# I rather die on my feet than live on my knees

Anti-Racism Activism in Post-Ferguson St. Louis

bachelor thesis



**Utrecht University** 

Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology

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**FRONTPAGE:** 'Retired Senior Master Sgt. Raymond Harris' by Justin Connaher, 2015 All other photos are taken in the city of St. Louis during the fieldwork by Thirza and Eline themselves.



## "I rather die on my feet than live on my knees" Anti-Racism Activism in Post-Ferguson St. Louis

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It is our duty to fight for our freedom It is our duty to win We must love each other and support each other We have nothing to lose but our chains

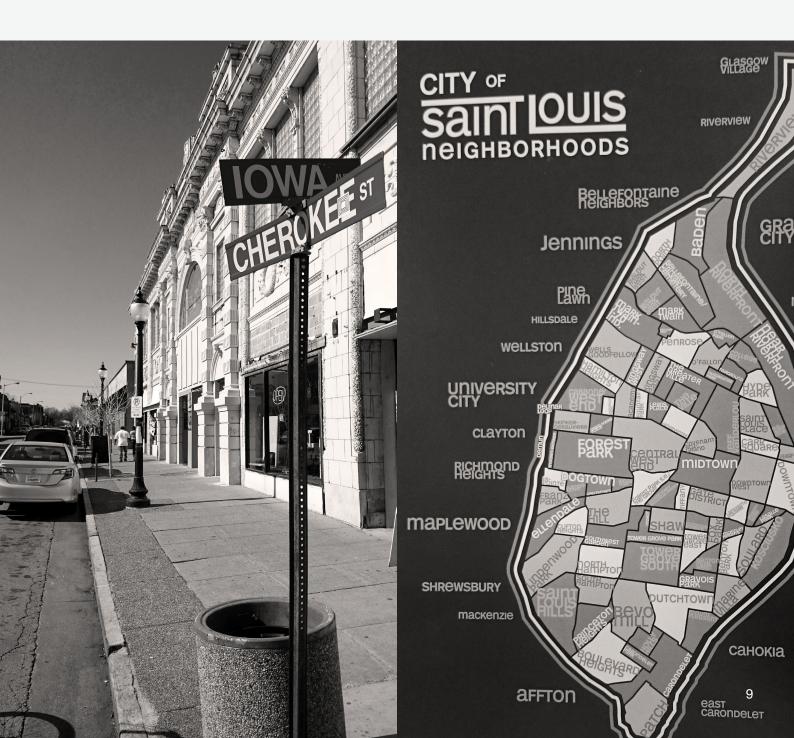
Assata Shakur

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## Maps



### Maps

Map of the United States

Figure 1: "Map of the United States" (Saint Louis University, 2016)

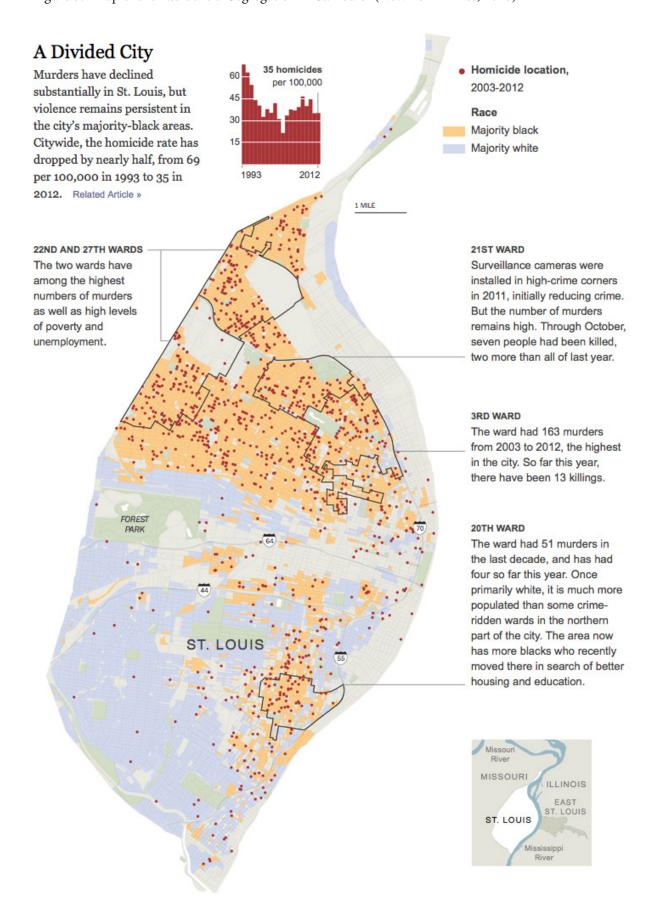


Map of Saint Louis

Figure 2: "Map of Saint Louis" (Google Maps, 2016)



### Map of the Residential Segregation in St. Louis Figure 3: "Map of the Residential Segregation in St. Louis" (New York Times, 2016)



# Acknowledgements



#### acknowledgements

### Acknowledgements

From the 3rd of February until 18 April we conducted anthropological fieldwork in St. Louis. Fieldwork is all about hanging out, participant observation and building relationships with informants in order to approach the way 'the other' speaks, behaves, thinks and feels. Although we can never feel and live like the activists, in our opinion we became insiders in the activist community of St. Louis as best as we possible could.

We would like to thank the activists of St. Louis for warmly welcoming us in their community and opening up to us. Without them letting us into their hearts, we could never have written this thesis. We admire the activists of St. Louis enormously for their bravery, dedication and perseverance, and their love. We feel immensely grateful for having had the opportunity of meeting and becoming friends with the amazing people we met during our time in St. Louis. They changed our lives. Because of them, St. Louis became to feel like home. Especially Cherokee street will forever have a special place in our hearts

Furthermore, we would like to thank the family of MoKaBe's Coffeehouse. MoKaBe's Coffeehouse has become our safe space since the very first days of our stay in St. Louis. We have spent a great amount of hours at MoKaBe's; we held several interviews there, we spent hours working on our laptops and we had lots of small talk and made fun at the bar with the staff and the regulars. They empowered us and made us feel at home.

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## Introduction



### Introduction

Ferguson is a small suburb in Missouri, the United States. It is located north from St. Louis and has approximately 21.000 inhabitants, from which 67% is 'black alone' as census has determined. The category 'black alone' implies that the African-American inhabitants in this category are not bi-racial, for 'mixed origin' is another category. A quarter of St. Louis' inhabitants are living below poverty level (United States Census Bureau 2015).

In this suburb lived the 18-year old Michael Brown, or as some of its friends named him "Big Mike". Family and neighbors knew him as a "good boy" with an easy smile, who was not the type to fight. He was an aspiring rapper and he liked to hang out and play football with his friends. His future looked great; he was just graduated from high school and was supposed to start college in a week (Lieb 2014).

He would, if he had not been shot on August 9 of 2014. Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was shot at least six times by a white police officer in Ferguson. His dead body was lying on the streets for hours in the summer sun. Witnesses do not agree on the movements that Michael Brown did or did not make before the officer shot him and if he was shot by an officer who just followed procedures or who not at all followed them up (The New York Times 2015).

The shooting initially was followed by weeks of demonstrations. Police responses included tear gas and rubber bullets. The Missouri National Guard even came to help quell the unrest. After these initial protests, demonstrations in Ferguson remained, although in smaller numbers. The case went up to court and 24 November 2014 it was decided not to indict the officer that had shot Michael Brown. This set off a new wave of anger, although with results; in March 2015, the Justice Department called on to Ferguson to revise its justice system. It declared that Ferguson had engaged in constitutional violations (The New York Times 2015).

To infer, people took the streets to show their discontent. The demonstrations show that there are citizens who demand change. This demand takes place in a society that is built on citizenship from a civic approach. But in recent times this approach is being revealed as being a myth (Kuzio 2002, 27). For, in times of crisis the *civic* element of the state can be overshadowed by the ethnic component (Kuzio 2002, 20). This return of ethnicity in the notion of citizenship brings back memories of the Civil Rights Movement and the retrospective cultural trauma of slavery, even when in the White House resides a black president for the first time in history. This shows the contradiction; it is possible to be successful as an African-American man in the United States, but this is not the lived experience of many young black men who took the streets after the shooting of Michael Brown. They feel trapped in an unjust system, surrounded by poverty and racism while lacking opportunities to create a better life for themselves.

The shooting of Michael Brown brought feelings of vexation, powerlessness and anger about the much larger feeling of discrimination through daily life among African-Americans to the surface. The demonstrations united citizens of St. Louis by their shared suffering and gave a lot of people the opportunity to find ways to stand up against racism. In this way, the shooting of Michael Brown on August 9 created a huge, flourishing social movement within the fight against racism, a movement that is characterized by its own ideologies and strategies.

Furthermore, people perceived the shooting of Michael Brown as the straw that broke the camel's back. The reason why the murder of Michael Brown was different from other killings by the police of young African-American youngsters can only be guessed. Factors that could have contributed to the fact that the reaction on the murder of Michael Brown was extraordinary could be that his body has been lying on the street for four hours for everyone to see, that it was a hot summer day and that he was not armed when he was shot by the police officer.

#### Understanding the Rise of Social Movements

To explain the increased engagement in activism after August 9, it is very important to understand the historical, social, political and economic context of the activists. This research tries to contribute knowledge about the underlying lived experiences of being passionate about engaging in activism by means of studying the case of activists against racism in St. Louis. Therefore, the main question is: *How are the motivations of anti-racism activists in St. Louis shaped by their lived experience of racialization, historical injustice, and ideas of citizenship and national identity?* To answer this question, both the memory of slavery and the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, and explicit and tacit knowledge regarding racialization, cultural trauma and citizenship, will be studied in relation to social movements and activism.

To conduct this research, we used a qualitative research design based on ethnographic fieldwork. Within ethnographic fieldwork the method of participant observation is central <sup>1</sup>. During 11 weeks of our fieldwork, we participated in a tight-knit network of Anti-racism activists who together represent a movement. We became engaged with their experiences, ideas and agency. Other anthropological methods that we used in the field to conduct this research are: informal conversations, unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews, life history interviews, community mapping and analysis of written texts and pictures on mainly social media or news articles.

#### Fieldwork on Activists against Racism in St. Louis

In the fieldwork that is conducted in St. Louis from February till April 2016, one and a half year after the shooting of Michael Brown, motivations of anti-racism activists were the main focus. The research

<sup>1</sup> Participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily life of informants in order to learn about both explicit and tacit aspects of informants' life routines and culture (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011:1).

population consists of citizens of St. Louis who are involved in social movements against racism in the United States. Social movements are to be seen in the broadest sense; informants are both individuals that are active within organizations, as well as individuals who are not associated with organizations but whom are actively spreading the message on their own either by demonstrating or by other means. In order to make sure that differing motivations, strategies and goals would be addressed, informants consist of individuals of all race, age, gender and socioeconomic background.

Racism and the corresponding activism are a heavy and sensitive topic to investigate. Due to long-term fieldwork the necessary rapport could be established. Luckily, our appearance came not across as being intimidating; we are two Dutch young women. Since, we are not 'American whites', our skin color was not threatening our research. After a while, rapport and trust increased and all kinds of activists were eager to talk to us. 'Hanging out' and being attentive listeners helped building relationships. Furthermore, the 'snowball method' was very useful in a community which is relatively tightly-knit and which strongly depends on loyalty and trust. Eventually, 27 individuals were interviewed, of which 25 are recorded and transcribed. All of the individuals that we interviewed were part of the movement in one-way or another. Besides these transcribed interviews, data consists of two little books with jot notes, almost 200 A4 pages of expanded field notes and personal experiences, a calendar and several schemes. The calendar was very helpful to keep an overview of all our activities and appointments. The schemes contained overviews of our various informants with their relevant features and contact information, research activities, conducted interviews and all the different organizations.

The design of the research is complementary. Initially, we would conduct research individually in order to both have our own segment within the activist movement. However, due safety reasons, this turned out to be impossible. We decided to make a virtue of necessity, which meant that field notes were made separately and compared in a further stage. This increased the reliability of the data, because of the in-built double check. Besides, interviews went extra smooth, because of the way we complemented each other in asking questions.

As racism is a sensitive topic, activism as a research subject also asks for a thoughtful approach. The government does not always appreciate activism; they keep an eye on some of our informants and try to oppose their activism. For this reason we tried to preserve the anonymity of our informants by not writing down alongside particular quotes when and where the interview took place. All our interviews were conducted between February 3 and April 18 in 2016. Thereby, in the field we were careful with sharing information out of interviews with other informants or people who were not part of our research.

We also were reluctant to share our personal opinion and views of topics to make sure not to become rejected by some activists. Within the movement there are various perspectives about for example the role of white Americans within the movement or strategies to fight against racism. These differences could be sensitive and create friction. Picking a side could create frost with some activists and result in less sharing of information and distrust.

#### The Importance of Studying a Anti-Racism Movement

Anthropologists, who have a shady history of studying racism, have the responsibility of continuing the study of ethnicity and racism in a way that is constructive for society, especially because racism challenges the most advanced anthropological thinking (Hill 1998, 680). Smedley states that race is a cosmological ordering system (Smedley 1993, 25). Therefore, race is not just one of many ways of ordering; it is a worldview. This understates that racism is based on lived realities of people and because of this, race, racism and activism against perceived injustice related to race cannot and may not be ignored.

We decided to conduct research in the United States, because this nation-state has been structured by a racial order from the beginning (Omi and Winant 1986, 72). Omi and Winant (1986) characterize the United States as a state, where the category 'white' is superior. Racialization is deeply institutionalized in American society and racism is part of the daily experience of many African-Americans. Hereby we specific focus on St. Louis, because of the before described demonstrations in Ferguson, which created a huge, flourishing social movement within the fight against racism.

By means of exploring the motivations of anti-racism activists in St. Louis, this research wants to contribute in giving a voice to minority activists, both on societal and scientific level. The purpose of the research is to contribute knowledge about the underlying lived experiences of being passionate about engaging in activism in general and to create understanding for the grounds of activists against racism in St. Louis in particular. Hopefully this research will offer new insights regarding the construction and development of social movements. Furthermore, we also want to create awareness related to the fact that racism is not just a problem of bygone times, but still is a deeply experienced phenomenon. This awareness is reflected in the revitalization of activism towards racism.

#### Content summary

In this research experienced racism, cultural trauma and activism are pivotal. In the first chapter concepts such as inclusion, exclusion, nationhood, citizenship, racialization, segregation, experienced racism, cultural trauma and social movement will be reviewed. Later on in the second chapter, these concepts will be placed into the context of St. Louis. In the third chapter, the ideas, feelings and experiences of activists themselves are central. Firstly, the experiences of racialization and racism in St. Louis will be looked upon. Secondly, the cultural trauma of slavery and the injustices after the slavery period will be discussed. And finally, in the fourth chapter, activism in St. Louis will be addressed by looking into the different strategies and goals are strived after. Thereafter there will be a conclusion.

## chapter 1

## Citizenship, Racialization and Cultural Trauma



### 1 Citizenship, Racialization and Cultural Trauma

Anti-racism activists use their agency as citizens to demand change regarding experienced and perceived racism. This racism includes both institutionalized racism as well as racism in interactions between individuals. The legitimacy of the contemporary order is constructed within a nation. However, the citizen rights constructed by a nation are not always accomplished in practice equally for every citizen. Anti-racism activists try to vindicate among other things unequal citizen rights based on the concept of race. Contiguously, because of the role in which activists are acting, namely citizens, their ideas about citizenship and nationhood are of central importance. This will be followed by an indication of the complexity of the problem of racialization, what they are fighting. Hereby race intertwined with class and space and aspects of the United States as a racial state will be described. After that, attention will be paid to the slavery history of the United States and the intergenerational cultural trauma it inflicted, and how this history is related to the foundation of the Civil Rights Movement and intertwined with nowadays activism.

