrimination against white Americans.

If the problems, then, rest in families, in their cultures, in their communities, if their otherness is self-imposed, then their economic and political tribulations cannot and should not be the subject of public policy. Political discourses that so much as name racial inequality as a problem are themselves the problem, as Trump voters and their apologists now express in droves. Eight years of post-racialism provided little ammunition to resist these inferences.

Intersectional failure is not simply a consequence of conventional mainstream politics. It’s also apparent in grassroots movements. Here, as my final example, I want to mention the movements against racial state violence and violence against women.

In 2014 my think tank, the AAPF, launched ‘Say Her Name’, a campaign to bring awareness and support to families of women who’ve been victimised by racist police violence. While the names of Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner have reached international audiences as black men killed by the police, names such as Tanisha Anderson, Mya Hall, Kayla Moore, Aura Rosser, India Beaty and India Kager remain largely unknown to audiences in the US and everywhere else.

These are all women who have suffered at the hands of police violence, but they have lost lives in relative obscurity, yet black women and girls have been killed in every conceivable way. They have been killed driving while black, having a mental health crisis while black, driving in the capital with a baby strapped to the back seat while black. They have been killed in every conceivable way.

Like their brothers, their deaths have been justified by claims that they were superhuman, posed a threat to officers with guns, simply had a look in their eye that made the officers fear for their lives and shoot to kill them. Unlike their black male counterparts, their names are not frequently mentioned or held up as examples of anti-black police violence. Their subjugation to racism and their exclusion from our memory is the very embodiment of racist patriarchy.

Here, again, this framework is the product of historical amnesia. The frameworks for racial violence today have taken lynching as a point of departure, and that has historically focused only on men, but women, too, were lynched. In fact, during the Jim Crow era, black women were frequently lynched alongside their male family members.

When issues are defined in terms of only some segments of the community that are impacted by them, we miss aspects of the problem. These problems go unaddressed. While I’ve focused so far on the elisions within racial justice, we also have to consider similar exclusions within gender-based movements.

Consider other forms of police violence. While excessive force is an overwhelming complaint against police, sexual violence is the second most common complaint, yet neither antiracist discourses nor anti-violence discourses among feminists have taken up this issue.

This vacuum creates an opportunity, then, for the most vulnerable of us to be subjected to such violence, such as the women who were sexually assaulted by Daniel Holtzclaw, the OKC police officer who was charged with abusing over a dozen black women. Consider what it was that made this officer believe that he could be a serial rapist – on duty – of black women. Was it because many were poor, system involved, chemically dependent, or former or current participants in the sex trade, or perceived as though they were?

Yet, with the exception of the National Organisation of Women, many feminist organisations, by and large, failed to show up for these OKC women. There was no ‘Me Too’ or ‘Time’s Up’ when these women were assaulted. When attention has been focused – where attention has been focused – has not been on these survivors but what happens in college campuses, and now what happens in Hollywood.

What is happening to women in the hands of authority and police cruisers, jails, prisons, public housing projects, largely happens out of sight. These are not the women that we see on the cover of news magazines. They’re not the women who come to mind when the conversation turns to gender abuse. Their invisibility simply extends the erasure of this woman, Recy Taylor. Not only has her story been forgotten, but her role in creating the modern civil rights movement and how it grew out of her story has also been forgotten.

Taylor was raped by a gang of white men in 1944. They kidnapped her at gunpoint as she walked home from church, and left her by the side of the road. An organisation, the Committee for Equal Justice for Ms Recy Taylor, sprang to life to seek justice for her. It drew the participation of notables such as W.E.B. DuBois and Langston Hughes, among others. It was founded by Recy Taylor and another woman, this woman: Rosa Parks.

[Quiet as it’s kept 0:52:30], Rosa Parks didn't start the civil rights movement by accident or because her feet were tired. She didn’t stumble into history, and her principal contribution was not simply getting arrested. She cut her teeth on defending black women against a legal system that sanctioned sexual assaults against them – against organised women who were not yet prepared to extend their concerns to black women, and to black communities who were too ashamed to foreground this particular form of white supremacy.

The organising that sprang up to defend Recy Taylor became part of the infrastructure that facilitated the ‘Montgomery Bus Boycott’, and that's the campaign that changed everything and led to the elevation of Martin Luther King. This is the kind of leadership from the margins that moves history forward, and we’ve seen it playing out in America today, in Alabama, and Virginia, and elsewhere, but to really incorporate these possibilities into a more robust intersectional framework, we have to re-ground social discourse. It requires hard conversations among socially responsible allies, across many institutions.

