

JENNIFER C. NASH

Teaching about Ferguson: An Introduction

THIS FORUM WAS ORGANIZED around the idea of asking feminist scholars to reflect on the practice of teaching about racial violence as well as on the experiences of teaching in the midst of racial violence. What do feminist pedagogies centered on Ferguson and its aftermath look like? How do we present the various forms of violence — including state action (in the case of murder) and state inaction (in the case of nonindictments) — that produce and uphold the conditions that mark the current situation? How do we bring our feelings about this moment into our classrooms, and how do we do this *feeling-teaching* in ways that attend to the fact that feminist scholars are endlessly called on to perform affective labor and also that racialized and gendered bodies' affects are policed inside and outside of the academy? What happens if we refuse the composure that faculty bodies are supposed to perform and enact grief, rage, or sadness? What happens if we refuse performing anything but exhaustion, numbness, or a protective desire to shield our bodies from our students' scrutiny or curiosity?

It quickly became apparent that a forum focused on “feminist pedagogies of Ferguson” would be far more expansive than a conversation focused on how to teach about Ferguson; put simply, to speak about Ferguson is always to speak about more than Ferguson. “Ferguson” has become shorthand for a murdered young man, Michael Brown, for a grand jury's nonindictment of the police officer who shot him, and for

the Department of Justice's recommendation not to bring civil rights charges against the officer, Darren Wilson. "Ferguson" has also become shorthand for a number of lives that ended violently, often at the hands of the state: Eric Garner, Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Tarika Wilson, Tanisha Anderson, Renisha McBride, and Tamir Rice, to name a few. "Ferguson," then, has become a keyword around which scholars organize conversations about legal murders, the variety of laws that regard property more than black life (so-called stand-your-ground laws, for example), racial profiling, stop and frisk, mass imprisonment, the death penalty, and the racial logics of systems of value that ensure that racially marked bodies are, in Lisa Marie Cacho's words, "ineligible for personhood."¹ The scholars included in this forum capture the expansive ways that we, as scholars and educators, articulate the meanings of this moment and the ways that we situate Brown's death in the conditions of the unfolding present.

The scholars included in this forum also powerfully ask about the possibilities for activism in the wake of Ferguson(s) and the powerful coalitions that have formed in the wake of Ferguson(s). If "Black Lives Matter" (and #blacklivesmatter) and "I Can't Breathe" have become refrains that respond to the violence of the present by making visible black pain, the scholars included here voice the possibilities these movements might open up. We can consider these possibilities alongside the painful truth that it takes spectacular violence to generate a widespread articulation of black bodies *as* bodies that matter.

1. Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 6.

JENNIFER JAMES

Looking

ON THE EVENING that District Attorney Robert McCulloch revealed the nonindictment of Darren Wilson in the killing of Michael Brown, I was visiting my parents for Thanksgiving. I had arrived a few days earlier than normal because my mother had been slipping into Alzheimer's, and my father needed help preparing for the holiday.

The television cable stations predictably dissolved into endless loops of the same footage: Michael Brown, dead on the ground, and scenes of the protest, grief, militarization, and violence erupting in the announcement's aftermath. Each time Michael Brown's body flashed across the television, my mother would ask: "Who is that boy? Who did that to him?" We would explain. She would then shake her head in horror. A pause: "Where is this? Where is this happening?" We would answer. She invariably issued this response: "St. Louis? St. Louis? Not St. Louis!" We turned the television off.

My mother was raised in St. Louis City. Her mother had successfully migrated from rural Mississippi by marrying a hard-working city boy sometime in the 1920s. The circumstances of their meeting and the fact of their marriage remain unclear. They prospered. They bought properties. They had clothes, cars, and *white* hired help during the Great Depression. For my mother, the monetary illusion of freedom was not enough. She chafed against the confines of Jim Crow, the daily violations of white supremacy, and the sexist mores of the black bourgeoisie.

By the 1950s, she had married, divorced, and fled for San Francisco, leaving behind a woman confused by her daughter's desire for an uncompromised racial and sexual liberation. If I am to believe my mother, she never looked back.

Most of my female relatives stayed put. With each visit back to St. Louis, I saw a once vibrant city—with “plenty of good black neighborhoods”—economically disintegrate. The decline occurred in spite of these women's best efforts, which, as educators, clubwomen, activists, and pillars of the church, were valiant. Well-paying industrial jobs still disappeared; their neighbors vanished along with them. Waves of whites, followed closely by blacks, decamped for the suburbs as the city teetered on financial collapse. Much of my extended family scattered throughout St. Louis County; one aunt eventually settled in Ferguson. The county was hardly the new Promised Land. My girl cousins explained to me why their high schools held separate-but-equal “black” and “white” proms and elected “black” and “white” homecoming courts. It was better that way, they assured me.

This was the 1980s—not the 1960s—and this racial divide took place in solidly middle-class and upper-middle-class communities, not ones riven with economic strife. I mention class only to underscore an important point: the economic similarities between blacks and whites proved immaterial in this context. A core of African Americans wished to retain a cordoned-off black world that might thrive without white intrusion. A core of whites in these communities feared any form of contact that might weaken the racial, social, and political boundaries ordering their existences. By the late 1990s, increasing numbers of whites and well-off African Americans moved again as the inner city pushed outward. Cities like Ferguson became largely black, working class, and poor. Whites, though a minority, retained control of most political institutions. And so it stood on the day Officer Darren Wilson killed Michael Brown in broad daylight and on the evening the nonverdict sent the nation racially reeling.

Through a cruel trick of biochemistry, my mother's Alzheimer's mimicked the even crueler repetition of history. Each day, a new black boy was killed. Each day, another white officer eluded punishment. Each day, a freshly wounded round of black people appeared, mourning and enraged. Each day, she was returned to a place that she thought she had escaped, and each night, that place threatened to be consumed in flames.