#### Inclusion and Exclusion within the Nation-state

Every individual and group has various dimensions of identification, which shift circumstantially (Eriksen 2010, 31-37). Identification creates feelings of cohesion within groups, but at the same time it also constructs outsiders. The philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) defines two basic mechanisms in this: *us-hood* and *we-hood*. Us-hood is a feeling driven by contrasts with others, whereby we-hood is a sentiment that creates internal principles of cohesion, like loyalty and sociality. Nationalism is one of the most extended forms of group identification (Hobsbawm 1990, 143). Anderson (2006, 6) describes this extended form as the product of *'imagined communities'*<sup>2</sup>. The distinguishing mark of nationalism regarding identification is by definition its relation to the state (Eriksen 2010, 7-8).

There are a lot of different constructions of nationalism, with competing understandings and uses of the same concept (Brubaker 1999, 55; Shulman 2002, 555). One distinction researchers primarily work with is the distinction between *civic* and *ethnic* understandings of nationhood and forms of nationalism. This distinction took shape by the influential theoretical framework of Kohn (1944), who argues that Western Europe and the United States are primarily civic nations and Germany and Eastern Europe are primarily ethnic nations. In civic nations members are unified by their equal political status and their will as individuals to be part of the nation (Kohn 1944, 574). In contrast, Kohn assumes Eastern nationalism to be based on the common heritage of people, where political boundaries are tried to conform to ethnic

<sup>2</sup> The national community is *imagined*, because never can one know all the members of the nation. "The imagined political community is imagined as both inherent limited and sovereign" (Anderson 2006, 6).

boundaries (1944, 329). Ethnic nation members are united through language, religion, culture and most importantly a belief in a common genetic descent of the group (McPherson 1998, 103). Ignatieff describes civic nationalism as a nation where all the adherents subscribe to the nation's political creed. 'This nationalism is called civic, because it envisages the nation as a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values' (Ignatieff 1993, 6). On the other hand, he argues that attachment to ethnic nationalism is not chosen, but inherited. Where civic nations are necessarily democratic, ethnic nations are often less democratic and more authoritarian (Ignatieff 1993, 7-8). Within this dichotomy, citizenship, described as a political concept deriving from people's relationship to the state (McCrone and Kiely 2000, 25), is a concept of civic nations. Although the dichotomy between ethnic and civic nations has been criticized <sup>3</sup>, Smith, an influential theorist in the field of nationalism, did not reject the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism, but has spun the dichotomy by the argument that every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms (1991, 13). Kuzio (2002, 20) also concludes that pure civic or ethnic nations only exist in theory. Within this thesis, this perspective will be concurred.

Although the United States has often been viewed as an ultimate civic nation, ethnic elements were always pivotal in the notion of nationhood <sup>4</sup>. Only since the end of Jim Crow laws every citizen is equal by law. However, even nowadays, still one is considered 'more citizen' than the other. This can be explained by the theory that in times of crisis, the civic element of the state can be overshadowed by the ethnic component; one is conceived 'more citizen' than the other (Kuzio 2002, 20). Globalization, migration and technology are responsible for a rapidly changing society, whereby the threat that these processes have towards identity can be seen as a crisis. This could lead to a move towards an ethnic notion of statehood and citizenship. Activists can challenge these 'false claims of citizenship' (Kipnis 2004, 265). In accordance, Isin (2009, 383) argues that while citizenship creates the potential to for one group to dominate others via the state, it also could empower groups. Through empowerment by means of claims to citizenship as justice, citizenship becomes a site of rights (Isin 2009, 372-377). Nevertheless, citizenship and the inclusions and exclusions it entails, may certainly influence and is influenced by race, class and space (Kipnis 2004, 265).

<sup>3</sup> This distinction has been criticized because of its normative, ethnocentric basis, whereby it labels civic nationalism as 'good' and ethnic nationalism as 'bad' (Yack 1999, 105). Furthermore, Neiguth (1999) criticized the logic of the conceptually distinction, by seeing ancestry, race, culture and territory as analytically distinct bases for national membership.

<sup>4</sup> The United States has often been viewed as an ultimate civic nation, historically defined by its commitment to 18th century liberal ideology (Kaufman 2000, 133). Being an American is not primarily defined in terms of specific cultural practices and symbols, but in more abstract, idealist terms (Stratton and Ang 1994, 8). However, before the Civil War of 1860-65, slaves did not have citizenship (McPherson 1998, 103; Kaufman 2000, 14). The Civil War evolved consciousness of a 'chosen people', whom were white, liberal, Protestant and English speaking, and who were granted citizenship (Kuzio 2002, 27).

#### Racialization

Categorization <sup>5</sup>, on basis of factors like color, religion and language, is common to mankind. People feel the need to categorize, in order to familiarize the unfamiliar. Knowledge of past experiences is used for utilizing stereotypes (Hamilton 1981). Categories can create order in chaos, but also they can be very harmful. Often stereotypes are used without being consciously aware of it (Bargh, Chen and Burrows 1996; Devince 1989; Leopre and Brown 1997). Besides, they can be internalized, even when one does not even believe the particular stereotype (Steel 1997, 618) <sup>6</sup>.

Stereotypes are social constructs and therefore it is important to be aware of the power of its creators. Power is always correlated to social relationships and is often not equally divided (Cohen 1976, 33). The one in power of creating history and stereotypes can in this way control the others. Benedict states: "conflict arises whenever any group - in this case a race - is forged into a class by which discriminations practiced against it; the race then becomes a minority which is denied rights to protection before the law, rights to livelihood and the participation in the common life" (1940, 155).

Racialization is one way of categorizing people, which can be described as the process of ascribing racial characteristics to a certain group, who do not identify themselves as such (Omi and Winant 1986:72). The categorization of the 'chosen people', whom were white, liberal, Protestant and English speaking, and who were granted citizenship (Kuzio 2002, 27), shows that from the beginning, the nation-state of the United States has been structured by a racial order (Omi and Winant 1986, 72) and at this point must be considered as an ethnic nation. Omi and Winant (1986) characterize the United States as a racial state, where the category 'white' is superior.

Important in the racialization of the United States is the Jim Crow era where it was decided who was 'black'. This was done with the 'one drop rule' <sup>7</sup>. The focus nowadays still lies on the construction of 'blackness', while 'whiteness' is not something open for negotiation. Whiteness is difficult to perceive because of its prevalence and cultural dominance (Mahoney 1995, 1664). While whiteness is not perceived, blackness is. Therefore, 'race' is only recognized when seeing someone who is black and this leads to tunnel vision by the white population about the concept of race (Mahoney 1995, 1665). White

<sup>5</sup> Hoyer and Macinnes define categorization as "the process of labelling or identifying an object that we perceive in our external environment based on its similarity we already know" (1997, glossary).

<sup>6</sup> In the United States Clark and Clark have conducted the widely known experiment in which children had to choose between a black doll and a white doll. Young children between four and seven years old already have internalized that the white doll is 'prettier', 'cleaner' and not a 'nigger' (Clark and Clark 1950). This experiment is repeated over time and shows that stereotypes can be internalized already at a young age.

<sup>7</sup> The 'one drop rule' implies that "anyone with a visually discernible trace of African, or what used to be called 'Negro' ancestry is, simply, black". This way of categorizing people was in the interest of slaveholders in relation to the enslavement of children, whom had a slave woman as mother, but whom were conceived by a white man. Later, the Jim Crow laws used this line to remain a strict border; a fluid one would not have been feasible (Hollinger 2005, 18-20).

people do not have to think about their skin color and are often unaware of the role in plays in the daily lives of others, since their own skin color only brings privileges instead of restrictions; this a is called 'white privilege' (McIntosh 1988). Categorizing people by their external characteristics and their perceived race, differentiating everyone from 'the purely white population', is ingrained in the society of the United States.

#### Race Intertwined with Class and Space

As determined above, one specific way of categorizing human beings is to use the concept of race. The concept of race is a socially constructed category (AAPA 1996; Eriksen 2010). Genetically, human races do not exist (Eriksen 2010, 5). Still, various racial groups are often constructed on the basis of physical differences among people (Mukhopadhyay and Henze, 2003, 669). Skin color, hair texture, nose width, and lip thickness have for example remained major markers of racial identity in the United States (Smedley and Smedley 2005, 20). Therefore, even if the concept of race is not biologically arguable, the socially constructed categorization of race does inform people's actions (Eriksen 2010, 6). Race is an important concept for anthropologists since racism as a social problem is real (Smedley and Smedley 2005, 16). Racism, unlike racialization, is an ideology that maintains that one race is inherently superior to another (Wellman 1977). Racism includes stigmatization of groups based on ethnicity, religion, and physical appearance.

Although racial groups are not necessarily related to status, these groups may be and often are ranked hierarchically within a society (Eriksen 2010, 7). The social construct of race is used in order to justify unequal treatment, to create power and privileges. Racism is done both by individuals and societal institution (Williams 1999, 177). In this way the concept of race interacts with the concept of class. Social class concerns systems of social ranking and distribution of power (Eriksen 2010, 7). Racism also can determine access to educational and employment opportunities <sup>8</sup>.

Race is an antecedent and determinant of socioeconomic status (Williams 1999, 177). This reconstructs differentiation through socioeconomic status, which is, alongside ethnic characteristics and family status, a defining element of urban structure (Clark and Bleu 2004, 668). Categorization by the concept of race and class can lead to residential segregation, which at general level is the degree to which two or more groups live separately from one another, in different parts of the environment (Massey and Denton 1988, 282). Certainly, there is a fundamental difference between racial and economic segregation. Racial segregation is based on an ascribed characteristic, while economic segregation is based on an achieved status (Adelman 2004, 44). However, the categorizations of race and class are

<sup>8</sup> In the United States minority schools are highly correlated with high-poverty schools and these schools are also associated with low parental involvement, lack of resources, less experienced and credentialed teachers, and higher teacher turnover, all of which combine to exacerbate educational inequality for minority students (Orfield 1995, 597-617).

closely intertwined in the reality of segregation (Adelman 2004, 46). The experience of class is to a great extent determined by productive relations into which men are born or enter involuntary (Thompson 1964, 9), which can coincide with the ascribed identity of race. Different social classes can contribute to development of various sub-cultures and thereby create a bigger gap between race cultures (Clark and Bleu 2004, 681).

This overlap between economic residential segregation and racial residential segregation is present in many cities in the United States. African-Americans in the United States, particularly those in large Northeastern and Midwestern metropolitan areas, have been highly segregated from whites (Adelman 2004, 43). Residential segregation has generally extremely negative consequences on the life chances of African-Americans (Fraley and Frey 1994). It simultaneously creates and reinforces racial and economic inequality and confines residential opportunities for middle-class blacks (Adelman 2004, 46; Wilson 1987, 7-8). With this, Massey and Fisher assume that segregation undermines the ability of high-income minorities to separate themselves spatially from the poor (2000, 688). Economic residential segregation reinforces racial residential segregation; when residential mixing is not the daily reality, one is limited to their own ethnic group and is not exposed to other people's values and influence (Varady 2005, 38). This is apparent by African-Americans, who forged their own independent communal institutions, cultural networks, and civic organizations (Lang 2008, 613).

Furthermore, overlap between class and race results in neglected neighborhoods where predominantly lower class African-Americans live, which results in environments in which weak informal employment network, joblessness, and concentrated poverty reinforce each other (Wilson 1997). These neighborhood characteristics, which can cause a feeling of being neglected and isolated, create angry and embittered youth. The combination of poverty, the felt anger towards society, and a longing for belonging, status and upward mobility, can result in seeking empowerment through gang membership (Majors and Bilson 1993, 50). Besides societal factors, obviously individual characteristics and family structures play a role in gang violence and youth delinquency.

Residential segregation, which creates a gap between white and black citizens, is also apparent in fragmented collective memories within the nation of the United States. For instance predominantly white schools teach a Eurocentric narrative of history to their students, which barely involves 'black history' (VanSledright 2008). This fragmented and incomplete narrative is an injury to the nation of the United States, for collective memories are a vital element in the construction of the nation and the self-understanding of its nationalism (Smith 1996, 453).

#### Cultural Trauma and the History of Slavery

Collective identity is shaped by both remembering and forgetting (Buckley-Zistel 2006, 132). Positive as well as negative experiences, events and phases can shape this identity. When a negative event has

tremendous collective impact it can become a cultural trauma. Negative events include acts of violence, forced migration, revealing the truth about the past and radical economic reform (Sztompka 2000, 452). Cultural trauma is defined as "a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation, which is a) laden with negative affect b) presented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural suppositions" (Smelser 2004, 44). Trauma, as a cultural process, is connected to shaping collective identity, as well as to the construction of collective memory and collective forgetting (Eyerman 2004, 60). Cultural trauma needs to be seen not as static in a way that it is or it is not present, but as flexible spectrum which is highly influenced by external factors (Sztompka 2000). Both external factors and personal characteristics influence the way an individual deals with cultural trauma. Herman (1997) describes three stages in which recovery from an individual trauma can be divided, which are useful for explaining the recovery of cultural trauma. However, these stages are to be seen as an ongoing process. Herman states that the first stage of recovery is a phase in which longing for safety and stabilization is pivotal. After the initial stage, the second stage is characterized by reconstruction by the matter of commemoration and mourning. The last phase of recovery consists of reconnection and revitalization (Herman 1997).

The first stage of recovery, in which there is a longing for safety and stabilization, people sometimes try to forget in order to survive (Herman 1999). When people try to forget the cultural trauma, Cohen calls it social amnesia. He defines it as "a mode of forgetting by which a whole society separates itself from its discreditable past record." This can be done at an organized, official and conscious level; deliberate covering up and rewriting history, or by cultural slippage, which occurs when information disappears (Cohen 1995, 13). Besides, there could be amnesia solely on the surface while remembering on a deeper unconscious level. This can for instance be done by remembering a traumatic event according to myths instead of facts; for example the idea that some people hold onto that slavery 'was not that bad' since slaves at least 'had food to eat', and by this neglecting the hardships of slavery. When there is some sort of selective amnesia, most of the times only in the public domain and not in the hearts of people, it can be defined as chosen amnesia. The collective group is unable to remember the cultural trauma, while it is still stored in the mind, even though the group does not (choose to) have access to it at present (Buckley-Zistel 2006, 133-134). This collective trauma can be transmitted to next generations. When parents themselves are traumatized they will pass the trauma on to their children. The inability of the parents to mourn and recognize the trauma enforces the children to repeat the process of being traumatized (Schwab 2010, 125-126).

The second stage of recovery from cultural trauma is coping with the trauma by remembering and reconstructing identity and history (Herman 1999). In this stage the cultural trauma is transmitted to the next generation by discourse and narratives. Intergenerational remembering is done by intellectuals, mass media and popular culture and consciously forms the awareness of the cultural trauma in next generations (Eyerman 2004, 160-164). However, collective memory and individual memory are inextricably bound and continuously influence each other (Lira 1997, 234). Commemoration rituals, as acts of collective memory, testify the truthfulness of a historical event, together with its social significance. Hereby, collective memory is set above the memory of separate individuals. However, individuals can interpret the commemoration of this collective memory in their own way (Frijda 1997, 111). On the contrary, individual memories also shape collective memory, for every emotional experience tends to be socially shared (Rimé and Christophe 1997, 133). When a large group of people, such as an ethnic group, feels helpless and victimized in response of the trauma, they can remember, both first-handed and intergenerational, and draw mental representation or emotional meanings to the traumatic event into their collective identity to create group cohesion, a collective identity and a sense of belonging (Nora 1993, 11). Volkan calls this a *chosen trauma* (1991).

