Afro 220: Introduction to Research Methods

Police Brutality, The State and the Killing of Kiwane Carrington

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Background

In the Spring of 2010, I designed and taught an introductory research methods class for undergraduates at the University of Illinois for the Dept. of African American Studies. I proposed teaching qualitative (ethnography, autoethnography, case study) and interpretive methods (textual and policy analysis) to analyze the death of a local, African-American teen, Kiwane Carrington, at the hands of the local police department. I had met Kiwane through my community work as an artist when he participated in an arts-based program I facilitated along with my daughters at the Don Moyers Boys and Girls Club. As it turned out, all three of my daughters knew Kiwane. It was through one of them that I learned of his death, calling me at 1:30 a.m. to tell me one of the boys from my program had been killed by the police. As such, I had a personal interest in understanding the life events that transpired between the time I had experienced Kiwane as a boy who eagerly waited at the door to help me carry the drums and enthusiastically played them while singing and reciting African proverbs, until his untimely death at the hands of a Champaign police officer.

Kiwane was 15 years old at the time he was shot to death by Officer Daniel Norbits after Norbits and the Chief of Police, R.T. Finney, arrived at the scene of a suspicious activity call. Kiwane and Jeshaun Manning-Carter, also 15 had been released from school early that day and Kiwane returned to the home in which he had spent the night to retrieve a jacket. It was raining. When the police arrived and discovered them at the rear of the home, the officers told them to get on their knees. According to the officers, the youth refused. Allegedly Jeshaun attempted to walk away, and Chief Finney used force in an attempt to subdue him. Norbits, who was with Kiwane, claims that he was distracted by the events and somehow his gun discharged. States Attorney Julia Rietz, wife of a police officer, decided not to press charges. Norbits received a 30 day suspension without pay. Lawyers for the family are filing a civil suit with the Department of Justice.

It was learned that on October 1, 2009, a few days prior to Kiwane’s shooting, the Champaign Police Department had instituted a new “Use of Deadly Force” policy that reads in part: A peace officer is justified in using deadly force only when: a) he reasonably believes that such force is necessary to prevent death or great bodily harm to himself or another; or, b) Such force is necessary to prevent the arrest from being defeated by resistance or escape…”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Unfortunately, young Kiwane’s killing was not an anomaly. The murder of unarmed Black at the hands of the state’s policing force has been a part of the social relations between whites and Blacks since the days of enslavement when paddy rollers and slave patrols would hunt down Blacks who had escaped from captivity, been involved in an insurrection or were the collateral damage in the aftermath of rebellions. These killings occurred with impunity except for in those rare cases when a property owner was compensated for their loss of property. Under certain circumstances, families are compensated through wrongful death claims and civil rights violation, but seldom are officers of the state indicted in their deaths. These acts of violence on Black citizens have precipitated several of the major race riots that occurred in the United States, i.e. the Harlem Riot of 1964, Philadelphia race riot of 1964, Watts Riots of 1965, 1967 Newark Riots, 1967 Detroit Riots and, more recently, the 1992 Los Angeles Riots following the acquittal of 4 officers in the videotaped beating of Rodney King.

In what follows, I contextualize Kiwane’s death the way in which I did for the class: by discussing Kiwane in relation to other high profile police killings of unarmed citizens and by discussing the dynamics and the symbolism of what is called “The North End,” the predominantly Black community just north of the university campus. I then look at juridical processes that have been used by the state to isolate and control the masses of Blacks since slavery. I use the example of contemporary anti-loitering laws, tracing them to vagrancy laws used on Blacks to return them to a form of enslavement through the convict lease system. Afro 220 student, Justin Allen, expands on this topic in his paper and website. I outline the pedagogical process and the readings used in the course followed by the title and abstracts from each student’s final paper. I conclude by offering my personal *raison d’etre* for doing this work as a member of multiple, overlapping communities.