To those of us who study black lives for our own livelihoods, African American history often appears as a series of narrow, harrowing escapes from death. We celebrate the ones who survived the slave trade, the plantation, poverty, hunger, disease, dangerous streets, imprisonment, rebellion, organizing, writing, speaking, state-sanctioned brutality, and heartbreak; we attempt to acknowledge and document those who did not.

In leaving St. Louis, my mother thought she had escaped the spiritual and material deaths that she felt awaited the family and the community who remained, in her view, locked in a suffocating space of historical stasis.

Each semester when discussing enslavement in my nineteenth-century African American literature class, I show my students a standard woodcut frequently used in ads for female runaway slaves. Generically “black,” the woman appears to be sitting and floating at once, unmoored from any geographical or human context, looking over her shoulder ... at something. My students imagine that “something” is the past encroaching upon her future. Perhaps a slavecatcher there to remand her to slavery, or a longing for the kin she had left behind. In the discursive and visual chains of the slave ads, freedom as a *fait accompli* remains mythical. The male slaves of the woodcuts are suspended in time, always and forever running but getting nowhere. Still, their eyes are fixed straight ahead. It is possible that they are considering a future. For the women slaves, their melancholic mourning works against them, turning them forever backward.

In my students’ minds, the image of a black female runaway slave glancing toward the past presents the danger of being subsumed by history. This is the danger I believed my mother felt in her reluctance to “return” psychologically to St. Louis to confront the mounting losses: the black deaths she had evaded, but which now came back, ceaselessly, in the body of Michael Brown.

At the time the nonverdict was issued, my class and I had already made our way through abolitionist slave texts and had recently tackled two of the heaviest works of the semester, Ida B. Wells’s antilynching treatises, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All its Phases* (1892) and *A Red Record, 1892–1894* (1895). Throughout the term, our discussions had turned to Michael Brown. The class naturally drew connections between Wells’s fearless leadership of the antilynching campaign and

the roles black women have assumed — the mothers of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, most recently — on behalf of their sons and other black men slain with the seeming sanction of law. They also noted that Wells robustly denounces violence against black women: the rapes and murders that are almost too quotidian to notice when placed against the spectacular nature of the lynching of black men.

They recognize the ways that Wells demands that her audience, whether black or white, male or female, *look*. bell hooks famously argued for the potential of that form of subversive black looking in her essay “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectatorship,” noting that “we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back.”¹ The power of looking back *historically* is what concerns me here as a black woman and a black feminist working in the academy.

The concept of historical looking requires that we accept a boundary between some notion of a “historical” past that can be roughly delineated from the present. However when black students facing endless instances of antiblack violence and systemic racism ask us whether anything has changed, they remind us that these boundaries are porous; their grief is indeed seeping through. When they ask us how we can bear to teach “this stuff all the time” — slavery and lynching — they are wondering how we mask our grief. In times like these, I wonder that as well. How do we navigate the place of black grief, theirs and ours, in our scholarly and pedagogical lives, especially if we are black women for whom that affect poses professional risks?

My answer (at least today) is that we accept the unleashing of historical mourning as part of what we do, as a natural consequence of black historical looking. Elsewhere I have suggested that for African Americans, melancholia, far from being the pathological condition Freud describes, “defends against ... [the] call to prematurely forget.” A resistant “memorial disposition,” black melancholia responds to our “cumulative losses” and is “activated by on-going and interrelated social and political violence.”²

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1. bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectatorship,” in her *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 116.
 2. Jennifer James, “Ecomelancholia: Slavery, War and Black Ecological Imaginings,” in *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Stephanie LeMenager, Teresa Shewry, and Ken Hiltner (London: Routledge, 2011), 167.

Wells has taught black women how to “stare dangerously” at history without becoming immobilized in grief.³ In Wells’s case, black female looking emerges as multidirectional. Her look is able to incorporate the necessary, backward gaze of the black female melancholic subject without sacrificing the black collective future. Her work demands that we acknowledge white supremacist violence against black men and black women as a structural reincarnation of enslavement, not as an emergent, discrete phenomenon to be mourned anew. Her look stands as an unflinching examination of the past, a sweeping assessment of present injustices, and a vision of a black liberation yet to be realized.

3. hooks, *Black Looks*, 16.

SYLVANNA M. FALCÓN

The Globalization of Ferguson: Pedagogical Matters about Racial Violence

IT NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME how current events shape conversations in the classroom in unanticipated ways. By the time I started teaching my course titled “Globalization in the Americas” in the Fall 2014 term, the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, had already occurred. Many of my students were closely following what was going on in Ferguson as well as deciphering ways to be in solidarity with the people there, even though they lived in Santa Cruz, California. Unlike my previous teaching environments at other institutions, these students did not need me to convince them about the existence of racially motivated violence or the militarization of the police; many intimately knew about police surveillance, harassment, and racial targeting, including by immigration-enforcement officers.

But when the St. Louis County grand jury made the decision not to indict Officer Darren Wilson on November 24, 2014, I went into class the next day visibly upset. I started our class by opening the floor for students to convey their sentiments and to vent, and I was met with total silence. I then asked, flippantly, “I guess I’m the only one upset by this decision,” even though I knew that was not the case; I had activist students in my class after all. Then a student finally spoke up and said, “Well, the decision is not surprising. This sort of thing happens all the time.” At that moment, I realized that the students did not fully appreciate the difference between a grand jury decision not to indict and a not-guilty

verdict from a trial. They were missing a larger structural and institutional analysis for what had happened. I then explained to students these legal distinctions, highlighting for them that the threshold to garner an indictment is incredibly low versus evidence needed for the purposes of a trial conviction. I also asked them to consider the political relationship between a district attorney and police officers, and how that codependency fosters a context that makes it rare to secure trial convictions (and apparently even trials at all). Within days of this class discussion, the same issue surfaced with the Staten Island grand jury decision not to indict a New York City police officer for the death of Eric Garner.

