

Zahra Dhanerawala
Simmons College

It Is Not a Dream Deferred

On July 17, 2014, Eric Garner, age 43, was put in an illegal chokehold by four NYPD officers in Staten Island, NY which resulted in his death. Soon after the decision of non-indictment for the officer in Garner's case was released, protests erupted all over the United States. There are several others we strive to remember: Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Renisha McBride, Aiyana Jones, John Crawford, Rekia Boyd, and others whose memories have been disposed not as victims of the institutionalized oppression of the State, but as those that were murdered to "protect" this country and its civilians. After nearly 50 years since the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, no phrase is more apt in describing today's student movements than Martin Luther King's "Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning."¹

It is difficult to accept that, in the 21st century, white supremacist forces can murder unarmed black individuals with impunity and—in Darren Wilson's case—get paid half a million dollars for it. Protesters in Ferguson, Missouri who have been the victims of police bombardments like smoke and stun grenades, riot guns, and tear gas banned in war zones have responded to the murder of 18-year-old Michael Brown with non-violent protests and vigils.² For them, according to the majority of American civilians, there is no reason to express justified apprehension of State-sanctioned violence, yet the police force can, by any (illegal) means necessary, subdue their resulting anger.

The United States has a rich history of using force as a means of subjugating its minorities. It functions as an imperial authority and uses violence and economic disparity as some of its many tactics against its own people. Hence, it is no surprise that in Edward Said's words, "...imperialism produces troubling self-images, for example, that of 'a benevolent progressive policeman.'"³ American tax dollars paid for Darren Wilson's leave, and the American judiciary system decides whether or not a black life matters. State-sanctioned violence has affected every man and woman who has spoken up against injustice in the U.S. This does not exclude the foremost leaders of the Civil Rights Movement: Malcolm X and Martin Luther King himself. It seems naïve to believe that those who fight for justice are "satisfied"¹ with the conditions of our modern world if it continues to dehumanize black people and show outright apathy when members of our own communities are killed.

Today, we are closer to materializing Dr. King's dream, but not as long as innocent civilians are murdered at the hands of the protectors of the State. It will not materialize as long as institutionalized racism in the U.S. affects housing, educational, and occupational discrimination, as long as racial profiling exists, as long as the prison industrial complex continues to profit off of marginalized groups, and as long as the media continues to project black communities as "communities of criminals."⁴

References

1. King Jr, Martin Luther. "I have a dream." *Washington, DC* 28 (1963): 217-20.
2. McCoy, Terrence. "Tear Gas Is a Chemical Weapon Banned in War. But Ferguson Police Shoot It at Protesters." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 14 Aug. 2014. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/08/14/tear-gas-is-a-chemical-weapon-banned-in-war-but-ferguson-police-shoot-it-at-protesters/?tid=hp_mm>.
3. Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993. 65. Print.
4. X, Malcolm. "After the Bombing." Speech at Ford Auditorium. 14 Feb. 1965. Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <http://www.malcolm-x.org/speeches/spc_021465.htm>.