Intersectionality can be a way forward only if we're willing to face some of these hard truths to recover aspects of our history that have been forgotten, and sometimes it requires us to risk being told that we aren’t good allies, because we insist on justice for all of us.

These intersectional erasures have opened up spaces for apologetic discourses to find a really comfortable home within our communities. Recognising that our struggles are not just for ourselves but for communities as a whole, we have to ask: what can we do to expand our conception of racial justice?

I thought I would leave you with another quote from Dr King, but, upon reflection, I thought I’d like to end with another source of inspiration for me: Vicky McAdory. In our movement, we call her ‘Auntie Mama’. She is the mother of India Beaty, one of the women killed by police in 2015.

Vicky was one of the mothers who marched with us in the women's march to attention to so many black women killed in obscurity. She was a lawyer for justice, but, when we last talked to her, she was encouraging us to keep pushing for the families of ‘Say Her Name’, lifting up research that can fuel activism, even against the complacency and silence on this issue.

She’d had a stroke a few days before when we talked to her, and she insisted on calling us from the hospital, to encourage her – to encourage us – on. We didn’t like the sound of her conversation. We were joking with her, saying that we were going to really beat her at her favourite card game when she got out of the hospital. A few hours after we hung up, Vicky had a massive stroke and passed away before she was able to make it to surgery.

She was India’s immediate survivor, but I count her among the police officers’ casualties. The pain of losing a loved one and suffering this injustice in complete isolation could have only added to all sorts of stress and trauma that sometimes lead to the early death of so many black women.

We are all fortunate to have had the opportunity to know Vicky, to laugh with her, to cry with her, and to support her. She came to the march with us, and I just want to leave you… I won’t play the video. I want to leave you with her last words. Her biggest fear, she said, would have not been to come to the march. “My fear would be realising that, if I didn’t put my all into something that's right, something that we were born with the right of having, what would happen? How could I not?” she said. “How could I not?” It’s my motto for today in the work that drives me forward, and I hope to share this with all of you: how can we not? Thank you. (Applause)

Moderator: We could keep cheering, or we might want to ask some questions, as well. (Laughter) So, open to the floor. We have roaming mics, so do put your hand up, but wait until the mic comes to you.

We will run over a little bit, [because I think 0:57:41] we do want to ask questions and also do the award at the end, so don’t worry about the three o’clock finish, but we also will let you have tea and coffee, too. So, hands up; who wants to be brave?

Kimberlé: Maybe we can take two or three together.

Moderator: Yes.

Female: Mine is not a particularly academic question. I guess I want to ask you where you get your strength and your courage from. I’m a black woman in academia here. I rarely see role models like you, so it’s just so empowering.

It takes so much courage to keep talking about inequality. It takes so much courage to say, “Race.” When I say, “Race,” people jump. It takes so much courage to say, “Black.” When I say, “Black” in my environment, people jump. Then when you say, “Race,” and, “Black,” and, “Class,” and, “Gender” – and you were doing all of that – (Laughter) \_\_\_[0:58:44]. Where do you get the strength and the courage? But thank you, anyway.

Kimberlé: Sure. Maybe we should take several.

Moderator: Yes, hands up. There’s someone at the back, way at the back there, right at the back.

Female: Hi, Kimberlé.

Kimberlé: Hi.

Female: I am blown away. Thank you for that. [I’m over here. My name is Sveta 0:59:21]. My question is this. [I have known your work] I’m thinking of the 1980s stuff on intersectionality [and the mind of Bell Hooks and her complaint that feminism failed to lift race, and critical race work failed to look fully at gender subjectivities. We’re in] 2018 and we’re still talking about black women invisible in public policy discourse.

My question to you is this: what would it look like to have a cross-racial empathy, a consensus between white women, black men, black women? I’m sure there’s some other group I’ve missed. (Laughter)

Moderator: [Hands 1:00:16]? We’ll talk take one more [before], just in front of you there, yes.

Female: Thank you very much [for this very inspirational and this great talk. As you’ve shown], you are very inspirational. [I am 1:00:29] \_\_\_. [I’ve come to the University of East London], and my question is in relation to your original [theorisation of intersectionality, which I tried to follow during my PhD. It was about gender and armed conflict in the case of Chittagong Hill Tracts] in Bangladesh.

