

# Redirecting the Blame: America's Overconsumption of Black Women as Illustrated in Kiese Laymon's *Heavy*

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Food within literature often presents itself through the multifaceted lens of the intersectionality of culture, gender, class, and race. Kiese Laymon's memoir *Heavy* is not exempt from this intersectionality as Laymon presents food as an outlet for the struggle that the Black women in his life face as they are forced to fit into gendered expectations through the gaze of not only men but of America and white power structures. Within *Heavy*, Kiese Laymon presents both the implicit generational and explicit current trauma that African American women endure through the consumption of their bodies by America, their use of food as ownership, and the role that food insecurity plays in ensuing actions. This essay applies triple consciousness to the trauma of these women as Black women in America as they internalize the gaze of white people in America and aims to shift abusive blame from Black communities back to the white institutions which use these Black communities for consumption. This is evident through analyzing the rape of Laymon's childhood friend, his grandmother's submission to white power structures but her strength in the kitchen, and Laymon's mother's abusive tendencies toward him which follow her food insecurities. This essay will delve into how throughout *Heavy*, Laymon illustrates how food functions in the lives of Black women in American societies and the unhealthy habits that are formed in order to confront both this explicit and implicit trauma, and the increasing relevancy to shift the blame of these unhealthy habits from Black communities back to the white power structures which enforced them in the first place.

## Introduction

Generational trauma—which was, and still is, evoked by white people—is prominent in the Black community today and often presents itself in a harsher manner both within Black women and as a consequence of how Black women are treated as consumable beings. This generational trauma stems from being enslaved by white people, to segregation, to societal racism, and can manifest itself within Black folk in multiple fashions. In Kiese Laymon's *Heavy: An American Memoir* (2018), an autobiographical narrative about a heavysset Black man's experiences with personal trauma and struggles with food, this generational trauma manifests in how the Black women in Laymon's life are treated as sexual objects. In Laymon's memoir, Black women respond to their hardships through their interactions with food as a tool to negotiate the implicit and explicit trauma they endure; at the same time, Laymon compares Black women's exploitative treatment to the indulgence of food being devoured throughout the narrative. By delineating generational trauma through the Black women in his life, Laymon affirms the consequences of white institutions abusing Black folk through overindulgence, and how that carries into the lives of Black women and their actions as a result. To further this conversation in a present-day context, it is also relevant to analyze the Black Lives Matter movement in relation to the protests, riots, and the deaths of Black women specifically as consequences of white power

within institutions such as the police force and within politics, evincing a pattern of abuse and overconsumption of Black women with a lack of remorse or justice.

This essay will explore how Laymon's *Heavy* is an indictment of dominant white power structures and the lack of acknowledgement of the impact that these structures have on Black women, in particular, as they see themselves not only through the white American gaze but also the male gaze—a theoretical framework referred to as “triple consciousness.” Moreover, Laymon's memoir shifts the blame from the Black community's actions to expose the ways in which white power structures built the grounds for these actions to begin with, reflecting the trend of food and consumption as the polarity of comfort and grief in the discussion of generational trauma within Black women.

To analyze this through the lens of triple consciousness, I will interpret where both the white and male gaze is evident within characters in *Heavy*, including Laymon's childhood friend Layla, who is sexually assaulted through the means of overconsumption but then neglected in the beginning of the novel; Laymon's grandmother and her negotiation of the white gaze and tendency to serve others while creating a safe space of food for herself and her family; and Laymon's mother through her abusive tendencies and food insecurities. Moreover, the essay includes research on the impact that generational trauma, as caused by white people, has on Black women. These interpretations and extensive research will allow for further understanding of the disregarded consequences that are derived from the power that white institutions hold, along with the harm of focusing the blame on the Black community rather than on the white structures which allow Black women to become the scapegoat for their own victimization.

### **Understanding Triple Consciousness**

To begin to understand the trauma—both generational and present—that the Black women in Laymon's *Heavy* encounter and react to, we must first take a step back to understand what generational/cultural trauma and collective memory is through the lens of triple consciousness. In his book *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (2008), Ron Eyerman explained that:

[T]rauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory. ... In this sense, slavery was traumatic in retrospect, and formed a 'primal scene' which could, potentially, unite all 'African Americans' in the United States, whether or not they themselves had been slaves or had any knowledge of or feeling of Africa. Slavery formed the root of an emergent collective identity through an equally emergent collective memory, one that signified and distinguished a race. (1)

The concept of collective memory and trauma being present in the Black community in America was caused by and perpetuated by the white population through continued racism and the enforcement of stereotypes. This collective and generational trauma is the foundation for both double and triple consciousness, where Black women are traumatized to view themselves through the gaze of Blackness, America, and womanhood. In some cases, including in *Heavy*, such experiences may influence their relationship to food.

