



The Inquiries of Racial Violence on Lauryn Hill's *Black Rage*

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Abstract

Racism is a racial problem occurs in multicultural societies that triggers negative impacts such as fights and segregations. The situation is also reflected in literature, one of them is in the song *Black Rage* by Lauryn Hill. The song involves situation of racial violence in which is also supported by the perspectives of L. Richardson and Phillip Goff. The main analysis of this song is that racial violence keeps intact in society nowadays due to practices of degrading the black race through ideology of skin supremacy. In conclusion, racial violence is not monolithic yet dead and static. It keeps going on through various practices while many literatures are aware to take those conditions into their main themes.

Keywords: Black Rage, L. Richardson, Lauryn Hill, Phillip Goff, Racial Violence

INTRODUCTION

Every human being in this world will always be side by side with differences, be those in backgrounds (religion, race, ethnicity, etc.), physical differences, gender differences, and so on. There is nothing wrong with living side by side with differences. Even those can make life more diverse and colorful (Blauner, 2022; Lavalley & Johnson, 2022). However, on the other hand, some differences that are close to us can actually be the cause of a conflict among individuals, individuals with groups, or groups with groups. Worse yet, differences can also trigger acts of violence in a society. Violence is an act intentionally carried out by individuals or groups with the aim of oppressing the weak so that they continue to suffer. This violence can be physical or

psychological (Hasbrouck, 2020). Physical violence includes someone hitting or kicking, and so on. Psychological violence reflects forcing other people to do things they do not prefer to do. Both forms have the same impact that can harm the victim.

Black Rage is a song by Lauryn Noel Hill. It speaks about experience of black people that is used to be oppressed by the white people (GeniusMedia, 2020). Moreover, government officials also display such racial disparities that are getting worsened from time to time. The song itself is also related to how racial violence draws the bad conditions. Racial violence according to L. Song Richardson and Phillip Atiba Goff is self-threats in producing racially disparate violence through racial and gender bias (Richardson & Goff, 2014). Racial violence is a form of racism expressed in violence. The practice of degrading the black race became commonplace because of the belief in the ideology of skin supremacy. Where the idea of whites is superior to blacks, the black race is often despised and treated.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative method. The data collected is in the form of words in its explanations. The sources of data in this research are the song lyrics studied and the meaning of the racial violence by L. Song Richardson & Phillip Atiba Goff. The technique used to analyze the document is content analysis. In this research, the data is analyzed by observing the lyrics of the song, relating the research with the selected theory, concluding the data, and writing a report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Worsened Conditions of Black People in *Black Rage*

Race is a category of human groups that differ from one another based on skin color, ethnicity, religion, gender, or something else. Violence is an act that is intentionally carried out by individuals or groups with the aim of oppressing the weak so that they continue to suffer. *Black Rage* is a song by Lauryn Hill that contains the enmity of black and white races, including police brutality that does not respect the black race. The song gives a glimpse into the importance of self-knowledge and courage on a societal level (GeniusMedia, 2020). White citizens expose black race at the lowest position in racial and ethnic strata based on the degree of dominance. Restrictions on social facilities and limited space for movement in the political field are also done to this oppressed race (Hasbrouck, 2020; Nuriddin et al., 2020). Through this journal, the writers want to discuss and analyze the racial violence in the *Black Rage* song. The following are the lyrics of *Black Rage* by Lauryn Hill;

Verse One

*Black Rage is founded on two-thirds a person
Rapings and beatings and suffering that worsens
Black human packages tied up in strings
Black rage can come from all these kinds of things*

Verse Two

*Black rage is founded on blatant denial
Squeezed economics, subsistence survival
Deafening silence and social control
Black rage is founded on wounds in the soul*

Chorus

*When the dogs bit
When the beatings
When I'm feeling sad
I simply remember all these kinds of things and then I don't fear so bad*

Verse Three

*Black rage is founded: who fed us self hatred
Lies and abuse, while we waited and waited
Spiritual treason, this grid and its cages
Black rage is founded on these kind of things*

Verse Four

*Black rage is founded on draining and draining
Threatening your freedom to stop your complaining
Poisoning your water while they say it's raining
Then call you mad for complaining, complaining*

