

THE DIASPORA, a special collection

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THE DIASPORA is a biannual publication of the Department of African American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Contributions are welcomed from UC Berkeley's faculty, staff, and students. We also invite submissions from guest columnists and scholars who may not be affiliated with the university. Articles may be edited for length, clarity, and style.

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Insurgency: The Black Matter(s) Issue

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About the Issue

*Na'ilah Suad Nasir, Department Chair and Associate Professor;
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Black lives matter. However, what that actually means to people in different locations, with different experiences and different life chances is decidedly more complicated. The complexities of mobilizing against anti-black racism is reflected in the naming of this issue—aiming to be in conversation with the ongoing struggles in the streets and the assertions of black humanity online, while at the same time reflecting the peculiar position of black scholars writing from the ivory tower. The title and contents of this issue are meant to engage with the roots of #BlackLivesMatter and to encapsulate the multiple meanings of being black, and how and why that matters in this moment of virulent suppression of black bodies and the spectacular and mundane executions of black people.

If blackness is a multiple and contingent category of being, both dominated and defiant, simultaneously excessive and inadequate, paradoxically profited from yet treated as socially dead, then the “black” of “Black Lives Matter” cannot be contained by 140-characters. Yet, the audacity of reducing blackness to an accessible hashtag has enabled new and successful forms of solidarity that, perhaps, we have yet to fully understand. Gesturing both to condition and response, functioning as both the celebration of black life and the indictment of a system built to obstruct our celebration, *The Black Matter(s) Issue* also positions itself along a continuum of black radical dreaming, in which our “black matter” is likened to dark matter: powerful, mysterious, not of this world.

This special issue of *The Diaspora* contains both work produced over the course of the Fall 2014 semester and rapid reflections generated in the window of December 13 to 23, 2014 as part of the acceleration

of national action. These short-form works respond to both local and national manifestations of radical blackness and anti-blackness. Engaging with affectual, material, memorial, historical and experiential concerns, we intend that these reflections serve as critical acts of witness, reports of participation, and letters of solidarity. Posing personal and political questions about our role as intellectuals, academics, and educators we aim here, with you, to wrestle with what we think we know and remain open to the unknown next step in our tenacious fight for justice and self-determination, strengthened by 400 years of insurgency in the kitchens, the prisons, the battlefields, the illegal spelling lessons.

Robert Allen, Professor Emeritus, contributes “Remembering Emmett Till,” a work reflecting on his childhood memories of the lynching of Till in 1955 in order to draw connections to our present historical moment. Vernessa Parker, staff member, contributes to conversations that connect #BlackLivesMatter to reproductive rights with her recollections of being profiled as a young mother in “Birthing While Black.” Kimberly McNair, doctoral candidate, has contributed “G-d Bless the Dead: A Calling of Names” on the spiritual practice of naming and insists on holding space for cis and trans women. Candidate Jarvis Givens’ ““General Dissatisfaction” and the Possibilities of Black Student Discontent” situates our understanding on #BlackLivesMatter mobilizations alongside the black activist oral history of Hardy Frye, a Mississippi Freedom Rider and Professor Emeritus in the department. Michael McGee, Jr., candidate, contributes another approach to memory work through historical and contemporary acts of witnessing and imagining in

his “Winter Witness.”

Leigh Raiford, Associate Professor, offers a critical approach to understanding art installations of effigies on the Cal campus that draws together the history of lynching, visibility, and the enduring trauma of blackness in her “On Effigies and Elegies.” Aya de Leon, Director of Poetry To The People, and Fayia Sellu, doctoral student, respectively employ poetry to intervene in the withheld grievability of black life in “How Do I Love Thee?” and “The (de)valuation of Black Lives.” Essence Harden, doctoral student, and her collaborator Jihaari Terry, have produced a large-scale work of visual art that melds the words of James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* with the names of victims of police and hate violence. A portion of the work is featured on the cover of this print issue of *The Diaspora* and visually structures the online version of the issue.

Charisse Burden, candidate, meditates on the direct action practice of blackness in “The Uses of Essentialism, or the Space of Black Legibility.” Kimberly McNair’s second piece, “T-shirts as Discursive Activism,” situates the wearable, material culture activism of “I Can’t Breathe” t-shirts in a critical tradition. Ianna Hawkins Owen, candidate, offers a Fanonian and queer black feminist critique of the inclusive possibilities of protest chants in “When All Lives Matter.” Her second piece, “Our Paradoxical Breath,” approaches the mantra-like living last words of Eric Garner from the perspective of activist self-care, while in “Trying to Find My Spaceship,” doctoral student Grace Gipsen finds refuge in music to contemplate her place in the constellation of social justice tactics available to us. Na’ilah Suad Nasir, Associate Professor, reflects on the relevance of the #BlackLivesMatter movement for the schooling of Black children in her “Killing Us Slowly: Slow Death by Educational Neglect.”

In her “The Makings of a Grassroots Movement Against Anti-Black Racism,” Assistant Professor

Tianna Paschel offers an analysis of the emergence, organization and demographics of the #BlackLivesMatter protests. Gabriel Regalado, doctoral student, reports on his experiences on the ground in Ferguson, MO in his “The Black Lives Matter Freedom Ride: From Ferguson to UC Berkeley to National Advocacy.” Kenly Brown, doctoral student, shares her experience of being among those teargassed by the Berkeley Police Department during a peaceful protest in “Law Enforcement’s Deployment of Excessive Force Against Peaceful Demonstrators.” Ameer Loggins, candidate, analyzes the phenomenon of hashtagging, viral circulation and citizen journalism in transforming activist practices in the United States. Selina Makana, candidate, gives us a window into the ways the circulation of stories from Ferguson and Staten Island have gripped the international community at UC Berkeley in her “Killable Black Bodies: An International Perspective.” Associate Professor Ula Taylor, approaching #BlackLivesMatter as a historian, advises us to loosen our grip on Civil Rights Movement nostalgia in order to fully contend with the organizational possibilities and formations of our particular moment in her “Movement or Moment in History.”

This print edition of *Insurgency* features supplemental poetry and essays by Assistant Professor Chiyuma Elliott, VeVe Clark scholar Chioma Amaechi, graduate student Purvis Cornish and undergraduate BSU members Alana Banks and Blake Simons. The edition also features photography by Rasheed Shabazz, Leigh Raiford, Michael Mark Cohen, Kimberly McNair, and Ianna Hawkins Owen. The issue comes full circle by closing with the Black Student Union’s press release for the December 4th shut down of Golden Bear Cafe.

We hope that these pieces generatively contribute to (y)our conversations about where we’ve been, where we are, and where we’ll go from here. You can also check out the online version of *Insurgency* by visiting www.thediasporablackmattersissue.com.

Black Lives Matter at UC Berkeley

A Statement from the African American Studies Faculty and Graduate Students

In the wake of the killing of Mike Brown in Ferguson, MO and Eric Garner in Staten Island, NY, and standing in the shadow of Oakland's history of summary executions of unarmed black people – this is a time when we ask: What is our responsibility intellectuals? What is our responsibility as scholars? What is our responsibility as members of the campus community?

On the Berkeley campus the Black Student Union has taken the lead in organizing protests, including taking over the Golden Bear Cafe on December 4, 2014 in a peaceful statement of solidarity with the national youth-led Black Lives Matter movement. At this protest, students spoke of the pain of being in a country where case after case of Black people of all gender identities are murdered by police officers and self-proclaimed vigilantes without consequence. This state sanctioned murder of black people is a multigenerational issue. Right now it's mostly seen as anti-youth/young adult, but children like Aiyana Stanley-Jones and elders like Kathryn Johnston and Pearlie Golden are also victims. Students spoke about the ways that their own lives have been affected by police violence and abuse of power, bringing home the point that the violence we have been seeing nationally touches all of us.

Not only are our students feeling the pain of all that it means to live in Black skin in this country, but they also spoke about the alienation they feel and the racism they face on the Berkeley campus on a daily basis. It is imperative that we recognize the pain that Black students feel on our campus, and on the campus of other universities where they are lauded in diversity brochures, yet endure a host of explicit and implicit racist actions as well as face structures that leave them feeling marginalized and unwelcome. Their occupation on Dec. 4th has been the catalyst for

conversation, but also a call to action for faculty, staff, and grad students.

We, the Faculty and Graduate Students of the African American Studies Department, stand in solidarity with the Black Student Union, and the Black undergraduate students on our campus in expressing anger and outrage at the recent events in Ferguson, MO, and in Staten Island, NY, as well as countless other places where Black lives are taken consistently, senselessly, and without punishment, including and especially Oakland, where many of us live. We stand with our students in the streets at local protest actions, in our lectures, discussion sections, as parents of black children in K-12, in administrative meetings, and in other spaces. We continue to work in opposition to anti-blackness at the university level, and we suffer with them when we continue to see the evidence of it on our campus.

We challenge our university, and all universities, to rise to the challenge of this moment, and to acknowledge and attend to the pain and rage our students are expressing. Not only that, we challenge the university to do better by Black students, to redouble recruitment efforts to achieve a critical mass, to take action to attend to anti-blackness and improve the racial climate on campus, and to put our money and policy where our mouth is when it comes to supporting Black students. We as a university must be committed to providing an environment that equips college-educated people to engage in critical race work, to have the tools to recognize injustice.

With you, in the words of June Jordan, we “stand / despite the trillion treacheries.” With you we “commit / to friction and the undertaking / of the pearl.” Alongside our courageous undergraduates, we dedicate ourselves to recognize and speak out against injustice on our campus, and in the world.



Memorial for Yvette Henderson, a black mother shot and killed by police in Emeryville, CA on February 3, 2015.
• Photograph by Ianna Hawkins Owen.

Remembering Emmett Till

Robert L. Allen, Professor Emeritus

In August 1955, I was thirteen years old and about to enter the 8th grade at Booker T. Washington High School in Atlanta. Built in 1924, the existence of Washington High was hailed as “progress,” the first public high school built specifically for African American pupils.

That summer I had a job working for Johnson Publishing Co. delivering Jet magazines door-to-door to subscribers. Jet, a weekly pictorial news magazine, was one of the most popular magazines in black communities. With tens of thousands of readers, it was read not only throughout the South, but in the North and West as well.

As a child in the heart of the black community, which made up one-third of Atlanta’s total population, it was possible to live for most of one’s childhood with no interaction with whites. I was born in a black-owned hospital, attended all-black schools, and bought goods in black-owned stores. My grandfather subscribed to the Atlanta Daily World, a black daily newspaper, and we listened to black radio stations. In the early years we did not have TV. I knew white people existed, but they seemed to live on the periphery of the known world, which was black. All of that was about to change.

On August 28, 1955, a black youth named Emmett Till was brutally murdered and his body mutilated beyond recognition for allegedly whistling at a white woman in Mississippi. Till, who was from Chicago and only 14, was visiting relatives in a small town. The news story appeared in the September 15th issue of Jet magazine along with grisly photographs of Till’s unrecognizable face and body. Seeing those pictures marked the end of my innocence.

The murder of Emmett Till was a wake-up call for black America. An open-casket funeral revealed the utter brutality of his killers for all to see.

Black America was horrified and outraged, as were many whites. Adding insult to injury, the killers were brought to trial and acquitted by an all-white jury. The failure of the justice system to convict the killers, who later bragged about killing Till, was further compounded when a grand jury convened in November refused to indict them for kidnapping Till before murdering him.

In December 1955, partly fueled by anger over Till’s murder, the southern civil rights movement was launched with the Montgomery bus boycott. The civil rights movement soon spread throughout the South, including to Mississippi. Much was accomplished by the movement, including the landmark civil rights legislation of the 1960’s.

Yet it is apparent from the murder of Trayvon Martin to the shooting of Michael Brown, and now others, that the justice system remains broken; it still is not just as far as African American lives are concerned. The refusal of grand juries to indict killer cops of unarmed black youth is a failure of the system. A powerful social movement for equal justice is needed more than ever to remedy this failure. Building such a movement is an effective way to remember those who have died, including Emmett Till, and to show that “Black Lives Matter.”

The Uses of Essentialism, or The Space of Black Legibility

Charisse Burden, PhD Candidate

At the Black Lives Matter Rally that shut down the Golden Bear Cafe on UC Berkeley's campus on December 4, 2014, Blackness was not a contested or debated identity-concept to be problematized or deconstructed. It was not something to be forsaken in favor of a post-racial or multicultural politics that subsumed the recent events of anti-black racism under abstract claims that "all lives matter." Nor was it a self-referential display of racial particularism that foreclosed the possibility for other articulations of oppression. In this case, Blackness was a legible space where state-sanctioned violence and dispossession converged with the collective consciousness that injustice has a peculiar way of mapping itself, with virtual impunity, onto certain racialized bodies.

As Black people—from the US, Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe—we knew who we were, and in that moment, our identity was legible, intractable, and situated at the crossroads of rage and recognition. It cannot be known what being black meant to each individual at the rally; however, as a group, a community, a people, being Black was less about being the descendants of slaves, and more about the mobilization of love and outrage against the protracted assault on a population systematically deemed unworthy of even the most basic human rights.

In this moment, Blackness was literally at the center of the conversation. Allies—non-Blacks who were nonetheless in solidarity—formed a perimeter around Black students who were blocking the entrances of the Golden Bear Cafe, simultaneously filling in the margins of the struggle, and providing a barrier between these perilous Black bodies and potential police assault. This inversion of racialized space, with Blacks being at the top, front, and center both literally and metaphorically, did not reproduce structures of domination that promote patriarchy, misogyny,

homophobia, or xenophobia. Rather, it was a space of unity without amalgamation; justice without universalism; and essentialism without chauvinism. It created the conditions for Black men to talk about being fathers without forgetting Black women; for sisters and mothers to express concern for their sons and brothers without the valence of failed Black womanhood; for Black women to organize and give speeches, and Black men to hand out food to nourish our bodies and lead the crowd in chants and songs.

I am not trying to paint a picture of some egalitarian Black utopia. The reality is that in this space of legible identity, constituted by and through raised fists, Black power slogans, all-black clothing, poetry, mobilization, peaceful protest, and vehement anger, Blackness resonated as a way to understand—as opposed to erase or silence—the multifarious and intersecting technologies of white supremacy.

In moments like these, the "essence" of Blackness is not something that can be defined, but rather something that can be gleaned by the senses. It is visible in the tears of those who are simultaneously fearful and hopeful. It is heard in the voices of those who demand the immediate cessation of anti-black racism. But most of all, for me, it is felt. In the pounding of my heart, the tightness of my muscles, the turning of my stomach. Through compassion and frustration and sadness and intimacy.

The way in which these students—many of whom were my own—applied what they had learned in their African American Studies courses to demands for justice and equality, showed that their Blackness could not be reduced to the color of their skin; it was manifest in the strength of their conviction, the depth of their passion, and the criticality of their minds.



Former Black Panther Party Chairwoman Elaine Brown speaks at the Ferguson2Cal blockade of the Golden Bear Cafe on December 4, 2014 at UC Berkeley. • Photograph by Rasheed Shabazz.

On Effigies and Elegies

Leigh Raiford, Associate Professor

I. Speak Their Names

By now, most of us know the names Michael Brown and Eric Garner. And we know the stories of these African American men, both unarmed, both murdered by white police officers, both portrayed in mainstream media as dangerous, both of whose killers have gone unpunished. But do you know the story of Laura Nelson and her son L.D., lynched in Okemah, Oklahoma, on May 25, 1911?