As these cases of lethal police violence and the effects of police militarization became a US national conversation, I felt that part of my role had to be to connect these issues with discussions outside the United States. I underscored that conversations about state-sponsored violence have been occurring for decades in other places. Citizens from Guatemala, Peru, Chile, and Argentina, to name a few, know all too well about systematic violence and the police's role in perpetuating violence. Further, global news media outlets widely reported on the decisions not to indict in the cases of Brown and Garner, as well as the public mobilization in the aftermath of those shameful decisions. Therefore, the world was watching, literally.

Given the class's focus on globalization, my pedagogical strategy was to facilitate students' abilities to apply a regionally informed analytics of structural and gender-based violence and counter the US propensity to individualize. I did not want students to overlook the ways in which institutions of violence collaborate throughout the region. Examples of these regional collaborations of violence include the training of former Latin American dictators at the School of the Americas under the auspices of the US Department of Defense at Fort Benning (an army base near Columbus, Georgia) and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani's private security firm receiving a substantial contract to consult with the Mexico City police force on how to organize itself to parallel the one in New York City. My students needed to assess what they knew on an experiential level and apply it to examples of hemispheric violence. They needed to reflect on the ways US militarism — from training former Latin American dictators to militarizing the police force in Mexico City, Ferguson, and New York City — is based on transnational logics of social control, surveillance, and disregard for human rights.

This pedagogical approach is deeply indebted to the work of feminists of color, including those involved in forming INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. INCITE! seeks to center women of color in their analytics to emphasize the intersection of interpersonal violence and state violence. In doing so, their work has retained a transnational focus that spotlights frequent instances of US mainstream women's organizations deploying racist language to justify US-led military interventions throughout the world. Hence, the analysis offered by INCITE! is particularly useful for conceptualizing a framework in which the convergence of interpersonal violence and state violence, such as what occurred in Ferguson, has transnational salience. Moreover, the legacy of the radical feminist politics embraced by grassroots organizations such as INCITE! can be seen in the emergence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, a Twitter hashtag created by three Black queer women. These movements for justice are being led by Black queer women who clearly assert that *all* Black lives matter — not just the lives of Black, straight men, which tend to be more valued among mainstream civil rights organizations and their charismatic leaders.

These social movements travel not only temporally, but also spatially. During her keynote address for the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Convocation for the University of California, Santa Cruz, on January 28, 2015, Angela Davis stated that everywhere she had traveled throughout Europe, everyone wanted to talk about Ferguson. Ferguson had become a transnational symbol of lethal brutality. In her aptly titled lecture, "Racism, Militarism, and Poverty: From Ferguson to Palestine," she linked these two seemingly disparate locations as interconnected sites of violence, most fittingly when she emphasized that Palestinian activists noticed the same weapons being used on them as were being used in Ferguson.

I asked students to also contextualize the related dynamics of masculinity and youth in the cases of Brown and Garner (also Trayvon Martin for that matter) to the horrific kidnappings of the forty-three Mexican students who went missing from Ayotzinapa Normal School in Guerrero, Mexico, in September 2014, about one month after the Michael Brown shooting. All forty-three students were young indigenous men ranging in age from teenagers to young people in their twenties; they were training to become teachers in rural parts of Mexico. They attended a school known for its indigenous/campesino Leftist political

activism, and they were on their way to a demonstration when they were disappeared. Their bodies represented and produced a level of threat to the state, just as the bodies of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Trayvon Martin did. In addition, one of the fathers of the disappeared students lives in San Jose, California, about thirty-five minutes away from our university. Suddenly, Ayotzinapa did not feel so distant.

When students in the classroom have been affected by racial violence, it offers a rare opportunity for a discussion that is not reduced to simply explaining the seriousness of the problem of police-sanctioned violence. At the same time, when my students have disclosed their experiences with the police, they are often at a loss for words about how to describe the incident beyond the individualized “racist cops” framing. By encouraging students in this class to think about globalization as a reconfiguration of social space and political landscape, they could situate Ferguson as a “global” site of contradictions rather than an individual incident of racist policing in a US city. These parallels then enabled my students to more clearly identify the convergence of militarism and the police and make the links across multiple sites of violence in the region, rendering an individualized “racist cops” discourse wholly inadequate.

The events of Ferguson, of Ayotzinapa, and beyond open up a feminist pedagogical space to help cultivate conversations about counter-hegemonic movements against racialized state violence. People coming together and collectively refusing to consent to domination in all its forms offers students important, often inspiring, models of challenging the state. The vibrant social movements that have emerged to demand justice also signal the breakdown of state legitimacy: across Southern Mexico, in Ferguson, in New York City, and countless other sites of violence. Our task as feminist educators is to employ pedagogical approaches that draw from critical genealogies to challenge our students’ understandings of racial violence beyond individual pathologies; our role is to situate these incidents within a larger continuum of hemispheric state violence. Furthermore, our task is to maximize the counterhegemonic imaginations and actions among our students by highlighting the global public responses to state violence that give hope.

SARAH JANE CERVENAK

On Not Teaching about Violence: Being in the Classroom *After* Ferguson

1. **teach**, *v.*

Pronunciation: /ti:tʃ/

I. To show, etc. [Old English or early Middle English (except 3b).]

†1. *trans.* To show, present or offer to view.