Verse Five

*Old time bureaucracy drugging the youth
Black rage is founded on blacking the truth
Murder and crime, compromise and distortion
Sacrifice, sacrifice who makes this fortune?*

Verse Six

*Greed, falsely called progress
Such human contortion,
Black rage is founded on these kinds of things*

Chorus

Verse Seven

*Free enterprise, is it myth or illusion?
Forcing you back into purposed confusion
Black human trafficking or blood transfusion?
Black rage is founded on these kinds of things*

Verse Eight

*Victims of violence both psyche and body
Life out of context is living ungodly
Politics, politics
Greed falsely called wealth
Black rage is founded on denial of self*

Chorus (GeniusMedia, 2020)

In the first line of the song, Hill begins the song by discussing the idea that black anger has its basis in the "two-thirds of the people" idea. This idea represents stagnation and the inability to learn through a certain point. In this *Black Rage* by Lauryn Hill calls for courage against racial oppression and violence (GeniusMedia, 2020). Miss Hill dedicated this song to Michael Brown and all the protesters who have spoken out about police brutality and the value of black lives. Michael brown was an 18 year old African American man who was shot and killed by Darrell Wilson, a police officer in Ferguson (GeniusMedia, 2020). Fragments of words or lyrics that contain evidence of racial violence are found in all of *Black Rage's* verses. In a fragment of the lyrics; "Black human trafficking or blood transfusion?" explains how cruel the racial violence was at that time that considers black people like goods to be commodified extensively.

The Chronicles of Racial Violence

Racial violence according to Richardson & Goff is self-threats in producing racially disparate violence (Richardson & Goff, 2014). The practice of degrading the black race became commonplace because of the belief in the ideology of skin supremacy. It is done where the idea of whites is superior to blacks, so that the black race is often despised and treated (Hasbrouck, 2020; Mitchell & MacFarlane, 2022). In the context of the police, aggression of different races is prolonged by justifying the violence. That is, a threat to self itself can provoke acts of individual violence and provoke justification for violence. Unlike the violence that seems clearly motivated by racial enmity, racially differentiated violence stemming from self-threat may be easier to justify, letting the different results stick with impunity (Mitchell & MacFarlane, 2022; Richardson & Goff, 2014).

Racial violence is defined as an act that is intentionally carried out to oppress or arrest a party or group because of racial differences. In fact, there are no special characteristics of racial violence, but racial violence has the characteristics that violence or detention occurs as a result of racial differences (Lentin, 2018; MacFarlane & Mitchell, 2019). The history of racial violence occurred when the 18th century was marked by communal conflicts in America caused by articles, as well as conflicts between the white race and the black race, also marked by the end of the civil war in America in 1865. This civil war also occurred in against the background of opposition to the provisions including the racial violence that occurred at that time (Hasbrouck, 2020). After the civil war ended, black racial groups were given the same rights as white racial groups, including the prohibition of racial violence and the right to access public accommodation and the same transportation. On the basis of the unfulfilled rights of the black race, racial violence began to occur.

The concept of racial violence theory is the difference or multiculturalism that exists in society. In many times, the violence is also intertwined with concept of gender, religion, even class differences between low and high-class

people (MacFarlane & Mitchell, 2019; Richter-Montpetit & Howell, 2019). An act can be called racial violence if the act is an act of threat or an act of intimidation either psychological, physical or social and involves race. This type of racial violence is no different from other acts of violence, covering all actions that threaten a particular party or group. It can be concluded that or types of racial violence are very broad, including physical (direct) or indirect (psychological) violence (Hasbrouck, 2020; MacFarlane & Mitchell, 2019). An example of direct racist violence is carrying out actions that hurt different parties or groups with the aim of physically damaging the victim.

Meanwhile, indirect racial violence is an act that causes pain to the victim, for example bullying. Since indicators of racial violence include physical, psychological and social background of racial conflict, it is not only physical that is subject to sanctions. Bullying can also affect changes in the existing social system because of this threat. The main idea of racial violence is how that action is based on racial issues. The threats may be vary from light to heavy ones, but the essence is still the same; hatred on a particular race (Hasbrouck, 2020; Richter-Montpetit & Howell, 2019).

