

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poetry
Say Their Names

by Joy Martin



IMAGE BY CLAY BANKS, WASHINGTON DC

Say Their Names

i 26 February 2012: Trayvon Martin, 17

Trayvon Martin

Returning to his Sanford, Florida, neighborhood

Attempted to eat Skittles and talk on his phone

Youth in full bloom until

Vigilante stalked him

On suspicion, no crime known—

Not concerned with proof of action or guilt.

Matters taken into wrongful hands

Armed in pursuit of this Black teen, the man

Reached for his gun,

Took aim, took life, took

Innocence

No standing-ground defense should he claim.

ii 17 July 2014: Eric Garner, 43

Eric Garner

Rose in death for us to chant his name

In Staten Island, New York, and the world,

Choked on suspicion of selling cigarettes.

Gasping for breath

After wrestled to the ground by

Race-blinded officer who was

Never prosecuted even though

Eleven times Eric begged, *I Can't Breathe*.

Riots did not erase the stain.

iii 9 August 2014: Michael Brown, 18

Michael Brown

In Ferguson, Missouri, off to college next week,

Carefree, pushing boundaries, walked down middle of street

Held no gun, posed no threat, nevertheless,

According to autopsy, was shot six times when

Excessive force used (his arms reportedly in air)

Left him dead, 4 hours lying uncovered in August heat.

Being brown was his major crime

Race crossing against the riptide

Of injustice that pulls too many under

Without hope that things will change so

No one need fear an unjust death.

iv 22 November 2014: Tamir Rice, 12

Tamir Rice, of Cleveland, Ohio,
All of 12 years old
Mowed down after calm 9-1-1-caller had said situation
Involved probably a juvenile pointing a fake gun.
Robbed of youth, he was

Robbed of life
Instead of living out his dreams.
Condemned to death without a trial
Erasing justice from the deadly scene.

v 4 April 2015: Walter Scott, 50

Walter Scott, driving
Alone in North Charleston, South Carolina,
Lost his life due to a defective center stop lamp.
The officer briefly scuffled with him; why? unknown.
Evidentially, he posed no threat.
Running away, he was

Shot in the back five times
Caught by bullets
Opened up to bleed, left to die
To suffer this predictable loss
To surrender hope as it bled away.

vi 5 July 2016: Alton Sterling, 37

Alton Sterling, accused of causing trouble,
Lost his life in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, when
Two officers responded to a call made from
Outside a convenience store. False accuser
Not known.

Selling homemade CDs while Black
Turned deadly under officer fire.
Each person of color taught this lesson,
Referred to euphemistically as justice,
Leaves the world to shout against
Injustice and chant:
No Justice! No Peace!
God have mercy on our nation's soul.

vii 6 July 2016: Philando Castile, 32

Philando Castile, while
Having a date with his girlfriend
In Saint Paul, Minnesota,
Lost his life at
A routine traffic check: told to show license
No lip offered yet he was shot
Doing as the officer requested,
Outraging viewers of the viral video

Caught on girlfriend's camera.
As he calmly
Stated merely to inform
That he had a licensed gun, he
Inevitably
Lost his life for trying to do everything right,
Eager to avoid any misunderstanding.

viii 18 March 2018: Stephon Clark, 22

Stephon Clark, shot at twenty times,
Took eight bullets, six in the back, murdered after
Entering his grandmother's backyard.
Police hit him in his leg with their first shots.
He fell face-down on Sacramento, California, soil.
Officers then fired fifteen additional rounds—
Nearly five minutes passed without giving care.

Coldly, to reduce assumed risk, he was sacrificed.
Life of this father of two gunned down, though
Armed only with a cell phone.
Reportedly he had broken some car windows, thus
Killed by policemen who failed to self-identify.

ix 13 March 2020: Breonna Taylor, 26

Breonna Taylor was startled out of slumber while
Resting in her bed. Unknown intruders left this
Emergency medical technician eight-times-shot-dead.
Only 26 years old
Never to wake again
Never to hold a lover or child
As a barrage of twenty bullets flew.

The deadly shooter lost his badge—not for murder tried.
Administrative leave given to the other two.
Young lady, innocent of any crime, slaughtered in
Louisville, Kentucky, when these plainclothes
Officers used battering ram, broke door down,
Raided her once-safe home.

x 25 May 2020: George Floyd, 46

George Floyd's neck compressed
Eight minutes forty-six seconds
Out of breath
Right before their eyes. Now ours.
Ghastly act, bystanders pleaded as
Everyone heard him gasp, *I Can't Breathe*.

Fatal racism
Left him lying in Minneapolis, Minnesota,
One breath short of life.
Yet another person suffocated
Dead, choked at neck, officer's knee the noose.

xi 18 June 2020: Andres Guardado Pineda, 18

Andres Guardado Pineda got in a gun's way
Never to see his 19th birthday. Shot
Dead in an alleyway
Riveted with bullets, five times in the back.
Evidence from his system—no drugs, no alcohol.
Surveillance footage destroyed, they say.

Gainfully employed as security in
Unincorporated section of Gardena, California,
At an auto-body shop where,
Reportedly when confronted, he ran
Determined to live for another day
And was gunned down by pursuing deputy.
Dead at the scene rendered.
On the street, a ghost gun allegedly found nearby.

Purportedly, deputies sought to sport inked-tattoo
Insignias linked to a violent clique
Nicknamed, as whistleblower revealed,
Executioners—
Deputies accused of "chasing ink" to celebrate
At "998" parties over drinks.

xii 31 August 2020: Dijon Kizzee, 29

Dejon Kizzee, chased for alleged bike-code violation,
Inconceivably shot 20 times in the back while running.
Justification impossible...gun, never pointed, dropped.
One known fact, he was riding while Black
Never again to bike home.

Killed in the streets of Los Angeles, California,
In front of a neighborhood of witnesses.
Zero rationale for his murder demands
Zero tolerance of such brutality.
Enough euphemisms. Enough carnage. Enough injustice.
Enough.

In memory of these and the many other stolen Black lives



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