2. **about**, *adv., prep., adj., and int.*

Pronunciation: Brit. /ə'baʊt/, U.S. /ə'baʊt/

I. Expressing actual or implied motion or direction.

1. In rotation or revolution; round in a circular course.

Now *rare* except in *fig.* use with verbs.¹

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TEACH about Ferguson? What does it mean to teach about Michael Brown, Islan Nettles, Eric Garner, and the lesser publicized deaths of Angelia Magnum and Tjhisha Ball, two black women from Jacksonville, Florida, found dead on the side of the road?² What does it mean to teach about unfinished strolls and conversations,

1. These definitions are from the *Oxford English Dictionary's* online edition, <http://www.oed.com>.

2. An important critique of Angelia Magnum and Tjhisha Ball's lesser mourning appears in Jamilah Lemieux, "Black Girls Murdered (But Do you Care?)," *Ebony*, September 19, 2014, <http://www.ebony.com/news-views/black-teen-girls-killed-but-do-you-care-403#axzz3NrlSoLy0>.

the interrupted dream of a little girl? If we are to rely on the Oxford English Dictionary, the conjoining of “teaching” and “about” suggests an orientation that is never not regulated by an imposed telos. To “teach about” suggests resolving unknowability with the successful illustration of beginnings and possible ends, a way of getting from there to here.

Sometimes I think I can *teach about* racial and sexual violence, but its very promiscuous reach, along with its devastating grip, dissolves teleological paths. For example, in the context of my women’s and gender studies and African American studies classrooms, I often begin classes with Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl* (1861). Beginning with an early narrative of black women’s subjugation under chattel slavery both attends to and upsets beginnings and ends themselves. That is, accounts of racialized and sexualized subjection, unending fugitivity, and disrespected maternity quickly move from the mid-nineteenth century into our present, as students ponder violences of forced sterilization, stop and frisk, the serial raping of black women in Oklahoma, and Marisa Alexander’s purportedly unlawful self-defense. The silliness of a syllabus unravels in the violence of palimpsestic life, texts become other texts, scenes collapse into each other.

In some ways, this is how *Incidents* refuses its own teaching. It refuses telos, an orientation that begins and ends at and with the text. *Incidents* moves terribly easily between 1848 and 2014. At the same time, a refusal to be taught about philosophically pervades Jacobs’s withholdings, the stuff she doesn’t say, what isn’t left for anyone else’s understanding. Perhaps what an engagement with Jacobs’s silences and withholdings requires is a different kind of pedagogical comportment toward violence. What, following Trinh T. Minh-Ha, might be called a “teaching nearby.”

In her meditation on what it means to make films without violating the life filmed, Trinh proposes a “speaking nearby” as another kind of documentarian positionality. Such positionality “reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it... a speaking in brief, whose closures are only moments of transition opening up to other modes of transition.”³ In some ways, I think I’ve been teaching nearby racial and sexual violence, attending to discourses, histories, and state-sanctioned operations that figure some life as expendable and contingent. The syllabus engaged but often foregone

3. Nancy N. Chen, “Speaking Nearby: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-Ha,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 8, no. 1 (1992): 87.

in favor of those “moment[s] of transition opening up to other moments of transition.”⁴ Discourses on reproductive justice move between the Comstock Law, *Roe v. Wade*, and eugenics to Samaria Rice’s frantic run that terrible Saturday.⁵ The classroom, vested with the impossible teleological logics of learning about, cannot withstand the weight of that run.

To honor the weight of that run would mean critically grappling with histories, discourses, and practices of racial and sexual violence, the endless criminalizations of black life, love, and mourning. At the same time, I think that these ethical, political, and pedagogical commitments should also make room for the unspoken weight of that very weight. This is where the revolutionary pedagogies of Jacobs and Trinh come in: what would it mean to pause before, after, with, and maybe a little against the explanatory? To ask the classroom to lovingly and always temporarily, always fleetingly, harbor the profundity of the unshareable, the refused-to-be-disclosed and elaborated traumas caused by antiblackness.

In some ways, Jacobs resisted the impulse to make her life fully teachable, even as the gaps and elisions in her narrative become sites of scholarly meditation (including my own). I think the time of the classroom, as with writing itself, needs to reorient itself out of respect for those gaps—to put off the “aboutness” of the educational exercise so as to make room for grief, moments of silence, what moves as a modality of life that agitates for some privacy, for a damn moment against understanding.

Should the classroom be about understanding? Of course. Those of us committed to social justice should encourage our students to ask critical questions of themselves and their understanding of the world. And in particular, to critically and poetically examine how the experience of racial, gender, economic, and sexual subjection and privilege animate the kinds of questions and arguments and commitments we make to and with each other. In my own experience in the classroom, for example, I think it is important to at once interrogate whiteness as a set of

4. Ibid.

5. Samaria Rice is Tamir Rice’s mother. On November 22, 2014, twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was shot by a Cleveland police officer who feared the toy gun he was playing with was real. His mother describes frantically racing to the scene only to be prevented from (and even threatened with arrest for) attending to her fallen child. See Elliott McLaughlin, “Tamir Rice’s Teen Sister ‘Tackled,’ Handcuffed after his Shooting, Mom Says,” *CNN*, December 9, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/12/08/us/cleveland-tamir-rice-mother/index.html>.

privileges, violences, and consciousnesses and to also acknowledge that it enables my own unfettered time to sit with the kinds of grief that come with the endless deferrals of a “free state.”⁶

Many of my students don’t automatically have that luxury: to sit on that public bench outside the school building, unbothered and with grief. What is more, many of my students don’t get to move through the world without the phantasmatic albatross of someone else’s need for explanation tethered to their every gesture. The viciousness of state-sanctioned surveillance making their private pause a potential public emergency. A scene of inquiry that disrupts their own.