Racial discrimination is the starting point of racial violence. The concept is the treatment of the majority group that marginalizes the minority due to racial differences. It could be structural or individual, and may be because of both. Structural discrimination is shown when the legal institution prefers a race to have more privilege than another does (Richter-Montpetit & Howell, 2019). The absence of lawful treatment in society also worsens the idea of the discrimination. The government official with their power could also nod to this discrimination. Though some of them deny the discrimination, they could not totally say no because they are part of the system. Individual hatred is the other aspect of the discrimination. Those who are whites tend to accuse the blacks for doing criminal doings, take their jobs, and even contaminate the society for no exact reason (Blauner, 2022; Graham et al., 2020). The individual one is also not alone, but accompanied by idea of structural hatred as well.

The idea of racial violence could not be separated from idea of race profiling. In this concept, those who are considered subordinate must obey those who dominant. The profiling itself is not neutral but regarding various degrading aspects of analysis (Nuriddin et al., 2020; Richter-Montpetit & Howell, 2019). This aspect is also matter of the prolonging racial stigma in which the victim could not go anywhere besides living the label. Indeed, it is so negative that is bad for the victim yet bring more privilege to those who can do the profiling. In this idea, racial hierarchy is inevitable though it is not certainly stated in natural aspect. Human is not born with option based on the race. Each is born regarding any given race (Richardson & Goff, 2014; Small & Pager, 2020). Most of them must face the violence because of what they could not choose. They must say yes to the hierarchy though they must bear the disadvantages by their own selves.

In addition, racial stereotype is also part of reality of race today. The stereotype is similar to idea of stigma in which people do not define themselves but being dictated arbitrarily by others. Those with darker skin color could not

go forward though they may have reached such better level of cultural capital (Mitchell & MacFarlane, 2022; Small & Pager, 2020). For example, someone who have reached better education will not be considered equal with others due to his/her skin color. Other instance is that those who drive a nice ride will be accused as thief only because he/she is black. This idea is matter of violence too in psychological aspects. It does not give freedom to people with minor skin color and must submit totally to the major color (Nuriddin et al., 2020). Therefore, further aspect of racial bias is also matter of the violence itself.

The action of racial violence is also widened reflections of racial disparities. In many aspects of life, the black people are often dehumanized since they could not go to the core aspects of everyday life. They must stay on the periphery yet will be stopped to get better capital (Lentin, 2018; Small & Pager, 2020). If any capital is not reached, they could not go forward either. That is why disparities are prolonged. They could not go advanced economically and their political choices are limited and even restricted as well. All of those are due to idea of racial prejudice that emphasizes other people with different skin color are alien that must not be recognized at all (Nuriddin et al., 2020; Richter-Montpetit & Howell, 2019). Moreover, the prejudice also maintains idea of exploitation in which those who are black are used only as instruments and objects rather than be viewed as full subjects that could determine themselves.

Black Rage as Matter of Racial Violence

The lyrics of the song *Black Rage* by Lauryn Hill have a theme of racism. The racism contained in the song is racial violence. Every part of the lyrics of the song contains racism to black people. The action then results to further discrimination to corner one party or a different group. Here are lyrics that contain racial violence:

*Black Rage is founded on two-thirds a person
Rapings and beatings and suffering that worsens
Black human packages tied up in strings
Black rage can come from all these kinds of things*

First verse indicates that black people is not considered as the fullest of persons, but only two-third of them. This matter emphasizes unequal rights given to the black people since they are still seen as aliens. The condition is worsened by explicit violence especially in beating and raping (Anderson et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2020). Raping here means covering an urgent situation and forcing the black race to serve the lust of the white race. This greatly adds to the torture of the black race because they cannot live freely like other humans who are free to express their rights. Even in the 19th century, the black race was considered a creation of nature or the work of God who was indeed created as a servant for the white race. Beating here means racial violence that is expressed in the form of actions that hurt the black race (Blauner, 2022; Hasbrouck, 2020). The black race was considered like animals that under any circumstance when the white race did not get what they wanted, they could torture the black race at

any time. In fact, the white race felt that the black race accepted the fate of those who were persecuted because there was no resistance. This was what exacerbated the condition of racial violence at that time (Hasbrouck, 2020; Lentin, 2018).

