

## PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY

## Blackness, Citizenship, and the Transnational Vertigo of Violence in the Americas

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When a Missouri grand jury decided not to indict Officer Darren Wilson for the shooting death of Michael Brown on November 24, 2014, the United States erupted into a symphony of protests, the likes of which we have not seen since the civil rights movement. Indeed, we are witnessing the dawn of a new movement, but this movement is about our national politics. It is about an emerging global politics of race, citizenship, violence, and nation that requires us as anthropologists take stock of our approaches to these topics.

Since 2005 I have been working with black political organizers in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, in the fight to denounce and demystify anti-black state violence. As an anthropologist, my collaborations have been with the grassroots community action network Quilombo X and the campaign React or Die!/React or Be Killed! (hereafter, React or Die! Campaign). This experience has led me to write about and analyze the relationship between blackness, citizenship, and national belonging in the Americas. Specifically, I consider anti-black state violence a performance of the modern American nation-state. In other words, state violence is a process of embodiment and subject making with plots, scripts, and spectacles that have tangible, material effects (e.g., Smith 2008). My work also recognizes the global patterns that connect local black experiences to transnational ones, like police violence. This essay is a reflection on those processes and their current political implications.

On August 22, 2014, while demonstrators in Ferguson, Missouri, headed to the streets to face another day of confrontation with an excessively militarized police force in the first weeks of protest following the death of Michael Brown, over 51,000 people in cities across Brazil also took to the streets to speak out against police brutality and racial profiling. However, their primary motivation was not the death of Michael Brown. The II (Inter)National March Against the Genocide of Black People, organized by the React or Die!/React or Be Killed! Campaign, was a nationwide protest to draw attention to the fact that according to official counts, Brazilian police kill approximately six people per day, totaling 11,197 over the past five years. This compares to approximately 11,090 people killed by the police in the United States over the past thirty years. Approximately

70 percent of those killed are black (Waisel 2012). Black people in Brazil are three times more likely to be killed by the police than their white counterparts (Cano 2010; Mitchell and Wood 1999). The numbers do not adequately reflect the gravity of this phenomenon. Records on police homicide are voluntarily kept, produced intermittently, and not reported by most urban cities (Lemgruber and Smith 2003). Moreover, most of the deaths caused by the police are not even registered as homicides. Instead, they are recorded as "death caused by resisting arrest" (a controversial category that in essence allows police killings to be classified as suicides). This also does not take into account police death squads, "off-duty" police officers who engage in vigilante-style killings (Amnesty International 2005). Recognizing that the statistics on police homicide are grossly underreported and the disproportionate majority of homicide victims in Brazil are black, the crisis of anti-black police brutality is much graver than it actually appears.

As the march began, the women leading the demonstra-

was not a fly on the wall. My personal implication in this struggle hung around my head like a fog. As a black mother of two boys, I am acutely aware that the state violence that stole the lives of the young people being remembered in both Salvador and Ferguson that day could easily have been enacted upon my children. Regardless of my geographic location, at home in the United States or abroad in Brazil, the realities of anti-black state violence followed and engulfed me. It was this sense of urgency that led me to work in solidarity with the React or Die! Campaign back in 2005. It is this personal imperative that has led me to continue working with them until today. Like most activist anthropologists, my work is about political solidarity (Hale 2006). Yet it is also about survival, and it is this distinction—solidarity versus survival—that also pushes me to consider the theoretical implications of this moment. The stakes of our reflections on Ferguson and Salvador are not just theoretical. For many of us, they are a matter of life and death.

For years, most anthropologists (with notable exceptions) have shied away from explicit discussions about the global politics of blackness and citizenship. Anthropological conversations around the question of citizenship have tended to focus on the politics of state belonging or cultural citizenship (e.g., Basch et al. 1994; Caldeira 2000; Holston 2008; Ong 1996; Rosaldo 1997; Stolcke 1995). Yet, as Kamari

long history of deadly police racial profling in the United States, Brazil, and elsewhere. For many of us, anti-black police violence is an extension of lynching. There is an eerie resonance between Michael Brown's body being left to lie in the street while his mother watched for four hours before it was removed, the spectacular display of tortured black bodies swinging from trees across the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries, and Tony's story of being forced to dig up his son from a clandestine grave after a police death squad killed him (Smith 2013). Diasporic realities of anti-black state violence resonate far beyond national boundaries, constitute the paradox of black citizenship, and indicate the need to expand our definition of race to also include the affectual economies that produce our selves as racialized, political subjects.