When deputies came to her home to investigate teenager L.D. Nelson and his father George Austin on suspicion of stealing a cow, Laura Nelson defended her family. A gun battle ensued and deputy sheriff George Loney was shot in the leg. Loney bled to death and mother and son were arrested and charged with murder. Austin pled guilty to larceny (he stole the cow, he said, because his children were hungry) and would spend the next three years in state prison. Laura and L.D. sat in jail for almost three weeks, Laura taking care of her toddler, Carrie. Late the night before they were to be arraigned, Laura and L.D. were taken from the jail cell by a mob of 40. It is said that Laura was raped before the mob hanged her and L.D. from a bridge over the North Canadian River. Oklahoma newspapers described Laura Nelson as “very small of stature, very black, about 35 years old, and vicious,” an attempt to besmirch Nelson’s character and make her seem monstrous and uncontrollable. Photographs of Laura and L.D. Nelson, hanging from the bridge were made by Okemah studio photographer, George Farnum, and sold as postcards.

Laura Nelson was one of nearly 3500 African Americans murdered at the hands of lynch mobs between the years 1882 and 1968. Unlike Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, or Oscar Grant, who died in the age of twitter and camera phones, we don’t

have Laura Nelson’s final words. All we have is her still image in death. All we have is her silence.

II. Effigy

On Saturday, December 13, 2014 Laura Nelson was made to speak on UC-Berkeley’s campus.

The photograph of Laura Nelson’s corpse was blown-up to life size, printed on cardboard and hung from the iconic Sather Gate. In red letters on the cutout was Nelson’s name and the year of her death. The words, “I Can’t Breathe” were also added, the last words of Eric Garner, murdered by police officer Daniel Pantaleo in Staten Island, NY that have become one of the movement’s most powerful rallying cries. When discovered that morning before hundreds would assemble to march to Oakland and join a day of national protests, the cutouts were taken down. Many people did not see them in person but word and image spread quickly via social media: Lynching “effigies” had been found on campus.

In its broadest definition, an “effigy” is a representation of a person, usually life-size, and almost always three-dimensional. More distantly, an effigy also describes funerary art that might adorn a tomb or coffin. But effigy also carries within it its negative connotation: a crudely made figure representing a hated person and made to be publicly destroyed (eg “George W. Bush was burned in effigy”). In the twitter storm and media outrage machine that followed the discovery of the lynching images, it was this last meaning that framed, if not foreclosed, the conversation.

And why shouldn’t it? On a campus in which black student enrollment has hovered at a mere 3% for the last two decades (in a state in which blacks comprise 7%

of the population); where black students have reported the lowest feelings of respect on campus of any demographic; where black students, staff and faculty alike withstand general feelings of anti-blackness, including racial profiling of students of color by campus police, and incidents of a dark stuffed figure found hanging from the window of Theta Delta Chi fraternity across from the African American theme dorm; the display of “lynching effigies” hanging high from one of the most prominent places on campus and without any explanatory statement could easily be interpreted as the latest in a series of persistent, relentless, exhausting micro and macro aggressions. As effigies, the people imaged therein become figures to be despised and destroyed. For those of us who are #Black-atCal, these images could feel a triggering reminder of our struggle against anonymity and unbelonging.

Yet, there was Laura Nelson’s name.

White supremacists don’t usually bother to learn the names of the black dead.

Moreover, the cutout reproduced the only extant photograph of a lynched woman.

History would have us believe that lynching (and police brutality) is a crime against black men alone. However, the case of Laura Nelson reminds us that these are crimes against black men, women, children, families, communities. Whoever put these up had done their homework. A form of guerrilla art, this display was meant as a powerful visual indictment of a system that continues to murder black people with impunity.

The group who claimed responsibility, self-described as “a Bay Area collective of queer black and PoC [people of color] artists,” contended that the project “is in unambiguous alignment with the #blacklivesmatter movement.” They apologized to those black people—and black people alone—who were unclear of its intention. In a letter to the Office of African American Student Development and to the

Daily Cal, they wrote, “Its brutal realism was intended as a non-negotiable route to empathy, as a wake up call from the past - a past that cannot be separated from the injustices of today - to reinforce our movement.”

One of the difficult things to consider is how we as African Americans change the conversation so that what is understood as our own personal pain and private burden becomes the pain and burden of white people as well, a “non-negotiable route to empathy.” Nowhere in the outrage over the use of these images is white outrage that these images were even made in the first place. In the assumption that “racists” put up these images, that this is simply a hate crime, ordinary folks who don’t know the history of lynching and the legacy it portends don’t have to consider the ways in which our system, from slavery to Jim Crow to the Age of Obama, is maintained largely through the violent control of black bodies. As effigies, lynching can be despised, forgotten and relegated to the bin of our pre-Post-racial past. White supremacy gets let off the hook. Again.

In their charge that “history must be confronted,” this collective has used these lynching images not as effigy, but as elegy.

III. Elegy

How do we mourn the black dead? How do we memorialize those lost to past racial violence and terror? How do we mobilize against such violence and its manifestations in our own historical moment?

Originally produced as testimonies of white supremacy, lynching photographs were soon employed by African Americans in the emergent anti-lynching movement. From these early uses well into our contemporary moment, there is a long list of black artists and activists who have repurposed lynching photography as critiques of contemporary crises and to draw explicit connections between the end of slavery and

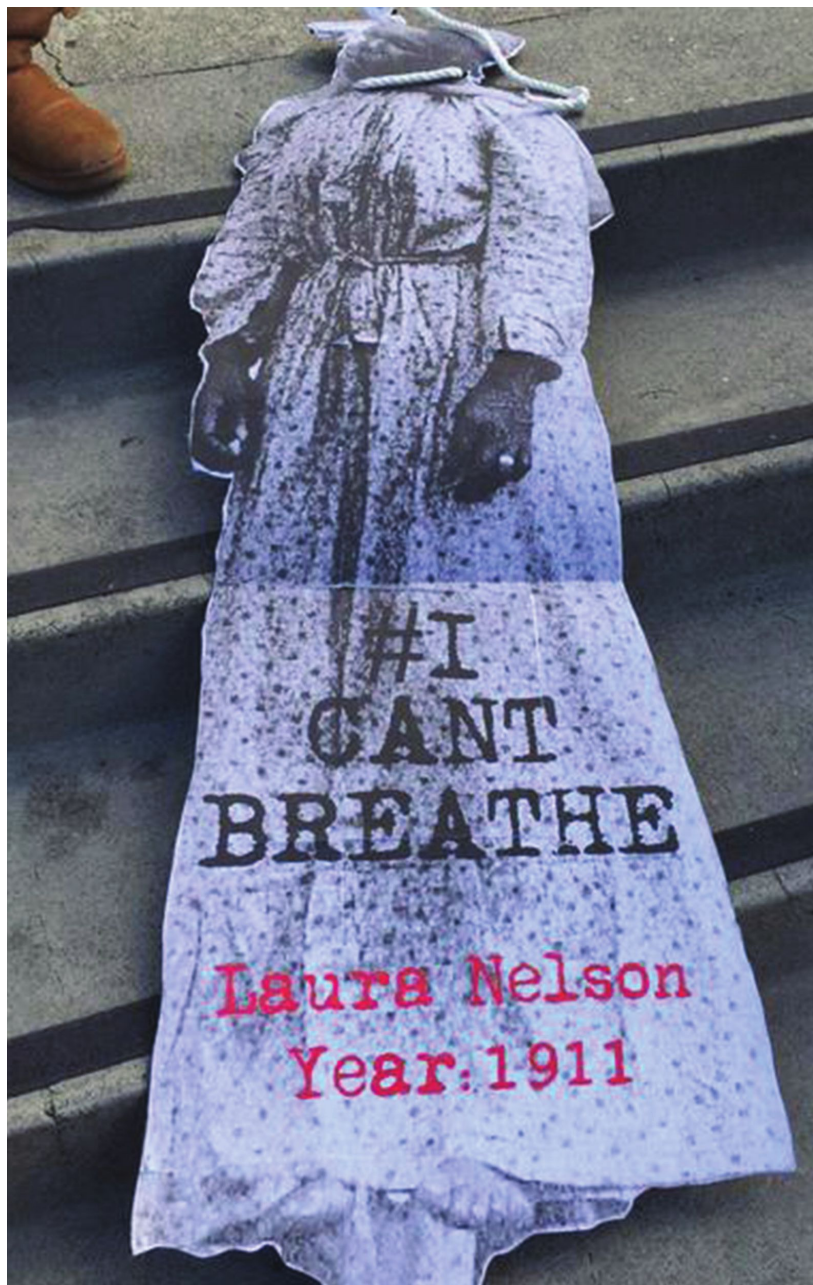
the age of Obama in which the relationship between racial violence and black citizenship remains an unsettling one.

Beginning with the pioneering work of activist Ida B. Wells, the first to employ lynching photographs in her 1893 essay “Lynch Law” and her 1895 pamphlet, *A Red Record*, these images appeared in antilynching propaganda and pamphlets of the NAACP and other antilynching organizations, as well as in reports of mob violence in the black press. In such contexts, these images transformed the dominant narrative of black savagery as one of black vulnerability; white victimization was recast as white terrorism. Though not the producers of lynching photographs, African Americans were nonetheless implicated as objects and spectators, and as such, many chose to respond through appropriating and recontextualizing these images.

For civil rights and black power activists, lynching provided a key referent for the continued terror experienced by African Americans whether in the rural south or the urban ghettos of the north and west. Organizations like SNCC and the Black Panther Party made use of lynching photography in their newspapers, pamphlets and posters.

And since the formal end of Jim Crow, subsequent African American artists, including Public Enemy, Carrie Mae Weems, Renee Cox, Kerry James Marshall, Dred Scott, and Pat Ward Williams have returned to these images as a way to repair, redress, mourn and as a call to action.

No amount of context or conversation can remove the shock or horror of lynching images. But when we speak the names of the dead, when we tell their stories and enfold them into our ongoing struggles for justice, these photographs can serve as elegies for black lives so brutally cast aside. Without a doubt it is hard for black folks to see these images. But white folks need to see them too. This is not our shame. It is theirs.



Effigy of Laura Nelson found hanging on the campus of UC Berkeley on December 13, 2014. • Photograph by Pastor Michael McBride.



Queer and trans people of color and allies shut down the Castro and 18th Street intersection in San Francisco on January 17, 2015 to honor black queer and trans lives lost and to protest racism, gentrification, and assimilationist gay politics. Demonstrators were earlier met with violence from patrons of the bar Toad Hall. • Photograph by Ianna Hawkins Owen.

G-d Bless The Dead: A Calling of Names

Kimberly McNair, PhD Candidate

For Grandmother nameless...

Maria Smith (unknown; 1878, MS)

Ella (15; 1892, LA)

Cora (unknown; 1893, Indian Territory)

Mary Turner (21, 1918, GA)

Laura Nelson (27, 1911, OK)

Addie Mae, Denise, Carole, and Cynthia

(14, 11, 14, 14; 1963, AL)

For Sister nameless...

Eleanor Bumpurs (62; 1984, NY)

Frankie Ann Perkins (37; 1997, IL)

Latanya Haggerty (26; 1999, IL)

Margaret Mitchell (54; 1999, CA)

Tyisha Miller (35; 1999, CA)

Tarika Wilson (26; 2008, OH)

Kathryn Johnston (92; 2006, GA)

Alesia Thomas (35, 2012, CA)

Shantel Davis (23, 2012, NY)

Rekia Boyd (22, 2012, IL)

Pearlie Golden (93, 2014, TX)

Yvette Smith (47; 2014, TX)

For Granddaughter nameless...

Ashe.

The victims stated above, like the cases of Oscar Grant (CA), Trayvon Martin (FL), Alan Blueford (CA), Jonathan Farrell (NC) and others are the latest in a series of (historical and recent) tragedies involving the policing of black bodies and the extra/juridical killings of unarmed black people. Given the number of Black womxn protesting on the front lines in Ferguson, New York, Los Angeles, Oakland, and nationally, it is incumbent upon us to honor the ways in which black womxn are directly targeted by the police. Words give life, and to speak their

names is to have them (or at least some part of them) live again. Speaking one's name is a voicing of what remains of the body.

At the time of this essay, I am completing a dissertation chapter that focuses on the "I Am..." t-shirts popularized over the past two decades. In the process I am forced to contend with the verbal and grammatical limitations of remembrance. When we say "I am..." there are countless names that we won't remember, that we never knew, who are missing from our recitation. This is an absence in black memory – a *dismemory* – a silencing, an often deliberate omission, of victims on the periphery. "Too," the adverb that brings closure to a sentence, has been employed frequently to reference black womxn victims "in addition to" those men already recognized. This mirrors how women's issues are relegated to an afterthought in not only broad ranging political engagement, but also academic scholarship. The "woman question" is an addendum.

I come to this issue at a crossroads. Each time I present my research I have to spiritually prepare. It's the space between scholarship and spirituality; where one must reconcile both secular and spiritual implications in the work. African Americans come from multiple communities, with varying cultural practices, yet the t-shirt culture emanating from the deaths of unarmed black people holds key signifiers that unite masses of wearers. It's a familiar narrative – unarmed black male, shot dead by police, vigilante, or citizen in fear of their life. The tradition of honoring the departed, ancestral worship, and even speaking the names of the dead has special significance in many communities. At some point one must pause and reflect – or pause and pray – when calling the names of those murdered in a way that unsettles what has now become routine in news outlets and social rhetoric.

T-shirts are performative symbols of celebration, commemoration, and continual grieving. It's not the material, but the context in which we find these objects and what that tells us about connections and disconnects in cultural practices today. When presenting on black t-shirt culture, R.I.P. and commemoration t-shirts in particular, there are ethical issues involved. What's below the surface yet primary and beyond academic inquiry is the need and desire to *remember* the departed. There is one sense that black t-shirt culture serves as a memorial for the dead and a form of continual grieving for the living; it's one of the varied ways we choose to honor the deceased. When t-shirts go mainstream, these t-shirts (like their photographs) can serve as a *shadow archive*, and this archive can both replace and displace collective memory. But womxn are not often included in collective black memory, and their deaths do not ignite community uprisings, street protests, and civil unrest. For the most part, they are left out of the mainstream record. The narrative of the endangered black male is all too familiar, and has been emphasized in popular culture and policy that both criminalizes black males and makes them the archetypal "victim" of racial inequality and subjugation. This is problematic not only in terms of re-victimizing black males, but also in the ways it obscures the reality of black female (cis and trans) as well as black queer extrajudicial casualties.

The murders of unarmed black men that gain media attention and spur community outrage and uprisings usually involve a loss of life in a public area (with visual footage circulated via cell phones, then social media and online news outlets), while most instances of black womxn and girls killed are inside the home or in relation to the home (without the "shared witness" via media forums). Womxn of color are viewed as casualties while men of color are seen as martyrs. Omitting womxn's positions as already subjugated victims of racialized and gendered violence

ignores the broader issue and impedes systemic change. Black men are overwhelmingly affected by this gross-injustice as much for their male-ness as their race. Black men as a category do not face any aspect of racialization or criminalization that black women do not. However, black women and black LGBT folks face aspects of racialization and criminalization that black cis men do not. All black people are racialized and criminalized, but differently. Black men therefore experience this differently and need resources that meet their specific needs.

As witness to the recent events and unrest across the country, I first had to acknowledge the binary that already exists in the ways we report and circulate incidents of the extrajudicial murder of unarmed black people. The only way to disrupt the binary is to purposefully cite other cases that involve LGBT, cis, and queer victims as frequently as we cite the murder of unarmed black men. This is not to imply equality in the number of these cases or sameness, for black men have a greater percentage and probability in the case of summary executions. However, this will illustrate that there is a "war on black people" and the whole of our communities, not just a "war on black males." It's the responsibility of scholars to change the discourse (the narrative) and to challenge the ways we defend all lives, and black life in particular. I suggest we move away from this language towards an inclusive intersectional analysis of the murder of womxn. People are already doing this work, but we must become more vigilant.



