

CASAR Dispatch: Confronting Racism at Home and Abroad—June 3, 2020



Credit: Corinne Bou Aoun
@CorinneBA_

Dear CASAR community,

All of you will have read about the current events in the United States. The last week, fueled by the news that yet another unarmed Black man was killed at the hands of a police officer, hundreds of thousands of Americans have taken to the streets to protest the anti-Black racism that still permeates daily life in the U.S.. George Floyd was merely the latest victim in a long line of Black men and women—and other people of color—who have been persecuted, killed, violated, and denied equality all because of the color of their skin. Just weeks ago, Breonna Taylor, an EMT from Louisville, was killed by police in her own apartment. It is profoundly saddening that in 2020 there is still the need to reiterate that #BlackLivesMatter. But the reality is that we need to say it, because inequality remains a reality in all levels of society, from the individual home to the government to the courts. #BlackLivesMatter, Black lives are precious, and as a community we need to loudly repeat this.

Right now, for non-Black people, the best thing to do is stand in solidarity and amplify the voices of those leading and interpreting this uprising. This is why at the bottom of this dispatch, I

have given a few reading and screening suggestions for those of you who want to learn more about the history of anti-Black racism, policing, and/or civil uprisings in the United States (I aimed to be concise, but am always happy to give more recommendations via email). 2020 is not the first time that anti-Black violence has led to large-scale protest. Recent mass uprisings include those of 1992 in Los Angeles, sparked by the acquittal of three police officers who violently beat Rodney King, and the 2014 Ferguson uprising after unarmed teenager Michael Brown was killed by a police officer.

The recurrence of protests reflects that essentially little has changed yet for Black Americans and people of color in the U.S. Indeed, if anything, Trump's ascent to the White House has made the presence and power of white supremacist ideology in the United States *more* visible. There is a lot of work that remains to be done, and by bearing witness and standing in solidarity we can begin to envision a future where anti-Black racism is no longer a reality of daily life. Not in the United States, and not in Lebanon either.

This is work that we all need to commit to. As civil rights hero Fannie Lou Hamer already said in 1971, "Now, we've got to have some changes in this country. And not only changes for the black man, and only changes for the black woman, but the changes we have to have in this country are going to be for liberation of all people — because nobody's free until everybody's free."

Nobody's free until everybody's free. We all have our part to play. At home, of course, there is more that we can do. Talk to your friends and family about racism or discrimination in your own community, even if these conversations might be difficult or painful. In Lebanon, many activists have pointed out the need to abolish the Kafala system. You cannot proclaim to support #BlackLivesMatter abroad if you, either implicitly or explicitly, condone the Kafala system at home. The moving cartoon by Corinna Bou Aoun at the top of this dispatch perfectly encapsulates this. In addition, there are also many stories of racial and ethnic profiling, both on and off campus. These are issues we must confront locally, yet at the same time all these forms of class and racial oppression are interlinked and require global coordination as well.

It is also crucial to keep in mind that race, both in the U.S. and globally, has never been an issue of mere skin-color, but is deeply embedded in local and global systems of economic exploitation. Race is not a natural category, but a social and political one. Its meaning and deployment shifts depending on context. American domestic racism was originally developed to divide poor and working-class White people from disenfranchised and enslaved Black people, indigenous people, and other non-white peoples, so that they would be less likely to unite in solidarity and demand just economic, political, and social systems. Thus, white-supremacy in the U.S. has always been used to maintain an unsustainable and inequitable system of economic growth and wealth-accumulation, and the racist violence we see today is intimately linked to the ongoing exploitation of all working-class Americans. Indeed, today's uprisings are multi-racial in nature

and come at a time of increased economic hardship and unemployment for all American citizens, due to COVID-19. Viewed in this light, we can see how the fight for justice for Black victims of police violence affects the entirety of U.S. society, and begin to understand how it is also related to the global causes of racial and economic justice.

#BlackLivesMatter everywhere. At CASAR we will continue to commit to social justice through our course content, our programming, and our mission. We hope many of you will join us. In solidarity, and with very best wishes on behalf of all of us at CASAR,

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Assistant Professor of American Studies and Media Studies

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Recommended readings/viewings:

1. Elizabeth Hinton, “The Minneapolis Uprising in Context,” *Boston Review* (May 29, 2020)

Hinton, a professor in Harvard University’s History Department and African American Studies Department, places current events in a larger historical perspective. She outlines how the murder of George Floyd and the resulting protests are not incidental, but rather a perennial occurrence in the United States. The reason? Political violence. ([Available online at Boston Review website](#))

2. Keeanga-Yahmatta Taylor, Commentary for *DemocracyNow* (May 2020)

Taylor is a scholar, writer, and activist who writes about the inextricably links between race, property, and economic disenfranchisement. She builds connections between working class struggles and anti-racist activism, and shows how the government has long used economic policies to hold back or undermine black social participation and equality. For *DemocracyNow*, Taylor addresses the financial roots of racism in the context of the current uprising. In [the first video](#), she talks about the uprisings as a class rebellion: In [the second video](#), Taylor addresses the necessity of defunding the police.

3. Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, 2016. Winner of the National Book Award.

This compelling and accessible book investigates how racist ideas informed the very foundation of the United States. Nearly every ‘great thinker’ in American history was complicit in some way, whether they intended or not. Kendi shows not just how racism takes root, but also offers a vision for how to emerge to a beyond. Kendi’s second book, *How To Be An Antiracist*, also comes highly recommended (Available online via AUB libraries)

4. Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*, 2016

The media disproportionately focuses on black rage. Today, too, much of the attention has been on looting, property destruction, and the behavior of protestors. Anderson, a historian, asks us to flip this frame—protests are not an expression of black rage, but a response to white rage. It is white rage that has animated consistent attempts to limit or roll back Black progress in the United States, as she shows by case studies from the Civil War until today.