In the last stage of recovery according to Herman (1999), the trauma is incorporated and dealt with. People reconnect their reconstructed and restored identity, which they rebuilt in the second phase of recovery, with their daily reality. When the feeling is present that the reality cannot co-exist together with their restored identity, people can feel the need to reshape the course of affairs. Ultimately the process of recovery results in equanimity.

The slavery history, which ranged over centuries, of the United States can be seen as a cultural trauma in retrospective. It became a central theme in constructing a collective African-American identity through remembering. The collective memory is assigned to people with ancestors whom were slaves or to African-Americans in general (Eyerman 2004, 60). Through representations of slavery, in both speech and art works, an Afro-American identity was constructed, even when people seemed to have not that much in common at first. Their 'race' in combination with the history of their ancestors was used to create a sense of belonging. Furthermore, remembering can be a coping strategy, but also of strategic, practical and political use (Eyerman 2004, 61).

#### Activism and the Civil Rights Movement

One way of coping with cultural trauma is to become an activist. Activism is defined as being actively involved in a social movement, which is not related to a political party. Activists challenge the legitimacy of the contemporary order. In this, protesting is a strategic weapon that can be used to negotiate the status quo (Juris 2008, 158). These activists are part of a social movement, which has its own place in civil society <sup>9</sup>. Civil society involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express themselves to achieve individual and collective goals (Diamond 1999, 221). Both institutions and independent action

<sup>9</sup> Civil society is defined as "the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules" (Diamond 1999, 221).

by citizens are responsible for a long-term, stable reproduction of society (Cohen and Arato 1992, ix).

The independent actions by citizens are more than just symbolic in the sense of empowering by the awareness and increasing of 'imagined communities' (Anderson 2006, 6). Building a movement requires a network and this network has to be built by means of periodic moments of interaction, which fosters the generation of new ideas, identities and solidarity between activists (Juris 2008, 158). However, because of the Internet and social media, physical interaction is not always necessary anymore. In the 21th century it is possible to be globally connected yet locally rooted as a social movement. As a result of this, new movements are more flexible and bottom-up than old movements were (Juris 2008, 14). However, the Internet can be eavesdropped by third parties, such as a government. Therefore, the Internet is not suitable for transmitting sensitive and secret information.

Social scientists have not agreed on what the underlying mechanism is to create and engage in social movements, responsible for the motivation of people. Early social movement theorists claim that resources are the central part of activism and state that people are able to recognize the opening of political opportunities and to mobilize internal recourses for political purposes. While, on the other hand, new social movement theorists give greater importance to the construction of one's identity and state that by means of activism people are able to claim recognition with regards to their identity. However, the empiric shows that most new social movements have combined political goals with more culturally orientated effort (Poletta and Jasper 2001, 287). So, both political resources and identity construction are influencing people to become active in social movements. However, it does not explain the exact timing of periods in which activism brisk up, that is also relevant for understanding activism.

These theories attach great importance to the agency of individuals. This bottom-up approach, that is responsible for the creation of social movements nowadays, does not mean that groups are formed of isolated individuals solely. Individuals have a certain degree of agency, but on the other hand individuals also have affective connections with others with whom they form groups. Members of such groups can oblige an individual to protest along with or on behalf of them (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 289-290). Loyalty plays an important role in the construction and sustainability of social movements. Religion has proven to be powerful in creating loyalty for social movement. In the Civil Rights Movement of the midtwentieth many leaders were clergy or faithful congregants. They used the religious rhetoric in order to move the people in both their argument and in their speeches (Houck and Dixon 2006, 1).

The Civil Rights Movement came up to fight, in pastor Martin Luther King Jr.'s words: "evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society, evils that reflected not just the legacy of slavery but also the perpetuation of that legacy during subsequent generations by racialized state policies that wove white privilege into the fabric of American culture and institutions." (King 1986, 315). Two great internal migrations gave rise to this movement: the migration of African-Americans from the southern sharecropping system to urban settings and the mass suburbanization of whites. African-Americans,

who migrated to cities, lived together in neighborhoods, partly to provide the safety net for each other that the welfare policies denied. African-Americans were denied access in the area of labor, education and recreation. Whites fled the cities. The G.I. Bill of 1944, which gave veterans the opportunity to live in suburbs, was a main factor in this flight. The law was seen as a result of 'their fair earnings'. The policy for new homeowners in the suburbs was favorable in terms of low taxes, property rights and neighborhood autonomy, which led to a shrinking sense of social responsibility for the rest of the community (Hall 2005).

In the dominant narrative the Civil Rights Movement becomes visible at first in 1954 with the Brown versus Board of Education decision. It continues in the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and in 1965 by both the Selma Campaign and the Voting Rights Act (Hall 2005; Ward and Badger 1996, 1). However, some historians state that the Civil Rights Movement's roots goes back deeper than 1954, more like the 1930s (Ward and Badger 1996, 1). Nevertheless, we are claiming the movement's roots are to be found in the first chapter of the United States: its slavery history. The generational accumulation of wealth and social capital, partly because of policies that kept inequality alive or even created sometimes, left a legacy of racial inequality (Hall 2005). We see the fight towards equality as a continuous one, sometimes more noticed and visible than in other periods.



# St. Louis: A Highly Segregated City



### 2 St. Louis: A Highly Segregated City

#### Racism and Activism in St. Louis

Feelings of vexation, powerlessness and anger about the much larger feeling of discrimination through daily life among African-Americans came to the surface after the shooting of Michael Brown. Besides discrimination at national level, it is important to investigate into the local history underlying the lived experience of citizens in St. Louis. Very important is the systematic racial segregation of St. Louis, which has impact on the nature of race relations in the city today. St. Louis is still one of the most segregated cities of the United States and has one of the largest gaps between black and white income levels (Bourgois 1998, 108). This contains residential segregation as well as socially and economically segregation.

The city is known for its exceptional residential segregation. The residential segregation is roughly divided by the 'Delmar divide'. This is a divide of which everyone is aware and talks about; Delmar is the street between the 'black, criminal, north side' of the city and the 'white, flourishing and well-kept, south side of the city. This residential segregation took shape within a specific historic context. The city was previous located in a border state that permitted slavery and slavery was marginal to the economy (Christensen 1972, 5). For several decades after the Civil War, the African-American population of St. Louis remained six per cent of its total population (McLaughlin 2005, 110). However, an influx of Southern African-American people reached St. Louis during the Great Migration (Adelman 2004, 56). On account of the Great Migration, a group of citizens of St. Louis enforced racial segregation by referendum in 1916. This segregation ordinance prevented African-Americans from moving into any neighborhood that were already seventy-five per cent white or vice versa (Bourgois 1998, 108). Jim Crow norms were manifested in the city's housing patterns. Consequently, the city could be seen as a southern metropolis by the racially proscriptive laws and practices (Lang 2008, 611-612). Although the segregation ordinance was decided to be illegal by a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1917, white separatists confined African-American migrants of St. Louis to the older districts near the downtown business district and central river front (Lang 2008, 613; Bourgois 1998, 108). African-Americans in St. Louis became among the nation's most racially segregated populations (Lang 2008, 613). This exceptional residential segregation of St. Louis encourages social and economic segregation.

St. Louis is still a highly segregated city. Although, after the Jim Crow laws, both racism in social interactions with other people and institutionalized racism became subtler, it still highly affects many lives of African-American residents of St. Louis. Throughout time, racialization continued to be present by public housing projects. Thereby the education system and the justice system also still contribute to a highly segregated city, which will be further looked upon later on.

Activists of St. Louis who have lived in other states explained that because of its geographical place and corresponding history in the United States, Missouri holds an intermediate position in

expressing subtle and explicit racism:

"[Missouri is] not quite like southern states, where people beat you over your head with racism. But they are not quite northern states, where they are very subtle in it. And so they just kind of like get the worst of both worlds, where they are both explicit and subtle about it. Racism is everywhere. It is a border state and it struggles for its identity. [...] I think it is just a blend of a lot of bad shit that happens."

Within this long history of racial segregation, there is also a long history of fighting against racism. St. Louis has been in the forefront of civil rights leadership. Local civil rights organizations and grassroots activists persistently assaulted discrimination in St. Louis through picketing, leafleting and demonstrating (Missouri Historical Society 1989, 26). Education, negotiation, litigation, and non-confrontational protests remained the major strategies of civil rights activists in St. Louis (Missouri Historical Society 1989, 26). The Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) took the lead in efforts opposing the city's 'by law and custom' segregation, along with St. Louis section of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP helped for full employment, access to public accommodations, and greater mainline political representation (Lang 2008, 615).

Currently, again social movements against racism arise both at national level and in St. Louis. Unlike the social movements during the Civil Rights Movement, which were often lead by a few charismatic leaders and organizations, the anti-racism movement in St. Louis nowadays is described as a movement of individuals without one leader. Within this modern-day activism, social media play an important role in mobilizing and organizing. However, there are also still various organizations that mobilize and organize the activists to agree on strategies to make the movement powerful. Some important organizations within the current movement in St. Louis against racism are: 'Organization for Black Struggle' (OBS), 'Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment' (MORE), 'Better Family Life' (BFL) and 'Black Lives Matter' (BLM). Thereby the current movement contains less structured groups, such as 'Hands Up United', 'Tribe X', 'Millennial Activists United', 'Artivists St. Louis' and 'Solidarity Economy St. Louis'.



# Daily Racism and Cultural Trauma



# 3 Daily Racism and Cultural Trauma

This chapter shows that racialization and racism are part of the lived experience of St. Louis' inhabitants. It will be expounded how contemporary geographical and social segregation are enforced and reinforced by housing projects, the education system and the justice system. Furthermore, the relation between historical and contemporary experienced racism will be made and signs of a cultural trauma explicated. It will be stated that activists against racism in St. Louis are in different phases of recovery from a cultural trauma.

## 3.1 Experienced Racism

As explained in the theoretical framework, racism is an ideology that maintains that one race is inherently superior to another (Wellman 1977) and it is done both by individuals and social institutions (Williams 1999, 177). The experiences of racism about which activists in St. Louis talk mostly regards institutionalized racism. Racism experienced in social interaction, which contains the public and private spheres, is mostly subtle behavior, like irritated communication or ignorance, whereby it is hard to ascertain that these people communicate this way because of one's skin color. Due to this subtleness of racism in social interactions and the segregation in social networks, it is easier for activists to focus on fighting institutionalized racism, which has clearer signs. The racism by means of law is mostly about enforcing geographical and social segregation.

#### Geographical and Social Segregation

As noticed above, the geographical segregation of St. Louis is roughly divided by the '*Delmar divide*'. The 'imagined' Delmar divide creates a physical divide in a way that some people do not even dare to come to the north side, with the result that people only hear stories about "the north", without having ever been there themselves. As such, geographical segregation in St. Louis is an important factor in the segregation of social networks. Not living in the same neighborhood or going to the same elementary school diminishes the chance of meeting people outside 'the own group' and stereotypes are more likely to be present (Steel 1997, 618). One white male, who is a university teacher in social science, noticed:

"The city of St. Louis is 50 percent African-American. And I have lots of friends who live in the city, white friends, whose social circle includes no or one or two African-Americans. And I have lots of African-American friends whose social circle includes one or two white people. If you look at the specifics of St. Louis it is not reflective of it at all. The fact that you can go to something that is a city event, whatever that event is [examples], and it is all one race or the other, that is problematic. The segregation goes into personal lives." However, activists are regularly an exception of this social segregation. The segregation of the social networks could be partly due to personal preferences and stereotypes about 'the other', but is certainly also a product of institutionalized racism by means of (former) public housing projects, the education system and the justice system.

#### Housing Projects and 'White Flight'

Public housing projects are clear examples of institutionalized racism, because it enforced segregated living for middle class whites and African-Americans. African-Americans were restricted to housing projects in St. Louis, among which Pruitt-Igoe, built between 1954 and 1956, is the most famous one <sup>10</sup>. Due to the G.I. Bill and restricted covenants made by neighborhood committees, in this period white people bought houses in the suburbs, while African-American people, who had enough money to buy a house in the suburbs as well, were limited by restricted covenants. Hence, in these years the suburbs became white enclaves.

Nowadays, houses in the suburbs are worth four times their initial investment. African-Americans have not had the possibility to gain this kind of wealth. The intergenerational wealth of the investment of a house in the suburbs gives white people the possibility to retire from their work, to give their children a good education and sometimes even pay a part of their children's first house. In this way public housing projects in the history of St. Louis still influence the segregation between black and white residents of St. Louis nowadays. By this means, wealth in property keeps being an important aspect in the institutionalized racism and segregation, especially because it also influences the opportunities that people have in education.

#### Racialization through the Education System

The racialization of the living area is strongly related to the education system in St. Louis, even after the official desegregation of the education system in 1954 as a result of the case 'Brown versus the Board of Education'. In St. Louis they tried to accomplish educational desegregation by 'bussing', which means putting African-American children on a bus to a 'white school'. However, this desegregation was never really successful, whereof an African-American, middle-aged mother told us the following:

<sup>10</sup> At first Pruitt was intended to be for African-Americans and Igoe was for the white Americans. However, due to 'white flight' out of the city into the suburbs, the Igoe part of the building became inhabited also by African-Americans. Decline, due to overdue maintenance of the building in combination with the rising crime rate which enforced each other, the building complex was demolished in 1972 (The Pruitt-Igoe Myth: An Urban History).

"Our resistance to change is so St. Louis. So, desegregation of school happened in 1954, we did not do that until 1957, because white St. Louis resisted desegregating schools within four years. By 1958, the schools that were all white were totally flipped to all black, so we never integrated our schools or our neighborhoods."

The education system is nowadays still very segregated. Another aspect that enforces educational segregation is the divide between public and private education. Public schools are open for everybody, but rely heavily on property taxes of the particular zip code one lives in. When most people are poor, and are renting a house instead of owning a house, there is less money for public education. This sometimes leads to shortage of resources: "The public city schools, there are not enough books for all the kids to have a book, so they leave the books at school." As a result children cannot study in their books at home. Meanwhile, white children from wealthy parents are able to get to go to a good public school in the suburbs, which are better due to higher percentage of people that pay property taxes. Besides, some wealthy people are able to take their children to a private school. In this way a vicious circle takes shape.

In accordance with the literature, we noticed that the segregated housing, enforced by acts of the government, reinforced the educational segregation by means of intergenerational wealth. The wealth gap results in the contemporary educational segregation, which also reinforces the gap in wealth and class, and thereby also reinforces the housing segregation. Several African-American mothers have told us that they struggle with the issue of where to put their child to school, both in terms of (lack of) money and the possibility for their children to experience racism at a predominantly white school that on the other hand often has more resources. A high-educated, African-American mother of middle-class told us:

"So, I live in a really little house that I bought when I was 24, in order to send my kids to private school. A lot of people would not trade with that. I live in a really tiny house, but education is really important. But I would love to send my kids to the public school, but the public school just is not, the black kids are just not doing well. I rather not take a change on my kids doing not well."

