

# Epilogue

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*An analysis of F.B.I. data from 2010 to 2012 concluded that the police killed black men ages 15 to 19 at a rate 21 times greater than the statistic for white men the same age. Department of Justice numbers indicate that a black person is about four times as likely to die in custody or while being arrested than a white person is.*

—Olevia Boykin, Christopher Desir and Jed Rubenfeld  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/01/opinion/a-better-standard-for-the-use-of-deadly-force.html?smid=fb-share&\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/01/opinion/a-better-standard-for-the-use-of-deadly-force.html?smid=fb-share&_r=2)

We speak their names (hear our voices) and honor their lives:

Tanisha Anderson  
Sandra Bland  
Romain Brisbon  
Michael Brown  
John Crawford III  
Jordon Davis  
Amadou Diallo  
Ezell Ford  
Freddie Grey  
Akai Gurley  
Eric Garner  
Dontre Hamilton  
Eric Harris  
Trayvon Martin  
Donte Parker  
Jerame Ried  
Tamir Rice  
Tony Robinson  
Walter Scott  
Phillip White

You too know who they are—Black individuals killed in encounters with

mostly white police officers or vigilantes. We begin our last word in this book with their names because they can no longer speak, their voices taken. While there is contention that these victims were not murdered, that they must have done something that lead to their deaths, this contention depends upon the very racial logic to which we call attention—a lens that dysconsciously reproduces as it justifies the racial thinking that conditions the lived experiences of people of color, including our students. These are the very conditions that we argue we all need to see, hear, recognize, and acknowledge. It is this terrible lens—notoriously distorting our perception of ourselves, our histories, our relations—that must be torn away, dismantled, and destroyed if we are ever to realize justice, racial justice.

We claim outright that racism is a murderous and a soul-destroying force not only in the streets, but in our classrooms, and in our revered institutions. True, our main concern in this book is antiracist activism in academic institutions and in courses associated with communication, rhetoric, and writing. But we need look no further than to the insidious trend of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts, known best for the Oscar Awards, to routinely self-justify its fierce promotion of whites, whiteness, and whiteness, to the exclusion of peoples of color. For instance, the Academy has for many years unflinchingly unveiled an all-white slate of nominees. And in 2016, when the Black president of the Academy announced that it would increase its diversity efforts, the *New York Times* reports that the backlash was swift, shifting blame and hiding behind inanities: “The most common cri de Coeur: The changes were ageist (a possibility) and insulting to Blacks (if there’s a Black academy member out there who agrees, please do get in touch). Another: ‘I’m liberal, so I can’t be racist,’ a tautological cry that largely misses the point.” (Buckly, n.p.) [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/28/movies/the-oscars-and-race-a-stir-over-rules-to-change-the-academy.html?emc=edit\\_th\\_20160128&nl=todaysheadlines&nlid=70223966&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/28/movies/the-oscars-and-race-a-stir-over-rules-to-change-the-academy.html?emc=edit_th_20160128&nl=todaysheadlines&nlid=70223966&_r=0).

The Academy’s dilemma and its members’ outcry against antiracist activism illustrates that institutional and everyday racism, especially in its most dysconscious forms, poisons relations between whites and people of color; it poisons our nations. So we offer our list of names above in order to remember, acknowledge and act—and we want you also to remember, acknowledge and act on behalf of those who have lost their lives as a result of white supremacist ideology. Act on behalf of those who stand together to eliminate that ideology.

We have listed a few of the more well-known victims of state-sponsored racism,

but please know that these names stand in for a terrifyingly longer list: the thousands of unarmed Black men, women, and children killed by police year after year, day after day, hour after hour even as too many of us tsk tsk tsk, then return to stasis. (Mapping, n.p., <http://mappingpoliceviolence.org/unarmed/>; Hudson, n.p., <http://www.occupy.com/article/black-man-killed-us-every-28-hours-police>)

Because of the men, women, and children whose names compose these lists, and because of our own everyday experience, we are compelled to discuss, and compelled to ask you to discuss racism openly, honestly, and courageously—compelled to wake ourselves to the reality not only of the United States, but also of Canada (where we both are currently located), the European Union—all nations and regions where white supremacy continues to thrive and in thriving to shape the lived experiences (and deaths) of peoples of color. We are compelled to join and spur change that is afoot, like that noted in the New York Times article, from which our epigraph is taken, calling for different standards of policing, precisely because current standards disproportionately and negatively impact Black people.

Some—perhaps too many—may disaggregate and isolate “racial incidents,” may count the numbers of those Black Americans murdered by police, for example, one by one, but the totality of white supremacy as a primary influence in both repressive and ideological state apparatuses globally refuses to be so contained.

We note with sadness, but with a still glowing hot ember of hope, that since we wrote the introduction at the start of this project (back in 2011), the dismantling of racism has become a project that some—but not enough—of our colleagues have taken up with collective discipline and dedication. In contrast, students in the U.S., Canada, and around the world show us the way, and engage antiracist activism with stunning success. Consider a few examples of what has recently taken place on the campuses where students have organized protests, demanding greater inclusion and access.

- Amherst College—hundreds of students held sit-ins to protest racial injustice on campus.
- Claremont McKenna College—student leaders demanded the firing of a high-ranked administrator considered insensitive to minorities and received promises of a more diverse faculty and staff.
- Occidental College—students occupied an administrative building on the campus, calling for President Jonathan Veitch’s resignation.
- University of Missouri—members of the football team, students and faculty groups demanded that President Tim Wolfe step down because of inadequate response to racial incidents.
- University of Kansas in Lawrence—students presented university administration with a list of demands to improve campus diversity.
- Yale University—students and faculty protested discrimination. President

Peter Salovey announced plans to support minority students on campus, including the establishment of an academic center for race and social identity and an increase in diverse hiring.

While we recognize the work of our colleagues across the disciplines who are active antiracist campaigners on and beyond their campuses, can we truly say that our efforts match those of our students? Have our actionable commitments kept pace? Students are modeling for us the work of antiracist activism, public intellectualism, intellectual activism, policy revision, and changes in everyday teaching and learning. Student organizations across North America are building coalitions to rise up and speak out: in the United States, the Black Liberation Collective, La Rasa, Students for the Dream, and in Canada, the Canadian Federation of Students.

Should we not answer the call of our students, to work with as well as for them? Can we be convinced to place our pens, mouths, and bodies in solidarity with them as did some 1300 Black professors across the nation in “An Open Letter of Love to Black Students?: #BlackLivesMatter” (Black Space Blog, n.p., <http://blackspaceblog.com/2014/12/08/an-open-letter-of-love-to-black-students-blacklivesmatter/>).

Our students’ activism is predicated on their recognition and critique of the social problems they perceive outside their universities. But our students also recognize the relationship between that injustice and what they experience on their campuses. Our students understand that they are not immune to the visceral as well as implicit dangers of racism within their institutions.

We call on our readers and our disciplines to join with students in a multiracial antiracist struggle for justice. Let us demand of ourselves and encourage one another to do more than mouth our commitments: to make our actions match our words; to transform our classrooms, our departments, and our institutions as well as our communities; and to learn from one another as allies who possess the courage to effect change.

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