#### NOTES

1. These numbers were reported by the Brazilian Police Forum (see <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/brazilian-police-kill-6-people-a-day-study-finds/>, accessed February 2, 2015).
2. Throughout this essay, I use the word ~~black~~ to refer to the word *negro* in Portuguese. *Negros*, those classified as (brown skinned) and *pretos* (dark skinned), make up 51 percent of the total population of Brazil.
3. See Darren Wilson's full testimony transcript (St. Louis, MO, Grand Jury Volume V, September 16, 2014).

Politics in the Time of Multiculturalism. New York: Palgrave  
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1997 Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism.

graduate student by white peers and program staff despite a lack of resemblance.

The panelists also made innovative programmatic recommendations for recruitment and retention of anthropology graduate students from underrepresented groups with practical implications to augment the number of future anthropologists. These strategies included the creation of outreach programs at the high school level; workshops that would encourage faculty to recognize issues faced by students of color; increased availability of student resources such as graduate assistantships and research funding; more

on its social class origins. The authors stated that apparently not much had changed since the 1973 report (Hutchinson and Patterson 2010:3). Evidence, perhaps, of further dividing and subdividing (Wolf 1980) was the proliferation and growth of AAA sections including the Association of Black Anthropologists, the Association for Feminist Anthropology, the Association of Indigenous Anthropologists, the Association of Latina and Latino Anthropologists, the Association for Queer Anthropology (formerly Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists), and the Association of Senior Anthropologists.

In 2012, AAA President Leith Mullings formed the Task Force on Race and Racism to develop strategies for recruitment and retention of racialized minorities in the anthropological workforce. At the 2013 AAA meeting, Karen Mary Davalos and Karen Brodtkin organized an open panel discussion entitled "Numbers Matter: How Do We Create a More Racially Diverse Anthropology?" This event was an open strategy session with participants from subfield and section leadership, designed to help the task force develop a specific plan for recruitment and retention of students of color. Following up on the results of the panel, in February of 2014 the AAA offered a 51-minute webinar called "Best Practices: Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Minorities in Anthropology Programs," hosted by Rosemary Joyce. In it, Joyce suggested how to develop a pipeline to graduate education, practice comprehensive admissions review, and establish clear benchmarks for minority graduate student progress as ways to recruit and retain students from underrepresented groups (Joyce 2014). Yet, for a number of historical reasons, anthropology continues to lag behind minority science and engineering degree holders. Only 2.7 percent of anthropology degree holders identify as holders.

Scholars Program, and international students are given special consideration for graduate assistantships, which come with tuition waivers. The department provides an endowed scholarship for minority students in archaeology, the J. Raymond Williams Memorial Scholarship in Public Archaeology, and students are regularly notified about the AAA Minority Dissertation Fellowship and other funding sources. However, as the SfAA panelists suggest, these efforts alone are insufficient to ensure the recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups.

With the goal of institutionalizing policies to encourage greater inclusiveness and accountability to anthropology's many publics, our committee to examine issues of departmental diversity has proposed our own "Three Rs" of recruitment, retention, and representation.

#### Recruitment

The department is establishing graduate student recruitment channels by producing materials to distribute to colleagues in historically black colleges and universities and Hispanic-serving institutions. Likewise, the department is searching for ways to support ongoing efforts to diversify the faculty. These are not easy, given the current political climate and legal challenges to programs that promote student and faculty diversity. One method used in the past is to place graduate students on search committees, including students from underrepresented groups. It should be noted that, like the University of Washington, we are seeking to expand on the notion of an underrepresented group to move beyond the association with race and ethnicity to social class, disability status, age, and sexual orientation—that is, the very criteria used in discriminating against people. This is not to undermine historical efforts at inclusion by anthropologists of color. It is to aid and abet those efforts but also to acknowledge the interrelationship of dimensions of difference and, at a practical level, to formulate different strategies and metrics for further diversifying the graduate student and faculty body. The overall ethos is the spirit of even more inclusiveness. One way of increasing inclusivity is asking all applicants to the graduate program to indicate how they would bring diversity to the department as part of their statement of purpose essay required for admission.

#### Retention

Retention of students from underrepresented groups starts from the pragmatics of funding. Many African American and Hispanic graduate students are able to earn a McKnight Fellowship, but the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the AAA, the Ford Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and other sources also offer funding opportunities for members of underrepresented groups. We are becoming proactive with external funding possibilities by devoting staff hours to searching for these fellowships

In revealing shared experiences and ongoing efforts, we hope that we will stimulate further dialogue on diversity with the aim of amassing and sharing examples of Óbest practicesÓ to address what we regard as a pressing problem in a profession that aims to reach out and work in diverse communities. We owe it to our publics to create programs and future researchers and policy makers that can operate inside and outside the academy and in the public sphere.

University of Washington

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