The lack of resources of schools with dominantly African-American students is supported by data in various articles and books (Orfield 1995, 597-617; Stein 2002, 126; Clotfelter 2004, 117). Out of different articles and various conversations with informants, we ascertain that private schools, mainly white, receive ample resources and push children to excel, while a lot of dominantly black, public schools lack resources and teachers have lower expectations for student achievement.

Characteristic for St. Louis is because all of this the following question: "Where did you go to high school?" The high school to which you went namely tells the other person about your zip code, your social circle and your socioeconomic background.

### The 'Justice' System

The justice system contributes to maintaining the system as it is, since it reinforces the gap between 'wealthy and rich' and 'poor and black' even further. As a lower class African-American activist stated: "The justice system in America, I think, sucks one hundred percent and is very unfair if you ask me. [...] It is just like I don't really feel like there is justice for us for real." During an event of Forward Through Ferguson <sup>11</sup> various experts made clear that the justice system is focused on earning money, since every little town has and wants to maintain their own courthouse and jail. Police officers need to distribute a lot of tickets in order to maintain the system. However, as asserted by many informants, officers distribute systematic more tickets to African-Americans due to patrolling in pre-dominantly African-American neighborhoods and racial profiling.

Tickets have bigger consequences for people of lower classes, which are most often African-Americans. When someone cannot pay the ticket or cannot pay a lawyer to defend the charges, they face a couple of days in jail. When, for example, a mother has not enough money to pay for a car-insurance, gets a ticket, then she cannot pay the ticket or the warrant and has to spend a few days in jail. However, because she has to spend these days in jail, she gets fired from her job and taking care of her children becomes even harder. Sometimes these children end up on the streets, whereby they are forced into illegality to stay alive and to be able to take care of younger siblings. As a lower class African-American activist explained:

"Cause understand something. Convictions go out the window when you're hungry. When survival comes in, conviction goes out the window. What you thought you wouldn't do yesterday, you would do today. And tomorrow you would do without question. That's how survival works. I never kill, but now you're hungry, you're kids are hungry. Now your thought is "where do I get a gun"? Second thought is: "how much are bullets?" Third thought is: when do I do..."

Criminality out of poverty, the felt anger towards society, and a longing for belonging, status and upward mobility (Majors and Bilson 1993:50) is a huge problem within the African-American community. As a consequence of geographical segregation the victims of the crimes are also mainly other African-American people. This can be sustained by what an African-American informant told us: "Up until today I have been to 127 funerals of close friends or peers or family members."

This lasting vicious circle of classism intertwined with race, continued by the justice system, results in prisoners that are predominantly African-American and enforces the stereotype of African-Americans as dangerous or immoral, instead of admitting that most of the crimes are done out of

<sup>11</sup> The Ferguson Commission is an independent group appointed by Missouri Governor Jay Nixon on November 18, 2014, to conduct a "thorough, wide-ranging and unflinching study of the social and economic conditions that impede progress, equality and safety in the St. Louis region." The need to address these conditions was underscored by the unrest in the wake of the death of Michael Brown, Jr. in Ferguson on August 9, 2014. ("The Commission," last modified June 20, 2016, http:// forwardthroughferguson.org/report/executive-summary/the-commission/.)

poverty. At a Hip Hop Poetry Project performance in the St. Louis City Juvenile Detention Center, African-American teenagers performed poetry and rap lyrics written about their experiences in jail and their life outside jail. A rap lyric of two girls showed a part of this vicious circle:

> "Kids on the streets With no family Have nowhere to go And nothing to eat Cry every night with no peace in sight Make them just wanna have a gun fight So one day he went out Just to see what the streets about He sees all the robbing & killing So that made him have a funny feeling So the one day he met a friend That told him they'll be tight till the end That same day his friend got shot So he want to go hit the block"

### Ethnic Profiling

As showed, nowadays there are still many injustices regarding racism and classism. Segregation in many areas is part of the daily experience in St. Louis, sometimes unconsciously. The conscious part of racism towards African-Americans consists mostly on racial profiling and unjust behavior by police officers. African-American parents discuss with each other about 'the talk', which is the conversation parents have to have with their sons at the age of 11 or 12 in order to prepare them for confrontations with police officers. Every day African-American parents are scared for their children when they have to walk down the street, because of the chance to be pulled over by the police for no particular reason, which can be lethal. The talk can be seen as a '*rite de passage*', which is an important part of the upbringing and becoming an adult. Informants told us that they do not feel too comfortable walking in a dominantly white neighborhood during the evening, because they fear the police. As one African-American woman explained:

"If I am walking around in a predominantly white neighborhood: 'would I get stopped?' Being stressed out about something as simple as going for a walk, it affects our life not just in the way that where we go and whereas white people or institutions, but in the ways about how you limit your choices, how free you live your life because of harm that isn't even occurred or harm that will occur."

#### And another African-American male explained:

"One moment you think they are for you and then the next moment they are against you. Slamming you against the car and all that other stuff, which I think is just unnecessary. I have been in situations where cops were pulling me over and were like expecting me to be somebody else."

Bad experiences with the police ensure mistrust by African-Americans in a system that should exist to protect them.

Activists have even a greater amount of experiences with unjust police behavior. Some of the activists even declare to have a post-traumatic stress disorder from their experiences with the police during these protests. As one activist stated: "They [the police] beat protesters. I was arrested several times. And [they] wrestled me to the ground and they beat me while I was on the ground. Those kind of things. That is violence." Furthermore, an activist made clear what kind of message is received when police officers are violent against them in the street:

"The message that I got, and that many people got, was 'You're not even human. We can kill you with impunity. And you just shut up and go home. We don't think you love your children enough that you would mourn them or care. We are just doing what we want."

This message even makes them more aware of the urgency to fight against racism. The confrontation with the violent behavior of police officers cannot stop them in their activism. One African-American activist told us:

"You cannot kill a revolution. You can jail a revolutionary, but you cannot jail the whole revolution. You cannot jail the mind-set. It started in jail. It started with the people who were at the bottom of the bottom, who have seen the brutality of the police at their worst. It starts in there, the whole mind-set starts in there. What is good overflows out, to get some to the streets. And then once it gets to the streets, that is when it gets a little bit more milder and more milder."

It seems that their fear and stress for the police even creates more awareness of the oppressive situation for black people, which substantiate their activism. The statements of two African-American activists support this: "They have done everything they could to me. We keep fighting. I am not afraid." and "We are just beginning. We got a long way to come. I am up for it. I came into this [...] with the full knowledge that I could die in this. I am okay with that. I rather die on my feet than live on my knees."

Due to this unjust and violent behavior activists experienced at the hands of police officers, they declare that the current racism in St. Louis has not decreased compared to the time of the Civil Rights Movement and Jim Crow. A quote of an activist:

"I remember I went to see Selma. So watching the movie Selma, when they were on the bridge and all of the things they went through, I remember crying in the movie theatre, because it felt like, I just went through that two months ago, three months ago. I was like damn, this was sixty years ago, you know, fifty years ago, and it is happening to this day. It is happening right now, the same exact thing. Tear gas, pepper spray, the dogs, the beaten. And then the bad thing about it is, that after Mike Brown, for every single month up until February we had a police involved shooting." These people state that the only thing that has changed since periods of slavery and Jim Crow is not the situation of African-Americans, but the denial and ignorance of white people towards the continuing existing racism. Nowadays racism is more subtle and not that explicit visible anymore in rules and laws. Thereby one goal of contemporary activists, that was not a goal for activists half a century ago because of its obviousness, is making people aware that racism still exists, be it in different forms than it did before. Although a part of the United States' history is neglected, the collective memory, may it be neglected or remembered, which to a large extent consists of historical and contemporary injustice towards African-Americans by the United States' government, can be seen as a cultural trauma.

## 3.2 Memorization and Cultural Trauma

### Feeding a Cultural Trauma

The history of African-Americans that were brought as slaves to the United States is very alive in the hearts and minds of activists, partly because people feel like racism only has taken a different shape, but is not gone or diminished. Activists tell that after the slavery period, the Jim Crow laws continued the racism by restraining the African-Americans from having equal rights. And even after achieving equal rights for African-Americans in the United States by law, the 'war on drugs' became the next chapter of African-Americans being oppressed by the system. Within this war on drugs, the policies transited by Ronald Reagan were far more detrimental for African-Americans than for white Americans, as multiple informants declared to us. One activist declared: "I mean crack, cocaine, I think that's what destroyed the black communities. I think that has been efficiently destroying. North St. Louis, all those burned down houses, a lot of them were crack." A lot of activists blame the government for this continuing oppression, whereby the earlier explained housing acts were part of the biggest recent stimulations. The aftermath of this period is one in which many fathers are incarcerated, in which neighborhoods are further impoverished and criminalized, and where children do not have a real chance for a brighter future.

The hardest part of the continuous racism that African-Americans in the United States experience is, apart from the experience itself, the denial or neglect regarding history. This can be confirmed by a clear quote of an activist:

"You know what the worst thing you could tell me as a black man in America is? "Get over it". How do you get... do you know black babies were fed to alligators and used as alligator bait. [...] I don't think the world understands what has been done to black people. Have you ever heard of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome? That's been inherited in us. Do you know how many discomfort you can feel at times just even being just by surrounded by all white Americans. It doesn't feel natural. Because you don't know what these people feel. You don't know what to think. And sometimes you're self-consciously getting prejudices." The fact that a lot of African-Americans feel that their cultural trauma is not recognized or taken serious is also evident by the fact that they sometimes compare it with the Holocaust, which is globally recognized even though the amount of victims is much lower than the amount of victims during the slavery period, as they told us.

### Different Phases of Cultural Trauma

Cultural trauma needs to be seen not as static in a way that it is or it is not present, but as flexible spectrum which is highly influenced by external factors (Sztompka 2000). Both external factors and personal characteristics influence the way an individual deals with cultural trauma. We noticed that socio-economic status was the most important factor in predicting in which stage of recovering from the cultural trauma people where in. Herman (1997) describes three stages in which recovery from an individual trauma can be divided. We find these stages useful for explaining the recovery of cultural trauma, although it has to be said that these stages are not to be seen as static phases, but more so as an on-going process.

Mostly African-Americans of the lower class experience the lack of safety and stability, which is characteristic for the first stage of recovery. As being stated before, they still experience a great amount of racism on daily basis in the United States and in this manner their cultural trauma is being relived every day. The police and the governmental system are threatening them and they do not feel safe. Besides, due to a lack income and incarcerated parents, there is no sense of a stable environment both emotionally and economically. A strategy to cope with their trauma is by forgetting it in their minds but not in their hearts, which can be seen as *chosen amnesia* (Buckley-Zistel 2006, 133-134).

However, there are African-Americans who achieved a better socio-economic status. Middle or higher class African-Americans can sometimes 'work around' the 'system of racism' somewhat. They can buy a house in a neighborhood in which they feel comfortable and in which police interact with civilians in a different matter. They still experience the police brutality and institutional racism, but they can shape their own lives somewhat more because of their resources. They can for example switch jobs when they feel that behavior towards them is unjust and racist. Although middle and higher class African-Americans cannot escape racism totally, they have the capacity to make sure their race is not all determinative of their life. This contributes to a feeling of safety and stability. Therefore they can be classified as situated in the second phase of recovery, since they have the opportunity to remember and mourn their cultural trauma and they are able to begin to reconstruct their past. One informant told us that a cousin had done a genealogy to reconstruct their lineage and their family history:

"I know a few stories about, like some of my great-great-great-grandfathers. And I feel really traumatized when I think about coming to America. My ancestors coming to America. And I can still feel it in my bones, like the trauma that happened during slavery, times of slavery. One of my cousins did a genealogy study, and she said that one of our ancestors killed their owners and fled to East St. Louis and that's why we are there. So, I feel like that was real and still lives in me. So, as far as being American or not, I mean, I feel a bit displaced. And I feel a bit traumatized, here in this country."

Besides, many African-Americans claim that (the role of) slavery history is often downplayed in American society. They observe that the offspring of slaves were never repaired for the slavery and want to do something about this injustice. One informant explained:

"Yeah. They got to give us our money back. Then they have to give us reparations. Everybody else getting reparations. But they got pictures of us getting burned, hung, slaved, shot, killed. Our whole lives. Our ancestors been going through this. And it's still going on today."

As shown, in this stage through mourning and remembering a sense of pride can be rebuilt and history can be restored.

Besides African-Americans who mourn, remember and reconstruct their identity, there are also white people who want to own 'their ancestors' history' out of 'white guilt'. These people acknowledge their role and their ancestor's role in the events that resulted in the cultural trauma by African-Americans. If you could say that the 'perpetrators' also can be put on a continuum of recovery from their guilt in the cultural trauma, then these white people can be put in the second phase. However, there are also white people who try to forget and do not acknowledge their ancestor's role in slavery, either because of ignorance, *social amnesia*, or on purpose, *chosen amnesia* (Cohen 1995, 13; Buckley-Zistel 2006, 133-134).

There are also African-Americans and white people who can be situated in the last stage of the continuum of recovery. In the final stage of recovery, people reconnect their reconstructed and restored identity with their daily reality. When the feeling is present that the reality cannot co-exist together with their restored identity, people can feel the need to reshape the course of affairs. Ultimately the process of recovery results in equanimity.

However, these stages are theoretical stages, while in practice recovery is to be seen as a continuum. In the second stage most individuals are focused on restoring their own identity and therefore fighting for a fairer world for their own group in particular. In contrast, in the final phase of recovery individuals often fight for overall liberation. However, as being stated before, the stages of recovery cannot be seen as divided so strictly. For example, an individual can be somewhere 'in between' the two last theoretical phases, which could manifests in being active in a commemoration meeting in one situation and encouraging to fight for improving the overall wellbeing, instead of only fighting for the group they belong to, in another. This makes it explicable that within a meeting with only African-American activists of St. Louis the collective phase could seem to be the second stage of recovering, because of mainly remembering and reconstructing identity and history practices, while on individual level some activists of the group are already reconnecting with white Americans in some situations.

#### Memorization

The activists whom we spoke with are by our observation located somewhere on the continuum between the second and the third phase of recovery from their cultural trauma mostly. Among the activists, there is no doubt that racism is still alive, although manifests itself in different forms than it used to be. They try to educate each other, memorize and celebrate together their history. There is much knowledge about the slavery period, about historic governmental policies and laws, and about (civil rights) organizations that fought all this. Besides, it is well-known among activists that the history that is taught in schools is the white version of history and not 'their history'. Therefor, African-Americans educate each other in meetings, which are most of the time attended by a predominantly or exclusively African-American audience. Being an activist and commemoration can be seen as ways to try to cope with cultural trauma. Memorization meetings that are very popular are poetry slams in St. Louis. At poetry evenings there is an open microphone, which means that everybody that wants to take the stage has the opportunity to do so. Most of the poets are African-Americans and daily experiences with institutionalized racism are a central theme. An impression of a poetry slam:

"How y'all feeling?", says Carlton. He wears a shirt on which is printed 'So Damn Black. "Let's do a little call and response first. When I say "If you can't become the poet", then you say "Become the poem", okay?" The audience loudly answers his call: "Become the poem". Since the DJ has been playing for almost an hour of soul music before Carlton took the microphone, there is already created a good vibe. Carlton explains: "This night isn't a poetry slam, nor entertainment, this is a therapy session."

