

Public Statement on the State, the Police, and Racial Violence

Along with the longer history of anti-Black racism, police brutality, state violence, and Black death, the recent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade worry us, pain us, and illustrate clearly the foundations and histories of anti-Black racism across the US, Canada, and Mexico. Further as the recent police shooting of Eric “Gato” Rosalia and the terrifyingly high rate of Indigenous women being murdered and disappeared, we see racialized state and vigilante violence against Black, Indigenous, and people of color as expression of ongoing colonization and white supremacy. As members of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS), we denounce and condemn all forms of state violence and corresponding vigilantism that make African Americans, Black diasporic subjects, and Black communities vulnerable to state forces of detention, incarceration, bodily harm, violence, and death.

As scholars who are committed to studying the relationship between race and racism, sport, sporting bodies, citizenship, the state, and colonialism, we understand that the historical legacies of colonialism, chattel slavery, and white ethno-nationalism continue to create and justify racial logics that lead to the increased death of Black and other people of color. At this present conjuncture, we understand that the ways that anti-Blackness has infiltrated the realm of sport. We have seen this through the treatment of Black players on the hockey rinks, in the baseball fields, on the basketball courts, on the football/soccer pitch, on the tennis courts, and in many other sporting realms. The consolidation of police power and the resulting embodiment of such authority through deadly violence against Black communities in many ways conjoins sports, the state, and the mechanisms/policing apparatus of the state. As a result, the activism of athletes and coaches across the realm of amateur and professional sports for BlackLivesMatter, for Indigenous rights, and for the rights of marginalized communities prove vital in calling out and naming anti-Black racism and racist states. Additionally, Tony McDade’s murder at the hands of police in Tallahassee, Florida, also illustrate clearly how anti-Black violence has been racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, religiously ethno-centric, and transphobic.

Resistance to anti-Black violence has been met by police forces, the same architects of anti-Black violence and agents of Black death. The discourses surrounding Black protest and struggling for BlackLivesMatter has also been met with symbolic, corporeal, and material violence on and off the sporting field. Thus, Donald Trump’s recent tweet classifying the protests against George Floyd’s killing as “looting” by “thugs” and calling on police and the national guard to “shoot” protestors illustrates the ways that colonized and racially marginalized communities are labelled as danger and their voices silenced. For example, we have seen the response by the US nation-state and the larger International Olympic Committee against the Olympic Committee on Human Rights demand for justice at the 1968 Olympics. Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf’s story of exile from the NBA because of his critique of U.S. imperialism is telling. Similarly, politicians have asked LeBron James to “shut up and dribble” when he was advocating for BlackLivesMatter. The players on the Minnesota Lynx and New York Liberty were denigrated by local police for standing for BlackLivesMatter. Colin Kaepernick knelt to call to attention various social issues ravaging the United States and was exiled from professional football. Serena Williams and Venus Williams have been policed and chastised for their politics,

aesthetics, and bodily comportment. Ariyana Smith, a basketball player at Knox College, was reprimanded and rebuked for protesting the police killing of Michael Brown.

As sport scholars who study the transnational and global impact of sport and sporting cultures, we are deeply concerned with the ongoing incidents of police violence against communities of color. We recognize that anti-Black racism reflects a longer history of police forces as the tools and systems of white supremacy in North America and in many parts of the globe. As critical scholars of sport, race, and justice, we underscore the formations of nation-states and the monopoly over violence invested in police department in order to protect racial capitalism, hetero-patriarchy, and the regime of rights. In this respect, we underscore how settler-colonial nation-states utilizes the force of police to silence, marginalize, and kill a wide swath of communities of color. In this respect, we acknowledge the long history of abuse, policing, dislocation, and death faced by Native, First Nation, and Indigenous communities across North America, Australia, and New Zealand. We also acknowledge the ways that the police have been critical to anti-Semitism and Jewish death across Europe and the United States. Nation-states have employed the police to maintain the power of racial hetero-patriarchy, limit challenges to the state, and naturalize its boundary-making of human and non-human. The protests on the sporting field and in our streets have been a challenge to the power of the state and its monopoly on violence.

Therefore, we recognize that marginalized and colonized communities are most impacted by the nation-states' police and most likely to be housed in their countries' respective prison-industrial complex. Communities of color, working-poor communities, and LGBTQI communities are especially precarious and more likely to face the wrath of the nation-state and its police force. We, as members of an academic organization and as scholars with a commitment to strategies of decolonization, condemn anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, and all forms of violence against marginalized communities that emerge through police acts and police departments. We support calls to reconstruct policing in our countries including the prison abolition movement, we support calls for campus police to condemn racial violence by police on the national scale, hold politicians accountable, and elevate the voices of protesting athletes and the voices of the most impacted communities. In the process, we make a call to foreground radical forms of protection and love, resistance and community-building, and form expansive collaborations in order to respond to the current state of police violence.

Respectfully,

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