

Language & Literature Final

Spurred on by the needless deaths of people like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of police, the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 have given calls for social change a new urgency, with thousands of people protesting for white accountability in almost every major city. To better analyze the protests, I have prepared two photographs to analyze, taken from TIME Magazine's Top 100 Photos of 2020. One is taken by Andre Chung on June 2, 2020, showing a Black Lives Matter protest frozen in time at Washington, D.C. Another, taken by Michael McCoy on July 28, 2020, shows a moment of appreciation for Congressman John Lewis's legacy, and an acknowledgement of the trials still to come. In these two photos, Chung and McCoy utilize color and arrangement to better communicate their respective purposes; one to show the unity present in the face of a racial and societal divide, and another to show the divide still present after decades of work to bring black rights to the forefront of American politics.

The first picture, taken by Andre Chung, shows a black protester raising his fist in the "black power" salute in front of the Washington Monument, a symbol of unity raised against a white pillar rising in the distance. Chung is trying to reach as many people as possible with this photo: protesters for a morale boost, and both neutral and opposing parties to see the power that this idea has among so many people. In this vein, Chung utilizes a gray-scale medium to de-emphasize the differences in skin color between black and white people, both of whom are protesting for the same cause in this photo. However, McCoy does give the largest scale to the black protester raising his fist to show that the conflict is only about black people, with other races on the side, behind, and in front of the protester. This group of protesters also offers an excellent contrast with the light gray sky and the Washington Monument in the distance, separating the photo into two distinct groups. Nobody knows what this exactly symbolizes except the author, but I think the white part of the picture symbolizes the white-preferring, black-oriented prejudices still prevalent in the United States, and the fist raised towards the Monument supports this train of thought well. Incidentally, Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech quite close to where this picture was taken, but I doubt this was the photographer's initial intention. In fact, this photo is not out of place from the photos taken at that famous

rally in 1963; the only difference you could tell is the presence of phones and cameras in almost every protester's hands.

The second picture, taken by Michael McCoy, shows a young black child leaning on a velvet rope gazing at the coffin of Congressman John Lewis, one of the foremost civil rights leaders of the 60s. The separation of the child from the coffin with the velvet red rope symbolizes the still existent class divide between black and white people; however, the fragility of the rope caused by the child leaning on it symbolizes that this class gap is slowly closing, caused by the efforts of the younger population. Additionally, the color of the rope and the shirt the child is wearing are the colors of the American flag, showing how both black people and the class gap are both an inherent part of America, that requires effort to meet the needs of and fix both. The white backdrop of the steps of the (random government building? idk) accentuates the color of the lone person at the bottom of the steps, showing how the racism prevalent in America is systemic and almost unconscious and requires effort to be unearthed and extinguished.

The Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 have caused many things: riots in most major cities, exposing police brutality and prejudice towards people of color, and a partial factor in white supremacists storming the Capitol. However, what no one can debate is that the protests stand for a request for freedom -- freedom in walking down the street without the fear of being gunned down by a cop and freedom in being able to afford to go to college. The only thing left to ask is -- will anybody listen?