I wonder then if the classroom can be a place for an ethical engagement with the explanatory as well as an ethical refusal to give it all the room. To not be entirely filled up with what needs to be talked about and dismantled, even if that might be part of the reason why we’re there in the first place. So while the classroom moves within a teleological logic and bursts out of that telos to name, discuss, criticize, teach about, learn about, and undermine the institutional moorings of racial and sexual violence, it could do some other kind of nonteleological work. That is, it can also make room for sitting with silence, the refused-to-be-explained features of black, trans, and poor grief. The sedimented pains of getting to, sitting within, and leaving class. A time when dreams of social justice amble by plain old exhaustion, the weightedness and seeming weakness of the explanatory roaming along with passions and philosophies of the new — unspoken and otherwise.⁷

6. “Free state” here is from Michel Foucault, “Lives of Infamous Men,” in *The Essential Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: New Press, 2003), 284, quoted in Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26 (June 2008): 2.

7. Fred Moten influences my phrase, “philosophies of the new,” both in the scope and complexities of his scholarship and from my experience of being in his classroom.

REBECCA WANZO

The Deadly Fight Over Feelings

ST. LOUIS ILLUSTRATOR MARY ENGELBREIT'S artwork mostly features cherub-faced white children and inspirational quotes in greeting cards and children's book illustrations; her work is described as comforting by some, saccharine with an "appeal mainly to eight-year-old girls and grandmothers with dementia" by others.¹ Thus fans and detractors might be forgiven for being startled by a work she created after Officer Darren Wilson shot and killed unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown on August 9, 2014.

A number of witnesses to the shooting stated that Brown had his hands up when Wilson shot him multiple times, and in the ensuing protests, "Hands Up! Don't Shoot!" became a call and response refrain for protesters around the world. One of my most indelible memories in attending an early protest was listening to African American parents explaining to their children who Michael Brown was, and why they needed to protest. One of the more painful, searing images from the militarized response to the protesters was that of children raising their hands up as local officers looked at them through riflescopes. Engelbreit must also have been jarred by this rupture of innocence and chose to blend her aesthetic with the language of protest in an image she created. In

1. Byron Kerman, "Hooray for Homeys," *Riverfront Times*, May 16, 2001, <http://www.riverfronttimes.com/2001-05-16/calendar/hooray-for-homeys/full>.

it, a tear creeps out of an African American mother's eye as she holds her young son in her lap, his hands raised in the air. A newspaper from "Everywhere USA" is in front of her, with the "Hands Up! Don't Shoot!" headline. Her caption is quite a different sort than what she usually produces: "No one should have to teach their children this in the USA."

The backlash made national news.² Responses to the artwork were emblematic of the battle over whose affective responses should be privileged, a battle that runs through the debate about police brutality. Engelbreit violated affective segregation for her fans—the regulation of the appropriateness of affective response in certain spaces and, critically, a valuing of white affect over the affect of people of color. Her usual stock of illustrations specializes in nostalgic and romanticized representations of white childhood. By bringing injuries to African American children into the space reserved for a mythic white US American ideal, she violated the segregation between idealized fantasies about the American dream and the injuries the state and institutionalized racism continue to inflict on African American children. One study found that African American youth are often read as older than their years and, thus, less innocent.³ This is evidenced by the killing of twelve-year-old Tamir Rice, shot while playing with a toy gun in a park, who was identified by the police officer who shot him within seconds of driving up to him as a "black male, maybe 20."⁴ Despite the reams of empirical data demonstrating continued racial bias against African Americans by the police and courts, many whites continue to argue that blacks experience little to no discrimination in the twenty-first century.⁵ To critics

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2. Ben Davis, "Beloved Illustrator Blasted by Fans Over Artwork," *Artnet-news*, August 21, 2014, <http://news.artnet.com/in-brief/beloved-illustrator-blasted-by-fans-over-ferguson-artwork-83486>.
 3. Phillip Atiba Goff et al., "The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 106, no. 4 (2014): 526–45.
 4. Elahe Izadi and Peter Holley, "Video Shows Cleveland Officer Shooting 12-Year-Old Tamir Rice within Seconds," *Washington Post*, November 26, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2014/11/26/officials-release-video-names-in-fatal-police-shooting-of-12-year-old-cleveland-boy>.
 5. Monique W. Morris, *Black Stats: African Americans by the Numbers in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: New Press, 2014); Michael I. Norton and Samuel R. Sommers, "Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6, no. 3 (2011): 215–18.

of Englebreit's print, she was encouraging a fiction about black suffering believed by African Americans and their allies.

Disputes over the slippage between feelings and so-called facts seem to present somewhat of an immovable impasse in many of the cases of the use of excessive force. Wilson supporters believe that the protesters' responses were irrational because the police officer must have had cause to shoot Brown, and as rumor circulated and evidence was collected, they argued that, since Brown allegedly committed a strong-arm robbery before the events, he must have also decided to attack and charge an unarmed police officer repeatedly. After the grand jury decided not to indict Wilson, many argued that the physical evidence was consistent with this account.⁶ But the "facts" would remain highly questionable to people who noted that the narrative about what caused the initial encounter in the car was still murky. Also troubling were the extraordinary irregularities in evidence collection and prosecutorial procedure in presenting evidence to the grand jury and the well-documented history of racial discrimination of police treatment of African Americans in St. Louis County.⁷ Many engaged in the Black Lives Matter movement remain committed to the belief that deadly force is used too easily against African Americans who should be able to be apprehended without losing their lives.