Those two actions are done since they are not well-recognized by society. Humans feel alive when their human rights are fulfilled, but these rights are not obtained by the black race because of the suffering they experience. The rights of the black race, including civil rights, have continued to be fought for since the 19th century to create a movement that was named Martin Luther King as someone who was persistent in fighting for the rights of the black race (Small & Pager, 2020). The white people and the government prolong the suffering by always making black people as victim who could never fight back. Hill then also says that someday black people will rise up and bring such black rage as the result of the suffering for ages (GeniusMedia, 2020).

*Black rage is founded on blatant denial
Squeezed economics, subsistence survival
Deafening silence and social control
Black rage is founded on wounds in the soul*

The second verse indicates understanding that the rage is such result of white people who do not want to admit for what they have done to black people. They always blamed the others yet they are the ones that do bad things to darker color. Squeezed economics is also categorized as racial violence. It is because the treatment to the black race can narrow the comfortable living space that the black race gets because of economic pressure (Mitchell & MacFarlane, 2022; Richardson & Goff, 2014). This economic pressure makes the black race lacking. As result, many cases of hunger may occur do to extended discrimination.

Colored people could not move forward since they could only focus on surviving everyday life. Their voices are never listened since their choices are restricted. They must always follow the rules yet those do not take side to them. They are always controlled socially yet white people could do anything out of control (Lang & Spitzer, 2020; Small & Pager, 2020). Those will only worsen the wounds of the victims. Black people will never get better spaces, but only suffering that will never end. They could no longer choose better life that they want. It is due to they are always dictated by the dominant one.

*When the dogs bit
When the beatings
When I'm feeling sad
I simply remember all these kinds of things and then I don't fear so bad*

The chorus is quite sad since Hill shows that black people are victims of the dogs of the police and the beatings of their sticks. They will never leave the stigma extended and expanded until now. Hill also feels sad about it and she

could never compare the suffering of her people to any other bad destinies (GeniusMedia, 2020). Indeed, she has no fear about it and she will never add more sadness to it, but she believes that black people will struggle and be succeeded to reach better future.

*Black rage is founded: who fed us self-hatred
Lies and abuse, while we waited and waited
Spiritual treason, this grid and its cages
Black rage is founded on these kind of things*

The third verse above indicates that the black rage is about self-hatred. Since black people are often oppressed, they tend to have low self-esteem. They could not advance besides merely waiting for things to change. Lies and abuse are their staple foods that make them feel like in cage. This is true aspect of violence that affects physical condition as seen in abuses and in lies that shape mental breakdown to them (Lang & Spitzer, 2020; Richardson & Goff, 2014). They no longer believe in such evolution since they are always fed with hatred. What they could think of is revolution in which total new condition may come for people to live in harmony, not in bad stigma of otherness.

*Black rage is founded on draining and draining
Threatening your freedom to stop your complaining
Poisoning your water while they say it's raining
Then call you mad for complaining, complaining*

The fourth verse is how the singer shows condition of black society. In wider structure, black people are prohibited to own and share their freedom. From freedom of choice, to have better education, to express their feelings, all of them are restrained from them. They keep being drained from what they really are as human beings. They are powerless and prolonged victims of the white people. If they complain, they do not meet government official easily, but they have to face the sticks that result to other violence again (Blauner, 2022; Richardson & Goff, 2014). Freedom is such illusion for them since threatening is what will come forward if they try to express their own ideas.

About the facilities, black people also feels inadequate matter of everyday life. For example, access to clean water is limited though they know that it is everywhere. They could not get better consumption that will affect to their health as well (Graham et al., 2020; Nuriddin et al., 2020). The source are abundant, but they are prohibited to reach that. If they try to say no about it, they could only complain, and even they are assumed not to be thankful. In other word, they will also be left since they are considered as abnormal or even mad.

*Old time bureaucracy drugging the youth
Black rage is founded on blacking the truth
Murder and crime, compromise and distortion
Sacrifice, sacrifice who makes this fortune?*

The fifth verse tells that the rage is flourished due to any old bureaucracy that is still intact. The bureaucracy includes segregation between white and black people that always make the current situations worse. Black people could not leave the world of the oppressed since the law also maintains that bad situation (Blauner, 2022; Lang & Spitzer, 2020). It also affect the youth that could not get better life so that the black society could not go anywhere either. The truth is blackened that means they do not have power to change things and must always nod to what is provided to them (Anderson et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2020).