We are in a restored, 19th century building. All walls are made of bricks and the white ceiling is decorated with a flower pattern. An elongated bar is located on the right side of the room. The brick wall in front of which the microphone stands functions as a bookcase. On the original wooden floor there are eleven rows with five chairs each. Almost all seats are taken. The majority of the audience is African-American, as are the poets. Carlton continues: *"Five bucks is just a discount on witnessing miracles, if you see someone emotionally expressing themselves for the first time to a room full of strangers, that's a miracle."* 

Carlton starts the evening by reciting one of his own poems: "There is a luxury in knowing that I am a descendent of the original man, that I hold the keys to ancient mathematics and the power of the sun in my hands." People snap with their fingers meanwhile to let him know that they like his words. "There is a luxury in knowing that my ancestors survived genocide." After the applause, Carlton announces the next poet. A girl wearing a crop top begins: "I love brothers, I love their kinky hair, I love all colors." Each piece is written by the performer themselves. More poets follow. "This piece is a fresh one" a girl in her late twenties says. The audience responds approvingly by screaming "oh yeah", "go for it". She sings in a high, pleasant voice: "Freedom, before I will be a slave, I'm buried and go back to my lord." More performers pass through, until Carlton announces: "We have an intermission, because some people tend to find it late for a Sunday night."

After a ten-minute break, in which some people take the opportunity to get a drink or use the restroom, poetry and songs continue to follow each other in brisk pace. "*Remember the days on the block*", recites a middle-aged man. A somewhat younger guy: "*White people don't like to see you in a suit.*" A girl in her twenties reads out a letter addressed to her ancestors.

"They chose love, but we sometimes forget what they fought for." She finishes her letter: "I declare my freedom, my soul is worth fighting for." After nineteen others, the last performer takes the stage. "There are white lies told with pretty black ink." With these final words the evening comes to an end. Some people still linger for a bit at the bar, others smoke a last cigarette outside while talking. This night really has been a therapy session.

As showed, during meetings memorization of the struggle of their ancestors during the period of slavery and racism in the United States is pivotal. Besides, celebrating African heritage in order to celebrate their black community by empowering and loving themselves is central in these meetings. They talk proudly about their ancestors that were African kings and queens and they motivate each other in wearing 'natural hair', such as afro's and dreadlocks. People also honor their heritage by wearing African headscarves or necklaces with the colors yellow, green and red, along with a black necklace pendant of the African continent on it. Besides, they eat their own 'soul food'. This all seems to contribute their feeling of *we-hood* (Jean-Paul Sartre 1943).

Apart from poetry evenings, there are also meetings that are organized by activist organizations. These meetings also are about commemoration and restructuring self-worth and proud. African heritage is celebrated, also by explicitly talking and discussing about history and using words in the language of their homeland, such as 'ashe' and 'asante'. During meetings of organizations, which fight against racism, they call upon their ancestors. Memorizing history is also done by explicitly talking about movements that fought for liberation and about the slavery history itself. People are aware of the footsteps they follow. They know all kinds of facts, for example about the struggle of the Black Panthers and about how MOVE was bombed by the police in 1987. This knowledge is being taught through meetings in which the history of movements are handled, or by means of documentaries screenings about hallmarks in history. Thereby, a lot of important people that fought for liberation during the history are honored, such as Malcolm X, Angela Davis and Assata Shakur. Afterwards such meetings, there is usually a moment to contemplate together on the contemporary events, such as the protests in Ferguson and personal desires for the future and how to accomplish them. We were invited to such a commemoration meeting in a community building in the north side of St. Louis:

"We, who believe in freedom, cannot rest. We, who believe in freedom, cannot rest until it comes" is the refrain of Ella's song that is sung a few times by a young African-American woman to start the meeting. Besides her stands another young African-American woman with a black t-shirt with the text 'Organization for Black Struggle'. This woman starts with an introduction, whereby she remarks that the people in this room belong to the heart of the black struggle. Amber, a black woman who is standing at the other side of the room, explains that we will begin this meeting together with calling names of important people in black history. We are sitting in a circle with about fifty people of which six white Americans and the rest African-Americans. "*Nina Simone*", says an African-American man, wearing a t-shirt with the text '#UnitedWeFight'. "*Ashe*", says the group in unison. "*Angela Davis*", appoints an African-American woman in the circle. "*Ashe*" says the group again in unison. A white man with a t-shirt with 'the whole damn system is guilty as hell' calls "*Malcolm X*", whereupon the whole group reacts with "*ashe*".

This ritual repeats while a lot of names pass. After this introduction to the history of African-Americans, Amber starts talking about characteristics of the African-American culture. She remarks "*We have always been fighters. Fighting is part of our culture*". Various people in the circle nod affirmatively during her talk. Thereafter she separates us in groups of eight people. Each group gets six important moments of the black history on paper and discusses these moments. Eventually, after ten minutes, we are asked to pick two of these historic moments, based on the most important personal meanings for the members of the group. One of the moments chosen by our group is the foundation of the Black Panthers.

After memorizing and venerating important moments of the black history, the focus of the meeting shifts to the contemporary fight against racism. Four people of the group, who represent different organizations within the fight against racism, explain their organization and the relation between their organization and the African-American culture. They ask questions to the group, such as *"What does liberty look like within Pan African tradition?"* Different views about the movement are discussed. An older man states: *"Black folks have to be the leader, but need support from the enemy's side"*. Finally, Amber closes the discussion with emphasizing: *"I do not protest from my anger. You cannot do this for this amount of time out of anger. It is about self-care in this moment"*. She also points out that it is their duty to continue the fight of their ancestors fought for their life and the contemporary African-American community has to fight for the next generation. Within this, she also appoints the *"tradition of love"* as part of the African American culture. She ends with: *"Our babies are screaming"*.

Finally, the meeting ends with holding hands in a circle and repeating three times the words: *"It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains"*. Every time the volume increases and we end up screaming. People leave the room full of motivation to join a protest in front of the Courthouse, against the case of Reggie Clemons <sup>12</sup>.

In meetings the focus lies on healing and uniting of the African-American community. One important way in uniting the African-American community is calling each other 'brother' and 'sister'. In this way they establish a fictive kinship relationship with each other. This seems a cultural way of showing appreciation for each other, the same as with that everybody hugs each other to greet. Thereby some of them are aware of the fact that they really could be closer family then they can prove, because families were torn apart during slavery. Since slaves did not have their own last name, many African-Americans do not know their ancestors and their lineage. One activist declared:

"And just thinking about, how in the United States, how our ancestors were brought over here. Even just being brought over here, they were, the families were torn apart. [...] And then once, if they were still together when they arrived in America, then being put on that first auction block, then they were ripped apart again. And so, someone who was a mother and son, they were split up. Now they ended up in two different plantations. And now this one took that last name, and this one took that last name. And so now they don't even realize, so later on they

<sup>12</sup> Reggie Clemons was sentenced to death in St. Louis as an accomplice to a 1991 murder of two young white women. Since his conviction allegations have arisen of police coercion, prosecutorial misconduct, and a 'stacked' jury. His death sentence was reversed on technical grounds. However, this evening (March 5 2016) he was facing the Missouri Supreme Court again, because prosecutors chose to retry for murder. (http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/cases/usa-reggie-clemons)

were actually mother and son. [...] And so now they form different families, but really we, and so, we are so jacked up."

Besides, they are aware that they do not have African ancestors only, which they experience as being really painful. An African-American woman told us:

"And then the fact that, like in our families, it's our bloodline is not even purely African. And that's what hurts too, because I don't know, like I know in my family there have been, there are women in my family who were raped by their masters. So we do have, whether it's French or whatever, in our family. [...] And so, we have all kind of, our blood is all mixed up. So what kind of identity do we have. We don't know. My last name is what it is. But a friend of mine, that can actually be a close relative of mine and I would never know it."

By addressing each other with 'sister' and 'brother' it also shows the struggle in which they are together; it underlines their common African heritage and history as slaves. People put strength out of the fact that they are the offspring of slaves that have been through so much and they are, as their offspring, still alive. This can be seen as creating group cohesion, a collective identity and a sense of belonging out of remembering their cultural trauma (Nora 1993, 11), which contributes to a chosen trauma (Volkan 1991).

It seems that the activists who feel strongly attached to the slavery history are actively trying to recover from a cultural trauma by remembering and mourning. They mainly focus on making people aware of the crimes that are done to the African-American community in history and focus on healing the African-American community with supporting each other. However, some other activists seem to be in a further, final stage of healing their cultural trauma. They do not feel the need to memorize their own history within the black community so extensively; instead they concentrate stronger on being aware of all the injustice in the world. This does not mean however that they no longer feel connected or associated with their own history, but they do not cling to it that excessively anymore.

# chapter 4

# Activism



## 4 Activism

As already noticed by the different ways of dealing with the history, within the group of activists against racism there is a lot of diversity. Activists against racism in St. Louis differ amongst other things in their skin color, socio-economic position, feelings towards their national identity, motivations to fight, the goals they are fighting for and ways of fighting. In this chapter we will first describe various ways of how activists become engaged. Then we will discuss the relation between their activism and ideas about national identity and citizenship. Hereafter, different future perspectives by means of goals and dreams will be explicated. Finally, we will demonstrate that out of these backgrounds and ideas their activism takes shape in different ways; activism by means of protesting in the streets, social media, being member of particular organizations, taking political functions, building communities and creating art will be discussed.

## 4.1 Activist Identity and Mentality

### **Becoming Engaged**

First of all, the way activists become involved in the movement varies and is strongly connected to their class, race and background. Many activists in St. Louis told us about their parents who transferred awareness on racism or overall unjustness and inequality in the world. One white, male activist told us:

"In some ways I was kind of born into it, you know. Like, I saw the things that my mom cared about, was passionate about. I do not know if you got to see her angry? Like, righteously angry about stuff? So like that, observing that as a kid, really influenced [me]. [...] I would see that by my mom and I think, seeing that, I started working things out in my head as a kid, kind of putting things together, it kind of opened my eyes to some stuff."

Parents also told them stories about how they and their ancestors experienced racism or other kinds of inequality in their life and how they handled this. An African-American young man narrated:

"My great grandfather was actually a big kind of activist and organizer in Florida. So he desegregated the Boy Scouts in Florida. And he started one of the first black unions for postal and rail road workers. And then his wife, she was one of the first black women to work in the parks, in recreation kind of work, and actually has a park named after her in Florida."

Besides the awareness of injustices, parents got them acquainted with ways to fight against inequality. Some parents of activists had a job in which they fought against racism, for example in politics. Sometimes parents of activists even taught them protesting at a young age, as a white activist explained:

"I was six years old and went to the big demonstrations at the Pentagon and watched my stepdad get arrested for pouring blood on the pillars of the Pentagon. [...] My mom and I had this whole

talk the night before [my first protest] 'if you want to get arrested, we have the bail money for you if you want to get arrested'. You know, this is the talk that my mother has with her 14 year old daughter."

It seems like this transferring from parents to children creates an involvement and awareness, which the children cannot release anymore. Once seen, it can no longer be unseen. Sometimes, this intergenerational remembering could be a way of transmitting a cultural trauma from one generation to the next by means of discourse and narratives (Eyerman 2004, 160-164).

However, there are also activists who did not have parents or other people in their network that supported their activism. Another important reason for residents of St. Louis to become engaged in activism was the shooting of Michael Brown. The shooting of Michael Brown created power and energy for some people to develop their identity as an activist and stand up against racism. One white, male activist told us:

"When I went to Ferguson and saw the people on the streets, just refusing to leave, And I think that was the first time as hopeless as it was and as awful as it was; to be tear gassed in the middle of the streets and like children being tear gassed and seeing the state brutality oppressing its people as if I was watching communist China on TV, that was all awful. But seeing them, seeing these people, who just refused to leave, who were just fucking fed up, I mean, it was like the most hopeful I had ever felt in my life. You know, like maybe things can get better, like really get better, Not just like service level better, but like, actually, you know, the people can actually feel some change. That was a big deal."

Also an African-American woman told us that the protests in Ferguson reinforced her motivation to be an activist: "Just to see the unity and the love. And then just the expressions, even the expressions of anger, seeing it played out, seeing the passion; I could not walk away from that, because that was the most amazing thing I had ever seen."

Sometimes, especially for white activists against racism, before they became an activist they had to stand up against their parents and disagree with their views. This was especially the case for activists who grew up in the county, where there is often a strong conservative body of thought. This shows that apart from created awareness and support by their surroundings, part of becoming an activist also has to do with a certain kind of character, which creates a drive for activism. Activists just cannot watch injustice and do nothing about it. As a young, white woman stated:

"I know that not everybody is built like this, right. But I see things, I can't not say anything about it. And that's just, that's who I am, that's what drives me. There are people that can step back and ignore things or could disassociate from them, and I feel everything. I got that empathetic soul."

Other features of the character of many activists are that they are idealistic, dreamers and can see the bigger picture in the long-term. Some of them believe that "change can happen overnight".

#### Feelings towards National Identity and Citizenship

Besides the diversity in the way activists against racism in St. Louis became engaged, there is also a variety in their feelings towards their national identity and citizenship. As noticed in the theoretical framework, the goal of civil rights activism in the post-war decades was to make civic nationalistic ideals a reality (Clayson 2010, 19). However, the relationship between their activist identity and their national identity differs among activists against racism in St. Louis. This can be explained by the fact that citizenship and the inclusions and exclusions it entails, may certainly influence and is influenced by race, class and space (Kipnis 2004, 265).

Most of the activists, both white and African-Americans, do not doubt that they have an American identity. They cannot deny the fact that they have been born and raised in the United States. However, not many activists have a strong emotional connection with their American identity. They are very aware of the history of the United States, which consists of genocides and slavery. Apart from their degree of emotional connection with their American identity, most of the activists, black and white, feel it as their duty to fight for their rights and to fight against the faults in the American system.

"I live here. I feel responsible to change what I can, you know. [...] I am not a nationalistic person or whatever. I just think that the places you can have the most impact, are the things you should focus on. [...] And the United States is in my life, St. Louis is in my life, so those are the things that I focus on and feel the most responsibility for, because I can affect them."

This shows a civic perspective on nationalism. The belief to have the ability to affect their society indicates a democratic perspective with an equal political status (Kohn 1944, 574; Ignatieff 1993, 7-8).

However, the emotional attachment with the United States of African-American activists is strongly related to the connection that they feel with the continent of Africa and their socioeconomic background. Within this, their feelings towards citizenship are often two-sided. On the one hand some feel like they deserve the citizenship more than other's do, since the United States was "built on slavery". One African-American activist explained:

"I feel like I am entitled to everything any American is entitled to. By version of my birth in this country, but more importantly; there would be no America if my great-great-grandmother did not build it. Literally carrying shit from over there to over there and picking the crops and nursing the baby. If my ancestors did not work for free for centuries, there would be no wealthy America, there would be no powerful America. You can only build the kind of wealth that this country has, the kind of political and military power that this country is built of, you can only build that by the exploitations of centuries of free labor [without paying slaves]."

On the other hand, they still feel excluded as a full citizen in their daily realities. As explicated earlier, this feeling of exclusion is in particular to greater extent felt by lower class African-Americans. In accordance, we ascertained through observation and interviews that especially the lower class African-American activists emphasize on their connection with Africa, and have no emotional bound at all with their

American identity. They do not feel accepted as an American by institutions, as one African-American activist of lower class explained:

"We are all Moorish Americans. So we do have an American identity. Do the government recognizes that? In a sense. Do the city and the officials recognize that? No. [...] They see us what they see us for; they are going to see us for black, negro, colored, African-American, whatever they want to call us. And think about this. Even in all of them names, that is no nationality. Is that a nationality? It don't even sound right. I am African-American? African-American. That's two continents. No, that don't make sense."