Racial divisions in the response to the nonindictment of Wilson do not completely map onto racial groups, but there was a significant racial divide: 80 percent of African American respondents in a Pew Research Center survey said the grand jury made the wrong decision in the case, versus only 23 percent of whites respondents.⁸ Brown's death became part of a larger national story about the use of deadly force against African Americans, and he was added to the many other victims, mostly

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6. Michael Smerconish, "The Pulse: Close Read Shows Ferguson Grand Jury Got It Right," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 7, 2014, http://www.philly.com/philly/opinion/20141207_The_Pulse__Close_read_shows_Ferguson_grand_jury_got_it_right.html.
 7. Jeffrey Toobin, "How Not to Use a Grand Jury," *New Yorker*, November 25, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/use-grand-jury>; ArchCity Defenders, "Municipal Court White Paper," August 2014, [03a5010.net-solhost.com/WordPress/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/ArchCity-Defenders-Municipal-Courts-Whitepaper.pdf](http://www.archcitydefenders.com/WordPress/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/ArchCity-Defenders-Municipal-Courts-Whitepaper.pdf).
 8. Pew Research Center, "Sharp Racial Divisions in Reactions to Brown, Garner Decisions," December 8, 2014, <http://www.people-press.org/2014/12/08/sharp-racial-divisions-in-reactions-to-brown-garner-decisions>.

African American and male, who could be killed for petty crimes or no crime at all. Even a cursory review of social media discourse reveals that many citizens naturalize death as an outcome for African Americans because they are “thugs.” In this logic not only are petty crimes justification for death, African Americans are always potential criminals, a misfortune of birth that could understandably lead to death.

Naturalization of black death as a commonsense outcome circulates as a fact: *of course* if you resist arrest for selling cigarettes illegally/play with a toy gun/reach for your wallet/are deaf and walk toward officers with a rake/are mentally ill/are a seven-year-old girl sleeping in a house with someone who may have drugs you can expect to die.⁹ Defenders of this naturalization ignore all of the contexts within the United States and outside of it where none of these encounters would lead or have led to death. Supporters of “broken windows” policing, “stop and frisk,” and a general criminalization of blackness defend “common sense” and “reasonableness” as universally understood facts, except by those whose “values” allegedly make them ill-equipped for good citizenship. But this is a logic shaped by two interconnected feelings. Many people have a desperate attachment to a belief in the formal equality that must exist in the United States in order for their narratives about the fairness of the country to be true. However, this attachment is constantly challenged by the structural inequalities continually faced by the poor and people of color. African Americans, in particular, challenge the romantic notions of equal opportunity and the “American dream” in United States. Rather, believing that African Americans have failed to thrive due to their own merits shores up a love of country and a belief in self-determination that is unshaped by white privilege.

The unreasonable belief in the reasonableness of deadly force against African Americans is unfortunately embedded in the law, which persists in the fiction that “objectively reasonable” standards cannot be colored by racist feeling. In *Graham v. Connor* (1989) the Supreme Court decided that the determination as to whether something is reasonable must hinge on “the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight.” Moreover, “the calculus of reasonableness must embody allowance for the fact that

9. Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Amadou Diallo, Errol Shaw, Sr., Dontre Hamilton, and Aiyana Jones are a small number of unarmed African Americans killed by the police.

police officers are often forced to make split-second judgments — in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving — about the amount of force that is necessary in a particular situation.” For the court, the reasonableness of the action hinges on “whether the officers’ actions are ‘objectively reasonable’ in light of the facts and circumstances confronting them without regard to their underlying intent or motivation.”¹⁰ In other words, they can feel racist, but if their actions are in response to an existing threat, their feelings bear no import.

Anyone who knows anything about studies of implicit bias should immediately understand the problem with this ruling. Researchers have consistently noted that the split-second decisions people make about black people are negative.¹¹ People consistently associate black men, in particular, with crime. If we know that people consistently behave with bias in split-second decisions about black people, how can we structure the law around the reasonableness of decisions that are grounded in racism? Because it is always “reasonable” to fear blackness in US culture, the affective response of the police can itself function as evidence, constructing the criminality they seek to enforce.

Many of us who work in cultural studies and who study gender, sexuality, race, and imperialism address things that people feel are abstract and ephemeral. We are accused of “political correctness,” “oversensitivity,” “playing the race card,” and being “social justice warriors,” when we call attention to discrimination or injury. We are often told we want to brainwash people and attack what’s in people’s heads and that we do not have evidence of real discrimination. But the fight over feelings is, literally, deadly serious. The civil rights struggle over police brutality is very much about feeling — whose feelings are allowed to count. The question of reasonable police response cannot be addressed without understanding that the question of what the police can do turns on the privileging of police affect. Moreover, the black fear of police is then cast as unreasonable in a cultural logic that privileges affect of the state over the affect of citizens disenfranchised by white fear.

The fiction on which *Graham v. Connor* depends is that feelings are private, which itself encourages an old, false binary between emotion and reason. Moreover, the state has built up a large institutional infrastructure to mask racist feeling as reasonableness. Police fear and

10. *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989).

11. Jennifer L. Eberhardt et al., “Seeing Black: Race, Crime, and Visual Processing,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 87, no. 6 (2004): 876–93.

suspicion of African Americans can count, whereas African American fears of being stopped by police do not. When New York Mayor de Blasio describes discussing with his son the caution he must take around the police — a reality for African American families — the NYPD advocates cast that reality as a discriminatory fiction meant to disparage the police. The fiction that every black man is a potential criminal or dangerous enough to deserve deadly force gets to count as reasonable, whereas the pain of telling a son that he will experience disparate treatment is irrelevant.