The murder is also familiar to black people. Some facts that can be seen to date regarding crimes and killings against the black race are; black people are more often victims of shootings to death, black people are more often arrested and jailed for drug cases, blacks are more judged to have committed crimes and imprisoned (Blauner, 2022; Graham et al., 2020). They are always falsely connected to any crime and they could not prove that they are not wrong. It is because their voices are shut, unheard, and even dampened. Even law does not take side to them. Sacrifice is made in many oppressions involved (Anderson et al., 2022; Hasbrouck, 2020). It also includes the sacrifice of energy when enslaved, a comfortable life which has become such wishful thinking.

*Greed, falsely called progress
Such human contortion,
Black rage is founded on these kinds of things*

The sixth verse emphasizes how greed is also being carried out not only by the white race, but also by the government with the aim of exacerbating the conditions of racial violence of the black race. Black citizens were also restricted in terms of working in the fields, so their economy could not grow (Anderson et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2020). They could only see others grow by embracing progress, but they have to accept bitter fate that they are not part of that. They are the ones that keep being drained while others enjoy wealth as results of the greed. They are the objects as the tools merely for the subjects. Black people must live under the undermining gaze of others. They are not being seen as themselves but being objects of contorted mind of society (Carlson, 2020; Hasbrouck, 2020).

*Free enterprise, is it myth or illusion?
Forcing you back into purposed confusion
Black human trafficking or blood transfusion?
Black rage is founded on these kinds of things*

The seventh verse involves how free market means nothing for the black people. They must think that it is a myth that reflects such illusion for them. Even they could not see their figures in the mirror of it. Black people are confused of living everyday life, not because of abundant choices but because of

the destined ones for them (Graham et al., 2020; McCoy, 2020). They are not provided with much choices, and even if there were choices, the discriminations will always follow.

Human trafficking is also carried out by the white race to the black race. This trade aims to enslave or even the black race that is considered as a gratification of lust. The white race thought that the more descendants of the black race, the more slaves were born to fulfill the desires of the white race. Slavery is already prohibited, but it transforms to modern aspects in which wages are not fully paid, segregated educations, and also stigma of doing many crimes (Graham et al., 2020; McCoy, 2020). The blood transfusion referred to here is the blood of the black race and the blood of the white race that are always distinguished even though they have the same blood type. Even in terms of health, the black race was provided with low quality medical services and doctors (Graham et al., 2020; Hasbrouck, 2020). It is so much different from what the white race gets.

*Victims of violence both psyche and body
Life out of context is living ungodly
Politics, politics
Greed falsely called wealth
Black rage is founded on denial of self*

The eight verse above exposes the oppression perpetrated against the black race not only hurts the body, but also the soul of the black race. Violence is an act of hurting someone or a group, both physically and mentally (Lentin, 2018; Mitchell & MacFarlane, 2022). Some of the violence experienced by the black race are human trafficking, beatings, rape, murder, and so on. As a government, it should provide comfort and security for its citizens, but it is the government that participates in oppressing the black race. Even the rights conveyed about the suppression were not heard. They must get treatment in ungodly ways though they embrace religions well. They could do nothing against wealth since even their self is not well founded in social and political ways (Carlson, 2020; Lavalley & Johnson, 2022).

Discrimination against black people in the lyrics is very visible (GeniusMedia, 2020). In the verses, the lyrics mention physical/direct evidence of racial violence. What distinguishes it from violence in general is the context of violence aimed at minorities and/or racism against the black race that causes mental wounds. The idea is in accordance with Racial Violence by Richardson and Goff as it creates violence and loses the rights of those who are cornered (Richardson & Goff, 2014). In this song, the rights of black people are not well received, they are even treated like goods that are even traded, tied up with ropes, suppressed, and not given the freedom to live in peace.

CONCLUSION

Black Rage is a song by Lauryn Hill that contains the enmity of black and white races, including police brutality that does not respect the black race. Black people could only have limited access to social facilities and space for

movement in the political field. The oppression of the black race causes the loss of human rights, in which black people are tortured and enslaved. Racial violence shows that the practice of degrading the black race became commonplace because of the belief in the ideology of skin supremacy.

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