

## **Magic Embodied: The Future is Black Girl Magic**

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**Jordan-Zachery, Julia S. and Duchess Harris, eds. *Black Girl Magic Beyond the Hashtag: Twenty-First-Century Acts of Self-Definition*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2019. 216 pages, ISBN 9780816539536. Pbk. \$19.95.**

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In 2013, CaShawn Thompson contributed greatly to discourses about the Black experience by introducing “#BlackGirlMagic,” a social movement that seeks to recognize the beauty and achievements of Black girls, women, and femmes. The movement also offers an intersectional approach towards understanding the intricacy of the Black experience by taking into account the complexity of race, gender, sexuality, social class, and disability. The movement has deeply inspired many scholars, authors, and artists including Julia S. Jordan Zachery and Duchess Harris, whose book, *Black Girl Magic Beyond the Hashtag: Twenty-First-Century Acts of Self-Definition* demonstrates Black girls’, women’s, and femmes’ ways of using “magic” in everyday life. The collective phrase is often applied by the editors in order to, on the one hand, maintain an inclusive language and, on the other hand, to emphasize the intersectional nature of the Black individual’s identity. The volume is an interdisciplinary collection of Black feminist scholars’ distinct interpretations of Thompson’s concept. The editors suggest that the unique, yet multilayered meaning of magic lies within its “intersection with the lived realities of Black girlhood and womanhood” (6). They additionally note that their approach to magic encompasses all the tenets of political and cultural behaviors—identity, power, and justice—that Black intersectional feminists consider as focal points of Black activism. While #BlackGirlMagic is an online form of activism recording and sharing real-time events

concerning the Black experience, the book's Black Girl Magic, without the hashtag, targets the practice of offline self-definition, self-reflectiveness, and claims for space.

Other possible interpretations and definitions of Thompson's Black Girl Magic are examined by Zachery and Harris, two Black intersectional feminist women, both experts on the function of social media as a tool of mobilizing Black communities. Zachery has published several works that concern Black women's position in a neoliberal and neocolonial context. Her *Shadow Bodies: Black Women, Ideology, Representation, and Politics* (2017) examines online platforms as tools of vocalizing problems related to systemic racism, police brutality, and the underrepresentation of Black victims. Harris's recent publication, *Black Feminist Politics from Kennedy to Trump* (2019) investigates the effect of offline Black Girl Magic on Black feminist movements and policies. Taking into consideration feminist leaders and organizers of Black Lives Matter and the contribution of Black feminism to the fight against systemic racism, her work reinterprets the notion of gender and sexual politics from an intersectional feminist perspective.

The jointly edited volume explores the ability to reclaim the past, challenge the interlocking oppressive systems in the present, and reimagine a future through a Black lens. Considering intersectional feminism, Black womanism, and critical race theory, the book explores the transgressive practices in Black girls', women's, and femmes' everyday lives to challenge and dismantle white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism. In addition to political activism, *Black Girl Magic Beyond the Hashtag* also concerns the practices that use cultural and historical perspectives to understand Black women's progress from being completely silenced to naming their own reality free from colonial influence.

The book offers an insight into the true magic of Black girls, women, and femmes rewriting the dominant narrative, hence becoming present in spaces from which they have usually been excluded. The contributors of the volume show readers that Black Girl Magic can

be observed in all walks of life—in schools, social media, popular culture, literature, spiritualism, and subcultures—to articulate the everyday magic Black girls, women, and femmes create. A great strength of the book lies in the personal recollections and first-hand experience of the contributors, which create a bridge between the authors and the audience. The publication suggests that engagement with social justice via practicing Black Girl Magic results in, first, the application of an intracommunication method to form and strengthen communities; second, the subversion of dehumanizing and stereotypical images to reclaim the power of self-definition; third, the critical interrogation of the politics of invisibility, and lastly, the restoration of the once colonized aspects—such as the agency over one’s own narrative—of Black culture (6).

