

Ingeborg Morawetz

The Black Lives Matter movement and representations of black male identity

The tragic hero as a guiding figure in the cultural discourse

Master's Thesis

YOUR KNOWLEDGE HAS VALUE



- We will publish your bachelor's and master's thesis, essays and papers
- Your own eBook and book - sold worldwide in all relevant shops
- Earn money with each sale

Upload your text at www.GRIN.com
and publish for free



Bibliographic information published by the German National Library:

The German National Library lists this publication in the National Bibliography; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de> .

This book is copyright material and must not be copied, reproduced, transferred, distributed, leased, licensed or publicly performed or used in any way except as specifically permitted in writing by the publishers, as allowed under the terms and conditions under which it was purchased or as strictly permitted by applicable copyright law. Any unauthorized distribution or use of this text may be a direct infringement of the author s and publisher s rights and those responsible may be liable in law accordingly.

Imprint:

Copyright © 2017 GRIN Verlag
ISBN: 9783668504776

This book at GRIN:

<https://www.grin.com/document/371884>

Ingeborg Morawetz

The Black Lives Matter movement and representations of black male identity

The tragic hero as a guiding figure in the cultural discourse

GRIN - Your knowledge has value

Since its foundation in 1998, GRIN has specialized in publishing academic texts by students, college teachers and other academics as e-book and printed book. The website www.grin.com is an ideal platform for presenting term papers, final papers, scientific essays, dissertations and specialist books.

Visit us on the internet:

<http://www.grin.com/>

<http://www.facebook.com/grincom>

http://www.twitter.com/grin_com

The Black Lives Matter movement and representations of black male identity

The tragic hero as a guiding figure in the cultural discourse

Master's Thesis

Literary Studies: Literature in Society

University of Leiden

Ingeborg Maria Morawetz

June 20, 2017

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Guiding Principles of #BlackLivesMatter in Three Historical Films.....	5
• Black Cinematic Representation and the Concepts of Double-Consciousness and Postmemory.....	9
• The Visualization of Double-Consciousness in Footage of Police Brutality	12
• Old Wine in New Skins: Constructing Black Masculinity in the Three Films.....	15
• Gender as Power.....	23
• The Hero as an Embodiment of Societal Values	29
• The Transformation into a Hero: An Investigation in Three Scenes	34
• A New Representation of Black Manhood Paves the Way.....	48
Chapter 2: The Guiding Principles of #BlackLivesMatter in its Unofficial Anthem “Alright”.....	53
• Masculinity and Agency: Encoded Hip Hop Elements in “Alright” and <i>To Pimp a Butterfly</i>	56
• The Street Code of Nihilism: Lamar's Tragic Narrative and “Second Sight”.....	63
• A New Representation of Black Agency: “Alright” as a Leading Narrative	69
Conclusion.....	72
Works Cited.....	74

Introduction

The Black Lives Matter movement started with a hashtag: in 2012 Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi created the slogan “Black Lives Matter” after a case of police brutality that led to the death of seventeen-year old Trayvon Martin (BLM website). After 2012 eight more cases of fatal police brutality became public. Seven of the victims were people of color, mostly African Americans (Akkoc, World Heritage Encyclopedia), and all of them were male.

From the guiding principles of BLM it becomes obvious, however, that the original idea behind the movement mainly focused on the inclusion of minority groups within Black communities, rather than only on racialized police violence. BLM states that it is about “celebrating difference(s)” in general, that it “goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes” and that it “affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum” and “centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements” (BLM website): every black person is supposed to be “part of the global Black family.” The three founders also attach importance to the correct use of the hashtag, and in the case of the usage of variations of the original hashtag insist on explicit acknowledgment of the original movement, calling unacknowledged borrowing explicitly a “theft of Black queer women's work.” The founders emphasize that in gender questions BLM is committed to “building a Black women affirming space free from sexism, misogyny, and malecenteredness” (BLM website).

The movement gained great popularity not only with hashtag-users and participants in protests, but it was also immediately picked up by the media and in public debates, while numerous variations of the slogan emerged to either mock or hijack the movement. The media attention can be divided into three different kinds: reports about the movement in connection to the police shootings, reports about protests and current incidents, and a wider field in which BLM was connected to the cultural scene in the US from 2012 to the present, which I will refer to as the cultural discourse.

Part of this cultural discourse are Steve McQueen's movie *12 Years A Slave* (2013), Ava DuVernay's movie *Selma* (2014) and Nate Parker's movie *The Birth of a Nation* (2016), all three historical dramas, as well as Kendrick Lamar's album *To Pimp A Butterfly* (2015). All four cultural productions were directly connected to BLM by the media. They were brought up in discussions about and within the movement, and, even though BLM was initially created in response to racially motivated police brutality, the three movies also triggered debates about other cultural and societal issues, such as the acknowledgment and representation of Black directors and actors in US cinema. Although Lamar's album provided the anthem of the movement, "Alright", and addresses police brutality in the other songs as well, it also uses a number of common rap themes, treating women, for instance, from a male-centered and at first glance misogynist perspective. Especially when we look at other Hip Hop artists connected to BLM as well, it becomes clear that the pop-cultural narrative that is associated with BLM is actually about black heterosexual men. Considering that the three founders of BLM are, in their own words, "queer Black women," this contextualization of the movement is surprising. I am interested in the incongruity between the original principles of BLM and its public appearance in (pop)cultural contexts that put a black male heterosexual narrative in the foreground.

The reason for this intertextual/popcultural (mis-)representation can be found in the intergenerational composition and decentralized structure in BLM. The youngest generation of black participants of BLM was not only the one to pick up the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter and thus spread awareness of the movement, initially predominantly in social media (BLM website, Jackson), but also the generation that identifies most with recent pop-cultural releases in the music and film industry. However, it is also a generation that grew up with the consciousness of a lack of equality and social injustice in US society and the awareness of a different perception of black identity by white people, partly because the history of the experience of social injustice and racial prejudice was passed on to them by older generations. The duality of self-perception was already