The theoretical origin of this framework is double consciousness, a term coined by W.E.B Du Bois,

which explains how Black men in particular are prone to looking at themselves through the white American gaze, rather being allowed to develop a true self-consciousness. This white gaze is internalized due to generational trauma that Black folk tend to suffer because of their ancestral history, consisting of enslavement, dehumanization, segregation, police brutality, and more, along with the repercussions of this consistent racism and the promised reparations that have yet to be made. As Du Bois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity... The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. (23)

Triple consciousness takes Du Bois's theoretical framework one step further by including the gaze of womanhood which Black women have been held against and hold against themselves, as they are consistently consumed (not unlike food) by dominant power structures. According to scholar Nahum Welang's "Triple Consciousness: The Reimagination of Black Female Identities in Contemporary American Culture" (2018), "[B]lack women view themselves through three lenses and not two: America, blackness and womanhood" (296). Black women are forced to see themselves not just as Black women but through "the perceptions of the white world" (Welang 297) and the generational trauma that they are faced with, along with the gendered stereotypes that are derived from these perceptions. In other words, triple consciousness acknowledges the impact that both "blackness" and "Americanness" hold on women specifically—recognizing that Black hypermasculinity targets Black women while white hypermasculinity targets the generalized Black community in general. Therefore, Black women are subject to the "womanhood" lens, which consists of gendered expectations, a lack of respect, and the normalized and accepted (over)consumption of their bodies by both male and white communities. Triple consciousness is evident through the Black women in Laymon's *Heavy* and how they are influenced by the power structures which oppress them and attempt to define their roles as women in Black communities.

### **Black Women Strength Trope**

As Laymon's memoir also indicates, issues ranging from physical abuse to food insecurities derived from the influence of white structures are normalized within Black communities and Black women especially experience the repercussion of historical and present racial and sexual abuse and trauma. In *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the Nineteenth Century* (2012), Kyla Tompkins argues that "The image of the black body as an edible object is a strong and consistent trope... black bodies and subjects in these encounters fight back, and bite back... in novels produced by black authors" (8). Not only is the Black body seen as edible to the white eye, such as Tompkins argues, but also by applying the triple consciousness lens, I contend that the bodies of Black women, in particular, are appetizing to both the

white gaze and male gazes. In Laymon's *Heavy*, these women "fight back, and bite back" through defying weakness and simulating perfection and strength, which is made evident through their actions and involvement with food in their lives. This normalization of the consumption of Black women can be seen through Laymon's childhood friend Layla, his mother, and his grandmother, and how they respond to the undue societal expectations to which they are held.

Each of these women face their own trauma—both generational and present—throughout their lives and are greatly influenced by triple consciousness, causing them to act out in various ways but with one common factor: fitting into the persona of a strong Black woman. Regardless of their particular traumas, they are forced to fight against the unwanted overindulgence of their own bodies. According to Roxanne Donovan and Lindsey West's study "Stress and Mental Health: Moderating Role of the Strong Black Woman Stereotype" (2015):

[The Strong Black Woman] is perceived as naturally resilient, able to handle with ease all the stress, upset, and trauma life throws at her. . . . During slavery, internalization of these traits was likely necessary for personal, familial, and community survival. Today, Black women no longer have to contend with institutionalized chattel slavery, but they do have to contend with such significant intersectional stressors as racialized sexism and gendered racism. (386)

To further contextualize this stereotype through the lens of triple consciousness, the strong Black woman is a trope derived from the need that Black women have to present themselves as secure in order to stray from humility, as pending from both the looming racism from white power structures and the sexism from hypermasculinity—both lenses that Black women tend to view themselves through. As I argue, these pressures to be strong bear down on Laymon's friend Layla, his grandmother, and his mother, influencing their interactions with food.

### **Black Lives Matter Protests in 2020**

The fact that Black women are forced to portray themselves as having a specifically strong "character" to provide protection for themselves is not a new subject of debate; however, while this conversation is not new, there is *still* a lack of acknowledgement of the consumption of Black women due to the dominant tendency to view Black women as something to devour and ingest—a view originating with white power structures during the long centuries of chattel slavery. This remains evident today through the recent 2020 spark of protests in support of the Black Lives Matter movement which were provoked by the murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police officers and protests that were spurred on by the continued killings of Black folx, and how white institutions taught us to fight for the lives of men but disregard the health of Black women.