(Available online via AUB libraries)

5. Angela Y. Davis. *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*, 2016

Davis, a political activist, professor, and an icon of the Black Panther Party, illuminates the connections between struggles against state violence and oppression throughout history and around the world. Reflecting on the importance of black feminism, intersectionality, and prison abolitionism for today's struggles, Davis discusses the legacies of previous liberation struggles, from the Black Freedom Movement to the South African anti-Apartheid movement. She highlights connections and analyzes today's struggles against state terror, from Ferguson to Palestine. Facing a world of outrageous injustice, Davis challenges us to imagine and build the movement for human liberation. And in doing so, she reminds us that "Freedom is a constant struggle."

(Available online via AUB libraries)

6. Jesmyn Ward, ed. *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Talks About Race*, 2016

Jesmyn Ward is a two-time winner of the National Book Award for Fiction, and a luminous voice about Black life in the United States. In this collection, she has amassed some of the best writers of today to respond to James Baldwin's 1963 essays about race in America. *The Fire This Time* includes both essays and poems, by writers such as Claudia Rankine, Kiese Laymon, and Kevin Young.

(Available online via AUB libraries)

7. Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, "A Most American Terrorist: The Making of Dylann Roof," winner of the 2018 Pulitzer Prize Winner for Feature Writing

In 2015, Dylann Roof entered a Black church in Charleston, SC and killed 9 parishioners. A white supremacist, Roof hoped his unthinkable act would ignite a race war. Ghansah's profile investigates what made Dylan Roof into a killer. She speaks with his family, teachers, friends, as well as those left devastated by his acts. In the process, Ghansah lays bare important truths about the poison of white supremacy, the influence of online alt-right chat rooms, and the deep roots racism has in U.S. society ([Available online at the GQ website](#))

8. *Who Do You Serve, Who Do You Protect? Police Violence and Resistance in the United States* Eds. Joe Macare, Maya Schwenwar, and Alana Yu-Ian Price, 2016

What is the reality of policing in the United States? Do the police keep anyone safe and secure other than the very wealthy? How do recent police killings of young black people in the United States fit into the historical and global context of anti-blackness? This collection of reports and essays explores police violence against black, brown, indigenous and other marginalized communities, miscarriages of justice, and failures of token accountability and reform measures. It also makes a compelling and provocative argument against calling the police.

(Haymarket Books has made the e-book available for free [via their website](#))

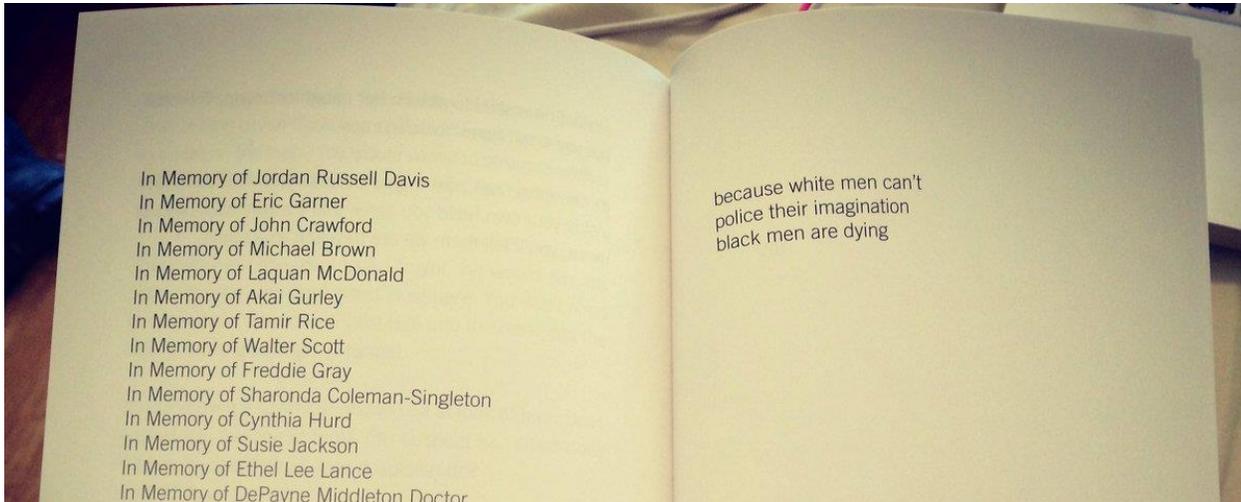
9. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, 2014

In this book-length poem, Rankine recounts mounting racial aggressions in ongoing encounters in twenty-first-century daily life and in the media. Some of these encounters are slights, seeming slips of the tongue, and some are intentional offensives in the classroom, at the supermarket, at home, on the tennis court with Serena Williams and the soccer field with Zinedine Zidane, online, on TV-everywhere, all the time. The accumulative stresses come to bear on a person's ability to speak, perform, and stay alive. In essay, image, and poetry, *Citizen* is a powerful testament to the individual and collective effects of racism in our contemporary, often named "post-race" society. An especially powerful segment (see image below) is a two-page poem commemorating the victims of police brutality. With each new printing of the book, the names of new victims are added. One day George Floyd will be

there, too. A haunting reminder of structural violence. (Available online at AUB libraries).

10. Ava DuVernay, director. *13th*

In this essential documentary, filmmaker Ava DuVernay explores the history of racial inequality in the United States. She examines the economic roots that underlie racism, from slavery until today, before focusing on the fact that the nation's prisons are disproportionately filled with African-Americans. This look into the prison industrial complex is condemning and reveals the myriad ways in which racism is written into the law (Available for streaming on Netflix)



Excerpt from Claudia Rankine's award-winning volume Citizen: An American Lyric