In this way, some African-American activists feel it as their duty to continue the fight against these 'false claims of citizenship' (Kipnis 2004, 265), which their ancestors started. This is in particular one of the reasons some African-American activists are engaged in activism.

#### Goals and Dreams

Within these different feelings towards national identity and citizenship, there is also a variety in what they want to achieve with their activism. Some of the activists in the movement especially fight against racism, others also fight for women's rights and for some activists this is part of the fight against overall oppression.

During interviews and gatherings of activists it seemed that the fight of lower class African-Americans is mostly concentrated on fighting racism and making their voices heard. This can be reasoned by the finding that especially African-Americans from lower class do not feel recognized and do not feel like they have a voice and a place in the American system, although some African-American female activists also focus on the liberation of women. By this, they continue to try to repair their cultural trauma. As being said, they have not had the opportunity to begin recovering from their cultural trauma, since they continue to experience the system of racism on a daily basis. It seems that most of the African-American activists of the lower class see the fight against racism as a continuous struggle and they state that even if they want to get out of the struggle against racism, by means of the combination of their American citizenship and their skin color, they are in it. Their skin color affects their daily life and reality and they can choose between quitting and fighting. Quitting is no option because of their character and they want to make sure that their children will have a better life than they have. They will not give up the struggle, even when they are aware of the possibility that there will not be enormous changes within their own lifetime. Even though activists are afraid sometimes, they continue to fight: "I am more afraid for the future of my children than for the pain in the fight right now."

The majority sees their fight against oppression even as a duty for a human being to help those around you. Since all humans are equal, every human being should fight an oppressive, unjust system. In accordance to Kuzio (2007, 27), the American system originally was built for white, rich, Christian men. As one African-American activist stated: "The system is never taking care of minorities. It wasn't built for us. And I've growing to understand it." This aligns with the philosophy of most of the middle class activists, since they are most of the time focused on fighting against racism within a bigger fight against oppression.

Thereby, many of the middle class activists can emphasize, because they have other target identities in which they experience discrimination. A white, disabled activist stated: "Understanding and sharing the struggles. One marginalized group cannot be free unless all marginalized groups are free, so you have to work together." The activists with this view agree that people from all kinds of target groups should be allies in a broader struggle for equity. They claim that everyone has multiple identities and that every person has target identities and dominant identities.

However, most of the activists in St. Louis agree that being someone of color is the target identity that has most influence on someone's life in St. Louis, whereby fighting racism is the starting point of the fight in order to liberate all people:

"If you are sitting and you are talking to your friend and they are bleeding to death and you have a scratch, you are going to tend to their bleeding to death first [...] that's going to be where we are going to put our focus. But it's ultimately about liberating everybody."

So, in the fight against racism, there is a broader goal of liberation also for other target groups, which are among others related to gender, sexual orientation, class, disabilities and mental health.

Most of the middle class activists try to fight against marginalization, discrimination and the whole oppressive system. The greater goal that they see for the movement is to ensure equality and equity for every citizen within the United States. In order to achieve that, a big part of the activists in St. Louis believes that the system of capitalism has to be thrown away, since capitalism is seen as a model for the world economy that only exists in order to exploit people. They state: "Capitalism is the greatest evil of the world." In their view, real liberation can only be accomplished when capitalism has vanished and people aren't exploiting any group at all anymore. This aligns with the lived philosophy of activists; they consider every human as being equal and they strongly believe that society has to mirror this worldview. Most activists stand up for all people and their activism can be seen as a worldview into practice, a way of life. Everything they do is done by the same norms and values.

Furthermore, because of their worldview, most activists nowadays do not define themselves as religious in the sense of part of an organized church. The majority sees organized religion namely as a part of the capitalist, oppressive system. Even the few that are part of an organized church distance themselves from the greater organized religious system in the United States. However, many activists consider themselves spiritual:

"You need to be a spiritual person in my opinion. It is just too easy to give up to the world if you are not a spiritual person. If you believe in some sort of higher spiritual existence, then you have to justify the evil that you see through some kind of lens. [...] If you don't at least have something to associate the struggle, the hardship, and the oppression and the good stuff too

with, then I have always find that those people just fall back and not be involved necessarily as deeply."

Although most activists believe in their activism from the bottom of their hearts, there are a few exceptions that use the opportunity of protesting in the streets chiefly to make them feel better about themselves. Within the activist community they also call some people 'actorvists'. Actorvists dominantly show their activism towards media and at big protests, but are not very active behind the scenes, because they cannot gain attention and fame there.

## 4.2 Activism in Practice

Out of the various ways people became involved in activism, feelings towards their national identity, ideas about citizenship and goals they are fighting for, different ways of activism take shape. The movement is not only something that is done by demonstrating on the streets, for the fight against racism contains people who use many different strategies. However, the first association people generally have with an activist is protesting in the streets. Thereby, some individuals who confirm their active way of fighting against racism are not identifying themselves as an 'activist'. Residents of St. Louis are also fighting racism by means of using social media, being member of particular organizations, taking political functions, building communities and creating art. And besides these ways of activism, there are people who are contributing to the fight against racism by means of organizing these different strategies, in order to ensure the power of the movement. Consequential, a lot of activists against racism in St. Louis call themselves 'organizers'. However, all people who confirm their active way of fighting against racism fall under our definition of 'activists'.

Different ways of actively fighting against racism, related to different thoughts about most effective strategies and the earlier described variation in what they are fighting for, will be described. Yet, the way socio-economic status influences activism in general will be explained first. This is because the socio-economic context brings an important discussion about the role of white activists in the movement. These different views about a differentiation in activism between African-American activists and white activists are repeated within the different ways of activism.

#### Socioeconomic Status and Skin Color

As race and class constitute an important context for ideas about citizenship and goals activists are fighting for, it also shapes the way activism is embedded in their lives. First of all, the majority of the activists are middle class. This can be explained by the fact that their stable income allows them to spend an amount of their (spare) time in being active in the movement. Moreover, these middle class activists have often accomplished a higher education. Their time in college has given them the opportunity to

become involved in activism while being a student and learning the tools to develop strategies and become organizers. While in college they have built connections with other activists or with organizations. This all lead to the reality that most of the activists within organizations of the movement against racism in St. Louis are of middle class.

On the other hand, it seems that African-Americans of lower class, most of the time, do not have the resources to be an activist against racism. Still there are some activists against racism in the lower class. These activists often are part of less organized, hierarchically structured, groups, which arose during the Ferguson protests and are not part of the older organizations, which will be explained below. Besides, many of the lower class activists are engaged in the movement by means of art, music and poetry.

Alongside the differentiation by money, time and knowledge, the socio-economic context is also important to understand the constant discussion about the role white people should have in a movement that is considered black. African-Americans that are often in a lower socio-economic position, most of the times state that 'white allies' are there to support them, but they should not necessarily be on the inside of the movement. We argue that because they are still experiencing racism on a daily basis, they are more focused on recognition of the daily barriers for African-Americans, getting their voices heard and celebrating black pride. This can be substantiated by two quotes of African-American activists: "For us our role being, to be just present, to be always be there. Make sure our voices are heard. To any door that opened, that we are there to push through." and "I got to fight for my own liberation. It is my duty to fight for my freedom and when I fight, I can win." Within this focus, white activists can only help them to create space to make the black voices heard, by making other white people aware of the racism and by fighting unjust policies. One African-American activist explained this:

"And one thing I love is that the white community has said 'we need to educate each other on racism'. [...] That is a room that black Americans do not need to be in, at least not yet. That is the safe space for white people to talk to other white people about racism and how they feel. Because one thing about it is if we were there, some things would hurt us and have us react, when it is just really maybe that person trying to understand or trying to work it through."

White activists who confirm this 'white allyship' do this to show that they recognize the racist behavior of white Americans and the institutionalized racism in the United States. As a white, male activist told us:

"It was a Black Lives movement. My personal experience in American culture as a white male and especially since my mid-twenties, college educated, having a professional sort of job and sort of appearance, is that white man in lots of situations, their voices get heard more and get listened to more, to the level of silly things. [...] I was very conscious about that this was a movement let by black people and that my role was to offer support that was desired."

The fact that it is often stated that the movement is a 'Black Liberation movement', corresponds with the new social movement theorists, who give greater importance to the construction of one's identity and who see activism as a claim for recognition (Poletta and Jasper 2001, 287).

However, African-American activists that are most of the time of higher socio-economic status are convinced of the fact that the struggle should be bigger than race. This group prefers the term 'comrade' over 'white ally'. Activists who see the movement as part of a bigger struggle for the liberation of all correspond more with a totally new distribution of resources, than with the goal of reconstructing identity. This aligns with the early social movement theorists who put their focus on the role of resources in social movements (Poletta and Jasper 2001:287). Furthermore, it can be argued that activists who focus more on the concept of resources over identity try to align their already reconstructed identity and ideals with the daily reality that corresponds with the last stage of recovery from cultural trauma (Herman 1997).

This divide within the community of African-American activists about the goal of the movement and the role of non-black activists creates confusion for some white activists, who try to listen to what the African-American activists describe as their role. A white woman told us: "And some people were kind of like staring at us and like 'what are you doing here, because it is a lame group of white people staying there'. But then there were also people 'thank you for being out here. Thank you for supporting us."

So, socioeconomic status and skin color, which are highly interwoven in St. Louis, are important aspects in the way activism takes shape by means of resources in order to be able to be an activist and by creating different perspectives of the role for white activists.

#### Protesting in the Streets

Although not all of the activists participate in protests on the street, still the majority of the activists against racism in St. Louis use protesting as one of their ways of fighting against racism. This contains silent, small protests, but also more noisily, radical protest. During the Civil Rights Movement protests were often lead by one or a few charismatic leaders. Nowadays, the anti-racism movement does not have any particular leader, which is explained as an intentional strategy:

"We are not going to do like what happened before in the last movement, where you killed off the leaders and everybody went to sleep. You know, this time there is no 'one leader' for you to kill us. So you cannot make it go away if you try it, because there is too many of us."

This shows that remembering struggles from the past can, apart from being a coping strategy, also be used for strategic and political goals (Eyerman 2004, 61). Furthermore, having not one particular leader is besides a strategy also is practically and ideologically justified: "We were fighting for equality. We were fighting for that. For the line to be raised and so there was no way to have a leader, because that takes away the equality. Everybody had to be on the level playing field." Although there is not one particular leader, most of the African-American and white activists agree that 'black people' should be the leaders during protests, whereby white activists should not be in the front or talking to the media.

Alongside the absence of a leader, there is a strong community feeling within the movement.

Activists sometimes lost their family and friends, because they did not support them in being an activist and/or because they grew apart, because they were in the streets of Ferguson such a great amount of their time. They needed to stick together for emotional and physical support during the protests and afterwards. One activist explained:

"None of us knew each other before August 9. And then just being around each other so much and just the trauma [due to the police violence and being tear gassed], you know, all of that forced us to quickly become family. So we got to know each other. People just fell into place."

Loyalty is not created by the binding factor of religion, which was pivotal during the time of the Civil Rights Movement in themed-twentieth century (Houck and Dixon 2006, 1), more so the shared experiences of police brutality created trust and built the network of activists. They formed a new family and call themselves 'Activist Family'. A white activist pointed to this as one of the motivations to be engaged: "As a kid I was kind of socially awkward. For a long time I did not have a lot of friends. That is also a big motivation, community. That I can care about a community of other people and that people care about me." This confirms with the theory that loyalty plays an important role in the construction and sustainability of social movements (Houck and Dixon 2006, 1).

#### Organizational Structure

Besides the feelings of loyalty among individual protesters and the feeling they were fighting for a bigger shared goal, sustainability of the movement was provided by already existing organizations. However, during Ferguson also new groups of people began organizing. Within the movement there are a lot of different organizations with various goals and strategies. In accordance with the account of various activists, they can be subdivided roughly in two main categories: 'pre-August 9 organizations' and 'post-August 9 groups'. This categorization is especially noticeable within the strategy to be in the streets and to protest. We have not noticed such a pre-August 9 and post-August 9 divide in the community building sector, which will be described later.

Some of the most important pre-August 9 groups that demonstrate in the streets are: 'Organization for Black Struggle' (OBS), 'Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment' (MORE), 'Better Family Life' (BFL) and 'Black Lives Matter' (BLM). They are often traditionally, hierarchically set up by means of an executive director, employees and members. They organize a lot of events to gather their members and to strengthen their strategies and their motivations to keep fighting against racism. Some of these organizations are mainly focused towards the black community, while other organizations are directed towards both black and white activists. However, there are also organizations and programs that only focus on the white activist. The two most important communities that are formed in order to assist white people by means of talking and reading together in understanding racism, white privilege and white supremacy in the United States are: St. Louis Anti-Racist Collective (STL-ARC) by the Justice Institute-St. Louis and the Witnessing Whiteness group of YWCA Metro St. Louis. In the pre-August 9 organizations, the role of white and black activists is often seen as differently.

A few examples of post-August 9 groups are: 'Hands Up United', 'Tribe X', 'Millennial Activists United' and 'Artivists St. Louis'. These groups are less structured and organized. Most of the activists who are part of the post-August 9 groups do not see the advantage of dividing black and white activists per se, although they do state that the most marginalized group should have the greatest space to raise their voice. However, they want to fight as a unity to end the way of thinking where there is always one group who wants to overpower another group. An African-American activist part of a post-August 9 group stated: "Anybody who is willing to stand up there and willing to fight with me, I need you right here. However you see fit. So I don't like getting up in job descriptions and titles."

Nevertheless, individual activism and activism connected to groups do exist abreast. Some activists are part of activism groups or organizations, but are also active apart from these groups or organizations. However, the ideologies and strategies of post-August 9 groups are often closer related to the views of activists who do not relate themselves to a group or organization, than to the ideologies and strategies of the pre-August 9 organizations.

On the surface it seems that everybody in the streets can get along very well with one another. However, these categorizing organizations and groups bring some frictions within the movement. Most frictions are about the fact that the government legitimizes some of the pre-August 9 organizations and they received money, while post-August 9 groups did not. In this way there are protesters who get paid for their activism, while many of the individuals in the post-August 9 groups are lower class youth and have to use their own money and spare time for their activism. In relation to this money issue, some people that are part of the post-August 9 groups consider the pre-August 9 organizations as part of the governmental system, because they are registered as non-profit organizations and are recognized by the state and consider the pre-August 9 organizations as not being radical enough. An African-American activist, member of 'Tribe X', construed:

"Real revolutionary is real revolutionary stuff. It's not organized in the way that they organize. Revolution is not organized in an office [...]. Revolutions happen in the streets, with the unprivileged, how people organize in the streets. [...] A lot of these non-profits are not comfortable with that kind of stuff, because it delegitimizes them in the government's eyes, and it takes away certain things that they get. So they don't want to risk any of that. So they have to maintain a certain level of social pushback. And America has created this buffer, because of what happened in the sixties and the seventies. [...] So now they created the non-profits industrial complex. Which is a buffer for to stop that. Once something pops through that, then they will handle that."

So, this informant states that pre-August 9 organizations that are recognized as non-profit organizations are part of the system and therefore part of the problem, for it seems that the government is improving and encouraging change, instead of part of the solution.