My question is that, if you would be able to comment on this \_\_\_[1:00:56] [theory] and the criticism by some [discursive] \_\_\_ such as \_\_\_ who, of course, have recommended that [people should follow your intersectionality]. But then also they have made some constructive criticism in relation to the [additive approach 1:01:21] of \_\_\_ [patients], so if you would be kind to comment on that.

Kimberlé: Okay.

Moderator: [Let’s start with that].

Kimberlé: Okay, thank you for all those questions. I guess where the courage comes from, I think that the reason why I wanted to share that story about 50 years ago is, as I was sitting there, and everyone was silent about the tragedy, that just felt like another tragedy on top of it. It felt like the point of the assassination was to silence us. It’s one thing to say, “Keep his memory alive,” but, if you're not willing to stand up and speak into the abyss, you’re basically making the assassination effective.

For me, the resistance to repression is to fight that urge to bow, to take our tongues out of our mouths. That used to be a punishment, and we live in a time at least where we can speak and live – in most places. If we don’t exercise that, then my sense is that there is no equilibrium. It just continues to unravel and get worse, and worse, and worse.

Part of my theory about why post-racialism was followed up by such a virulent move to the right is that it opened up the space for resentments to go uncontested, for an analysis of why there’s racial inequality to attach itself to traditional explanations that were deeply problematic. I think the idea of, “We’ll step around it, we’ll step through it, we’ll figure out nuanced ways of not calling it out,” that I see as part of the permission to, basically, move far to the right on some of these issues.

In the US in particular, there is a history of this having happened before. The first Reconstruction ended not so much because the other side just amassed so much power but the forces for Reconstruction grew tired and were more interested in other issues, so they abandoned that terrain. In that abandoning of the terrain, redeemer politics created this juggernaut of racial privilege and [law’s 1:03:57] reinforcement of it that we're still dealing with today.

That’s where it comes from, and sometimes it’s just reckless. I’m not going to act as though it’s always thought out. The last thing I should have done is written ‘Demarginalising’ before I got tenure, but things happen. (Laughter)

What would it look like to have cross-racial [consensus 1:04:21]? I think that the political discourse is ongoing, but I wouldn’t want to suggest that it’s never happened or we don’t have any examples of it. I would say that there were moments – moments – in the civil rights movement where we saw cross-racial coalition that made it possible for the national media to draw attention to what was happening in the south.

The white students who took their lives in their own hands and went to the south did it fully aware of the fact that what they were contributing was racial capital. They were increasing the cost of repression such that that cost would buy attention. With that attention – the world's attention – came the pressure to actually create reform. That was a meaningful moment that I think is not really appreciated as strategic as much as it should be.

I also think there have been moments of meaningful coalition between and among women. We are hoping that we’re in one right now, but part of what has to happen in order to make this moment meaningful is to retell the history of how this came about, the history about how sexual harassment came about, and the history about where white women were when sexual harassment was institutionalised – namely in slavery, when it was institutionalised in the post-slavery period. There wasn't really the kind of coalition that was necessary to bring that about.

When I imagine what it would look like, it takes moments like this, and ask how we bring that to scale and how we deeply institutionalise it beyond the little pockets of historical memory that we can come up with. It does involve making some really serious challenges, and allies across the board being willing to sit through interrogation of our priorities and the ways that we frame particular issues, which is one of the reasons why I talk a lot about how we frame an issue.

On the last question, I’ve kind of tried to make it a habit of late not to answer each and every writer who has some various nuanced critique of intersectionality – particularly the ones who want a new name. I don’t care, (Laughter) but I will give you my general orientation to it.

My general orientation is, if the reframe or the critique can help me figure out what to say and do to carry out Vicky McAdory’s command to us, I’m all for it. If it can speak to why it is that ‘Say Her Name’ has got to exist, why we have to have ‘Say Her Name’ and can’t simply rely on the police to not kill us – and, when the police do kill us, racial justice and feminist organisations to see it as their issue – if the critique helps me do that work better, I’m all for it.

But, if it’s basically just about, “Well, this is too additive and this is the way that, if we reframe it, we’ll be in a better position to address this,” if it doesn’t tell me that, I’m really not… I don’t feel a demand to attend to all those nuances. My primary commitment comes to the material realities that intersectionality is meant to capture.

If the idea is not doing the work of capturing that, then I want to know how to fix it. If it’s just another moment of academic moving in and out of different ways of talking about things, then you say, “Potato,” I say, “Potato.” (Laughter) If we’re getting at the same thing, I’m really not going to the mat about it.

Moderator: We can take one more question. Okay, over here, just in the middle \_\_\_[1:08:48].