A West Oakland resident burns sage at a gathering before the “Black Friday” BART shutdown on November 28, 2014. The Black Power mural in the background was demolished in January 2015. • Photograph by Rasheed Shabazz.

In Memoriam: Artists' Statement

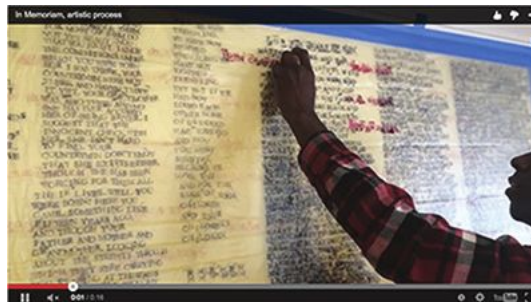
*Essence Harden, PhD Candidate;
Jihaari Terry, painter*

“In Memoriam” is a response to the despair and unimaginable loss of black lives and black life via the racist actions of state and white vigilantes. Forced into a position of continuous mourning wherein social media and national news note that black life in fact does not matter and justice is in fact an oxymoron for black people we searched for reprieve.

In need of solace, James Baldwin’s essay “My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation” provided a means of foundation to rest upon and memorialize the black folks recently and wretchedly killed by callous and racist actions. As Baldwin beautifully and sorrowfully describes the limits and unjust cruelty enacted upon black Americans he also offers the task of love and loving without the means of recognition as the burdensome bond for black folk.

Using a semitransparent vinyl, each letter of Baldwin’s text was dutifully stamped. Imperfect in effect, aching in length and physicality, the task of stamping offered a tangible outlet for the pain and anguish we both felt in this moment. Atop of Baldwin we stamped the names of fifty black people who we sought to mourn as their deaths served as the impetus and reminder of black folks’ precarious state of life. The vinyl and ink together, Baldwin’s words and the deceased’s names, structured a sense of ill/legibility that presented our own sense of how black life struggles to matter and always, already does.

If we are in fact surviving our own genocide, as Fred Moten recently stated in a talk given via Critical Resistance, then the weight of that survival and the radical act of love Baldwin proposed shook us to our core and demanded an act of physical response. Crying out via our hands and pressing our pain into vinyl, we carved some space by which we could endure a bit longer, mourn for the loss of black life, and find that love we share with each other as a means of black radical artistic practice.



DEAR JAMES

I HAVE BEGUN. **THIS ROSSEN**

LETTER FIVE TIMES AND
TORN IT UP FIVE TIMES. I

KEEP SEEING YOUR FACE

WHICH IS ALSO **CHRISTIAN GREGORY**

OF YOUR FATHER AND MY

BROTHER. I HAVE KNOWN

BOTH OF YOU ALL YOUR

LIVES AND HAVE CARRIED

YOUR DADDY IN MY ARMS

AND ON MY SHOULDERS **GREGORY**

KISSED HIM AND SPANKED

HIM AND WATCHED HIM

LEARN TO WALK. I DON'T

KNOW IF YOU HAVE KNOWN

ANYBODY FROM THAT FAR

BACK, IF YOU HAVE LOVED

ANYBODY THAT LONG, FIRST

AS AN INFANT, THEN AS A

CHILD, THEN AS A MAN. YOU

GAIN A STRANGE PERSPECTIVE

ON TIME AND HUMAN PAIN AND

EFFORT. OTHER PEOPLE CANNOT

SEE WHAT I SEE WHENEVER I

LOOK INTO YOUR FATHER'S

FACE, FOR BEHIND YOUR

I KNOW WHAT T

HAS DONE TO M

AND HOW NARRO

HAS SURVIVED

KNOW WHICH IS

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The Killable Black Bodies: An International Perspective

Selina Makana, PhD Candidate

To many in the international community, the United States is a bastion of democracy and equality. However, the recent developments in Ferguson and Staten Island that sparked outrage and worldwide protests over cases of police violence against black men, helped put the limelight on what many see as the U.S hypocrisy on human rights. And as the world watched with disbelief as the heavily militarized police force in different cities squashed the #BlackLivesMatter protests, many residents of the International House at UC Berkeley, a home to so many people from around the globe, engaged in several conversations around the #BlackLivesMatter.

I heard varied opinions that ranging from: “This can not happen in a post-racial society,” “It is an issue of human rights abuses, and not just a black people’s issue,” “These incidents are isolated and are not reflective of the rest of country,” “Cases of police brutality happen everywhere around the world,” to “What do the protesters hope to accomplish?” Yet, these conversations missed the fact that the history of black bodies being rendered killable and disposable did not begin with —and will certainly not end with —the senseless killings of Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice and Eric Garner. The process of criminalization, demonization and dehumanization of minority groups, particularly black and brown people, is not just an American phenomenon, but is indeed a global phenomenon. Whether it happens in Italy where the appointment of Cecile Kyenge as the first black cabinet minister continues to evoke a racist response from the country’s Northern League political party, or in the United Kingdom where 46 year old Jimmy Mubenga died of a heart attack after he was restrained for more than half an hour during his deportation from the UK by three guards from a British multinational security

company—these cases underscore, if you may, what W.E.B. DuBois voiced over a century ago that “Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. How does it feel to be a problem?” [1]

These incidents and many others reveal an ugly reality of anti-black racism around the globe. What needed to be said in the conversations around the dining tables at the International House is the fact that racial profiling is a form of violence that devalues black bodies, and that structural racism continues to normalize acts of violence bestowed upon black bodies everyday. Above all, what was missing in these conversations with my fellow residents is that racism is an undercurrent in the so-called war on terror and war on crime. The point here is that policies on war on terrorism and crime rely on the use of fear mongering and racial profiling to justify why certain groups of people are considered a threat to our suburbs, streets, and nations. Thus, in an effort to protect our nation, we have learned to make racial profiling an acceptable way of conducting war on terrorism.

And so, as I ponder over the outcomes of the #BlackLivesMatter protests, I find myself asking my fellow residents to read Claude McKay’s poem, “If We Must Die.” Although written at a specific historical moment, McKay’s poem captures the conviction and the unity of purpose of the black youths in these protests. The poem also captures the silent prayer that every black man and woman in a white space whispers to themselves and their loved ones anytime they step on the streets.

If We Must Die, by Claude McKay

If we must die, let it not be like hogs

Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! We must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
rested to the wall, dying, but fighting back! [2]

As a protest poem, “If We Must Die” remains relevant today and it provides insights into the condition blacks across the African diaspora. It is a reminder that for as long as we live in a society in which an overwhelming number of black and brown people continue to be subject to economic, educational, and carceral racism to a greater extent than any other group, we need solidarity movements that are not afraid to speak out against such injustices. It is a call for solidarity, not just in the US but also across nations, for victims of anti-black violence because anti-black racism is a “common foe” that requires a global response and must be met from multiple fronts.

[1] From *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B Du Bois, 1903.

[2] From Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” in *Harlem Shadows: The Poems of Claude McKay* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922).



“Third World Unite For Black Resistance” protest and lock down of the Oakland Federal Building during the Januar 2015 #reclaimMLK, 96 hours of direct action. • Photograph by Ianna Hawkins Owen.

Ferguson Will Not Allow Me To Rest

Ameer Loggins, PhD Candidate

It was 4:06 am Pacific Standard Time and Ferguson would not allow me to rest. I could not take my eyes off of the around the clock coverage of what could have been seen as a race riot in a presumed post-racial America. My focus alternated between technological devices of conveniences that have become necessities. One minute my attention was on the television, the next it was on my smart phone. My intake of information was fluid, as my concentration on all things Ferguson shifted between the punditry of correspondents on traditional media networks such as CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News, and timelines of the millions of voices on social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook. Back and forth, back and forth, the flow of information and opinions surrounding the death of Michael Brown was paralyzing. The real-time news reporting and footage, jostling with the second by second updating of Twitter timelines, both gripped my attention and informed my opinion on Ferguson, Missouri, a location that had been violently forced into the historical annals of race, class, gender, power dynamics and policing in the United States. I was observing Ferguson, while conjointly participating in the construction of the narrative that surrounds Ferguson, a place that I have never visited, regarding an unarmed teenage Black male that I have never met. This is the moment that we are in. We are in what I would consider a first in American history. This is the first protest/rebellion/riot/occupation/movement (depending on who you talk to) surrounding issues tethered to the deadly policing of Black bodies in the era of social networking and smart phone technology.

The debate surrounding officers of the law and their methods of policing Black bodies is nothing new. Of the more historically notable moments that deal with policing Black bodies in

conjunction with protest, we may think of Birmingham, Alabama 1963, Watts, Los Angeles 1965, and the Los Angeles rebellion of 1992, surrounding the beating of Rodney King, whose violent encounter with the police was caught on camera by George Holliday, and what the camera caught was King being struck 56 times with police batons, while his body lay in the street, unarmed, defenseless, and Black. Now we can add Ferguson, Missouri 2014 to this list of unfortunate run-ins with the law. What is different, what is novel about the Ferguson is the social networking element that has been introduced to the way in which this 2014 reincarnation of a race riot has contributed, not only to the ways that we contextualize Ferguson in the moment, but also how the narrative is and will be constructed and preserved for future people interested in said moment in the history of police brutality and Black bodies.

According to a report published by the Pew Research Center, Twitter posts related to the fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri by officer Darren Wilson began to appear a full 48 hours before cable news outlets like MSNBC, and Fox News gave it coverage, while it took CNN three days before it deemed the story worthy of primetime attention. The Pew research also revealed that on August 9th, close to 146,000 posts related to the fatal shooting of Michael Brown were being circulated via the timelines of members of the Twitterverse. MSNBC and Fox did not devote prime-time coverage to the shooting and the surrounding events until Monday, with 21 minutes and 6 minutes of coverage. CNN began its prime-time coverage on Tuesday, with 24 minutes of coverage. To put it another way, More than 1,000,000 Ferguson related tweets were sent before CNN covered the story in primetime. Twitter was covering the story live and in the moment.

And a Twitter member that goes by the user name @ThreePharoah first captured and broadcasted this horrific moment.

At 12:03 pm, @ThreePharoah tweeted, “I JUST SAW SOMEONE DIE OMFG.” @ThreePharoah continued by framing his bodily response to this event by tweeting, “Im about to hyperventilate.” At 12:04 pm in response to an inquiry by another Twitter user by the name of @allovevie, @ThreePharoah provided more specific aspects of the death that he had witnessed and was now reporting. @ThreePharoah responds by tweeting, “the police shot someone dead in front of my crib yo.” He then tweeted a photograph of Michael Brown’s lifeless body, uncovered in the middle of the street with a visibly White, presumably male, uniformed police officer standing over him. Brown’s body would lie in the middle of that street, exposed and on display for all of the Ferguson onlookers to view, but not attend to. Deceased and disrespected, serving as both a spectacle and commonplace, Brown’s corpse remained in the street for four hours.

@ThreePharoah continued reporting, tweeting next, “Its blood all over the street, niggas, protesting nshit. There is police tape all over my building. I am stuck here omg.” Another Twitter user asked @ThreePharoah why was the man gunned down and dead in the street, what did he do, @ThreePharoah emphatically replied, “no reason! He was running!” As if someone had questioned the authenticity of his account, @ThreePharoah somberly tweeted, “I saw it happen man.” After other tweets like, “Homie still on the ground tho,” @ThreePharoah tweeted that he was, “DONE TWEETING ABOUT THE SITUATION.” Although @ThreePharoah was understandably, “done tweeting about the situation,” in Ferguson the tweets surrounding the death of Michael Brown were just getting started.

There were more than 3.6 million Ferguson-related tweets sent between August 9th, the day Brown

was killed, and August 17th (and as the conversations continue the numbers are literally increasing by the second). I was (and continue to be) one of those people contributing to the millions of tweets surrounding the death of Michael Brown. With each tweet, each update, members of the Twitterverse are creating, and countering narratives constructed about all things Ferguson related. It was during one of these aforementioned moments, when the teargas (the same teargas prohibited in military combat) was raining down, filling the eyes and lungs of civilian protesters, while highly militarized police officers, clad in Kevlar vests, camouflage fatigues, and helmets, resembling soldiers stationed in Iraq used military gear such as Long Range Acoustic Devices, Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles (mind you that Ferguson is devoid of landmines and IEDs), against United States citizens, peaceably assembling, practicing their First Amendment rights, that I heard a young Black male say, “They think we’re just some niggas that don’t want to live. They always make us look like we don’t care about our lives. Well if we didn’t care about our lives, then why in the hell are we out here protesting and catching hell? Why are we tweeting and taking pictures of the real news for the people to see? We ain’t goin’ nowhere!” It was almost as if the young man was rearticulating Audre Lorde when she said, “If I didn’t define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people’s fantasies for me and eaten alive.” Like @ThreePharoah and the millions of other citizen/guerilla journalists, they wanted to be heard. They wanted to be taken seriously. They wanted to construct their own narratives. They wanted to show that not only did their *#BlackLivesMatter*, but also their Black voices, words, images, and perspectives mattered as well.



*Michael Brown, Sr. and comedian Joe Torrey in Canfield Apartments in Ferguson, MO on October 3, 2014. •
Photograph by Rasheed Shabazz.*

"General Dissatisfaction" and the Possibilities in Black Student Discontent

Jarvis R. Givens, PhD Candidate

The former chair of the Black Panther Party, Elaine Brown, at seventy-one years old, addressed the crowd of onlookers over a megaphone as a group of UC Berkeley's Black students occupied The Golden Bear Café. The students were protesting the recent acquittal of the police officers responsible for killing two unarmed Black men—Michael Brown of Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner of New York City. The juxtaposition between Elaine Brown and the students assembled behind her, dressed in all black, forced me to think through the ways in which Black students in the contemporary moment draw upon the cultural memory of Black activism of the past in their engagement of university campuses. The presence of Dr. Hardy Frye, who was a graduate student at Berkeley during the Black student protests of the late 1960s, further captured this continuity. Days later I had a conversation with Dr. Frye to explore his analysis of the events taking place around campus, particularly the upsurge of Black student activism.

Dr. Frye, originally from Tuskegee, Alabama, was an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement. In 1964 he went to Mississippi as a field organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and participated in the Mississippi Freedom Summer. In the years that followed he continued to travel to various Southern states on assignment for SNCC, even while he was enrolled as a student at Sacramento State University. In 1968 he began graduate school at UC Berkeley in the department of sociology, where he received his masters in 1970 and his Ph.D. in 1975. His time at Berkeley was during the height of the student protest movement and he was an active participant—a vanguard in the quest to establish Black Studies on campus, the very department he currently teaches in as a professor emeritus.

While Dr. Frye acknowledged that the

current student activism on campus is not as organized as the 1960s student movement, he believes that it has the potential to be. What we are seeing currently is a "general social movement; there's general dissatisfaction" amongst Black students. Dr. Frye asserted that this dissatisfaction is something that has been endemic to the Black student experience on campus throughout his years here. He offers that the slogan "I can't breath", which were the plea words of Garner as he struggled to get free of the fatal chokehold of NYC police, is reminiscent of the feelings Black students continue to express regarding their experiences on campus. Further elucidating this point he stated, "'I can't hardly breath' is right for this campus, with Black students, because that's what Black students say to me, that's what comes through a lot. They feel like they're invisible sometimes and they feel like they're ignored."

In tracing the relationship between the words of Eric Garner and the experiences of isolation and exclusion by Black students on campus, Dr. Frye shared, "That slogan captures, I think, a lot of what they feel. As a consequence of this shooting that happened in Ferguson and what happened in New York and etc., just put the relationship between the police and the Black community in front, in their face...and so therefore, they feel they have no choice but to participate." He suggests that the recent events have forced many Black students to recognize the connection between their encounters with racism (both structural and overt) during their collegiate experiences and the larger vestiges of racism that continue to plague the larger society—particularly in Black urban environments.