#### Mobilization and Organization through Social Media

Social media was of great aid for the post-August 9 groups. Social media is a fast way for activists to communicate. It gives individuals the opportunity to organize, since social media is free and very accessible nowadays for people from all different socio-economic backgrounds. This corresponds to Juris, who states that new movements are more flexible and bottom-up, due to technologies, than old movements were, who often are more hierarchical structured (2008, 14). Mobilizing by new organizations is done especially by means of Twitter and Facebook, although also longer established organizations use the Internet to mobilize. We experienced the use of social media ourselves during our fieldwork when we were added to a Facebook chat with 54 activists of St. Louis, for we demonstrated with them against Trump on March 11 2016. In this chat they keep each other up to date about amongst other things shootings, protests and court cases.

However, social media is also monitored by the government, which makes it not usable for more secret strategizing. An African-American activist was for example 'Facebook jailed' <sup>13</sup> during our fieldwork, probably because the government did not accept some of his activities on Facebook and wanted to discourage him in his activism. Another African-American activist told us about a phone surveillance device, named 'Stingray boxes'. This is used by the government to control activism, whereby they have access to all the data of the phones of people who walk by these boxes on the street.

Besides, the fact that social media can be eavesdropped, it can be argued that physical interaction is needed to build and sustain a network, for contact is needed to foster the generation of new ideas, identities and solidarity between activists (Juris 2008, 158). This is noticeable in St. Louis, for social media is used as a tool only; there are no 'internet only activists'. Activists argue that in order to maintain the movement "people have to be out there".

Besides mobilizing, social media is also used to support each other within the activism against racism. Informants for example wrote on Facebook:



<sup>13</sup> He was not able to use his Facebook account for two weeks. Facebook can block or ban users from accessing their accounts when they violate Facebook's guideline. However, probably the government asked or demanded Facebook to block his account.

This support goes also beyond national borders. Several activists told us about the support of Palestinians during the protests in Ferguson:

"You know, early in Ferguson we were getting tear gassed. Palestinians were tweeting us, like 'do yourself a gasmask' and tear gas tips and stuff, because there is the solidarity between Ferguson and Palestine and there is a group that went from Ferguson to Palestine and stuff."

Activists also have their own live streams on social media, to show what is really going on during their demonstrations and in order to protect the protesters from further police violence. A lot of activists namely noticed that police officers are less likely to show brutality when being filmed.

Lastly, it also is used as a way to express their ideologies and worldviews and to make other people aware of the daily racism in the United States. However, this way of using social media, also creates some friction between activists about different opinions of strategies and ideologies, as earlier described.

### Art

Besides social media, art also is regularly used in all the different ways of activism to get attention and to spread their message in a positive way. The role of art is essential, since it is used at demonstrations in order to get media attention in a positive manner. This is especially done by the earlier named "St. Louis Artivists". For example, an African-American Artivist told about how they created a coffin:

"It was mirrored on all sides, and on the top it had fractured pieces of mirrors. And we took it like a casket, to represent the people that were killed by cops. And we take it to protests, when the cops would go out, we took it right up to the front, and we hold it, and there was this mosaic, of fragment images of the cops. And then they would see that. And we told them: 'look into this, in this reflection, this is what you represent, terrorizing our community, this is the reflection of the grief and the anger that you inspiring in us, by killing us."

As showed in this example, activism is often interwoven with art and being an artist, because of their similarities with regard to thinking out of the box.

Furthermore, besides on the streets, within community building art is regularly used as a way to commemorate and to empower the community. In particular 'open mics', where mainly poetry is to be heard, are very popular in St. Louis. Contiguously, music and visual art, like paintings, are also widely used forms of arts to express experiences with racism, to relive memories about the history of their people and to transmit anti-racism messages.

## Community Building

As stated before, every organization, and every individual, has their own idea of how the movement should look like and chooses their own strategy in order to fight against racism. Besides demonstrating

on the streets, people are part of the movement by means of community building, by for example creating a feeling of unity, building bridges, making other people aware, creating safe spaces and by entering local politics.

Spaces and organizations that are part of this community building strategy are: 'Urban Artist Alliance for Child Development, Inc.' (UrbArts), 'Blank Space', 'MoKaBe's Coffeehouse', '2720 Cherokee Performing Arts Center' and 'Legacy Books and Café'. Some of them are mapped as being part of 'Solidarity Economy St. Louis', viz: Blank Space, 2720, UrbArts, MoKaBe's. During our fieldwork we have spent a lot of time at MoKaBe's:

When enter, two signs directly catch the eye: 'Black Lives Matter' and '#UnitedWeFight'. Everywhere you look there are activist statements. On the red wall a poster with a picture of a woman and the text 'FREE Angela Davis Now!' On the window: 'Stop Profiling Muslims'. In the back there is a little bookcase with titles like 'Ferguson is America: Roots of rebellion' and 'Ferguson & Faith: Sparking Leadership & Awakening Community'. There even is a book written by someone who was on the frontlines during the Ferguson protests. On the bookcase an award, a miniature of the Gateway Arch, is standing. 'Business of the year, 2014'. A little note is hanging on it, the handwritten text says: 'racism lives here'.

It is Tuesday, 3pm in MoKaBe's Coffeehouse and most of the about thirty tables are taken by people with all kinds of skin colors. There are a lot of costumers sitting at the bar. Some of them are studying or working behind their laptop. Others seem amused by their conversation with Kaitlin, while drinking a shake. We order some vegetarian food, a latté and a root beer. Kaitlin grabs a mug from one of the many glasses and mugs which are hanging at iron shelves. Behind the bar there is a silver fridge of which the door is totally placarded with stickers, signs and slogans that challenge the norm and promote social movement. 'Gender is a lie'. 'Kill your television'. 'Don't pray in my school, and I won't think in your church'. 'Prison: Growth Industry of the 21st century'. 'Stop Bitching, Start a Revolution'. We hear music out of the speakers. *"Then I'm walking in Memphis, walking with my feet ten feet off of Beale"*. A lot of the music played is from African-American artists.

While having our drinks, we sit at the bar and talk with Kaitlin and some regulars about how the coffeehouse was tear gassed. After VonDerrit was shot in the Shaw neighborhood, which is located on the other side of Tower Grove Park from MoKaBe's, a group of people marched at the street alongside MoKaBe's. Eventually the police started tear gassing and MoKaBe's opened their doors as a safe space for the activists. However the police did not back down. "*They started shooting tear gas on the patio, into the crowd. That's how it ended up inside. The doors were wide open and people were pushing to get inside, to come through the door.*" Although MoKaBe's always has been a place where a lot of activist folks came, since they always have been gay friendly and favored by anti-war protesters for gatherings, since the tear gas attack the post-August 9 anti-racism activists also know to their way to the coffeehouse. "There are a lot of people who sort of seek out and feel safe at MoKaBe's. There is something here that is different than other places. It is a place where activists can come and meet up and have a burger and strategize. I think we must love and support each other and try to have it be a place of love and support."

Solidarity Economy St. Louis' goal is to "build an alternative to capitalism" and to "connect people with each other to build political power around an alternative economy or a solidarity economy". They try to accomplish an alternative economy by for example 'time banking', 'skill sharers' and 'free stores'. This anti-capitalist philosophy fits in well with the ideas of the activists. Many of them namely believe that alternatives to the existing system have to be built in order to change the system of capitalism and oppression, and change the world by starting on a small scale. As a result, activists are supporting cooperatives of the solidarity economy and a lot of events organized by activists are events organized within spaces that are part the solidarity economy. Such events are among others events that commemorate the cultural trauma by means of art, meetings in which bridges are built between the community and the police, and fundraisers for activists who have to pay lawyer costs or who are in need of money for their political campaign.

However, both in demonstrating on the streets and in community building, opinions differ in whether it is desirable and necessary to work within the system to change it or if the system can only be fought from outside the system. As being stated, some post-August 9 groups consider pre-August 9 organizations to be entangled in the governmental system. However, this is also a struggle within the strategy of community building. The organization '28 To Life' for example works mainly within the system by trying to bridge the gap between police and community, as well as trying to empower youth and support small community businesses. Also, there are some Ferguson activists that run for office within the city of St. Louis itself or within on state level. An African-American activist explained her role as politician:

"I don't even like calling myself a politician. [...] But I think from a political position we need more activists. [...] When I get into politics, I don't have to stop being an activist. [...] I am going to push for these different laws. And I am still going to curse people out if they are going to be cursed out."

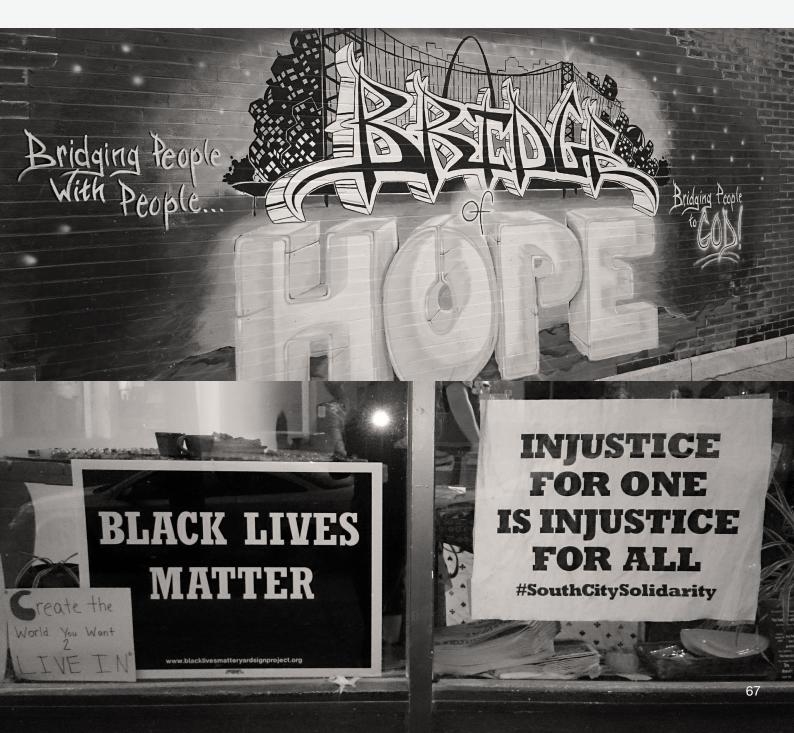
Although activism is defined as to being actively involved in a social movement, which is not related to a political party (Juris 2008), activists themselves argue that becoming a politician should be seen as activism, since running for office underlines that a movement is always changing and engaging in politics can be a next step for the movement against racism.

"[We have to keep] remembering that a movement is only a movement because it does move, because it transforms, because it does not look the same year after year. We have to grow and we at least have to morph into something. So even with the few of us that have decided to go to run into, to go into politics, that is the next phase of it. And there will be another and there will be another. So that is what keeps the movement alive, the fact that you allow it to transform. So the movement would be dead if we thought that it would suppose to stay the same."

Although activists have various ideas about fighting against or within the system, everybody agrees on the following: "the whole damn system is guilty as hell."

# chapter 5

# Conclusion



## 5 Conclusion

The conducted fieldwork of eleven weeks in St. Louis aimed to answer how the motivations of anti-racism activists in St. Louis are shaped by the broader context of experienced and perceived racism, the individual and collective memories of historical injustice and the idea of citizenship within the nation-state.

First of all, most of the activists in St. Louis experience or perceive racism on a daily basis. Racism experienced in social interaction, which contains the public and private spheres, is mostly subtle behavior, like irritated communication or ignorance. However, the experiences of racism about which activists in St. Louis talk mostly regards institutionalized racism, such as housing acts, the education system and the justice system. Housing projects, such as Pruitt-Igoe, and 'white flight' reinforced geographical segregation. The exceptional geographical segregation of St. Louis is roughly divided by the '*Delmar divide*'. The 'black, criminal, north side' encompasses neglected neighborhoods, where pre-dominantly lower class African-Americans live, which shows, in accordance with Wilson (1997), environments in which weak informal employment network, joblessness, and concentrated poverty reinforce each other. The segregated housing, enforced by acts of the government, reinforced educational segregation by means of intergenerational wealth. Because of the unequal distribution of resources within the educational system, African-American mothers struggle with the issue of where to put their child to school.

This all proves that race is an antecedent and determinant of socioeconomic status (Williams 1999, 177). Hereby, the justice system reinforces the gap between 'wealthy and rich' and 'poor and black' even further. African-American and white activists perceived that officers distribute systematic more tickets to African-Americans due to patrolling in pre-dominantly African-American neighborhoods and racial profiling. African-Americans have a lot of experience with being pulled over and unjust police behavior. Activists are even more often confronted with the violent behavior of police officers against African-Americans, whereby they declare to have a post-traumatic stress disorder from their experiences with the police during these protests.

In accordance with the intertwinement between race and class, it is noticed that African-Americans of lower class experience racism to a greater amount on daily basis. They do not have the resources to 'work around' the 'system of racism'. Because of all these experiences with racism, African-American activists feel excluded as a full citizen in their daily realities. This maintains the literature, which states that American citizenship was constructed for the 'chosen people', whom were white, liberal, Protestant and English speaking (Kuzio 2002, 27). Consequently, most of the African-American activists do not have a strong emotional connection with their American identity, which proves that ethnic elements are pivotal in the notion of nationhood of the United States (Kuzio

2002, 27; Kaufman 2000, 14; McPherson 1998, 103).

However, most of the activists, both white and African-Americans, do not deny that they have an American identity. They show a civic perspective on nationalism, whereby they belief to have the ability to affect their society (Kohn 1944, 574; Ignatieff 1993, 7-8). Their daily experiences with racism in combination with their inevitable American identity lead to the perception that they do not have a choice of being engaged in activism against racism. Their skin color affects their daily life and reality and they can choose between quitting and fighting. Quitting is no option because of their character and they want to make sure that their children will have a better life than they have. In this way, daily experiences with racism motivate African-American activists to keep fighting against racism.

Besides daily experiences, anti-racism activists are also strongly motivated by historical injustices. We ascertain that various motivations of activists can be organized within a framework of recovering from a cultural trauma. This cultural trauma started by slavery and took shape by a long history of racialization in the United States (Omi and Winant 1986, 72)(Hollinger 2005, 20). As being argued by our informants, after slavery racism just took different shapes by means of sharecropping, Jim Crow and the war on drugs. As a consequence, activists of St. Louis still indicate signs of recovering from a cultural trauma.

Three main motivations for activists to fight against racism can be related to different phases of recovering from this cultural trauma. Although one activist has several motivations simultanieously, most of the time one motivation stands out. The first reason to be engaged in activism is to continue the fight of their ancestors. Within their activism, these activists are very focused on remembering the historic injustices, making their history recognized, their voices heard and repairing their group identity as African-Americans. This confirms new social movement theorists who state that by means of activism people are able to claim recognition with regards to their identity (Poletta and Jasper 2001, 287). Mainly lower class, African-American activists of St. Louis still feel a very strong connection with their ancestors, which can be explained by the fact that they experience exclusion from American citizenship most.

Activists who are mainly motivated to continue the fight of their ancestors are often on the continuum between the first and second phase of recovery. They still search for a certain safety and emotional and economic stability for their community, but also are sometimes able to remember and mourn (Herman 1999). Within this phase of recovering, the role of white activists in the movement is very sensitive, because they are still mainly seen as the perpetrators of their traumatic experiences. This demonstrates that these African-American activists are not ready for the last stage of recovering, whereby people reconnect (Herman 1999). Within this motivation white activists have to be detached and accomplish the role of 'white ally'. Towards these African-American activists who are motivated to continue the fight of their ancestors, there are white activists who recognize this phase of recovering, whereby they mainly focus on creating space for these people to get their voices heard. Their empathic

#### conclusion

character and sometimes feelings of guilt motivate them.

