

The female side of the Black Lives Matter movement

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During her talk on the Tulane University uptown campus, Brittney Cooper tells the story of Rachel Jeantel, one of the black women she says has suffered oppression and pain. Jeantel, who testified in the Trayvon Martin case, was ridiculed. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

"Social discourse focuses solely on the vulnerability of black boys and misses social outcomes for black girls," asserted Brittney Cooper. The [Newcomb College Institute](#) invited Cooper to Tulane University to speak on Wednesday (Feb. 24) about the [#blacklivesmatter](#) movement and the importance of remembering the role of women within that movement.

[Cooper](#) is an assistant professor of women's and gender studies and Africana studies at Rutgers University and she is an expert on the institutional racism and sexism faced by black women in their daily lives.

Cooper drew on multiple stories of women and girls being harassed, assaulted or killed by the police.

"It shouldn't take an act of God to get us out of trouble with the police," she said, shaking her head.

These stories about atrocities of racial violence that Cooper told the audience have gone largely unnoticed by the general population. She discussed Rachel Jeantel, a young woman who testified during the Trayvon Martin case, saying she was ridiculed for her appearance and speech impediment.

"The widespread mockery of this girl ... for her size and skin color, are examples of ways people hold black women to a classist set of social standards in a public situation. We did not pay attention to other factors ... her existence and her pain."

Cooper encouraged Tulane students to engage and begin to understand the ways in which black women may be victimized by the general population.

"Black women's relation to movements through history has been both romantic and abusive," she said.

She urged listeners to take part in the movement called [#sayhername](#), a play on the title of the Destiny's Child song, "Say My Name," hoping they will remember to not let the names of black, female victims fade into ignominy, but motivate the community to fight even harder against racist institutions.

Claire Davenport is a sophomore at Tulane University, majoring in English and political science.

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