"This moment forces Black scholars and Black students to look back towards the hood and the so-called ghetto and don't look away from it and forces

them to confront what these issues are. And I think that the potential for that would be, could be that a lot of them will spend a lot of their time thinking about what these communities need, and maybe help provide some leadership.” Dr. Frye suggests that this moment has the potential to be quite influential in how many Black students construct their scholastic identities but also how they come to see their role in taking up the issues that continue to challenge Black people. He’s hopeful that Black students will work to “build the organizational structure and help us understand some of the problems in terms of our community that we have to address and not expect the larger society to do it. They’re not gonna, they might help support it but they’re not gonna do it without our leadership.” He believes that this moment has captured how a general disregard for Black lives continues to persist. Furthermore, he suggests that clarity on this reality has the potential to be powerful for young Black students as they form their career trajectories; or at least he’s hopeful that it does, because “this country has shown that it is more prepared to address and help any other group of people at the expense of African American people.”

Listening to Dr. Frye recount his experiences as a field organizer in the rural south and as a student on UC Berkeley’s campus in the 1960s served as a reminder of a fact that often hides in plain sight. The opportunities that Black students have today came at a high price to those who struggled and sacrificed before us; and many of those gains are constantly being challenged—particularly when we think about Black students and higher education. As Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009) suggest, “African American participation in higher education cannot be taken for granted or assumed to be a privilege that has always existed. On the contrary, this presence was precipitated by an ‘up-and-down’ struggle for equity, access, and progressive policies mandated via judicial and legislative action” (p. 392). [1] These policies have not all been sustainable as seen by the plummeting numbers of Black students enrolled at highly selective and state flagship institutions in the

past few decades. This “up-and-down struggle” should serve as a reminder to Black students to maintain their vigilance and continue to resist the cultural norms of their local campuses and the larger society where oppression continues to manifest. During the students’ occupation of the Golden Bear Café, Elaine Brown stated, “I know it was the blood,” referencing the pain and sacrifices of Black people that paved the way for the students standing in protest behind her. She urged students to recognize that they would have to continue to resist and sacrifice in moving forward a liberation agenda.

The general dissatisfaction that Black students have continuously felt on this university’s campus coupled with the recent transparency of the systemic racism within our society is undeniable. Students’ have inherited a legacy of protest on the campus of UC Berkeley, and with persistence, structure, and collaborative efforts with faculty, graduate students and community members, this moment has the potential to address many of the structural challenges African American students on campus and beyond. This moment is encouraging in the sense that students seem to be imagining new possibilities for their futures on this campus, and in the world in general—radical change starts here. Black students’ discontentment and their imagination, together, have the potential to be immensely powerful. “Without new visions, we don’t know what to build, only what to knock down. We not only end up confused, rudderless, and cynical, but we forget that making a revolution is not a series of clever maneuvers and tactics, but a process that can and must transform us” (Kelley, 2002, p. 82). [2]

[1] Shaun R. Harper, Lori D. Patton, & Ontario S. Wooden. (2009). Access And Equity For African American Students In Higher Education: A Critical Race Historical Analysis Of Policy Efforts. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(4), 389-414.

[2] Kelley, R. (2002). *Freedom dreams the Black radical imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press.



Declaring no more “Business as Usual,” 14 Black activists shut down the BART system on Friday, November 28, 2014 by chaining themselves to trains at the West Oakland station. The “Black Friday 14” were arrested and charged with trespassing. A campaign has been launched to drop the charges and the proposed \$70,000 restitution charges. • Photograph by Rasheed Shabazz.

The Making of a Grassroots Movement Against Anti-black Racism

Tianna Paschel, Assistant Professor

In recent months, thousands of people have taken to the streets in cities throughout the United States outraged over the murders of Eric Garner and Mike Brown, among others. If the brutal and unjustified killing of these black boys and men by the police wasn't enough to catalyze mobilization for racial justice, the non-indictment of the police officers that murdered them did. In this, protestors have not only used classic repertoires of action including marches where they've chanted, "hands up, don't shoot," but they have also staged "die-ins," where protestors collectively lay on the ground in positions that mimic the dead.

There is no shortage of debate about these recent protests, or the cases that catalyzed them. As a scholar of social movements, I would like to focus my thoughts on one question that I think is particularly important to ask at this juncture: What kind of movement is this?

First, the recent waves of protest from Ferguson to Oakland to New York represent the emergence of a *grassroots movement* against anti-black racism, unprecedented in recent decades. Beyond the sheer size and number of protests, their locus has also been somewhat surprising given what we know about social movements. Rather than emerging from established civil rights organizations or black political elites that have long considered themselves the spokespersons of the black community, this movement has radiated out from the outraged and grieving families and communities of the black men killed by the police. In taking their struggle to the streets, these communities have targeted state institutions as well as ordinary Americans who have passively watched as black people experience racialized violence.

What is most remarkable about the protests in Ferguson, in particular, is how collective pain and indignation itself has called so many people to the street, night after night, in the face of an increasingly militarized police force and largely outside of "respectable" black middle class institutions. Indeed, while in some cases, traditional civil rights institutions have helped to shine a spotlight on these injustices, their involvement has largely happened after mobilization was well underway. Moreover, amidst debates on the right as to whether these deaths were racially motivated at all, some traditional black leaders have tried to discipline protesters and emphasize personal responsibility as a potential remedy to the ills facing black communities. This was best captured in Al Sharpton's eulogy at Mike Brown's funeral, which spoke not only about racialized state violence, but the need for blacks to "clean up" their communities and embrace being successful. The family of Akai Gurley, another unarmed black man gunned down by the NYPD in a dark stairwell, refused to let Sharpton speak at his memorial service. In this sense, recent mobilization must be understood as having its roots in spontaneous, grassroots action that has become increasingly coordinated.

The second root of such organizing both on the streets and on the internet is *black youth-led social movement organizations* and networks such as Black Lives Matter, We Charge Genocide and Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), to name a few. All of them have emerged in recent years around the question of racialized police violence as well as other issues facing black people. In so doing, they have not only mobilized and raised visibility around these

issues, but have also produced important written analyses of the situation. They have insisted that we understand these murders as systemic rather than episodic, as endemic rather than aberrations to an otherwise post-racial society and state apparatus. These organizations have also been emphatic about contextualizing these horrific events along a spectrum of state violence that black people, and particularly poor black people experience everyday in the form of surveillance, hyper criminalization and mass incarceration.

We Charge Genocide – a grassroots Chicago-based organization that emerged in the wake of the killing of Dominique “Damo” Franklin and that works to equip individuals and communities to “police” the police – took its name from the 1951 Petition with the same name. Originally submitted to the UN General Assembly submitted by the Civil Rights Congress, the petition documented 153 racial killings and was signed by W.E.B. DuBois and Paul Robeson, among many others. Its authors held that “the oppressed Negro citizens of the United States, segregated, discriminated against and long the target of violence, suffer from genocide as the result of the consistent, conscious, unified policies of every branch of government.” In a similar vein, the youth organizing with We Charge Genocide, along with the parents of Mike Brown made similar statements on state violence against black communities in front of the UN Committee on Torture in Geneva in November of last year. The parallels between these two moments of black resistance in both domestic and international space are many. These similarities caution us to resist the temptation to demarcate the current moment as constituting a new kind of racial violence.

The third aspect of this movement that is important to underscore is that it is *not a white movement*. If you have participated in recent protests, or even seen footage of them, you have likely noticed that many of those organizing for racial justice and against anti-black

racism are not black. In fact, a great deal of the images circulating in the newspapers in cities like New York and in the Bay Area show a great deal of white, likely middle class liberal whites marching and “dying in.” On the one hand, it is a significant moment when whites chant “black lives matter”. This is especially the case when we consider that much of the racialized violence perpetuated against black people (though not all) has happened at the hands of white police officers who refuse to see black people as fully human. Having participated in some of the protests myself, I have to admit that watching black people being joined by other people of color and white people yell “black lives matter” gave me a little bit of renewed hope about the possibilities of breaking through the ideological force of “post-racial” America.

On the other hand, the participation and visibility of white protestors has been highly problematic. Social Justice Blogger Tam highlighted this best in a recent post entitled “Dear White Protesters”: “As a Black person in this country, I am well aware that the streets belong to white people. I am not empowered or made more safe by hundreds of white people chanting that the streets belong to them. The street in Ferguson where Mike Brown was murdered and lay dead for 4.5 hours should have belonged to him, but it didn’t. He’s dead. He’s not coming back. That’s because the streets belong to white people.” Indeed, the impulse of many white protestors throughout the United States has not been to simply stand in solidarity with black communities and others affected directly by racialized state violence, but to appropriate that suffering, to “give voice” to black people, to be at the center of the movement.

These tensions were accentuated in a recent protest organized by black students at the University of Chicago where students called on everyone to march, but only allowed black students to “die in”. This was a strategic decision that was an important one because it

reaffirmed the fact that it is blackness itself that made Eric Garner and Mike Brown susceptible to what Achille Mbembe calls “necropolitics” or the “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” that “profoundly reconfigure the relations among resistance, sacrifice, and terror”. Yet while it is important that black bodies remain at the center of this movement, it makes sense that we would not necessarily be there. Indeed, the same de-facto mandate of the police to serve and protect white people (and perhaps more importantly, white property) that led to the deaths of these black men is what makes whites so comfortable showing their outrage in public spaces, that affords them the privilege of feeling relatively safe while protesting, that prompts them to taunt police. As such, while broad-based cross-racial solidarity can certainly shape the sustainability and outcomes of this movement, there must also be a critical reflection among white protestors, as well as the movement more generally, about the ways in which whiteness is being articulated in it.

Finally, it is important to note that while many protestors have made it clear that this is about black *lives* mattering, in much of the actual discourse and political practices, a concern for *black men's* lives have eclipsed that of black people on the whole. This has led to a de-emphasis of the ways that racialized state violence affect black women. More importantly, the effective erasure of black girls and women from the popularized slogan “black lives matter” has also rendered invisible the stories of black women such as Tarika Wilson, Miriam Carey and Yvette Smith, all of whom were also brutally killed by the police. As a result, we have to ask ourselves why the stories of black men are the only ones that compel people to march, why their names are the only ones that are remembered.

Ultimately, we are experiencing a special moment in black resistance. While the dynamics of mobilization that have coalesced under #blacklivesmatter are

still somewhat nascent, they arguably started with mobilization around the deaths of Oscar Grant and Trayvon Martin years before. Of course, the racial violence of which they speak has an even longer and deeper history. What one senses as people have taken to the streets is a cumulative and collective sense of pain and outrage over the continual disrespect of black life and suffering. The haunting expression “I can’t breathe” that Eric Garner whispered while being choked to death by the NYPD has had deep resonance with black people as a metaphor to our suffering. It expresses a collective awareness that behind the brutal killing of Mike Brown are hundreds of other black women and men, that black people have yet to be guaranteed the basic rights to life and dignity. The media has disparagingly called some of the mobilization around Ferguson as riots. While I do not share this analysis entirely, it makes sense that a people who feel like they can’t breathe might turn to riots, a strategy some scholars have aptly argued is the last weapon of the truly dispossessed.



Millions March, Alameda Court House, December 13, 2014. • Photograph by Kimberly McNair.

The Black Lives Matter Freedom Ride: From Ferguson to UC Berkeley to National Advocacy

Gabriel Regalado, PhD student (Originally printed by The Berkeley Graduate)

On August 28th, hundreds of black activists, artists, poets, writers, photographers, filmmakers, legal and medical experts, campus and community organizers, and concerned black mothers and elders set out in caravans from several states to St. Louis, Missouri, to advance the struggle to end state-sanctioned violence against black people, and to emphatically and unapologetically declare that “Black Lives Matter!” This call to action was organized in the spirit of the interstate Freedom Riders of the early 1960s and it was coordinated in close collaboration with the Organization for Black Struggle (OBS) and Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment (MORE), the lead groups that formed the Hands Up, Don’t Shoot Coalition in response to Ferguson police officers murdering 18-year-old Michael Brown on August 9, 2014.

By early Saturday, August 30th, these black freedom riders arrived in St. Louis, poised to take action: to utilize their respective skills and talents to support the ongoing protest efforts of local activists. As a graduate student in the UC Berkeley African Diaspora Studies Program and former community organizer in Los Angeles, I was among my long-time comrades as a rider, offering our own capabilities to help build and sustain the movement. After an orientation at St. John’s United Church of Christ, we found ourselves shoulder-to-shoulder with the people of Ferguson chanting “Hands Up! Don’t Shoot!” to emanate our collective grief and righteous anger as we marched towards the intersection of Canfield Drive and Caddiefield Road, where Officer Darren Wilson brutally murdered Mike Brown. Local church groups held a rally around the makeshift memorial — ornate with flowers, candles,

and other embroideries — to honor Mike Brown’s family and to engage in the process of community healing as they entered their fourth week of resistance.

When local activists proceeded to march, the Black Lives Matter contingency remained circled around the shrine, joining hands to voice our condolences and affirming our purpose of action as we declared in unison, “it is our duty to fight for freedom,” and “it is our duty to win!” “We must love and protect one another,” and “we have nothing to lose but our chains!” As we shouted the final affirmation into the humid air to summon and honor the spirit of Mike Brown, the spirits of the countless black lives lost to state-sanctioned violence, and the spirits of our long-suffering ancestors preceding our struggle for justice and equality, a showering rain descended upon us. The water not only washed away the sweat and dirt from our journey, but also cleansed our fears, trepidations, fatigue, and any lingering feelings of futility. Standing together on that ground, it became clear that whatever sense of fear or timidity we may have harbored could only serve to empower the forces of oppression that thrive from our docility and hesitancy to confront and combat white supremacy firmly and directly.

Energized by a reinvigorated sense of conviction, we dispersed from Canfield Drive to re-join the people of Ferguson in various community building and community resistance engagements. Specialized teams comprised of experienced political workers participated in community-based service projects seeking to raise awareness about issues pertaining to police violence perpetrated specifically against black people. These riders went door-to-door, canvassing various locations including predominantly white neighborhoods where

they were met with verbal hostility from police sympathizers. This experience convinced many riders to forego efforts to engage the white community and to entrust white allies with undertaking this work in the future. Other riders participated in a youth-led public demonstration in front of the Ferguson Police Department on South Florissant Road to verbalize grievances over police misconduct.

For several hours, hundreds of protesters stood their ground, demanding Officer Darren Wilson's immediate arrest before a line of grim-faced police officers — newly equipped with body cameras — who formed a barricade along the parking area of the building. Excluding Captain Ron Johnson and three other black police officers, this lineup of approximately 50 officers was overwhelmingly Caucasian. This "white" line contrasted starkly with the masses of black protesters on the other side of the yellow "Do Not Cross" tape. While young black activists spearheaded the demonstration, participants consisted of a diverse array of community members. In attendance were black mothers demanding an end to the systemic murder of their children, black children as young as 10 interrogating officers on why they were being targeted, and a handful of white anti-racist allies. Three weeks after the fatal shooting of Mike Brown and the people of Ferguson remain persistent in their demands for justice.

The remainder of the weekend consisted of riders engaging local activists in discussions and workshops on how to expand the pedagogy of resistance articulated by the Hands Up, Don't Shoot Coalition into a nationwide movement. Strategic planning sessions to develop a national advocacy agenda took place as medical teams availed themselves to riders and local activists whom the turbulence of Ferguson's contentious atmosphere emotionally or physically affected.