These murders of Black folx were committed by, and as a result of, white power structures which influence communities to act and respond in a certain manner, including "Protesters [who] burned a police precinct in Minneapolis, torched cop cars in Los Angeles and Atlanta, and dodged plumes of tear gas" (Altman). Moreover, "By June 2, the National Guard had been activated in at least 28 states, and dozens of cities had imposed curfews to quell looting, arson and spasms of violence," as Alex Altman

recalled in his *Time* article “Why the Killing of George Floyd Sparked an Uprising” (2020). Instead of asking how the Black Lives Matter protestors could destroy property, steal from big name brand companies, and protest in the middle of a pandemic, which consequently shifts the blame to the Black community, this blame needs to be redirected to the white power structures that have suppressed the Black community for centuries by instead asking the question of why the Black Lives Matter protestors have responded in such numbers and actions.

While this recent series of BLM protests happened in response to the unjust murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, the mention of Black women such as Breonna Taylor, an innocent woman killed in her sleep by a no-warrant home invasion by police officers, has been significantly less valued along with a lack of justice due to America failing Black women in addressing their pain and instead continuing to consume their bodies as if they were edible. This is evident not only through the fact that Taylor’s murder happened on March 13, 2020 (Booker), two months before Floyd’s, which is what caused the series of protests, but through how the media consumed Taylor’s body as a Black woman in response. Taylor became a popularized image in the media, as seen on the covers of *Vanity Fair* and *The Oprah Magazine*, as America continued to overindulge in her body post-mortem and use her picture to attract buyers yet stay static about taking any action to bring Taylor any justice.

This standardization of the overindulgence of Black women is explicitly stated when Laymon writes in *Heavy* that “I was taught by big boys who were taught by big boys who were taught by big boys that Black girls what be okay no matter what we did to them” (16)—a philosophy passed down not only between Black boys but also one that stems from when Black people were still enslaved and Black women were owned and sexually abused by white men without consequence.

### **Black Women as Sexual Consumption in *Heavy***

Throughout Laymon’s *Heavy*, the pattern of justified sexual abuse and using Black women as a means for overindulgence through the act of sex is prevalent and emphasizes the indictment of dominant white power structures and the impact of triple consciousness on Black women’s experiences. The consumption of Black women within *Heavy* is most notable with the introduction of Laymon’s childhood friend and crush Layla, and how the “big boys” in Laymon’s life would sexually abuse her. Laymon remembered that “Layla had to go in Daryl’s room with all the big boys for fifteen minutes if she wanted to float in the deep end. . . . I assumed some kind of sex was happening” (18), and that afterward “I knew that the big boys would tell stories about what happened in Daryl’s room that were good for all three of them and sad for [Layla] in three vastly different ways” (21). The “big boys” consumed Layla’s body without consequence, abusing her in the overindulgence of sex, satisfying their own appetites and allowing her to reap the small benefit of swimming in the deep end of the pool. Just as the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 brought fleeting attention to Breonna Taylor and the media’s exploitation of her body without any serious act for justice and therefore without consequences for the consumption of Taylor’s image, thereby perpetuating generational trauma and the experience of triple consciousness, the “big boys” in Laymon’s *Heavy* sexually consumed Layla’s body and left her with nothing but trauma and minimum gain through the swimming pool deal.

This scene, along with Laymon’s own acknowledgement of Layla’s rape yet his refusal to try to

stop it, relays how Black women—and girls—are treated and seen as succulent beings in the Black community, especially by Black men, as influenced by systems controlled by white people. In “Black Women and Girls & #MeToo” (2020), Jennifer Gómez and Robyn Gobin explain that “Black women and girls’ experiences of intra-racial sexual assault . . . [are] impacted by racial trauma, sexism, cultural betrayal, and (intra)cultural pressure. . . . Consequently, addressing racial trauma has implications for healing from cultural betrayal trauma as well” (12). Accordingly, when Black women are abused by someone within their own community, such as Layla was in *Heavy*, this behavior creates not only physical but also emotional scars that tear Black women away from their people, creating a further division and increasing the blame of the Black community, even though this abuse and thought process originated from white power due to the fact that Black women view themselves through the trifecta gazes of white America, Blackness, and womanhood.