Secondly, activists are motivated to create a better future for the next generation, their children. Within this motivation there is less focus on recognition of the past and more on future ideals. This motivation is mentioned by as well lower class African-Americans as middle class African-Americans. For many white activists this is not directly a motivation, because most of them have children who are also white, just like them. However, they want their children not to be part of a racial society. Furthermore, there are white activists whom have friends or relatives who are affected by racism in St. Louis and they fight for their next generation.

The activists who are mainly motivated to create a better future for the next generation are very much aware of the daily racism in St. Louis and the ways racism constricts opportunities in daily life. Besides the above-explained current experienced or perceived racism, which drives them to be engaged in activism, their belief in change for the future is also motivated by knowledge of historic achievements by their ('imagined') ancestors who fought for the same cause. Because of a combination of focus on the past and attention to the future, the activists with this motivation are more often between the second and third phase of recovering from the cultural trauma. Their motivation is still shaped by remembering, but they also have attention for reconnecting with the daily reality (Herman 1999).

The third motivation regarding the cultural trauma is to fight against human oppression overall. Besides fighting against racism, they also focus on empowering other minority groups, such as queer people or disabled people. The greater goal that they see for the movement is to ensure equality and equity for every citizen within the United States. In order to achieve that, a big part of the activists in St. Louis believes that the system of capitalism has to be thrown away. Especially many white activists are motivated to achieve a society without capitalism. However, there are also African-American activists who not solely fight against racism. We assume that they already are almost or totally recovered from the cultural trauma. They focus on reshaping the course of affairs (Herman 1999). These activists are often African-American of middle-class, who still experience racism, but have the capacity to make sure their race is not all determinative of their life. Within this motivation some activists see the people who are oppressed as the people who should get space to make their voices heard. However, this group often prefers the term 'comrade' over 'white ally'. Besides, there are also activists in St. Louis who do not differentiate roles for black and white activists, because they do not want to divide people anymore based on skin-color.

Although the struggle against racism can be seen as a fight that is lengthened over centuries, the demonstrations in Ferguson marked a shift in the anti-racism activism in the United States. This is supported by the fact that many people who were not actively aware of the effect of racism in their modern-day society and of the racism citizens of another background and phenotype face every day, began to wake up. African-American people of lower class, who before August 9 did not have the

acquaintance of ways and/or people in their surroundings that would support them to fight against racism, became more familiar with activism and the activism network of St. Louis. Thereby, activists who are motivated by a bigger fight against oppression became more focused on racism. It made them realize that being someone of color is the target identity that has most influence on someone's life in St. Louis, whereby fighting racism is the starting point of the fight in order to liberate all people.

Demonstrators began to form their own groups, that were horizontally structured, rather than hierarchically. This way of organizing was practically, tactically and ideologically informed. Post-August 9 groups are often characterized by the idea that they do not see the advantage of dividing black and white activists per se, although they do state that the most marginalized group should have the greatest space to raise their voice. The activism in St. Louis since August 9 is both a new beginning, and at the same time, a continuation of a struggle that has been going on for centuries, since also pre-August 9 organizations played an important role in the demonstrations by bailing people out of jail and organizing safe spaces.

Apart from the framework of a cultural trauma, the huge, flourishing social movement since the shooting of Michael Brown also brings motivations to stay engaged in the activism against racism. Activists motivate each other by a strong community feeling by means of emotional and physical support. People with the same anger, grief and ideals met each other on the streets and spent many hours together there. Conversations were being held and people had to trust each other, since the police reacted towards them by means of teargas attacks and violent behavior. They even call themselves 'Activist Family'. Loyalty therefore is also a huge motivation for activists in St. Louis to stay engaged in activism against racism. This confirms that loyalty plays an important role in the construction and sustainability of social movements (Houck and Dixon 2006, 1).

In conclusion, most of the activists against racism in St. Louis are mainly motivated by an inevitable engagement to racism. Firstly, the daily reality of African-American activists is inevitable shaped by racism. Hereby, some white activists experience oppression of their own target identity, such as disability or homosexuality. Secondly, parents of African-American and white activists often transferred an involvement and awareness on racism or overall unjustness and inequality in the world. This contains also awareness about historical injustices and the experiences of their ancestors. Sometimes, this intergenerational remembering could be a way of transmitting a cultural trauma from one generation to the next by means of discourse and narratives (Eyerman 2004, 160-164). The activists cannot release this awareness anymore. A combination between this awareness and common characteristic features of activists creates an inevitable engagement towards activism against racism. Most of the activists namely have a character whereby they just cannot watch injustice and do nothing about it. They feel it as their duty to continue the fight of their ancestors against 'false claims of citizenship' (Kipnis 2004, 265), or to fight for the freedom of the next generation. A lot of activists even see their activism as a duty of a human being to help those around you. Thereby they are idealistic, dreamers and can see the bigger picture in

the long-term, which ensures that they not easily give up in the fight against racism.

Recovering from a cultural trauma plays a huge part in the inevitable engagement towards anti-racism activism. Anti-racism Activists in St. Louis spread awareness about both institutionalized racism as well as racism in interactions between individuals in order to change the society regarding racism. However, to make a future possible where there is no difference between white Americans and African-Americans anymore, it is also very important that African-Americans are ready to reconnect with white Americans. This only can be done if white Americans acknowledge the injustices that are done to African-Americans historically and contemporary. The collective identity of the United States cannot be one that is shared by all until the cultural trauma is resolved, since collective memories are a vital element in the construction of a nation and nationalism (Smith 1996, Buckley-Zistel 2006). And even if all citizens are being aware of the injustices, there should also be effort made to make citizens not only equal in theory, but also in practice. By means of creating space for the voices of African-Americans and making the racial origin of the United States recognized, the social movement against racism after the shooting of Michael Brown supports reconstruction of the social relations between white Americans and African-Americans. Only after recovery from the cultural trauma, the identity of 'American citizen' will be an inclusive one for all.

"Sometimes I have got, I guess, discouraged. Because you know you do all of that fight and then injustice still occurs. So, you feel like, can we really change anything, even though you know you have, but you know. Like, when of course with Mike Brown, when Darren Wilson was not brought to ..hmm that was.. that was probably the lowest blow for me. [...] That is what makes it discouraged. So I am feel like 'what the hell are we doing?' But then realizing that the only way that we are powerless is if we stop talking. If we sit down, if we do not continue to push. So, that is why I keep moving."

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## Literature

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# Appendices

## Appendices

#### Recommendations

Our fieldwork is based on 11 weeks of participant observation, informal conversations and interviews in St. Louis. We are convinced that theory and research on anti-racism activism and social movements is by no means done with. Therefore we would like to make some recommendations and suggestions for further fieldwork on these topics both within the United States and outside the country.

#### Recommendations for Further Research in the United States

An informant stated: "[We have to keep] remembering that a movement is only a movement because it does move, because it transforms, because it does not look the same year after year." And we can only totally agree with this statement. Because of the way a movement transforms, we firstly want to recommend conducting fieldwork in St. Louis on the anti-racism movement, one or even a couple of years from now. We think it would be very interesting to see how the movement is going to re-form itself continuously. This would be of interest for social movement theorists, since we would get more insight in the way people organize themselves and how a movement transforms.

Secondly, we would recommend further research in other states in the United States. The contemporary wave of anti-racism activism, which arose in Ferguson and the area of St. Louis after the murder of Michael Brown, appears to be also visible in other parts of the United States. Hence, in other states the killing of African-Americans by police officers is also not incidental. It would be interesting to compare the situation of St. Louis with that of other cities in the United States in order to see similarities and difference in the way they organize and how they are engaged in activism. Furthermore, we would suspect that motivations of anti-racism activists in other states would be to a great extent similar to the motivations of the St. Louis' activists. It would be interesting to see if this hypothesis is true. And lastly, it would also be interesting to investigate the degree to which activists have interstate or international contact with each other.

#### Recommendations for Further Research Internationally

Besides further fieldwork in the United States, we would also recommend fieldwork in other countries that have played their part in history regarding colonialism and slave trade. We are convinced that, when taking an international perspective, it can be stated that there is a new wave of awareness regarding racism and colonialism.

For example, in the Netherlands, which had multiple colonies and was an important factor

in the slave trade, the awareness on the topic of racism is growing. In the last few years a discussion is started about the use of 'Zwarte Piet' ('Black Pete') and the 'Sinterklaasfeest'. A group of people argued that the use of Black Pete is racist and they went to court to address this topic. The tradition of Black Pete continues to be a topic of discussion every year around the 5th of December, when the feast is celebrated. However, this year, 2016, the 'Black Pete discussion' is very alive in the media even during the summer months. Black Pete and the celebration of 'Sinterklaas' is a debated topic nowadays in all levels of society; it is being discussed in media, schools, on governmental level and in households. Racism is a topic of societal importance again. Since the start of the 'Black Pete is Racism' movement, there have been many other cases that were addressed about racism. The issue of ethnic profiling made the news when a famous Dutch singer, Typhoon, was stopped by police because his luxurious car did not 'match his profile' (Verschuren 2016). This incident addressed the broader topic of ethnic profiling, but also showed how people who do not encounter this kind of profiling by the police deny the racism other citizens experience, hence they tell to just man up and to not play a victim. We would suggest that this reaction can be seen as similar as in the United States and can be connected to the terms of both white privilege and social amnesia.

We argue that the United States and the Netherlands are by this means more similar than would be expected at first view. In the Netherlands there are also people who have been killed by police officers. Activists that want to create awareness and demand justice also hold signs that say 'Black Lives Matter', just as we saw ourselves in St. Louis. Furthermore, there is a music scene in the Netherlands that raps about the issue of racism, which could be similar to the poetry scene in St. Louis. For example, the artists Insayno and Rass Motivated rap about the slavery and the continuing struggles of minorities experienced at the institutional level in their song 'slavenmentaliteit'. Likewise as we heard in St. Louis, they rap about reparations that are needed for slavery, the misbehavior of police officers and the influence of the mass media. They even cite from a famous speech of Malcolm X: "By any means necessary". We suggest that it would be interesting to conduct a similar fieldwork among the Dutch anti-racist activists, to study similarities and differences in relation to experienced and perceived racism and the cultural trauma and collective memory in the Netherlands.

#### Summary

At the 9th of August 2014, the African-American teenager Michael Brown was shot by a white police officer. The shooting initially was followed by weeks of demonstrations in the streets of Ferguson. It brought feelings of vexation, powerlessness and anger about the much larger feeling of discrimination through daily life among African-Americans to the surface. This made people aware of the still existing racism in the modern-day society of the United States. Therefore, the activism in St. Louis since August 9 can be seen both as new beginning and as a continuation of a struggle that has been going on for centuries. To explain the increased engagement in activism after August 9, the historical, social, political and economic context of the activists in St. Louis are explored. This research especially aimed to construe how the motivations of anti-racism activists in St. Louis are shaped by the broader context of experienced and perceived racism, the individual and collective memories of historical injustice and the idea of citizenship within the nation-state. This research is conducted by means of a qualitative research design based on ethnographic fieldwork in St. Louis from February till April 2016. It contributes in giving a voice to minority activists as well as to general knowledge of social movements.

Several theoretical debates that are important to frame the case study of anti-racism activists in St. Louis are: the notion of the nation-state as being inclusive on ethnic or civic grounds, racialization as a way to categorize people, the interplay between economic, residential and racial segregation, cultural trauma as a societal process and theories on the construction of a social movement. These concepts are specified with regard to the context of the United States. Therefore, racialization within the United States, the history of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement is explored. After the theoretical embedding of the research, the specific context of St. Louis, as being one of the most segregated cities in the United States, is dealt with. A close look at the history of St. Louis' policies and laws that facilitated segregation, racism and inequality is taken and the history of the Civil Rights Movement in St. Louis is being discussed. Finally, contemporary activist organizations of St. Louis are introduced.

In the two empirical chapters, the ideas, feelings and experiences of the informants have a pivotal place. The first empirical chapter exposes how racism and racialization are experienced and perceived by activists in St. Louis. It shows how geographical and social segregation are enforced and reinforced by housing projects, the education system and the justice system. Thereby experiences with ethnic profiling are described. Furthermore, the relation between historical and contemporary racism and cultural trauma is made. Hereby it is ascertained that the slavery history of African-Americans is very alive in the hearts and minds of activists, partly because people feel like racism only has taken a different shape, but is not gone or diminished. It is noticed that the hardest part of the continuous racism that African-Americans in the United States experience is, apart from the experience itself, the denial or neglect regarding history. Subsequently, three phases in the recovery from the slavery history as a cultural

trauma are introduced. These phases correspond with coping strategies such as forgetting, remembering and incorporating the history and the cultural trauma. Hereby socioeconomic status appears to be the most important factor in predicting in which stage of recovering from the cultural trauma activists where in.

The second empirical chapter explores the identity and mentality of the activists against racism in St. Louis and their activism in practice. The diversity within the group of activists is demonstrated by showing how differences in 'race', socio-economic background, feelings towards nationalism, the moment when becoming engaged in the movement and the stage of recovery from the cultural trauma are often related to each other and influence the ideologies and strategies of individual activists and activist organizations. Residents of St. Louis are fighting racism by means of protesting in the streets, using social media, being member of particular organizations, taking political functions, building communities and creating art. Within the activist movement there are activists who are convinced that activism has to come from outside 'the system' in order to fight it, while on the other hand there are activists that state that there has to be worked from within 'the system' in order to achieve change. While showing the diversity within the activist movement, the unity is also demonstrated by the addressing how activists support each other, consider each other as a family and ultimately all have the same goal: changing the system that, because it does not regard all people as being equal, oppresses part of its citizens.

In the conclusion, it is argued that most of the activists against racism in St. Louis are mainly motivated by an inevitable engagement to racism. Recovering from the United States' cultural trauma can be related to the engagement of activist. The three main motivations for activists to fight against racism can be related to different phases of recovering from this cultural trauma. Firstly, there are activists who focus on remembering historic injustices, the fight of ancestors against racism and presenting an alternative narrative opposing the dominant, 'white' version of history. Secondly, there are activists focusing on fighting racism in order to create a better future for their children and future generations. Lastly, a lot of activists focus on the future by fighting against overall human oppression. After providing this overview, it is argued that since collective memories are a vital element in the construction of a nation-state and nationalism only after recovery from the cultural trauma, the identity of 'American citizen' can become inclusive for all its citizens.

### Abstract

At the 9th of August 2014, the African-American teenager Michael Brown was shot by a white police officer. The shooting initially was followed by weeks of demonstrations in the streets of Ferguson. This made people aware of the still existing racism in the modern-day society of the United States. Therefore, the activism in St. Louis since August 9 can be seen both as new beginning and as a continuation of a struggle that has been going on for centuries. To explain the increased engagement in activism after August 9 with its own strategies and methods, this research aimed to construe how the motivations of anti-racism activists in St. Louis are shaped by the broader context of experienced and perceived racism, the individual and collective memories of historical injustice and the idea of citizenship within the nation-state. This research is conducted by means of a qualitative research design based on ethnographic fieldwork in St. Louis from February till April 2016. This case study explores the construction of social movements and of anti-racism activism in particular. In the conclusion, it is argued that most of the activists against racism in St. Louis are mainly motivated by an inevitable engagement to racism. Thereby the three main motivations for activists to fight against racism are related to different phases of recovering from the slavery history as a cultural trauma.

Keywords: racism, activism, cultural trauma, nationalism, citizenship, segregation, St. Louis, Ferguson, United States