Upon returning to our home cities, the freedom riders of the Black Lives Matter campaign are faced

with the challenge of finding meaningful ways to channel the fearless spirit of community resistance from Ferguson in our respective localities to effectively address police violence and anti-black racism. At UC Berkeley in particular, both institutional and interpersonal racism continue to play pervasive roles in diminishing black matriculation rates, nurturing a hostile white-centered atmosphere, and impeding positive learning outcomes for black students.

In a campus environment where administrative callousness towards the real material impacts of racism stymies black student growth and development, and where black students are continually harassed and terrorized by racist anti-black sentiments — including a mock lynching of a brown-skinned mannequin and racist bake sales mocking Affirmative Action — racism is an everyday lived experience for those of us attempting to navigate this white-dominated institution. The same white supremacist mode of thought that *allowed* officer Darren Wilson to murder Mike Brown with impunity informs the racism right here on our campus.

As I breathe in one of the most profound experiences of my life, the foremost imperative I can immediately endorse to Berkeley graduate students who are eager to join the fight to end state-sanctioned violence and anti-black racism is to first address the white-centeredness of the very spaces in which they operate. Graduate seminars and assembly meetings are easily monopolized by white student voices. It is imperative that black and brown students receive black- and brown-affirming spaces free from white paternalism. Being an ally who occupies a position of power along the axes of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc., is rarely easy: it means honoring and yielding to the self-determination of those who are directly affected by a specific form of oppression.

Often, well-meaning white allies are quick to co-opt black and brown spaces before addressing racism in their own communities. As many riders discovered

while canvassing in Ferguson, addressing anti-black racism in white communities is best left to our progressive white allies who are better-suited and emotionally-conditioned to perpetrate critical dialogue in those spaces. We cannot afford to be hesitant in identifying white supremacy, especially if it exists in our own backyards.

The Black Lives Matter ride to Ferguson is over, but the work to put the UC Berkeley community in congruence with the national advocacy project is just beginning. Although it was just me, I hope my participation in this national weekend of action can serve as a small gesture of solidarity that a member of the UC Berkeley graduate community rode out to Ferguson, Missouri, because Black Lives Matter.



September 2014 in Ferguson, MO. • Photograph by Gabriel Regalado.



Cal Black Student Union co-chairs Gabby Shuman and Myles Santifer speak at a forum on Police Brutality at Boalt Hall on October 10, 2014. • Photograph by Rasheed Shabazz.

Movement or Moment in History

Ula Taylor, Associate Professor

The recent anti-police brutality demonstrations associated with the tragic deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown cause me to pause and ask what actions constitute a political movement and what events are simply reduced to a footnote in history?

The modern Civil Rights Movement, linked with the post World War II period, had pockets of victories but was ultimately transformed by the Montgomery Bus Boycott. [1] It was in this southern city that an entire community resisted the humiliation of the Jim Crow law by refusing to ride segregated public transportation for a year. The collective effort of the black community culminated with the United States Supreme Court decision rendering racial segregation in Alabama unconstitutional. However, what we primarily remember about the Montgomery movement are the personas of Mrs. Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Both were elevated to national prominence and recognized for the power of their activist histories.

Many Americans who witnessed the Civil Rights Movement are taken aback by what appears to be too much unrespectable activists' behavior from the Black Lives Matter activists: what they view as loud, reckless, thuggish, and looting conduct. They also want to know who is the "leader." It is hard to imagine the effectiveness of decentralized leadership when one has stored in their memory the inspiring oratory and visions of Dr. King. As an African American historian, I understand this nostalgic yearning. I also understand how historical writing gravitates towards larger than life personalities, poetic verse, and neatly packaged narratives. It is easier to wrap our minds around the individual personality and not the emergent issue of concern.

For the Black Lives Matters protestors the killings of unarmed African Americans by law enforcement ignited their call for social justice and the acknowledgment of Black humanity. If you peruse

the Black Lives Matter website, you begin to understand a much larger effort is in motion, deeply rooted in the empowerment of Black communities. Their activities are clearly directed at the state and theorists, such as Michael Rios, argue that until the apparatus of the state is forced to change a full fledge movement does not exist. [2] Much evidence indicates that what is actually happening in this youth led moment is the planting of an infrastructure that can propel structural change. The roots of the movement are in the tradition of Miss Ella Baker, who guided the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and advocated for group-centered leadership and the empowerment of the poor. For Miss Baker, a group-centered movement for the liberation struggle would only have staying power if it were anchored in grassroots organizing. In so many ways the Black Lives Matter activists answer her call, with an added twist that she could not have anticipated; the power of the internet. The leveraging of technology, particularly smart phones, generates instant messaging that leads to intentional and spontaneous organizing; as well as the fluid movement of bodies from one urban setting to another. Moreover, the Blacklifematters.org website is replete with a PayPal donation tab, galvanizing photos of victims, and clear mobilization strategies centered upon POWER principles. Lastly, in the spirit of Ella Baker's philosophy, the organizing shakes the moment loose from the reliance upon a single (s)hero and middle-class respectability politics, propelling us more readily towards a "black freedom" movement.

[1] These victories include Executive Order 8802 which prohibited discrimination in the national Defense Industry and the 1954 Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

[2] Michael Rios, *Scale, Governance Coalition, and the Branding of Collective Action: The Politics of Obesity in Pennsylvania* (Pennsylvania State University: Dissertation, 2006).



“Up in smoke.” Berkeley Police teargas protesters on Telegraph Ave on December 6, 2014. • Photograph by Rasheed Shabazz.

Law Enforcements' Deployment of Excessive Force Against Peaceful Demonstrators

Kenly Brown, PhD student

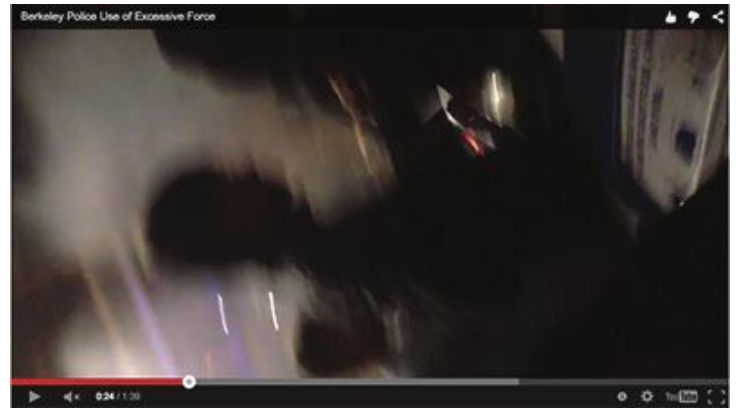
Since the failures to indict police officers in the murders of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, millions of people across the country erupted in protests to voice and project their anger, sadness, and thirst for change in an unjust legal system. The colorblind and post-racial rhetoric that permeated policies and practices to reduce race to an innocuous social construction in US American society has been called into question and deconstructed as a way to ignore racial inequity. To see protesters come together in unity and develop a movement in solidarity to showcase the lack of regard for Black lives in the United States is striking. People are tired of seeing the blatant disregard and dismissal of Black life and are using their first amendment right to publicly voice their discontent. The reaction of law enforcement to crowds of protesters has varied, but this piece pertains to the excessive use of force law enforcement use against peaceful demonstrators.

On December 6, 2014, a friend and I witnessed firsthand the violent suppression of a peaceful protest by the Berkeley Police Department on Telegraph Ave and Durant Ave. We were walking toward Bancroft Ave and Telegraph when we noticed fifty police officers. Initially, a number of students and community members were gathered around chanting "Black Lives Matter" and "We are the people of the state of California" while audibly requesting that their fellow protesters stay peaceful. We witnessed the police put on their gas masks and take out their batons. As we continued to peacefully, non-violently standing, the police began to move us back toward the sidewalk. When we moved back, they tear gassed the crowd. While running from

the scene we heard and saw the residue of the first shot of what sounded like a rubber bullet into the crowd. As we ran further down Telegraph, more tear gas permeated the space and two or more shots went off into the crowd. We were in a peaceful protest.

Initially, news sources reported the police responded with teargas, batons, rubber bullets, etc. because protesters were rioting. It was not until photos and videos from those who witnessed or experienced the violent response from the Berkeley Police when news stories reported the excessive use of force police officers used against peaceful demonstrators. These tactics police officers used to disperse crowds signifies a larger issue of procedural justice and legitimacy of authority. Tom Tyler, a Macklin Fleming Professor of Law at Yale, conceptualizes procedural justice and legitimacy as "measurements of the extent to which members of the public trust and have confidence in the police, believe that the police are honest and competent, think that the police treat people fairly and with respect, and are willing to defer to the law and to police authority" (Tyler, 2014: 4). This trust and fair treatment is embodied in procedural justice where civilians feel like they are protected, fairly treated, and the police officer is benevolent. When civilians are approached by police officers and are treated fairly and respectfully, they are more likely to perceive police officers as legitimate and comply. Once civilians are treated poorly, they are less likely to comply with police officers, which leads to a higher probability they will use physical force (Tyler, 2014).

Since this incident, more protests have been organized in Berkeley and police officers continue to use



*Stills from a cellphone video taken by Kenly Brown.
View the clip here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HMGjFt1B2Y>*

excessive force against demonstrators. The public's perception of the legitimacy of police officers is low because of the treatment and response by law enforcement. However, tactics police officers use in black and brown communities (e.g. high volumes of surveillance, excessive use of force, and fatal interactions between men and women of color and the police) daily illustrate a sustained deficit in procedural justice and legitimacy. If we want to build a collaborative effort between community members and police officers, law enforcement should implement strategies that are procedurally just and fair to reduce violence against black and brown communities.

Reference: Tyler, T. (2014). *Legitimacy and Procedural Justice: A New Element of Police Leadership*.

Killing Us Slowly: Slow Death by Educational Neglect

Na'ilah Suad Nasir, Associate Professor and Department Chair

This is an unprecedented moment in our nation's history. 2014 marks an apex of unpunished, state-sanctioned violence against Black people, and an historical moment where Black communities all over the country, in the face of the murders of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, and countless others, have stood up together in protests and die-in's and boycotts to express our collective anguish. These deaths at the hands of police violence have touched a nerve, in part because every Black person I know, men and women, rich or poor, young or old, in all parts of the country have a personal story of police abuse and violence (whether it be symbolic violence or physical violence). Being harassed and unfairly treated by police is an experience that unites Black people domestically and globally, and the heart-breaking deaths we have seen recently make dramatically salient the way that Black lives are undervalued. The hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter, is a rallying call to notice and resist the multiple ways our society has undervalued Black lives.

While the recent deaths certainly underscore the unacceptable levels of implicit and explicit racism against Black people globally, they are but one aspect of how our society communicates and reinforces the message that Black lives do not matter. As a scholar of education, I find also appalling the way our educational system dampens the spirits and potential of Black kids in daily mundane interactions in far too many schools and classrooms.

I was talking recently about this with a teacher at one of my children's schools. My children attend Berkeley Public Schools, which have a long history of being progressive with respect to school desegregation, and which are quite (purposefully) racially and socio-economically diverse. However, like school districts across the country, opportunities to learn

are not evenly distributed across racial groups in the schools. At the school one of my children attends, the achievement levels (as measured by standardized test scores) of Black and Latino students are lower than that of white and Asian students, as is the case in every school in Berkeley and most in the Bay Area and the nation. This teacher made the point that if the achievement patterns were reversed, with white students "underachieving" the school and the district would not stand for it. We reflected together on how schools have a collective level of acceptance for the "underachievement" of Black students, but if white students were to "underachieve" at the same levels, the system itself would certainly be declared broken. In other words, not doing well in school is only normalized for students of color—when it happens to white students the very system itself is viewed as not doing what it is designed to do. This is a form of acceptable death, the death of intellectual potential, which our society does not question and continues to perpetuate. It is active educational neglect.

One of the key processes that support systems of schooling that do not allow Black students to reach their full potential are the overtly racist systems of discipline and punishment in schools. This is where the core concerns of the BlackLivesMatter movement and my focus on schools align. Many have written about the multiple ways that Black students, boys and girls, are more harshly disciplined, and are more likely to be kicked out of class, suspended, and expelled, most often for infractions like "disrespect" or other ambiguous offenses. The propensity to discipline Black children and adolescents in schools is deeply tied to the anti-black racism prevalent in our society, and the ways that such racism spawns explicit and implicit bias. The ease with which teachers and administrators punish Black

children, and the ease with which we accept that some children (Black ones) are more likely to “underachieve” in school reflect a set of assumptions and implicit biases that tend to go unnoticed and invisible. It is the same implicit and explicit bias that causes police officers to be comfortable attributing criminality to Black bodies, and for our criminal justice system to fail to punish the police officers that kill Black men and women. At the root of both is a form of dehumanization that argues there is no value to be found in Black life, or in Black minds.

Thus, the BlackLivesMatter movement is a call to rehumanization. It is a grassroots movement led by a generation that understands that the call for acknowledging the humanity of Black people is far too important to rest with one charismatic leader. And it is a movement that rests on more than a set of action items. It is a massive effort to stir the consciousness of our nation, to wake up to the brutality that continues in mundane and dramatic ways every single day.





Ferguson, MO activists visited UC Berkeley on October 27, 2014 to discuss the justice for Mike Brown movement. Here, they stand with Cal students with the "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" pose. • Photograph by Rasheed Shabazz.

Winter Witness

Michael McGee, Jr., PhD Candidate

On December 13, 2014, Critical Resistance hosted a conversation with Fred Moten, Robin D.G. Kelley, and Maisha Quint at Bethany Baptist Church in Oakland, CA.

The history of our present looms large. The angst, anger, anxiety; the dissonance between evidence of progress and observations of failure; the inner conflict holding both pessimism and optimism. We have known this. We have felt it before.

When I took my seat in the pew at Bethany Baptist, history did more than loom; it raptured. I couldn't help but to think about the many local church gatherings doubling as civil rights meetings in the 1950s and '60s. Or how those sermons on the social justice of Christ informed the political philosophy of resistance. Or how the very act itself of gathering at the church house has long been the occasion of resilience, resistance, and strategy. The stakes for this night wouldn't be as high, so I thought. We were in attendance to witness a conversation. But I could not shake the question: what must it have felt like to sit in the pews at First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama on May 20th 1961, besieged by a mob of three thousand? What could it have felt like to hear the threat to your life and to your protest, while waiting for the National Guard to rescue? Although that moment and ours are different, the weight of its gravity hovers over our present.

Today we are not surrounded by an angry and encroaching mob. And yet, today we are surrounded by a hostile vigilantism out to kill blackness—that life, way of being, and way of doing which they fear because they cannot apprehend it. Today we do not wait on the National Guard to intervene; they do not—and *they cannot*—save us. Today, we do not wait for Obama or Holder or Nixon or de Blasio to do something. We do

not wait for the first of the long overdue indictments or convictions for the manslaughter of black life by law enforcement. Today, the urgency of Why We Can't Wait is thick; it looms behind every word of "Why We Won't Wait." And so on the night we gathered at Bethany Baptist, our assembly was witness to the unfinished work of the past.

Recognizing what is unfinished is not only about our continued struggle for justice; it is also about knowing the operations of that which we are up against. In his response to the Ferguson verdict, Kelley writes: "... *what we are dealing with is nothing less than permanent war waged by the state and its privatized allies on a mostly poor and marginalized Black and Brown working class. Five centuries in the making, it stretches from slavery and imperialism to massive systematic criminalization. We see the effects on our children, in the laws that make it easier to prosecute juveniles as adults; in the deluge of zero tolerance policies...in the startling fact that expulsions and suspensions have risen exponentially despite a significant decline in violent crime. Crisis, moral panics, neoliberal policies, racism fuel an expansive system of human management based on incarceration, surveillance, containment, pacification, lethal occupation, and gross misrepresentation.*" [1]

We witness the continued work of this history of violence in the murders of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, and in the non-indictments of Darren Wilson and Daniel Pantaleo. And we must also see this violence in the repeated beseeches to keep the peace, to "breathe easy: don't break the law," to express frustration but not to disrupt. The longevity of this war on black and brown bodies is premised on its ability to accumulate the protest, to incorporate the resistance, and in the process, to effect an amnesic tendency to sequester the his

tory of racial violence to the nether regions of the past. Order's insistence for calm, political correctness, and obeisance is an attempt to take away our witness. More so than the events, it is the feel of the past—the memory carried in the body, aggravating the soul—that presents a problem for the regulation of black life. And so we live in a society that is unwilling to hear our witness, unwilling to accept the hollowness of romantic notions of progress, unwilling to be disturbed by disruption.