The lack of recognition for Black women and girls who have been raped force these women to act accordingly, as if they were unaffected. In “Revealing a Hidden Curriculum of Black Women’s Erasure in Sexual Violence Prevention Policy” (2017), Sara Wooten furthers this idea by stating, “Ultimately, Black women are the antithesis of the ideal rape victim due to centuries of racist and sexist ideology aimed at protecting white supremacy” (409). To elaborate, it is not just that Black women are not the “ideal rape victim” due to white supremacy, it is also that Black women are not seen as victims at all when it comes to sexual abuse. Instead, their bodies are seen as meant for men to consume without consequence, as Laymon exhibits with his unwillingness to act when Layla is being gang raped in the next room. The implication is that Black women and girls are not actually seen as women and girls but instead as objects for consumption and food to be devoured by America, as can be currently seen through Taylor’s face on the cover of magazines as a form of pathos but no perceived legal amends for her or her loved ones.

As a response to her sexual abuse by the three boys, Layla puts up the “strong Black woman” front in the face of Laymon and the boys waiting in the pool. This trope that Layla exhibits, as previously discussed, is a way for Black women to mask their true emotions in order to present themselves as unconsumable, even after being consumed, as constructed by a systemically white America and the triple consciousness that Black women tend to see themselves through. However, by portraying herself as a strong figure who “was all-world at dissing” (Laymon 16), Layla further performs the idea that Black women and girls don’t need help and cannot be bothered, and therefore don’t deserve justice—similar to how the Black women consumed, raped, and/or murdered by white power structures are often not given justice or even entirely fought for by movements such as the Black Lives Matter protests, not only in 2020 with Breonna Taylor, but throughout American history. Indeed, the strong Black woman front is problematic because it normalizes the overconsumption and overindulgence of Black women and their bodies, both sexually and not, as evident not only through Layla in Laymon’s narrative but with many Black woman today.

### **Food as an Outlet in *Heavy***

Another woman within Laymon’s *Heavy* who is constantly consumed by both the white, male, and American gazes is Laymon’s grandmother, who teaches him the importance of home, food, and the struggles of racial inequality. His grandmother worked at the chicken plant, sold a variety of food, and

worked as a domestic laborer for the white Mumford family (Laymon 49). In one scene, she takes Laymon to the Mumford's house with her, and Laymon is offended by the privilege of the white family and his grandmother's servitude toward them; in response, his grandmother talks to him in the kitchen when they return home—a place of solace, and as she describes, “she spent so many hours in white-folk kitchens and just wanted her children to respect her kitchen when she got home” (Laymon 57). To Laymon's grandmother, the kitchen was sacred because she was working for herself and no one else, as she exhibited the “strong Black woman” trope that is consistent within the Black women throughout the narrative. Behind this is a history of Black women working in kitchens as servants. As, Kimberly Nettles-Barcelón, et al. write in “Black Women's Food Work as Critical Space” (2015), “Black women are not seen as authorities in the kitchen or elsewhere in matters of food—culturally, politically, and socially. . . . She is rendered absent, and made invisible by the continued salience of intersecting vectors of disempowerment: race/gender/class/sexuality” (35). Historically, Black women were not accepted within the production nor consumption of food, so for Laymon's grandmother, her kitchen is a symbol of strength in the face of adversity and independence in the face of triple consciousness.

Since Laymon's grandmother experiences America's gaze, the Black community's gaze, and the gaze of womanhood, she fights their expectations by creating a safe place within her kitchen for herself and her family, outside of any of these gazes. The “strong Black woman” trope is also evident in Laymon's grandmother's self-efficiency within her food habits, including growing vegetables in her own garden because she likes to know the process the food that she is consuming has gone through (Laymon 59). Laymon notes that, because of this, he would tend to eat more healthily with his grandmother, even though she is a heavier woman, which defies the food insecurity which Black communities often suffer from due to white power structures oppressing Black folx to the point of food scarcity and a lack of access to a variety of healthy food. Moreover, Laymon's grandmother's strength—unlike Layla's which was derived from intrapersonal trauma through sexual abuse between her Black peers—has developed from a need to protect herself from the abuse of the white families to which she has been in service. Her strength is a defense mechanism to ensure that they cannot “get” to her—therefore consuming her body as a result—and accuse her of an action such as stealing food, as Laymon had wanted to when he visited the Mumford's house.