In Chapter 2, Leconté J. Dill, along with three other contributing authors, sets out to critically interrogate respectability politics and analyze the methods of community formation through the shared experience of being controlled by toxic norms. Generally, respectability politics is a concept created by dominant cultures against marginalized groups, prescribing a set of rules and expectations about the ideal behavior and personality of an individual. With Black people, the expectations are designed to limit and control their bodies and minds, and further, to force them to comply with the rules to be perceived as respectable citizens of society. The authors invite readers to participate in the discussions with Black girls funded by Kings Against Violence Initiative (KAVI). The organization offers a safe space for Black girls to share their personal experiences, gain agency over their narrative by naming their own reality, and lastly, to theorize about Black girlhood (65). The authors clearly outline the meaning and harmful effects of respectability politics inside and outside of Black communities. For example, the detrimental stereotypical images of Mammy, Jezebel, or Sapphire, which were created and popularized by white culture to dehumanize Black women, still exercise great power over African Americans. The negative images limit the capability of expressing gender identity,

sexuality, and emotions, resulting in the loss of agency over the body and mind. KAVI brings several examples from real-life scenarios told by young Black individuals, which allows the readers to recognize how respectability politics is normalized and internalized in people's lives and language. In light of the chapter's content, its title "I Can Only Do Me" reflects on the reclamation of power by first, deconstructing negative images surrounding the Black community, second, challenging respectability politics, and third, being able to freely express themselves without being bound by any social expectations. Therefore, Black Girl Magic in this sense means practicing self-care and using the movement as a coping mechanism in a world where Black women's, girls', and femmes' existence and contributions to society are disregarded by the dominant culture.

Chapter 4 by Porshé R. Garner and Chapter 5 by Jessica L. Robinson are two interconnected sections in the collection that closely look at Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), an organization offering a form of group work among Black girls. The two chapters further investigate how spirituality, magic, and creativity are used to decolonize the mind, survive, heal, and continuously dismantle social and political hierarchies. Garner returns to her childhood memories to recall her first spiritual Black Girl Magic experience her grandmother furnished her with. Using Audre Lorde's writings, she suggests that deeply rooted creative power and knowledge are capable of disrupting academic binaries and oppressive systems. Garner also recognizes that Black girlhood does not equal a fixed identity or physical identification, rather, she urges that Black identity should be regarded as a fluid and dynamic notion. Black spirituality allows Black individuals to recognize the endless potentials of their identity and thus, endeavor to imagine fluid futures without being disrupted by colonial influence.

In Chapter 5, Robinson challenges the invisibility of Black victims of domestic violence, systemic racism, and police brutality. Robinson connects her personal experience and

knowledge gained from her involvement with SOLHOT and the tragic death of Kasandra Perkins, a victim of domestic violence. She claims that the speculative performance of Perkins—the act of actively engaging in discourses about the brutal and violent nature of oppressive systems by being known and remembered—can become a new medium of reminiscence where knowledge, emotions, and the act of remembering are interconnected. These concepts challenge society to not view Black girls', women's, and femmes' identity as fragmented as in the case of Kassandra Perkins, for instance, perceiving her solely as a victim of domestic violence at the hands of a famous boyfriend. Thus, Perkins is not merely a label but an individual, a Black woman with a history, goals, and most significantly, with an identity of her own. Robinson goes on to reinterpret spirituality within the context of a haunting, symbolic “ghost” of Black girls, women, and femmes that are ever-present and cannot be controlled by heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, or capitalism. Being haunted by Black victims in this sense means demanding justice and a change of the system that abandoned individuals like Perkins. The strength of this chapter lies in Robinson's refusal to limit Kasandra Perkins's existence and identity to being a victim, and it also acknowledges the humanity of Perkins, which was erased by the media.

The lack of a more thorough introduction of the other chapters does not take away any of their value. Rashida L. Harrison offers a history lesson to the reader about the relevance of Black Girl Magic in grassroots Black British feminist movements during the 1970s and 1980s. In this particular chapter, she emphasizes how Black Girl Magic is both a mirror of deeply rooted power games and a channel of passing on knowledge from one generation to the next. Charlotte E. Jacobs positions Black Girl Magic within educational institutions and analyzes the strategies used in schools to counter oppression. She encourages Black girls to use emotional literacy to respond to gendered, racial, and sexual discrimination. Maro David shifts the focus to the process of claiming space in punk culture, an area Black people in general are usually

excluded from. The last chapter by Julia S. Jordan-Zachery invites the reader to an intimate and personal conversation between the author and her daughter Makeen J. Zachery about the significance and presence of Black Girl Magic in her daughter's identity.

*Black Girl Magic Beyond the Hashtag* is a comprehensive volume of offline self-definition, self-expression, and self-care of Black girls, women, and femmes. The collection opens a safe, inclusive space for all audiences to critically relate to interlocking oppressive systems that disregard Black communities' existence and magic. In an academic setting, the collection serves as a great starting point for discussions about race, gender, sexuality, class, and social justice. In addition, the book also invites all audiences to engage in social justice matters and envisage a future through the prism of Black Girl Magic.

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