

Lynching and Anti LGBT Violence: A lecture by Dr. Koritha Mitchell (A Review)

By **Tara Wallace** - April 7, 2022

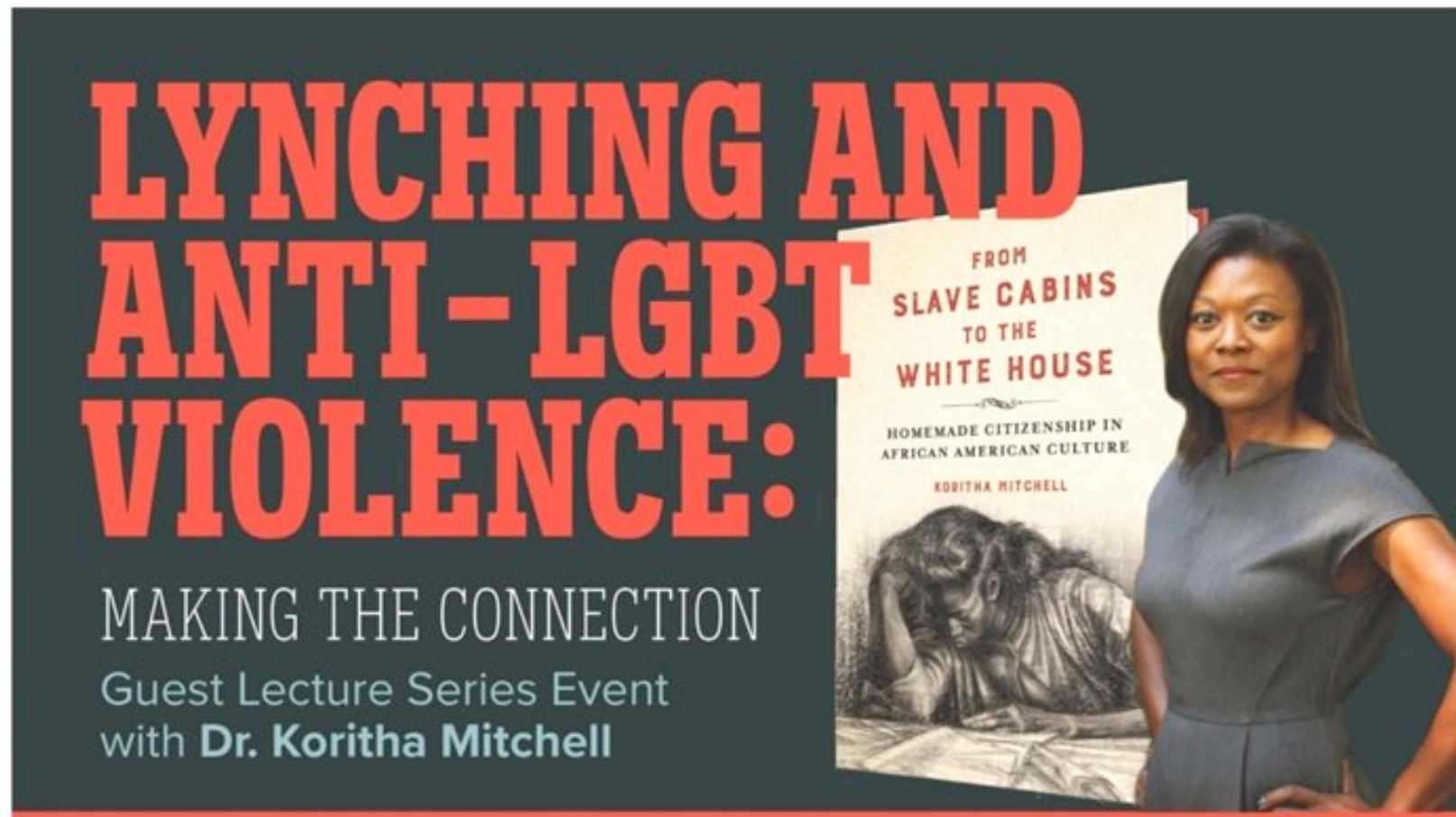
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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6 AT 4 P.M. | ZOOM

The violence plaguing LGBT communities has much in common with the brutal practice of lynching, which was at its height from the 1890s to 1930. Ultimately, both forms of aggression are designed to deny targeted groups recognition as citizens. Having studied racial violence for more than 15 years, Dr. Mitchell brought this expertise to her examination of the data on anti-LGBT attacks collected by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP).

Questions? Contact Emily Todd at etodd@westfield.ma.edu

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Dr. Koritha Mitchell's lecture *Lynching and Anti LGBT Violence* Wednesday, April 6 was very moving as she relayed to us the parallels between these two serious, ongoing, and dangerous issues in the American cultural context. The violence against African and LGBTQ Americans may not look the same, but the message of their violence answers the same calling by defining who belongs and who does not.

Their violent message is clear; Gay and Black people do not belong and will be kept in "their place". Since before the founding of our nation this idea of who belongs and who does not was considered an established fact. Cisgender white men belonged, cisgender white women belonged solely for the benefit of these men, and everyone else must be kept in their place outside and below this cis white male citizenry.

Despite all the hard work put into leveling the field of equality and justice in our society over the past century plus, it was only a couple of years ago in February of 2020 that an antilynching bill passed both houses of the United States Congress for the first time in history. Mandy Carter of Southerners on New Ground (SONG) asked the poignant questions, "*Are we about justice? Or, are we about just us?*" These questions are affecting to those of us who wish to be a part of the solution, but for those who are in denial or blatantly committed to the cis white male status quo they arouse defensiveness.

Even non abusive, cis white people benefit from this status quo; whether they want to or not. White men and women cannot relinquish the privileges allotted to them, there is no option to opt out of such shallow social assumptions. The rampant racism and heterosexism that is the basis of our culture discriminates against people just for being who they are and shapes everyone's life in mundane ordinary ways. Non- cis white male Americans live with the knowledge that common everyday events could lead to violence; for example just by looking at someone who then may take it as an insult worthy of violent punishment.

We read about gruesome rituals of cis white identification like this in the news every day, yet people continuously turn away as trans and racial panic works as a defense not just in our society, but our court system. White people are rarely held accountable as they are assumed to belong, whereas people of color and gay people have to prove they belong.

White people need objective standards to hold themselves to if we are to succeed in improving our society. If we want to to change America, we must acknowledge and accept our violent past and present that fights blindly to cling onto the white status quo for many. We must have these difficult conversations that make many white people uncomfortable. No more excuses, no more cop-outs pretending insults and threats are jokes.

The benefit of doubt has become a weapon for cis white people that works only within their community, while other communities are consistently denied. Shame always accompanies violence. Warriors for change must not get caught up in this defensiveness, but rather be proactive with a proactive vision.

Do not discriminate even though there is sadly a lot of socially acceptable discrimination. Support and join activists doing their part & leading the way. Shift your language and deeds to create safe spaces wherever you go to expose and address these issues. Name the many unearned social advantages of cis white people publicly to help change perceptions. Call out bullies everywhere. Get serious about what you are capable of doing to be proactive.

As Dr. Mitchell says, *"Discourses, practices, words, and deeds gain their meaning from social practices."* Adjust your social practices accordingly, lives are on the line.

Big thanks to Dr. Koritha Mitchell for her important lecture and to English Chairman Emily Todd for organizing this event!

*Note: a cisgender person is a person who identifies with their gender at birth.