Female: Thank you very much. \_\_\_[1:09:01] [University]. For me, listening to you today, directing the concerns towards the state, I think, is something that is, maybe, overly avoided in sociology. But what I also think, as well, when you talked in terms of state violences that you can pinpoint as violences, these are physical violences.

What is so inherent in so many women’s lives is the institutional and structural decisions. They’re very specific decisions that also lead to the deaths of women. I was thinking of you mentioned immigrant women as an example. Immigrant women are in this country [held at the minute 1:09:41] on hunger strike in Yarl’s Wood. Immigrant women are left where they have corporations working within their homes, [and] \_\_\_ sexual [violences] within the home perpetuates domestic violence.

Cuts to women’s sectors that disproportionately affect black women’s hostels, but also the fact that you can’t go to hostels unless you have secure status, all of these things facilitate insecurity. That is just never-ending for these women.

The ways in which the racism, classism, and sexism and ableism intersect in these ways are deliberate, but what is also a concern for many people who don’t have status is that, if you do speak up against the state, you actually face either detention or deportation. If you don’t, then you are kept in either domestically violent circumstances, so-called transactional sex, or any of these other things in terms of deportation.

So, I wonder how, in terms of allies, without [facilitating 1:10:46] threats on women – not just migrant women but any women generally – that would put them in further danger with the individuals but that also passes responsibility and how we, maybe, as sociologists, focus much more systematically on state decisions that aren’t identifiable as abuses but that still lead to the same outcomes for women in these situations.

Kimberlé: Yes, thank you. That’s a wonderful outcome and prompt for me to say a couple of things. I’m very intentional about not trying to extrapolate from the story that I was telling to what’s happening here, and at the same time aware that much of this resonates with some of what I know to be similar vulnerabilities of marginalised women here. My hope is that what actually does seem to connect does some work, and what doesn’t is discardable.

I also want to be very clear: there’s so much that I’ve wanted to say, but one of the pieces that you talk about that I think has to really be elevated is we do have to have a different understanding of the kinds of decisions that cause material harm – not simply being those that are framed as intentional discrimination, and not those that are seen as designed to hurt a particular category of people.

That's a limited conception of a juridical harm that is a product of a retrenchment in legal thinking, not an expansive understanding of it. It is part of this story of how we think differently when we think about institutional and structural forms of inequality, as opposed to just its distributional consequences that come from desires to harm people.

It also draws attention to what we, as allies – and by ‘we’ I mean scholars, academics, policymakers – have to be prepared to think about, thinking prophylactically in an intersectional frame.

I’ll end with just this one story. It came out of mapping the margins, and it still ends up being really relevant. The shelter movement in the US really took a long time before they realised that there was an immigration dimension of vulnerability, so that the anti-violence agitation and the pro-immigration agitation, neither one of those dealt with the fact that undocumented women were at a particular risk of all sorts of abuse.

It took women actually dying before both immigration rights activists and gender violence activists realised that they needed an intersectional way of thinking about immigration rights and gender vulnerability. They hadn’t done it, but, even when they did do it, they reimagined it not in a way that was accurate to the actual the condition of the women on the ground.

When they realised that immigrant women who were not documented ended up staying with abusive partners for fear of being deported, they created an exemption, but, in order to get the exemption, you had to have a psychiatric evaluation. These were women who were least likely to have access to psychiatric services, and it didn’t deal with the fact that even going to the psychiatrist made people fear that they were putting their lives in danger of deportation.

It’s sort of the, when you do something intersectional as a stopgap measure, in it often means that you haven’t really fully reconceptualised what the problem on the ground actually looks like. That’s the additive ‘add and stir’ bit, and not the, “Let’s analyse exactly what the vulnerability is. What are all the different dimensions that are creating it? Let’s build the intervention from that assessment.”

That’s what I think the charge for us is when we do research. I'm looking at all the different of aspects of the problem, the women who’ve been killed by the police. I’m looking at the fact that many, if not most, had psychiatric difficulties, and the police are the first responders to that.

I'm looking at the fact that many of them were sole custodial parents and so the children are experiencing new trauma because men who are their fathers and families have come in to take them away. I’m looking at exposure. I’m looking at all sorts of things. It’s not a one-factor analysis. That’s to me what makes intersectional analysis both difficult to do but also an imperative that we do.

(Applause)

END AUDIO

[www.uktranscription.com](http://www.uktranscription.com)

Transcription services provided by UK Transcription and may include occasional errors in name spelling. If you spot any errors, please do get in touch.