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Interrogating Rights: How the United States is Not Complying with the Racial Equality Treaty

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Research Panel: The Marginalized and Minorities: Interrogating Rights

Presenter: Malia Lee Womack, Ohio State University

Title: Interrogating Rights: How the United States is Not Complying with the Racial Equality Treaty

Abstract:

In 1994, the United States ratified the United Nations' core anti-racism treaty, ICERD. Although it has been more than two decades since the United States became a member to the multilateral agreement, a wide range of scholarship determines that the nation is not in compliance with the treaty. Little of this research focuses on gender. This paper intervenes with the research by conducting a gendered analysis, with a focus on African American women, of key areas where the US is not meeting its duties to the multilateral agreement.

This manuscript proves that, first, the United States does not comply with the multilateral agreement's mandates about social, economic, and cultural rights (specifically in housing, education, and health), and second, the nation's prison industrial complex (its discriminatory sentencing practices, school-to-prison pipeline, war on drugs, and violence against women practices) does not comply with the treaty's provisions.

This paper is valuable because it reveals the ways African American women experience racism differently from how men do and lobbies for implementation strategies designed to include black women's gendered needs, which are often marginalized in anti-racism strategies.

Methodologies used throughout the paper include examination of the state's policies and practices, analysis of shadow reports about the US and ICERD, and analysis of the treaty's monitoring body's general recommendations and reports about the United States. Finally, this paper examines the 2015 United Nations Working Group on the Issue of Discrimination Against Women in Law publication that determines how the United States is not meeting global standards of gender equality.

About the presenter:

Malia Lee Womack earned a bachelor's degree from University of California, Berkeley in women's and gender studies with a minor in global poverty and a master's from Columbia University in human rights studies with an emphasis in women's, gender, and sexuality studies. She is working on a joint master's and doctoral degree at Ohio State University in Latin American studies (master's) and women's, gender, and sexuality studies (Ph.D.). Her research critically analyzes US humanitarian initiatives in developing countries to expose imperialist and hegemonic tendencies and to advocate for revised activist strategies that cultivate and nurture cultural diversity and grassroots organizing. She also investigates intersectionality; exposes historically formed global and transnational power structures and structural violence; and considers how colonialism, neocolonialism, and globalization impact the communities she

researches. She remains rigorously active in feminist social justice initiatives. Her work history ranges from community outreach and education; being a college professor; striving to diminish sexual, relationship, and domestic violence; working with the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Team; and spearheading initiatives locally and abroad to advance the positioning of disadvantaged communities.