While Laymon's grandmother actively works against holding a defiant attitude toward the white families that she has worked for, she is still allowing their white American power to affect her and her mindset such as it does through triple consciousness. She relays that “It ain't about making white folk feel what you feel. . . . it's about not feeling what they want you to feel” (Laymon 56). She reveals the impact that the white gaze holds on her life by adamantly thinking in a way that defies the expectations that she is held to as a Black woman by the white communities around her. Laymon's grandmother is heavily influenced by triple consciousness, but she also recognizes the cause and effect that white people tend to have on the Black community, so she attempts to stray from stereotypical manners—stealing from white people, lying to white people, etc.—that would allow the white people to consume her even further and place the blame on the Black communities that they are hungering for.

### Abusive Tendencies as a Result of White Hunger

This white hunger for Black blame is satisfied when the Black community responds to their generational trauma in negative fashions, in turn passing down white hate, supremacy, and power to influence their families and allow them to be consumed by white influence. Within *Heavy*, this hunger is satisfied through his mother as the memoir follows her trends of food insecurity and abusive impulses as derived from white institutions and triple consciousness. Within the memoir, Laymon's mother is yet another Black woman who presents herself as a strong, no-nonsense, professional, and educated woman in order to defy any negative feedback from the white community which could deter her professional career.

With these publicly secure qualities, Laymon's mother hides her insecurities through the abuse of her son: insecurities including a lack of consistent, nutritional food for herself and her son, and her fear of white power systems affecting her, and her son's, lives. These insecurities, as derived from white supremacy and therefore triple consciousness, lead to abusive tendencies—both physical and emotional—that Laymon's mother felt were necessary in order to teach Laymon about the harm that white power systems could impose upon his livelihood if she weren't there to punish him first. Laymon's mother inadvertently consumes her own son through the influence of white power structures and the hold that they have on her life by abusing him into submission toward both her and the food present in his life.

Unlike Laymon's grandmother who grew her own vegetables which gave Laymon access to healthy food options growing up, Laymon's mother, throughout the *Heavy* narrative, struggled with supplying Laymon with those same nutrients and was therefore associated with unhealthy foods, ranging from Laymon binge-eating Pop Tarts late at night (Laymon 13) to him stealing an obscene amount of bread which his mother never questioned (Laymon 108). Laymon's mother's food insecurities only further motivated her to act out the strong Black woman trope and her abusive tendencies; she focused on the womanhood gaze as included in triple consciousness, which caused her to abuse Laymon as a result of her role as a food insecure mother protecting her son, not only against her own food insecurities, but against the white power structures which devoured their Black community, and many other Black communities, into submission.

Laymon's mother would physically abuse her son—once over Laymon dating a white girl, hitting him and relaying the dangers of such a relationship (Laymon 97) and once over poor grades, going “on and on about ruining the only chance [Laymon] had of getting free” (Laymon 138)—in order to show Laymon what white people and institutions would do to consume his body if he didn't learn his lesson now through his mother. The physical act of beating her son suggests how influenced Laymon's mother was by triple consciousness and the white gaze and how it controlled her life, leading her to commit abusive acts which shifted the blame from those white institutions to herself as a Black woman. Throughout *Heavy*, Laymon refutes that placement of blame by not only illustrating his mother's actions but the reason behind them, therefore redirecting the blame back to white supremacy and the racist systems that are still in existence today.

Along with physical abuse, Laymon's mother mentally abused him about his weight as a result of her food insecurity. The mention of weight is consistent throughout *Heavy*, but Laymon's mother viewed it as another excuse for white people to devour the Black community without consequence and with justified reason. Within the text, after Laymon lost weight and went on daily and nightly runs, his mother

addressed his concerns about being shot by police:

“How is running at night increasing my chances of getting shot?”

“Please. You are a big Black man,” [she] said. “Stop running at night.” I asked [her] if [she] still thought I was big even though I had hardly any body fat. “To white folk and police, you will always be huge no matter how skinny you are.” (Laymon 201)

Laymon’s mother’s actions and abusive tendencies were a direct result of the trauma that has been inflicted upon her throughout her life by white people as an independent Black woman, causing her to react in fear and anger. Laymon’s mother’s food insecurities and her inability to view her son as anything but “big” or “heavy” are abuses influenced by triple consciousness and her inability to fathom herself or her son outside of the white and American gaze, and herself through the womanhood gaze as a single mother raising her son under the influences of white power structures. According to Wendy Ashley’s “The Angry Black Woman: The Impact of Pejorative Stereotypes on Psychotherapy with Black Women” (2014), “Many characteristics of the angry Black woman stereotype, including hostility, rage, aggressiveness, and bitterness may be reflective of survival skills developed by Black women in the face of social, economic, and political oppression. This trifecta of oppression is all encompassing and creates a pervasive environment of injustice” (29). In addition to the “strong Black woman” trope, Laymon’s mother also negotiates the “angry Black women stereotype” in response to the constant humiliation of being a Black woman as seen by Americanness, Blackness, and womanhood.

