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#SayHerName

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#SayHerName**Overview**

The African American Policy Forum (AAPF) launched the #SayHerName political movement in February 2015 to recognize black women who have lost their lives to police brutality. Founded by Drs. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Luke Charles Harris, the think tank’s initiative brings together nine prominent leaders of racial justice and gender equality from numerous ethnicities, backgrounds and academic disciplines. The team hopes that by making police killings of black women visible, we can begin to reform discriminatory practices in law enforcement. The movement’s appellation, #SayHerName, pulls from a rich tradition of African American oration, in which repetition and the volley of call-and-response helps the storyteller and the listener remember the narrative (Daniel and Smitherman 1976). The #SayHerName movement also emphasizes that names have meaning—these crimes are not faceless.

Rationale

In this lesson plan, students will use the Daniel-Smitherman theory of Black communication to explore why the #SayHerName movement has resonated with people of African descent around the world. Sociolinguists Jack Daniel and Geneva Smitherman (2004) suggest that all blacks share what they call an “African world view,” which includes unity between the spiritual and material worlds, the centrality of religion, harmony in nature, a society patterned after natural rhythms, and a communicative pattern of call-and-response. Call-and-response, they claim, is a “‘perfected social interaction’ that embodies communality rather than individuality” (5). They offer the church as a place to witness call-response in action, where the speaker (the preacher) gains his oratorical strength from the verbal affirmations of his listeners (the congregation). The response to “Say that, pastor!” or “Amen, pastor!” are a uniquely black communicative rhythm that volleys language back-and-forth.

Internet researchers have observed call-and-response among black users on popular social networks too. Sharma (2013) found that so-called “Black Twitter”—which features a subset of African American Twitter users—has higher levels of reciprocity than mainstream Twitter users. This means that Black Twitter users actually follow their followers back, even though Twitter’s infrastructure does not require this kind of mutual relationship. Black Twitter users also employ the “@” reply function more commonly than white users, which allows real-time, person-to-person dialogue about timely issues. This may provide a good framework for explaining why blacks use Twitter at higher rates than any other ethnic group (Smith 2015). Twitter provides real-time call-and-response. Every new Tweet that bears an identical blacktag takes the discourse to a higher and higher level. Reaching Twitter’s “Trending Topics” status could be considered the highest communal affirmation.

Social movements such as #SayHerName and #BlackLivesMatter have reached levels of online contagion that mirror its real-life engagement with its desired audiences. This lesson plan explores how tried-and-true African American communication patterns fuel the success of these campaigns, through new technocultural packages. Students will be able to identify repetition when it is used as an oratorical technique in storytelling or song. This lesson also will teach

students how *call-and-response* functions in the Daniel-Smitherman black communication paradigm to give #SayHerName its power. This lesson culminates with students responding critically to the #SayHerName movement's call-to-action, by producing a short video, song, or essay about the women who have lost their lives to police brutality.

Timeline

This lesson is appropriate for undergraduates at all four levels of study. It should take one week to teach and another week to allow students to present their work. The “hybrid” course for which the assignment was designed meets twice a week: once online and once in-person. If you choose to “flip” your class in this manner, have students begin the lesson by reading all of the sources provided in the bibliography on the first day. Use the “in-person” portion of the class, during the second meeting day of the week, to screen the video and audio media. Use the accompanying discussion questions to get the students thinking about call-and-response in its updated forms.

Preliminary Readings

Assign the following background readings to students before beginning the lesson:

- Official Site: African American Policy Forum. <http://www.aapf.org>.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams and Andrea J. Ritchie. *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*. African American Policy Forum: New York. <http://bit.ly/1OMTkho>.
- Daniel, Jack L. and Geneva Smitherman. 1976. “How I Got Over: Communication Dynamics in the Black Community.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 62: 26-39.

Videos

Screen the following videos in class with your students, or “flip” your class by posting these videos online in your learning management system. You may use the corresponding questions to guide the discussion about the videos.

“Black Women Killed by Police Are Being Forgotten: #SayHerName”

By AJ+

<https://youtu.be/PyxbfvVgojs>

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the death of black men at the hands of police garners more national press coverage than black women murders by police?
2. How does the #SayHerName movement employ the Daniel-Smitherman theory of Black communication?

**“Say Her Name:
Families Seek Justice in Overlooked Police Killings of African-American Women”
By Democracy Now
https://youtu.be/jMV5_lYR6Y**

Discussion Questions

1. Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw states in the film that we have familiar frames of reference for police brutality when it happens to black men, such as the repression of black masculinity or state-sponsored lynching. What frames do you think we should begin to use to understand police brutality that black women experience?
2. Do you think the #SayHerName movement frames the slain women as sympathetic victims? Why or why not?

Audio

This summer, R&B artist Janelle Monae released a protest anthem to support the #SayHerName movement. Listen to Monae’s song, “Hell You Talmbout,” in class. You can stream it online at: <https://soundcloud.com/wondalandarts/hell-you-talmbout>.

**“Hell You Talmbout”
By Janelle Monae and Wondaland
<https://soundcloud.com/wondalandarts/hell-you-talmbout>**

Discussion Questions

1. In one word, how would you describe the tone of this song?
2. How does Monae and her group use repetition as a technique in this song? Is it effective? Why or why not?
3. How does Monae and her group use call-and-response as a technique in this song? Is it effective? Why or why not?
4. Are there any other sonic elements in this song that “feel” distinctly African or African American? If so, what are these elements and how do they function?

Assessments

The theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1989) suggests that students process new information differently. The eight intelligences include: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist. Offer at least three different assessments that cater to the varying intelligences that you may have in your classroom. Feel free to add more assessments to culminate this lesson. Here are some samples.

Spatial Intelligence: #SayHerName Video

1. Ask students to produce a one-minute #SayHerName video.
2. The video should feature images of some of the fallen women that the movement commemorates.
3. The video should feature either repetition or call-and-response as its communication technique.
4. For more information on how to edit video once students shoot it with a cellphone or computer webcam, have them view, “How I Edit My YouTube Videos.” <https://youtu.be/aHocQeo9ibY>.

Musical Intelligence: #SayHerName Song

1. Ask students to write a song in which they convey their feelings about the #SayHerName movement.
2. Songs must include either repetition or call-and-response as a key communication technique.
3. For tips on how to write a song, students can view the YouTube Tutorial: “How to Write a Song—Top Ten Tips.” <https://youtu.be/f3IFkhRTYsI>.

Linguistic Intelligence: #SayHerName Essay

1. Ask students to write an essay that argues either for or against the following statement:
The #SayHerName movement restores the humanity to black women who have lost their lives at the hands of police.
2. The essay should employ repetition as a key communication technique.

Grading Rubric

Students’ grades for this assignment will be based on the following criteria:

1. Does this video/song/essay employ repetition or call-and-response? (1-5 points)
2. Does this video/song/essay feature the name of a fallen woman? (1-5 points)
3. Is this project presented in a polished and thorough manner? (1-5 points)
4. Is this project well-organized and compelling? (1-5 points)

A—Exemplary = 18-20 points

B—Proficient = 16-17 points

Partially Proficient or Requires Resubmission = 15 points or less

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Biography

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Allissa V. Richardson teaches mobile journalism at Bowie State University. She is a two-time Apple Distinguished Educator, a Harvard University Nieman Foundation Journalism Fellow, and the 2012 Journalism Educator of the Year for the National Association of Black Journalists. She has taught students throughout Africa and North America how to report news using only smartphones and tablets.