On the morning of this critical dialogue at Bethany Baptist, three effigies were found on UC Berkeley's campus. Cardboard cutouts were found hanging by noose, marked by name, date of execution, and #ICantBreathe. Laura Nelson, 1911; George Meadows, 1889; Michael Donald, 1981; Charlie Hale, 1911; Garfield Burley and Curtis Brown, 1902. Campus administrators and black student protesters alike were in dismay as a past too poignant, too grotesque broke in on the present. The effigies brought disruption beyond expression; they were evidence of both the acts and feeling that make up the history of lynching in America. Responses encouraged looking away, decrying the reiteration of racial terror. But when we turn away—to not reproduce the horror, to conceal a liberal shame for the sins of the past, or because this past triggers a psychic and somatic pain too much to bear—we vacate our witness. What we saw in that strange fruit was the radical disruption of progress narratives, of keeping the peace, of breathing easy. It was an aesthetic disruption of a predetermined and permissible solidarity. It was unexpected and unsettling; roiling our conscience, unnerving our consciousness. Notwithstanding, this is the testimony of our witness. We are inclined to want to repress the monstrous, the peculiar, the unsightly because of the traumatic scarring of what we witness. Michael Brown's body left lying on the sidewalk. News feeds replaying video of Eric Garner's asphyxiation over and over again. This is the continued work of black con-

trol: to frighten, to deter, to make one want to *not* see. But the desire to turn away does not mend the traumatic breaks. The amnesic tendencies of pain do not bring healing but a continued aversion to witnessing.

There can be no protest without witness. This is our unfinished work. To testify on behalf of the many murdered by state-sanctioned or affiliated violence, speaking their names and telling their stories. To testify against the racial anxiety masquerading as neoliberal policy and post-racial rhetoric. To disrupt the narrative of black criminalization and expose the criminal activity of the state against black life. To disrupt the narrative of progress and expose the historical continuities of our global society's racial past.

Our witness to these things is not calm, it cannot breathe easy. Our witness must disrupt normalcy, it must disturb the ironed out reports claiming closure to a past yet in progress. The purpose of our witness, even in all of its uncomfotability, is not to incite or blame or instigate but to profess the sanctity black life, which is life itself. In every witness we see and we speak our survival—the survival of life, blackness, expression and disruption, resistance, and the will to be free.

[1] Robin D.G. Kelley, "Why We Won't Wait: Resisting the War Against the Black and Brown Underclass," *Counterpunch*. 25 Nov 2014.



Our Paradoxical Breath

Ianna Hawkins Owen, PhD Candidate

*“plant yourself in the dreams of the people
scattered by morning bullets.
let there be everywhere our talk.
let there be everywhere our eyes.
let there be everywhere our thoughts.
let there be everywhere our love.
let there be everywhere our actions.
breathing hope and victory
into their unspoken questions
summoning the dead to life again
to the hereafter of freedom.”*

--Sonia Sanchez, “MIA’s (missing in action and other atlantas)”

Tweeted, chanted, sharpied, silkscreened and played-back on loudspeakers, Eric Garner’s last words, “I can’t breathe,” echo all around us in our twinned effort to demand justice and refuse to forget. Moreover, the sudden sustained national attention fixed on the extrajudicial murder of black people in the United States #Every28Hours means that, for many of us it has become next to impossible to pull ourselves away from reading, thinking, and feeling—viscerally and nauseatingly—the old news that black life does not matter.

We are used to taking shallow breaths in our classrooms and workplaces, our homes and our beds, our streets—not only because unfettered capitalist expansion means that, for example, at the end of November, Friday begins on Thursday night and lasts until Cyber Monday. As striving modern subjects we must be constantly available for speed-up and increased exploitation (did somebody say “Operational Excellence”?). But, more than this, the depth of any given breath taken by blackened subjects is

roughly determined by the daily reality of social death and proximity to actual death. Many on social media have tapped anti-colonial psychologist Frantz Fanon’s discussion “occupied breathing” and “combat breathing” to understand the resonance of Garner’s words on the lips of thousands filling streets across the country, day after day. Our breaths get shallower and more defensive, more insecure all the time. But, we’re still breathing and Garner can’t, so we tell ourselves “we must.” In Assata’s words, “it is our duty.” We must keep breathing and repeating. *I can’t breathe*. Yet, as difficult as it is to ask this, how many times can we wear the shirt, say the words, and hear his cries over loudspeakers without becoming utterly immobilized?

We know that the strategies of stopping, breaking, and pausing have historically been co-opted by entrenched political authorities to “cool down” labor agitation, social disruption, and political rebellion. So, too, have well-intentioned liberals been known to urge the oppressed to “slow down”—a misrecognition of the pace and legacy of oppression pointed out so well in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” and Nina Simone’s “Mississippi Goddam.” With this context, it is not easy to make the case in this particular moment of necessary and unceasing action that “stopping does not mean repression,” as Thich Nhat Hanh suggests in introductory meditation text, *Touching Peace*.

Eleven times Garner told the world, through the cellphone video recorded by Ramsey Orta, how he would be murdered. *I can’t breathe*. Officer Daniel Pantaleo, the literal and figurative coercive arm of white supremacist state power stops Garner from breathing forever. *I can’t breathe*. Testifying before and to his own erasure, we can’t stop repeating Garner’s words because they capture so precisely and horrifically the

precarity and abjection of this thing called black “life” and the suffocating weight of the Du Bois’ enduring veil.

Esaw Garner tells us, “My husband was a quiet man, but he’s making a lot of noise right now.” The persistent hashtag #ICantBreathe serves as many things; a reminder, a demand, a metaphor, an incantation. On December 15th, the BlackOUT Collective’s four and a half hour lockdown of the Oakland Police Department (complete with flag pole occupation) offered us a companion phrase: #blackandbreathing. Their intervention would suggest that, taking seriously the last words of Eric Garner, we must acknowledge all the weapons at our disposal—however temporary and contingent—in the fight for his memory, our lives, and the imagined future. To choose to be restored by breath so that we can continue to bear witness to the words of Garner, to “summon the dead to life again” with our own paradoxical breath—black and breathing.

Thich Nhat Hanh explains that through breathing meditation, “We do not practice escape. We practice to have enough strength to confront problems effectively.” We must take control of our breath while we still have it, and breathe deeper than we ever have. When we focus on our breath, he advises that we’ll find, “There is a mountain in you. Please get in touch with it... No wind can blow the mountain down.” [1]

I am not the “right person” to write about meditation. I have only done so a handful of times in my life, for five or ten minutes at a time. When I experience anxiety my breath is the first thing to go and I suffer from fainting spells. No, I am not an ideal or even an experienced person who should be giving anyone advice about how to slow down. How to breathe in because we are still here. How to breathe out because we are not leaving. Instead, I hope to practice with humility, alongside you, and submit myself to a moment of stillness: in (hope) / out (freedom).

Wherever you are, dying-in, holding the mega-

phone, writing, weeping, studying, storming the bridges and the freeways, setting your own family straight, shutting down the city council meetings and the corporate headquarters, ... renew yourself for this fight. Participate in a collective act of stealing back the depth of our breath from those who would take everything from us, even the very air inside the ones we love.

Do you want to be free? For the long haul, breathe with me.

[1] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Touching Peace: Practicing the Art of Mindful Living* (Berkeley, Parallax Press, Revised Edition 2009).

* Image credit for page 46: “FTP” march in Temescal, Oakland on the night of August 15, 2014. • Photograph by Ianna Hawkins Owen.



"Vigil For Fallen Angels" at Lake Merritt, Oakland, November 30, 2014. Organized by Anti-Police Terror Project, CRT, Healthy Hoodz, Young Oakland, Workers World, The Alan Blueford Center for Justice, and POOR Magazine. • Photograph by Ianna Hawkins Owen.

How Do I Love Thee?

A love poem from the Ferguson, MO police dept to Black residents: An informal emulation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnet 43

Aya de León, Director of Poetry to the People (Originally printed by The Feminist Wire)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

I love thee with the blooming red rose of police bullets to thy firstborn sons.

Like a coy and unsigned suitor's note leaving thee to wonder exactly who sent these flowers.

I love thee in the full knighthood of riot gear body armor that exposes only my amorous motives.

I love thee with the sharp cracking kiss of a baton on your tender temple, wrist, shoulder...

I love thee with the seductive siren perfume of tear gas.

I love thee with the steady, rumbling march of tanks on residential city streets.

I love thee with the warm, heavy-armed embrace of curfew and martial law.

I love thee with the sly lover's denial in public, all the better to heighten my passion in night's clandestine shadows.

And when thou would protest against my love with smoke and gas-choked breath,

I shall but love thee better after death.



The Cal Black Student Union marched from Berkeley to join the Millions March in Oakland on December 13, 2014. Here, the group arrives at the Alameda County Courthouse. • Photograph by Rasheed Shabazz.

"I Can't Breathe": T-shirts as Discursive Activism

Kimberly McNair, PhD Candidate

T-shirts are tools, used to indict injustice and incite thought and at times (re)action. However, when last words become a slogan adorned on already commodified and branded bodies, we must reckon with the idea of passive and direct forms of activism and t-shirts as a site of resistance. As discursive activism, t-shirts and the images and/or phrases framed at the center challenge dominant narratives. They lend voice and agency to wearers and how the public engages the subject of anti-blackness and the killing of unarmed black people.

These t-shirts emerge while the nation is in a moment of reflection, amidst tensions arising from the spectacle(s) of institutional practices and policies that disproportionately impact the black community. The media event(s) of recent weeks illustrate the four hundred year old tradition of how not only black suffering is made spectacle of, but also how the attempts to redress this suffering is then misappropriated, parodied, and dying words branded as trademark. [1]

In the wake of the national tragedies and controversies surrounding the high profiled deaths of Mike Brown, Jr., Eric Garner, and now Tamir Rice, athletes including LeBron James and fellow Cleveland Cavalier teammates, Cleveland Browns receiver Andrew Hawkins, and the Brooklyn Nets have worn t-shirts signifying their personal experiences and connection with the numerous African American men and boys who are victims of not only racial profiling and police brutality but most jarringly, extrajudicial killings and summary executions. Even members of the St. Louis Rams football team have come out onto the field with hands raised, indicating their support of the "hand up, don't shoot" mantra and the Mike Brown case in Ferguson, MO – the site of communal unrest for the past several months.

Last week, President Obama commended LeBron James for wearing an "I Can't Breathe" t-shirt during warm ups for a Cleveland Cavaliers game against

the Brooklyn Nets. Obama told *People* magazine: "We forget the role that Muhammad Ali, Arthur Ashe, and Bill Russell played in raising consciousness. I'd like to see more athletes do that -- not just around the issue, but around a range of issues." [2] This praise comes after other public debates about the politics of respectability inherent in the different forms of political engagement. There are two points of contention – that is to protest or not to protest; and the efficacy of various protest strategies. T-shirt protests are a passive form of resistance that can nevertheless influence those who interpret the material as rhetorical device.

This practice is not without precedent. Gestures of solidarity were previously illustrated in different venues. For example, in 2012 the Miami Heat players were pictured in donned hoodies on Twitter and other media outlets, and Dwayne Wade and his young sons were among a series of African American athletes, entertainers, and politicians featured on the *EBONY* magazine "We Are Trayvon" tribute to slain Florida teen Trayvon Martin.

These t-shirts as political expression of marginality have historical significance when considering protest actions by sports figures of the past. Almost 50 years have passed since the world witnessed the John Carlos and Tommie Smith black power salute at the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games and the formation of the Olympic Committee for Human Rights; and the "Ali Summit" that President Obama referred to, called after Muhammad Ali's refusal to fight in the Vietnam War in 1967. The Carlos-Smith silent gesture went on to become one of the most reproduced images of the last century. That moment became a symbol of a movement and an era, which then became commodified as posters, artwork, and most notably – t-shirts, which commemorate and parody the significance of the event.

The one thing these moments have in common

that today's gestures of solidarity do not, is the fact that there was risk involved – personal, bodily, and professional – and a level of conviction unseen in decades on the part of black athletes. This is not to suggest that the cultural shift in athlete's political engagement is not significant. I believe any progress is a good thing. However, these actions are still on the level of individual objection. These t-shirts are oppositional esthetics that do not necessarily reject acceptable sartorial (or political protest) practices nor do they upset the systems of inequalities these players are situated and implicated within.

As a semiotic tool, the t-shirt holds both embodied and sartorial meaning; they are canvases for illustrating internal and external identification. To wear the "I Can't Breathe" t-shirt in spaces where athletic prowess is performed and coveted means marking membership in a specific demographic – as black American above athlete and player – in ways that upset the history of overt and covert racism in major league sports. These gestures are ironic and affective given the commercial nature of pro-athlete endorsements. Existing in a world of sartorial advertising, these t-shirts stand apart as a re-entry into the broader conversation of anti-black violence. Much has been said about branding and the professional black athlete as well as consumer activism and resistance as commodity. However, this phenomenon amplifies the in-between nature of the athlete as black and therefore abject even in light of commodified reality. Black athletes have used this opportunity to take the gaze away from their already commodified bodies to represent themselves and identify with others.

My concern is that these gestures do not move past recognizing the individual level of racism toward a critique and indictment of systemic and institutional racism. Though the stories of individual heartbreak and tragedy fuel t-shirt culture as a practice of remembering, continued mourning of self and community, and the desire to redress suffering, we must expose systemic implications. T-shirts as material objects, tell a broader story about the black experience and the criminalization of communities of color. The em-

ployment of t-shirts should be the catalyst for further politicization, not a momentary staging of dissent.

The phenomenon of wearing t-shirts to protest against state sanctioned murder in spaces of capitalist enterprise is fraught with contradictions and shows the depths of which major sports fandom may be implicated in the erasure of a players humanity as African American men and women away from their respective sports venues. If athletes are to advance the movement in their respective venues, we can challenge the ways women are positioned as victims worthy of remembrance, refuge, and redress. The Donald Sterling fiasco and the fall out after the Ray Rice incident are indicative of ways to further challenge media-made narratives. This year saw the constant rotation and replay of an African American woman being knocked unconscious by her partner. This was irresponsible and reprehensible. Women athletes, such as the California Golden Bears Women's Basketball team and the Notre Dame Fighting Irish Women's Basket teams have both extended their support of this now growing movement. In remembering the lives of these athletes and the now martyred victims of police murder, we must find a way to recognize black lives as important in sports and beyond bringing attention to all systems of inequality and oppression.

In the post-Jordan and post-Obama election moment: What counts as political activism... a gesture... an action... or campaign? Millennials have the unique advantage of being able to study the past socio-political movements. This access to information (via social media or access to historical archives and texts online) can be used in multitude of ways. My hope is that these gestures will excite solidarity among activists and the public, and motivate fans (consumers) to become politically aware of the dangers these athletes face, even as millionaires and popularized (commodified) figures.

[1] a.) Dockerman, Eliana. "Illinois Woman Files Trademark Application for 'I Can't Breathe'" *TIME* Magazine, 12.19.14. b.) Howell, Kellan. "I can breathe - thanks to the NYPD' shirts flood pro-police NYC rally," *The Washington Times*, 12.20.14.