The protesters have clear policy goals, but their affective work is also an essential, radical battle. Protesters in the St. Louis area, the nation, and around the world began disrupting everyday life at the symphony, sports events, highways, and weekend brunches, moving their pain and rage into the public sphere of those who felt they could compartmentalize or ignore it. Even when Engelbreit offered the print for sale in support of the Michael Brown, Jr. memorial fund, she commented that her print was not “a cheerful little picture you’d want to hang over the sofa,” but that “you might know a school or an office or a police station that could use it.” She segregates the appropriate location for this image — it would not be an image for the home, but an image for the public sphere in which people might have conversations about racial discrimination. But these are the conversations that are happening in the homes of many African Americans who cannot isolate this experience into a location. While Engelbreit comments on her Facebook page that her more painful images “hardly ever see the light of day,” many people see pain every day that is far outside of most white citizens’ experiences.¹² African Americans would like these painful images to be elsewhere too, but don’t have that luxury. Dismissing black fear as a reasonable affect constantly challenges the idea that full citizenship is possible, while affirming white and police fear has deadly consequences. Until we stop naturalizing the “objective reasonableness” of black deaths, the struggle will not end.

12. Mary Engelbreit, on her Facebook page, August 18, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/maryengelbreit/photos/a.283968321636466.87914.138832742816692/803562979676995/?type=1&theater>.

TREVA B. LINDSEY

Post-Ferguson: A “Herstorical” Approach to Black Violability

ON OCTOBER 7, 2014, *Feminist Wire* published a piece by activist Alicia Garza titled “A Herstory of #BlackLivesMatter.” Garza, who created #BlackLivesMatter along with Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tomet, writes that the hashtag/call to action is “an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.”¹ Garza’s piece clearly articulates the herstory of the hashtag/call to action and of the infrastructure these three women developed to mobilize and organize a national movement. Notably, Garza also illuminates the erasure of the work, leadership, and insights of Black women, particularly Black queer women, in this emergent movement against anti-Black state and state-sanctioned violence. Speaking to issues of cooptation, heterosexism, homo-antagonism, sexism, patriarchy, and racism, Garza emphasizes the importance of a radical inclusivity and of a necessary acknowledgement of the tremendous work of Black women, trans* people, and queer people within contemporary racial justice movements.

Although nascent, the emergent national (and arguably global movement) against anti-Black racial violence and violation connects to

1. Alicia Garza, “A Herstory of #BlackLivesMatter,” *Feminist Wire*, October 7, 2014, <http://thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2>.

a long tradition of African American activism. A troubling part of this tradition, however, is the regular erasure of Black women, queer people, and trans* people from the historical record both as victims and as activists. Despite a robust field of scholarship that focuses on African American women as activists challenging anti-Black racism, dominant narratives about racial justice movements, both historically and contemporarily, often pivot around Black men's activism and, more specifically, Black heterosexual men's activism.² In her article "Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race, and Class," Bernice McNair Barnett explores the experiences of Southern Black women leaders and examines the continued noninclusion of these leaders in dominant historical narratives about civil rights leadership and activism.³ Although published in 1993, Barnett's analysis of the racism, classism, and sexism extant in social movement literature echoes what Garza sheds light on—attempts to remove or decenter Black women from being both creators and leaders in the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

In addition to uncovering herstories of African American women's activism, a growing body of work within Black women's history, Black gender studies, and Black queer studies is the exploration of Black women and girls, trans* people, and queer people as victims of anti-Black state violence. In a moment in which activists, artists, Black communities, and scholars grapple with the white domestic terror lineage that extends from Emmett Till to recent victims of anti-Black state violence such as Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown—a Black masculine-centered narrative of contemporary anti-Black racial violence emerges. In what one could identify as the post-Trayvon Martin

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2. Notable scholars who have focused on the activism of African American women challenging anti-Black racism include Bettye Collier-Thomas, Ruth Feldstein, Darlene Clarke Hine, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Mia Bay, Deborah Gray-White, Danielle McGuire, Bernice McNair Barnett, Tiffany Gill, Dayo Gore, Tanisha Ford, Jeanne Theoharis, Paula Giddings, V. P. Franklin, Barbara Ransby, Susan Smith, Pamela E. Brooks, Christina Greene, Crystal Feimster, and Sharon Harley.
 3. Bernice McNair Barnett, "Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race, and Class," *Gender and Society* 7, no. 2 (June 1993): 162–82.

era of racial terror against Black people in United States, the framing of contemporary anti-Black racial violence as a pervasive injustice primarily experienced by Black men and boys fails to capture the deeply entrenched reality of Black violability.

I previously defined Black violability as “a construct that attempts to encapsulate both the lived and historical experiences of Black people with state-initiated and state-sanctioned violence.”⁴ Understanding this contemporary era of anti-Black racial terror and subjugation requires excavating the gender-specific and gendered dynamics of anti-Black racial violence and necessitates a more inclusive conceptualization of the Black violable subject. A herstorical approach to Black violability does not preclude studying and acknowledging the particular historical and lived experiences of Black men and boys with anti-Black racial violence in United States. Rather it offers an expansive lens that renders visible Black women and girls and trans*, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, and queer people as victims and survivors of anti-Black racial terror. This approach also compels us to remember Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Denise McNair not only as the “4 Little Girls,” but as individually, collectively, powerfully, and painfully indicative of a nation founded on and built upon violence against Black bodies.⁵

In 2013, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement released a study revealing that one Black person was murdered by police or vigilantes in an extrajudicial killing every 28 hours in the United States, prompting the frequent retweeting of the hashtag #1Every28 as part of the broader #BlackLivesMatter social media-based mobilization.⁶ Although the report did not identify Black men and boys as the sole victims of extrajudicial killing, the study became integral to racial justice movements

4. Treva Lindsey, “Let Me Blow Your Mind: Hip Hop Feminist Futures in Theory and Praxis,” *Urban Education* 50, no. 52 (January 2015): 66.

