

FOREWORD:

SOCIAL JUSTICE: WHEN BLACK LIVES MATTER

By **Alicia L. Moore & La Vonne I. Neal**

Poet Paul Laurence Dunbar in 1900 described the compounded trauma of African Americans in the U.S. when he wrote:

No one has the right to base any conclusions about negro criminality upon the number of prisoners in the jails and other places of restraint. Even at the North, the prejudice against the negro reverses the precedents of law, and everyone accused is looked upon guilty until he is proven innocent. In the South it is worse. Taking into account that some of the offenses for which a white boy would be reprimanded and released, would send a negro to the chain gang or to the jail, it is easy to see how the percentage of criminals is raised. A fight upon the street, picking up coal, with the accusation of throwing it off the cars, brawling generally, that with white boys would be called children's fights, land the black boy in jail and so the percentage of criminals increases, and the Northern friend of the negro holds up his hands in dismay at the awful thing he sees before him.¹

Over 100 years later, African Americans are still experiencing crippling obstacles such as disproportionate mass incarceration and death. We now ask the same question as Dunbar. Why is there dismay? Why is there dismay when African Americans say, "We can't breathe"? Forensic historian Karsonya Wise Whitehead described in a compelling manner the physical impact of compounded trauma and the cries for relief:

When we yell and say that "We Can't Breathe," we are saying that we feel as if the American political and social system is doing all that it can to squeeze the very life out of us. "We Can't Breathe" means that we are tired of the stress that comes from breathing while black in this country. "We Can't Breathe" means that we want the system to see us and to respect us. "We Can't Breathe," when yelled by a diverse group of American citizens, means that we recognize that this country was built by and belongs to all of us.²

In this issue, guest co-editors Satasha L. Green and Kimberly Edwards-Underwood feature scholars who describe the recurring cycle of injustice in the U.S. that has resulted in contemporary activism for social justice. The authors highlight mobilization and advocacy with reflections on collective change through social media, photographs, teach-ins, die-ins, etc. We are clear—"Black Lives Matter."

Teacher Resources

1. Monita K. Bell, "Students are Watching Ferguson," Teaching Tolerance, August 26, 2014, <http://www.tolerance.org/blog/students-are-watching-ferguson>.

2. “Jim Crow Stories,” PBS, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_plessy.html
3. “Plessy v. Ferguson,” History, <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/plessy-v-ferguson>.
4. The Marc Steiner Show, December 4, 2014, <http://www.stainershow.org/podcasts/racism/eric-garner/>
5. Karsonya Wise Whitehead, “Bending the Arc of Justice,” Baltimore Sun, December 16, 2014, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/oped/bs-ed-justice-arc-20141216-story.html>
6. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Institute, <http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/search//searchresults/9b843dfa4b853081100efd735a367cd0/>
7. Jordan Moeny, “Resources for Addressing Ferguson in the Classroom,” Education Week, November 25, 2014, http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2014/11/resources_for_addressing_ferguson_in_the_classroom.html
8. Ferguson Action, <http://fergusonaction.com>
9. Katherine Schulten, Tom Marshall, and Michael Gonchar, “The Death of Michael Brown: Teaching about Ferguson,” The New York Times, September 3, 2014, last modified December 8, 2014, http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/03/the-death-of-michael-brown-teaching-about-ferguson/?_r=0.

(Notes)

¹ Paul Laurence Dunbar, “Higher Education,” in *The Dramatic and Other Collected Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar: In His Own Voice*, ed. (eds.) Herbert Woodward Martin and Ronald Primeau (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002), 194. Originally published in 1900.

² Karsonya Wise Whitehead, “Bending the Arc of Justice,” Baltimore Sun, December 16, 2014, accessed January 16, 2015, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/oped/bs-ed-justice-arc-20141216-story.html>



ALICIA L. MOORE, Ph.D., holds the Cargill Endowed Professorship in Education at Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas; email: moorea@southwestern.edu.



LA VONNE I. NEAL, Ph.D., is Dean of the College of Education & Professor of Special Education at Northern Illinois University; Email: lneal1@niu.edu
Follow me on Academia.edu: <http://niu.academia.edu/LaVonneNeal>
Follow me on Twitter: twitter.com/DeanLNeal