[2] Westfall, Sandra Sobieraj. "The Obamas: How We Deal With Our Own Racist Experiences," *People* Magazine, 12.17.14.



Firelight glancing off a cheek, Downtown Oakland, November 24, 2014. • Photograph by Ianna Hawkins Owen.

When All Lives Matter

Ianna Hawkins Owen, PhD Candidate (Originally published on Medium.com)

In the Oakland streets on Monday night responding to the failure to indict Darren Wilson, some protesters shouted “Black Lives Matter” while others answered with the revised echo, “All Lives Matter.” This could be heard and held lots of ways. But the way that I hear it and have heard it over the years is as an insistence that we can’t just do something in the name of black life, which is too specific. The something we do needs to be done on behalf of “all lives.” A deceptive little revision, a phrase that beams with the false polish of inclusion. It sounds like it broadens our understanding of the kinds of bodies we care about and, yet, “all lives” can’t accommodate or account for blackness because the universal “all” can only understand itself through the erasure of its other: blackness.

My hesitancy around how to hear the call of “all” comes from the ways that each successive call for the eradication of the police, triggered by the extrajudicial executions of black men, simply pass through the bodies of the dead without lingering there with them. To assert that the eruption over whether black life matters is only a symptom of a problem that affects us “all” reminds me, rightly or wrongly, of Frantz Fanon’s exacting critique in *Black Skin, White Masks* of Jean Paul Sartre’s suggestion that the *négritude* was merely a phase to pass through to get at universal issues: “*And so it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me. It is not out of my bad nigger’s misery, my bad nigger’s teeth, my bad nigger’s hunger that I will shape a torch with which to burn down the world, but it is the torch that was already there, waiting for that turn of history.*” [1]

Instead of a dubiously universal, colorblind insistence that “all” lives matter, instead of insisting the police hurt us all and so we all should care, instead of needing

to recenter the self as a possible victim of state coercion, what about defending the call “black lives matter” in the spirit of black lesbian feminism that has long asserted that *her fight is every fight*? The central claim of the Combahee River Collective bears repeating here, now, “If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.” [2]

To actually believe *black* lives matter—without needing to revise or broaden that qualified life—more effectively does what “all lives” respondents wish they were doing: actually including us all. To talk about *black life* is to hold two extremes side by side, to imagine abjected blackness inching closer to legibility. At the same time, to utter or RT #blacklivesmatter is to be reduced, to concede that there is something called *life* that we are wholly outside of. Perhaps, then, to say that not *all* but *black* life matters is to so unsettle the contented category of “the human” that, by insisting on its possible proximity or penetration by blackness, we might hope to destroy “the human” altogether.

The unspoken companion, the echo to every hoarse cry that “black life matters” is that black life does not matter at all. Still, Audre Lorde instructs us, “it is better to speak / remembering / we were never meant to survive.” [3]

We can burn this shit down *and* keep each other warm; we can do both at the same time. This torch is ours to shape, to raise.

[1] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press, Translated by Charles Lam Markman 1967). 134.

[2] Combahee River Collective Statement. Accessed at <<http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html>>.

[3] Audre Lorde, “A Litany for Survival,” *Black Unicorn* (Norton Paperback, Reissued 1995). 31.



Wanda Johnson, mother of Oscar Grant, speaks during Police Brutality Forum at Boalt Hall at UC Berkeley on October 10, 2014. • Photograph by Rasheed Shabazz.

Birthing While Black: Reproductive Rights Matter

Vernessa Parker, Office Manager

The recent police brutality and events on campus have brought up different memories for me for when I was a young black mother in the early 1980's. After my son was born in May 1985 he kept shaking. A nurse in the hospital said he may be cold. She said she would take him to the nursery to go under a warmer. I waited for a while and an hour had gone by and she had not brought him back to my room. I became very concerned thinking he should be warm by now so I walked to the nursery to see about him. As I looked through the window of the nursery, I saw him shaking very badly. All of a sudden someone pointed to me and a doctor and nurse came rushing over to me and asked, "Did you take drugs while you were pregnant." I immediately said, "No."

In the 1980's crack use was prevalent, especially in my old neighborhood in Oakland, CA. Across the street from where I lived there was a crack house (this neighborhood has changed a lot since then in a manner that seems akin to gentrification). A contribution to the 1993 Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality by Shelly Geshan notes, "Newspaper reports in the 1980's sensationalized the use of crack cocaine and created a new picture of the "typical" female addicts, as young, poor, black, urban, on welfare, the mother of many children and addicted to crack." [1]

I felt I was asked this question because I was a young and black female and I lived in an urban city. As it turned out my son's problems were due to the fact that he had a bleed in his ventricles and the shaking had nothing to do with me using drugs or crack. I thank God the almighty that my son's disorder was properly diagnosed by a CT Scan and he was able to receive the proper surgery to stop his spinal fluid from building up.

This was the first time I experienced being stereotyped and the hospital administration was made

aware of my situation. I realize that medical situations come up and doctors review various explanations for medical causes but this is a concrete example of the racial stereotyping young black mothers that could have resulted in the loss of my child.

[1] Shelly Geshan, "A Step Toward Recovery, Improving Access to Substance Abuse Treatment for Pregnant and Parenting Women" Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality (1993): 1. Geshan's work is quoted in Lynn M. Paltrow, "Punishment and Prejudice: Judging Drug-Using Pregnant Women," National Advocates for Pregnant Women (May 2005), accessed on 21 December 2014 <<http://www.advocatesforpregnantwomen.org/articles/ruddick.htm>>.



Wall detail of Temporary Books, an ephemeral decolonial feminist bookstore on Telegraph Ave and 48th Street, Oakland, slated for demolition in the next year. • Photograph by Ianna Hawkins Owen.

Trying to Find My Spaceship So I Can Fly Far, Far Away...

Grace D. Gipson, PhD student

"I wish I could buy me a spaceship and fly past the sky... I wanna fly, I wanna fly...I said I want my chariot to pick me up and take me brother for a ride..."

--Kanye West, "Spaceship"

These words have been and continue to be my thoughts right now as I try to process what has happened in the recent weeks and years passed in relation to #BlackLives. Listening to this song from Kanye West's seminal first album *The College Dropout* evokes a plethora of emotions. Fear. Anger. Passion. Frustration. After hearing the announcements of "no indictments" for the Mike Brown case in Ferguson, MO and the Eric Garner case in Staten Island, NY, I wanted to buy that spaceship from Kanye; and even more I began to wonder and question how much does my #BlackLife really matter? With all the events and protests happening in Oakland, at UC Berkeley, and nationwide I have to take a moment to reflect on what was and had happened to these #BlackLives.

One would think that the United States is simply numb to all of the #BlackLives that have been killed over the course of numerous years from the killing of Emmett Till and the lynch mobs, to the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. It is very clear that Mike Brown and Eric Garner are not the first cases where I have sat wiping my tears in solace watching #BlackLives taken without hesitation, but these events opened my eyes to this ongoing #BlackLife trauma. These questions began to affect me in 1992 with the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles, CA—at the time I was only 11 years but I understood that an injustice had taken place. After this case it seemed as though

the violence had simmered, at least from what I could remember. But then in 2006, my wounds opened again with the Jena Six case in Louisiana. Then three years later in the early hours of New Years Day in 2009, 23 year-old Oscar Grant III was fatally shot by a BART police officer in Oakland. In 2012 in the Midwest, CeCe McDonald suffered a racist and transphobic attack. In that same year, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was fatally shot; in 2013, 19-year-old Renisha McBride was fatally shot in Dearborn Heights, Michigan. These are just a few cases that have been brought to our attention. There are many more #BlackLives whose names we do not know or have any audio or video of. #BlackLives continue to be targets whether they make the news, or simply become just another life taken.

At times I feel like the last words spoken from Eric Garner, "I Can't Breathe," become what I am feeling as my thoughts and hopes are dashed and suffocated by "trigger happy" enemies and authority figures. As I watch the protestors literally pass by my home, the buildings where I study and have class, and stop traffic on the streets where I travel, I am simultaneously frightened and overwhelmed by all the organized chaos. I had seen and heard about protests taking place through social media and news outlets and stories from my elders but, now I was witnessing with my own eyes. Even as I type this it is hard to fathom that I live in a nation where my life can be videotaped and taken in an instant without any recourse. Dissonantly, I recall when one of my mentors from undergrad told me, "the world is yours." Yet, I wonder, if the nation does not even want to see me exist, and can act on that wish,...then how can anything be mine?

As the protestors pass my home, I contemplate my role as a Black woman PhD student in African

American Studies. I grapple with where I fit in within the movement, I weigh my anger and my future aspirations. How do I contribute to the cause without being shamed or, worse, running away? I understand that I am not built to stand on the front lines, nor am I a voice to lead a movement, but I do play a part. Over the years, I am learning more and more that my voice may not be a physical one, but through my actions whether it is through my research on superhero constructions, my expertise in social media, or offering and participating in support systems. I recognize my role in the diversity of tactics required for the defense of #BlackLife. As long as #BlackLives continue to be abused, wounded, or worse, killed, my #BlackLife must always be alert. Everyday remains a struggle and I take temporary comfort in Kanye's words, "I wish I could buy me a spaceship and fly past the sky... I wanna fly, I wanna fly... I said I want my chariot to pick me up and take me brother for a ride..."





Berkeley City Council Meeting at Ed Roberts Campus, January 17, 2015. • Photograph by Ianna Hawkins Owen.

The (de) Valuation of Black Lives

Fayia Sellu, PhD student

Since the verdict in Ferguson that saw a grand jury fail to indict Darren Wilson for fatally shooting unarmed Black teenager Michael Brown, seconded by similar failure to indict NYPD policeman, Daniel Pantaleo for choking-holding Eric Garner to death, there has been an surge of protests across the United States. The prevalence of hashtagging of slogans like: #blacklivesmatter, #icantbreathe and #alllivesmatter falls right into the column of what Judith Butler calls “precarity,” the idea of what lives are “grievable” or not; and the schema that frames and reinforces such differentials in values accorded bodies referred to as “human.”

In her *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Butler’s discusses the (de)framing of lives as precarious or not, grievable or not, and the role of language and characterization in the fields of representation, perception and images. If we talk about how non-Black Americans relate to the travesty of justice in Ferguson, Staten Island and elsewhere, one concept that helps us to understand the expression of outrage in the United States streets currently, is *affect*. What can make anyone take to the streets to protest Black lives or summon the compunction for solidarity with such a struggle, is inextricable from the ability for, mostly white, but also people of color, to be relational: how they perceive of the framing of these incidents and the lives positioned within it. Butler explains: “*If we accept that affect is structured by interpretive schemes that we do not fully understand, can this help us understand why we can feel horror in the face of certain losses but indifference or even righteousness in the light of others? In contemporary conditions of war and heightened nationalism, we imagine that our existence is bound up with others with whom we can find national affinity, who are recognizable to us, and who conform to certain culturally specific notions about*

what the culturally recognizable humans. This interpretative framework functions by tacitly differentiating between those populations on whom my life and existence depends, and those populations who represent a direct threat to my life and existence.” [1]

It matters how or who we characterize as “insurgent” in Falujah, just as much as it matters who we call a “thug” (as nigger or other ‘frames’ become problematic or simply reconfigured)? The War on Drugs and the re-criminalization of Black (and Brown) bodies in the New Jim Crow, frames the targets, the enemy, in an “Otherness” that makes their lives perceptively devalued, in that, law enforcement, and most of the citizenry, see them as a constant threat to public safety and security. So much has changed; maybe not, as the much-banded about: “we have made much progress in the area of race relations, but there is lots more work to be done,” anesthetic line persists, every time the “catastrophe” of racial injustice rears its insurmountable monstrous head. This country was built on race and is sustained by the denial of it. Because I cannot find any proper theorization of the pathology that generates the chronic nature of criminalized and dispensable black bodies, and the affective distance non-Black people feel toward them; whether they are dying of police guns shots wounds and choke-holds in America, or of Ebola in West Africa, I—a black male in America—can only resort to Poetry...

I have raved, and ranted
Craved and wanted
To be wanted

No words can marry this pain
No thoughts fellow this disdain

The shame
Of civil rights, all over again.

If ever I break this frame
It would not be under the name
T-H-U-G
Nigger this or that
Is still C-O-O-L
Just have to know where
I can't breath
Anywhere, in Lynchburg, U.S.A

Men no more hang from racks
They say
This blinding flares
Of cataractic catharsis
I see HOPE
In America's revulsion
The revolution will be
Social media'd
In tweets, Instragrams
Facebook (re) posts ...wtf

Don't be phlegmatic
Vomit, or mimic me
When I smell my armpit
And say
YO SOY HOMBRE, still
I-AM-MAN

[1] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Verso.
(2010). Pages 41-42.



“Black Power Matters” banner held aloft by a balloon at a “Third World for Black Lives” lock down of the Oakland Federal Building during the #reclaimMLK 96 hours of resistance. • Photograph by Ianna Hawkins Owen.

From Fear to Love

Chioma Amaechi, undergraduate African American Studies major and VeVe Clarke Scholar

As I walked home from campus on the evening of December 5, 2014 I could see searchlights beaming down into my neighborhood. There were three helicopters in the air circling both Berkeley and Oakland. At that moment, all I could think was, big brother is watching. Twenty minutes later I could hear a herd of police sirens heading in all directions. I never felt so unsafe. I wasn't solely worried about my own safety, but also the safety of my community. Fearing the police should be considered an irony, but more and more I realize that both guilty and innocent people fear police officers. Fear for me is a problematic conundrum. Rather than sit in my fears I faced them head on. The next day, I joined the protesters.

Before heading out, I researched some of the groups that were organizing protesters, including Occupy Oakland and BAMN (by any means necessary). I joined their Facebook groups for updates, downloaded a police scanner, and grabbed my camera, my emergency anxiety pills and a facemask in case we were tear-gassed. I decided to walk because the bus was a sitting rock due to traffic from the protest. Soon, this walk became a middle passage to discovering an unknown side of myself. Before I knew it, I had a megaphone in hand, shouting, "No Justice, No Peace," while the crowd of over 3,000 people replied, "No Racist Police." We marched to the highways and on our way blocked the Amtrak train. I shouted, "Eric Garner, Michael Brown," the crowd replied "Shut-um Down, Shut-um Down!" We were shutting down the oppressive systems that allow the unlawful, but "legal" killing of Black citizens. When we finally approach the highway the crowd ripped down the fence and we took over the Bay Bridge.

As we marched from Berkeley to Emeryville, we chanted "Out of the car, into the streets." Many people in cars were very responsive. Honking their horns, blasting their music, cheering the protesters on or even jumping out and joining! To those who were angry and cursing

at protesters, my megaphone found its way to their car windows saying "No Justice, No Peace!" As we approached the Emeryville shopping plaza on Bay Street, the police finally caught up to us. I turned and notice that the crowd behind me had dwindled. Soon, the police shot a round into the crowd. It was a rubber bullet, but it was enough to send the crowd running to the fences. We tore down the fence and fled for shelter behind Ross, a clothing store. When we reached the other end of the building, the police were already set in line formation blocking the entire exit. They were dressed in heavy gear decked out with non-lethal, but lethal weapons. Bang! Another round was shot into the crowd. I watched the man next to me fall to his knees in agony. He was shot in his stomach and had a black and brown welt the size of a kiwi as a token. The token was a reminder to the protesters that they, the police officers, had the power. We turned to run back where we were, but were met with another line of officers. We had been barricaded.

