
Volume 5 *The Revolution Is Now Being
Televised and Tweeted: Black Protest,
Preaching, and (Re)Presentations, From the
Black Arts Movement to #BlackLivesMatter,
c. 1965-2016*

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The Politics of Engagement in the Digital Age

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The Politics of Engagement in the Digital Age
Sherlynn Allen-Harris, Guest Editor

Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it. —Edmund Burke

EDITORIAL

Although Edmund Burke did not live in our time, his vision, nonetheless, is true and speaks to us over time. With the questionable election of President Donald J. Trump, many believe earth is sliding off its political axis—so to speak. I believe human nature is such that most of us would like to believe in the inherent goodness of most people. This election, however, calls into question these beliefs that I, and many of my peers, have held since we were children under our parent's care. "Follow the golden rule," "treat others as you wish to be treated," "hard work will be rewarded," etc., were the platitudes we heard in our formative years.

While these bits of wisdom from the elders helped to guide and inspire us to be the best we could be, there were others whose rearing gave them an alternative inspiration that was diametrically opposed to the values many of us hold dear. They were obviously taught that the empowerment and self-determination of a very large segment of the U.S. population somehow diminishes them. Those who are economically disadvantaged and those deemed disadvantaged based on artificial constructs such as race, culture, and ethnicity are a threat to their super-inflated sense of superiority.

One part of this group is populated by those who do understand the lessons of history and are bound, by this election, to repeat that history. Indeed, they would love to return to the *good old days* when they, wealthy White men, were in control of politics along with politics of the economy, the social structure, and the politics of control over women's bodies—and black and brown bodies in particular. The politics of control over bodies and institutional brutality are particularly egregious and sinister.

Another segment of this population is comprised of those who have been manipulated by the media and other questionable sources into believing they have a vested interest in siding with those mentioned above, who actually hold them in a great deal of disdain. Think of the *47 percent* Mitt Romney mentioned in his 2012 election bid. More recently, Trump chided some of his loyal supporters who chanted the familiar campaign refrain of "lock her up" (speaking of Hilary Clinton) that the hype was only for the election. "We don't need that anymore," he said, during one of his many victory tours.

Into this mix steps the hashtag resistance. This resistance is a cross-section of the U.S. population that has begun movements that articulate and address issues covering a broad spectrum of concerns, from racial justice to women's rights, to pay equity, to voter's rights, and more. These average Americans seem driven by a desperate need to hold onto and expand what they understand about the machinations of our democratic society—free and open elections, the guarantees of our civil liberties, and constitutional amendments. Indeed, they understand they *are the People* stated in the *Preamble* of the U.S. Constitution. They know well how to engage the apparatus of free speech—and they're not afraid to do it in this digital age.

Organic movements, those whose seeds have been sown and germinated in the rich soil of the peoples' discontent with political affairs in this country, are growing exponentially. Some

of these hashtag movements are quite well-known. #BlackLivesMatter was probably the most recognizable over the course of the past six years. Unfortunately, there are those seeking to discredit this movement by falsely connecting it with violence.

The Reverend Dr. William Barber's #MoralResistance movement is engaging citizens across differing political perspectives with its connecting threads based in civil and human rights. These disparate groups are coalescing around principles they deem as having enough moral latitude to require a response in the form of resistance. According to the Reverend Dr. Barber, #MoralResistance is a fusion movement that is connected to other hashtags, including #MoralMondays and #StandingDownIsNotAnOption!

Social networking of this sort has changed the way the world expresses and defines itself. Caution must be taken here, however. There are other hashtag movements, such as #MakeAmericaWhiteAgain, that are actually making America very unsafe again. Regrettably, some elected officials will continue exploiting these groups to keep their votes.

According to Edmund Burke, "All tyranny needs to gain a foothold is for people of good conscience to remain silent."

The American story shows that silence has never been an option. Not from the dawn of the American Revolution, to shouts of "Black Power," to the first cries of "Black Lives Matter." History has always vindicated the righteous freedom fighter.