In his review “What We Hoped to Forget: The Weight and Power of Kiese Laymon’s *Heavy*” (2019), Bijan Stephen notes that “His mother hurt him as well, beating him when she thought he was out of line, while insisting to Laymon that it was for his own good. . . . Even when he was a college student, his mother continued to police his behavior, worried as she was about how the white world might harm her son.” Through the repercussions of generational trauma and the consequences of viewing her life, and her son’s life, through the white gaze in America, Laymon’s mother harmed her son for fear of how others would harm him outside of her own control. Put another way, she was consumed by America as she acted out in abusive tendencies, not unlike white institutions expect Black women to in order to place the blame on Black communities rather than on themselves.

This fear, as maintained by white power systems, is continuously perpetuated by the consistency of white supremacy, from before Laymon’s mother was alive to after *Heavy* was published—a fear which creates a chain reaction within the Black community and places blame on its members for being trained in the mindset of pleasing the existing white institutions. Laymon elaborates on this fear in an interview with Abigail Bereola titled “A Reckoning is Different Than a Tell-All” (2018):

[T]his anxiety about white folks and what they would do if given opportunity was always around us. . . . I think sometimes it can inadvertently make white folks into the traffic cops of your life. . . . I think it makes it harder for us to imagine because we’re literally told that if we imagine out of the box, white people are gon’ get us. And so when I bring that shit up in the book, I’m not trying to indict my grandmom, my mama, and them, because I understand. They’re trying to protect themselves and protect their child and their grandchild.

Laymon recognizes this fear of white power structures within himself and within the influential Black women in his life, pointedly saying that they are only trying to protect their children before white institutions can harm them. To further this, I argue that Laymon is relaying in *Heavy* that these Black women in his life are not at fault for fearing white supremacy and acting out in ways that are harmful—such as his mother abusing him. It is instead these white institutions and systems that are held in such high regard that are at fault and are to blame for the destruction of Black communities, specifically across America, as these white power structures continue to overconsume and indulge in the oppression and destruction of Black communities as they stand.

The destructive consumption and exploitation of Black communities by white institutions was further proved during the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 when police officers continued to harm Black bodies in public but rarely with consequence. This lack of consequence further implies the lack of care for Black folx and how their bodies are only feasted on by America, the white gaze on Black folx, and, for Black women, hypermasculinity. As a result, the narrative of the blame of destruction during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests was further bestowed upon the Black community rather than the white power structures which instigated the destruction in the first place.

## Conclusion

Throughout *Heavy* (2018), Kiese Laymon shifts the blame of abuse, insecurities, and negligence from the Black community and projects it onto the white power systems which have upheld the grounds for these negative actions for centuries. Through the strong characteristics of the Black women in his life, including Layla, his grandmother, and his mother and the overindulgence of their bodies and impact of triple consciousness, Laymon shows how they view themselves, as well as their fraught relationships with food.

Following suit in the reactionary strong Black women trope, the Black women in *Heavy* face trauma—both generational and present—which force them to act in specific manners, from a normalization of being consumed by men, the media, and America in general, to having abusive tendencies in order to stray from future potential harm from white institutions. This can also be seen through the mention of food habits throughout the novel, from Laymon's grandmother's place in the culinary world and conversation, to his mother's focus on Laymon's weight—whether he is “heavy” or not—and her food insecurities.

All of this is a reaction to how Black women have been treated in the past and continue to be treated as consumable items and something that others are allowed to overindulge in without consequence. This is still evident today in America with Black women such as Breonna Taylor within the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests and the consumption of her body for the media and publicity without any real warrant of justice. The abuse of Black women causes them to see themselves through triple consciousness, or the lens of both the white and male gaze, and react in ways that shift the blame to the Black community. In writing *Heavy*, Laymon achieves redirecting this blame back to white supremacy and the influence of the white systematic oppression of Black people, and specifically Black women, throughout America.

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## Essay

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