There were around 250 protesters. With our size, the thought of rioting did occur, but different groups and myself were adamant about the protesters remaining peaceful. "What would happen to all that beauty then?" James Baldwin. So, one by one, we were detained, held over night at Santa Rita County Jail and cited on public nuisance and trespassing charges. One thing I did learn from my time in county jail was that this fight is far from over! A Black officer looked at me and said, "Not everyone is your enemy." I looked into his eyes, smirked and replied, "Enemy, you don't have that much power to be my enemy." My heart, my mind and my soul are all free I have no enemies. Simply put, black lives are lost daily by police fire. Racism and its oppressive nature that's enforced through fear and violence are the same notions of fear that are used today. Rather then policing through fear, police through love and respect for the community. But, what will it take to find this Eden?



*Evening of the grand jury's failure to indict Officer Darren Wilson, Downtown Oakland. November 24th, 2014. •
Photograph by Ianna Hawkins Owen.*

From

Chiyuma Elliott, Assistant Professor

I always have difficulty answering the question “Where are you from?” I typically say “the West Coast,” but that response is inadequate, even with the addendum about hippie parents and a peripatetic childhood. The better answer is that my parents met at a workshop on community responses to police brutality that my dad was leading at Washington University in the 1960s. A young African American artist from East St. Louis and a white music major from small-town Iowa met because poor black children were being killed on the streets—routinely and brutally—and the moral indignation of their fellow youth was powerful and palpable. It changed many people’s everyday routines, and their assumptions about politics, and the boundaries of their families and communities. A. Van Jordan, in one of his dictionary-inspired poems, takes on the word “from,” and begins like this:

from (→) *prep.* **1.** Starting at (a particular place or time): As in, John was *from* Chicago, but he played guitar straight *from* the Delta; he wore a blue suit *from* Robert Hall’s; his hair smelled like coconut; his breath, like mint and bourbon; his hands felt like they were *from* slave times when he touched me—hungry, stealthy, trembling. **2.** Out of: He pulled a knot of bills *from* his pocket, paid the man and we went upstairs.

If I have a hometown, it’s not a place; I’m *from* a long and particular history of racist violence and community resistance. I’m violence’s child, its legatee, I’m part of its wake. I share this because, yet again, the little corner of the world where I’m from (Ferguson, roughly) is on people’s minds because of police violence. It’s on my mind because, when you come from violence, it seems to me that you have to make a choice about how to deal with that history. My mom is a yoga

teacher now, and she and all the yogis and yoginis I admire shape their practices around *ahimsa*, or *non-harm*. This disciplined commitment to peace has shaped my intellectual work, and has been centering in the classroom over the last months. We’ve had incredible, difficult conversations about racism and art and violence. As the violence in Ferguson erupted, I watched the Red Summer of 1919 become real and palpable to my students—not just as a remote historical fact, but as a potential precedent or cautionary tale (of the more than three dozen race riots that summer, three were here in Mississippi: in Monticello, Macon, and Hattiesburg). I’ve seen the best kinds of intellectual wrestling, both inside and outside the classroom. One moment that stands out: After seminar, a student told me that she felt guilty about missing the most recent solidarity protest; she had to take care of her eight-month-old, and wasn’t able to find a babysitter. She imagined that her son would be ashamed of her when he was old enough to understand. Somewhere in this is a definition poem called *irony*. She wants to be on the picket lines precisely because she wants to help make a better, safer world for her child.

So how do you facilitate peace in a college classroom when the backdrop is this kind of deep and complex hurt? In my seminar on the New Negro Movement of the 1920s and ‘30s, we took a hard look at failure. We read Richard Wright’s 1937 “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” and David Levering Lewis’s similarly damning 1981 critical assessment of the entire Harlem Renaissance as a naïve manifestation of the belief that art could change entrenched American political and social realities. We talked about aims as well as means: what exactly were the goals that all these New Negro artists and intellectuals articulated? We revisited the students’ favorite work from the beginning of the

semester: Claude McKay's battle-cry of a poem "If We Must Die," which calls not for success, but instead for militant and dignified resistance to racist violence. My students decided that the most vivid and compelling accounts of racism and its effects came in art—and then they struggled again with the charge that art was an inadequate tool in the fight against racism. We looked and read, and argued about what we saw in the textbooks and out in the world. I quoted Samuel Beckett, and asked the class to respond: "Fail. Fail again. Fail better."

I can't offer any kind of simple assurance. What I can share with students is the long tradition of scholars and activists and artists who have also wrestled with the adequacy of their responses to brutality and injustice. I can connect this tradition of self-scrutiny to the institutional beginnings of African-American and African Diaspora Studies as academic fields, and so link it to the day-to-day study and introspection in which we are all engaged. And because it's more eloquent than anything I've written about this particular moment, I can share a poem cycle by Purvis Cornish, one of my graduate students here at Ole Miss. When he first brought me the draft, he said "I was trying to make a found poem about the ships, but I was so mad; Ferguson just took over." Ahimsa. Sometimes we have to let it take over, and shift what it is we say next.

After Ferguson

Purvis Cornish, Southern Studies MA student at University of Mississippi

“The beautiful boy has entered the beautiful city.”

--Lucille Clifton

I.

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the same horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men. Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly.

II.

The store itself kept her with a sick headache. The labor of getting things down off of a shelf or out of a barrel was nothing. And so long as people wanted only a can of tomatoes or a pound of rice it was all right. But supposing they went on and said a pound and a half of bacon and a half pound of lard? The whole thing changed from a little walking and stretching to a mathematical dilemma. Or maybe cheese was thirty-seven cents a pound and somebody came and asked for a dime's worth. She went through many silent rebellions over things like that. Such a waste of life and time. But Joe kept saying that she could do it if she wanted to and he wanted her to use her privileges. That was the rock she was battered against.

III.

The flock had to wait the white-headed leader, but it was hard. They jostled each other and pecked at heads in hungry irritation. Some walked up and down the beast from head to tail, tail to head. The Parson sat motionless in a dead pine tree about two miles off. He had scented

the matter as quickly as any of the rest, but decorum demanded that he sit oblivious until he was notified. Then he took off with ponderous flight and circled and lowered, circled and lowered until the others danced in joy and hunger at his approach.

IV.

So she sat on the porch and watched the moon rise. Soon its fluid was drenching the earth, and quenching the thirst of the day.

V.

She was borned in slavery time when folks, dat is black folks, didn't sit down anytime dey felt lak it. So sittin' on porches lak de white madam looked lak uh mighty fine thing tuh her. Dat's whut she wanted for me—don't keer whut it cost. Git up on uh high chair and sit dere. She didn't have time tuh think whut tuh do after you got up on de stool uh do nothin'. De object wuz tuh git dere. So Ah got up on de high stool lak she told me, but Pheoby, Ah done nearly languished tuh death up dere. Ah felt like de world wuz cryin' extry and Ah ain't read de common news yet

VI.

It was next day by the sun and the clock when they reached Palm Beach. It was years later by their bodies. Winters and winters of hardship and suffering. The wheel kept turning round and round. Hope, hopelessness and despair. But the storm blew itself out as they approached the city of refuge.

Havoc was there with her mouth wide open. Back in the Everglades the wind had romped among the lakes and trees. In the city it had raged among houses and men. Tea Cake and Janie stood on the edge of things and looked over the desolation.



"Black Disabled Lives Matter" protest at the Ed Roberts Campus in Berkeley, CA on January 17, 2015 as part of the #reclaimMLK, 96 hours of direct action. • Photograph by Ianna Hawkins Owen.

Black Voices Can and Can't Breathe at Protests in Berkeley

Blake Simons, undergraduate Black Student Union member

The day before the #BerkeleyProtests made national news, UC Berkeley's Black Student Union created the hashtag #Ferguson2Cal. Black students occupied the Golden Bear Café for the 4.5 hours while allies stood in solidarity and respected the Black space. Fewer people have seen this action in the news; rather they have heard about #BerkeleyProtests that have "looting", "violence", "property destruction", and "police being injured."

Why did peaceful Black students' protests on Berkeley's campus receive little mainstream media attention? Why did protests organized by non-Black voices garner mainstream media sources? I was at both spaces, and I'm a member of Cal's Black Student Union. My voice was suppressed when I entered the #BerkeleyProtests space, yet thrived at the Black Student Union's #Ferguson2Cal protest.

The Black Student Union's protest was beautiful and empowering for Black folks. It was a peaceful protest and an act of civil disobedience. Black folks chanted #BlackLivesMatter while allies stood in solidarity. When Black folks invited allies to join in the chanting, allies also chanted #BlackLivesMatter. Black students voiced how it was the most beautiful event they've been to while being students on campus and how it brought some of them to tears. The protest allowed Black voices to breathe on campus.

UC Berkeley is designed in a way in which Black voices on campus are suppressed. The undergraduate population is around 3 percent and there's a small number of Black faculty. During class, often times I feel isolated as the only Black student in the room. It's painful when a white Professor says the "n-word" like it's nothing. Furthermore, as soon as a conversation is brought up around race, I slowly feel mostly non-Black faces staring at me as if I'm

the token negro that represents the race. When I speak about racism in America, I am often greeted with weird looks from classmates. My voice being suppressed creates a traumatizing learning environment.

When I was at the #BerkeleyProtests documenting events that were occurring, I had a white man yell at me to get off the sidewalk and into the street. That's a huge problem, especially if one is to hold a #BlackLivesMatter sign. If #BlackLivesMatter, you wouldn't yell at me and attempt to tell me how to feel about this movement. If #BlackLivesMatter, Black voices do as well. White people have been telling Black people how to feel in America since it was founded. It's problematic how our history has been re-written by Eurocentrists for years.

I have family that isn't Black and I explained to them what's occurring. I told them about the plethora of incidents I've had around racism and being profiled. I asked how they would feel if I was unarmed and killed by the police. They responded that they would be angry, sad, and want restorative justice. But they have never lived in the shoes that I walk in. The experiences I told them about are foreign to them. It's unique to a being Black in America where micro and institutional racism affects our daily lives. This lived experience is daily for Black people. I would want them to say that #BlackLivesMatter, because if I was murdered by police, it has to do with the Blackness that I represent.

I am frustrated when non-Black people chant "all lives matter". I understand that all lives do matter. However all lives don't matter until Black lives matter equally. Until the police do not murder Black lives at disproportionate rates, all lives don't matter. Until the institutional racialized spaces in America are no more, all lives don't matter.

This is further problematized because when you

say “all lives matter” you are marginalizing the authentic voice behind the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Those original voices are the Black queer women who started it. Their voices are already suppressed by the hetero nature of the #BlackLivesMatter movement they created.

Many Black folks in Berkeley are still mourning the death of Kayla Moore, a Black transgender disabled woman who was murdered by Berkeley police in 2013. She was killed in similar fashion to Eric Garner as police suffocated her to where she could not breathe. They didn’t even perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. However Moore’s killers are still free. I say I can’t breathe for Kayla Moore just as much as I do for Eric Garner. All Black lives do matter, and that is the movement.

I appreciate allies who are standing up for the movement, but do not co-opt the origins. Stand in solidarity for Black people and let Black voices breathe.

Read more about Kayla Moore here:

<http://www.berkeleyside.com/2014/02/14/berkeley-slapped-with-lawsuit-over-kayla-moores-death/>





Mural in the Mission, San Francisco, September 14, 2014. • Photograph by Ianna Hawkins Owen.

7 Things Black People Should Know

Alana Banks, undergraduate Black Student Union member

1. We are not incompetent. They wrote that narrative for us during slavery and now the media doesn't have the courage to re-tell our real story

2. Our Beauty is more than skin deep, it's a black hole of greatness. Black excellence dating back to the first human beings

3 We have such beautiful souls

Dipped in 24 karat gold

Queens like Nefertiti

Kings like Tut

And if you got lost with the names that founded royalty you need to do some more research

4. Our people are such a perfect paradox

How we are built to win and born to lose

They tried to bury us but forget we were seeds

Clipped our wings but forgot that you don't need to fly when you have roots grounding you to the sky's the limit
my people never timid

We bounce back

They set us back

We are already black so we don't need much more than that

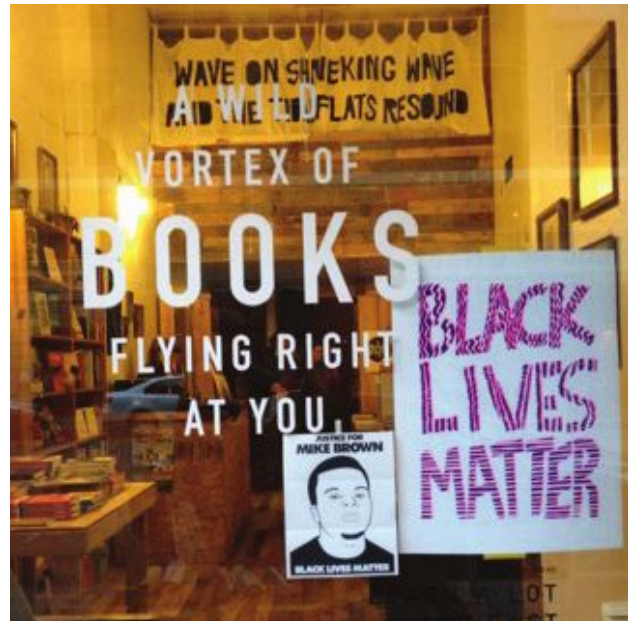
5. They hate us cause they ain't us

6. This quote unquote great nations was built on our backs. So If we stand up it most definitely will collapse

7. You don't have to be the picture they try to paint of us

Be great like your ancestors have taught you to be

That's what they are most afraid of



Photographs by Leigh Raiford.

Cal Black Student Union Press Release: 12/4/2014

Black Student Union Statement

We, the Black students of UC Berkeley, are staging a building-wide shut down of the Golden Bear Cafe from 12-4:30 pm to express our outrage at the murders of our brothers Michael Brown and Eric Garner by the police and to signify the fact that Michael's body was left lifeless and unattended on the street for 4.5 hours.

We are carrying out this shut down to stand in full solidarity with the Black people of Ferguson, New York and Black people across the United States in our struggle against police brutality. The long history of Police brutality and the murder of Black people by the police have been well documented and are etched in the memories of our families. We condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the grand jury's decisions not to indict officers Wilson and Pantaleo and we understand these decisions to be a further indictment of the American so-called justice system. It is clear to us that in a country that was founded on the genocide of the indigenous people of this land and the enslavement of Africans, we can NEVER rely on the institutions of this country to serve justice and peace to our people. We must wake up and realize that the very people who are meant to protect us are the ones whom we now and always have had to protect ourselves from. As such, we are in full agreement with Point #7 of the 10-Point Program of the Black Panther Party which stated: "We believe we can end police brutality in our Black community by organizing Black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our Black community from racist police oppression and brutality... We believe that all Black people should arm themselves for self-defense." We find today that the Black Panther Party's call for self-defense is still a legitimate call to protect the very survival of Black People in America.

In conclusion, we urge all the Black Student Unions, Black staff and faculty throughout the country to organize their own protest actions. We must demonstrate the extent of our Black rage to the sleeping consciousness of white America. We call for the strong UNITY and ORGANIZATION of Black people across this country to resist the wretched conditions in which we find ourselves. With unity and organization, our liberation is inevitable.

We send our deepest condolences and sympathies to the Brown and Garner families and all families who have lost precious family members to police brutality!

We send our deepest respect to all the Black youth organizers of Ferguson!

In Solidarity and Struggle,
Black Student Union at UC Berkeley



Black students gather near Sather Gate on December 4, 2014 after blockading the Golden Bear Café for four-and-a-half hours in solidarity with the people of Ferguson and Staten Island. • Photograph by Rasheed Shabazz.

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BACK COVER

On December 8, 2014 in Berkeley, CA protestors shut down Interstate 80 in both directions. • Photograph by Michael Mark Cohen.