5. *4 Little Girls* is the name of the 1997 documentary film, directed by Spike Lee, about the four girls killed in the 1963 bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. A fifth “little girl,” Sarah Collins Rudolph, was seriously injured and hospitalized for months as a result of the bombing.

6. Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, “Operation Ghetto Storm: 2012 Annual Report on the Extrajudicial Killings of 313 Black People by Police, Security Guards, and Vigilantes,” April 7, 2013, <https://mxgm.org/operation-ghetto-storm-2012-annual-report-on-the-extrajudicial-killing-of-313-black-people>.

anchored by a singular focus on Black men and boys. The 313 known Black victims of extrajudicial killings in 2012 became illustrative of harsh realities confronting Black men and boys, including but not limited to police brutality, racial profiling, and mass incarceration. Racial, gender, and cultural stereotypes about Black men and boys as criminals, thugs, violent, and hyperaggressive permeated discussions about what contributed to state violence against Black men and boys. Black women and girls occupied a marginal space in most discussions about Black violability, despite being on the frontlines of protests against anti-Black state violence occurring across the nation.

The names of women and girls such as Tarika Wilson, Pearlie Golden, Rekia Boyd, Tanisha Anderson, Aiyana Jones, Renisha McBride, and Yvette Smith remain unknown to most people. Their stories and, more specifically, their fatal experiences with white police and security officers and vigilantes disrupt a masculinist framing of anti-Black state violence. Knowing their names and stories compels conversations and activism surrounding anti-Black state violence to wrestle with how gender and sexuality affect how we mobilize and organize for racial justice. Furthermore, using an intersectional approach to addressing Black violability opens our collective eyes to multiple dimensions of state and state-sanctioned anti-Black violence. A broader, more inclusive approach would allow us to see the thirteen African American women accusing Officer Daniel Holtzclaw of sexual assault as victims warranting our outrage, support, and organizational efforts.⁷ A herstorical approach to anti-Black state violence encompasses the range of violence and violation Black people experience. The racial justice activism of foremothers such as Ida B. Wells and Rosa Parks provide a herstorical foundation for including Holtzclaw's victims in our racial justice-centered activism. Both Parks and Wells understood interracial rapes and sexual assaults against Black women as distinct and important acts of anti-Black state and state-sanctioned violence. These women and many other women understood sexual violence and lynching as powerfully interconnected forms of racial terror.

7. Heide Brandes, "Oklahoma Police Officer Charged With Raping Women While On Duty," *Reuters*, Nov. 19, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/19/us-usa-oklahoma-rape-idUSKCN0j324I20141119>.

The work of Crystal Feimster uncovered the stories of nearly two hundred Black women lynched during Jim Crow.⁸ Her scholarship showed that the strange fruit of Jim Crow included Black men, women, girls, and boys. In the twenty-first century, the victims and survivors of anti-Black state and state-sanctioned violence extend across gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability spectrums. A singular, predominating narrative of anti-Black state violence as a unique lived experience for Black men and boys forecloses opportunities to advocate against domestic state terrorism against all Black people in United States. Intentionally, #BlackLivesMatter is not #BlackMenMatter. The demand for recognition of the humanity of all Black people requires activists, allies, and the broader US public to critically consider the impact of state violence on individual Black people, Black families, and Black communities. To affirm the particular experiences of Black men and boys with state violence should not and cannot relegate the experiences of Black women and girls, queer people, and trans* people to the margins of our activism or our documentation of contemporary anti-Black racial terror.

In *If We Must Die: From Bigger Thomas to Biggie Smalls*, Aime Ellis demarcates three distinct periods of racial terror: antebellum slavery, Jim Crow, and the mass incarceration of Black people in the prison-industrial complex.⁹ Published in 2011, the book predates the murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his murderer, vigilante George Zimmerman, as well as the local and national uprisings catalyzed by the murder of eighteen-year-old Michael Brown by Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson in August 2014. Ellis's book tackles the effects of racial terror on Black men through examining cultural texts about death and violence produced by and about Black men. Arguably, an updated periodization of racial terror would include police violence as a distinct, historically specific manifestation of domestic terror. Building on Ellis's periodization using a herstorical framework, we can think about the legacies of brutality against Black women and girls during antebellum slavery. We can painstakingly unearth the assault, rape, and murder of Black women and girls during Jim Crow. We must push ourselves to

8. Crystal Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

9. Aime J. Ellis, *If We Must Die: From Bigger Thomas to Biggie Smalls* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2011).

more critically consider the effects of the prison-industrial complex on Black women and girls, trans* people, and queer people. We should also debunk discourses about contemporary anti-Black racial violence that do not uphold that *all* Black lives matter.

When documentation and activism fail to encapsulate violence against Black trans* people, queer people, and women and girls, then we further marginalize and render invisible those surviving and living on the margins of marginalization. The push toward being more inclusive in our documentation and our activism surrounding anti-Black state violence opens up a dynamic space in which we can intentionally and collectively make visible and legible all victims of state and state-sanctioned violence. Painting a more accurate and complete picture of contemporary Black violability strengthens racial justice movements and forces us to confront the ways in which sexism, patriarchy, ableism, classism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and queer antagonism affect how we teach about anti-Black racial violence and how we organize and mobilize for racial justice. Herstorical approaches encourage particularity and specificity as well as collectivity and shared experiences. Similar to preceding eras of anti-Black state and state sanctioned violence, all Black lives are potential victims. The chronicling of and movements against the perpetual, lived experience of terror must therefore, affirm that *all* #BlackLivesMatter.