Recent High Profile Cases of Police Brutality against Unarmed Black Citizens[[2]](#footnote-2)

* February 4, 1999, four New York City policemen searching for a rape suspect knocked on Amadou Diallo's door to question him. When he came to the door he reached inside his jacket, at which point the officers shot at him 41 times, hitting him with 19 bullets. The object Diallo was reaching for turned out to be his wallet. The officers were later acquitted.
* On November 21, 2006, 92 year old Kathryn Johnston was shot 5-6 times by three police officers who had entered her home in Atlanta, Georgia on a no-knock warrant looking for someone accused of selling drugs. Allegedly, Ms. Johnston fired through the door thinking she was the victim of a home invasion. The officers returned 39 rounds. In this case, it was discovered that the officers had falsified the warrant, planted drugs after the fact and attempted to bribe a witness. All three pleaded guilty to conspiring to violate Johnston’s civil rights and were convicted and sentenced. The city paid the family $4.9M.
* Nov. 25, 2006, Sean Bell, a 23-year-old New York City man due to be married later that day, walked out of a Queens strip club, climbed into a gray Nissan Altima with two friends who had been celebrating with him - and died in a hail of 50 bullets fired by a group of five police officers. The officers involved were acquitted. One officer, Michael Carey, who claims to have been struck by Bell’s car as he attempted to flee the assault, is suing Bell’s estate for his injuries in response to the wrongful death lawsuit brought against him and the other officers by Bell’s family. http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/sean\_bell/index.html
* In the early hours of New Year’s Day, 2009, Oscar Grant was shot in the back as he was handcuffed along with three others on the platform in a Bay Area Rapid Transit stop by a BART police officer, Johannes Mehserle. The shooting was captured on video and circulated the globe via youtube. Perhaps due to the exposure, Mehserle was convicted on the lesser charge of involuntary manslaughter which ‘could’ carry up to four years when he is sentenced in November 2010.
* On May 16, 2010, police searching for a murder suspect threw a flash grenade into a home where adults and children were sleeping before shooting into the home, striking a sleeping, 7 year old, Aiyana Jones in the head. The police first attempted to claim that the officer’s gun discharged during a brief altercation with the grandmother, however, the officers had been accompanied by the film crew for a popular crime reality TV show, First 48 Hours. The family’s lawyer claims the video provides evidence that the officer shot from outside the home. The case is currently under investigation.

The North End Community and Black Containment Laws

In understanding the spatial and geographic location of residents in what is called “The North End,” it was necessary to look at historical patterns of segregation: the way Blacks, immigrant populations and minority groups are sequestered into spaces once habited but left following neighborhood decline and the expansion of the city. In the North End of Champaign, railroad tracks, old and dilapidated housing and a lack of commercial development characterize the area. Additionally, following the concentric pattern of city development (Chaskin, 1997), the area immediately surrounding the downtown area, once an area of commerce, shows signs of decline and decay: rust, shuttered businesses and vacant lots over grown with brush and strewn with litter. In an effort to revitalize the area, newer subsidized housing has been built as well as mixed income properties, with larger, newer homes to attract solid working and middle class Black families back to the neighborhood. Despite these attempts to modify the environment and the structures that are situated therein, this area is heavily patrolled and policed with the police station located at the southern edge of the community resembling and occupying force. Students discussed this form of colonizing and colonial administration through the works of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) who argued that the elite choose to self-segregate in the better areas of the city, town, state, with access to pristine public spaces, vibrant commercial areas, healthy food and quality schools. Meanwhile, poor and undesirable populations are quarantined as if they were diseased (Foucault, 1975), festering in areas that are compromised by environmental and sensory pollution. Foucault argues that in these instances, the police act to control the spread of disease (the diseased) to the larger social body.

The plantation economy operated on the similar logic, relegating enslaved Blacks to slave quarters that were typically located on the edges of the plantation where, following revolts and resistance movements, became monitored by “paddy rollers” and white vigilantes. These poor, uneducated whites were granted by law, powers to capture, maim and even kill Blacks with impunity. As a result of insurrections staged most notably by Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and John Brown, laws were enacted to prevent Blacks from gathering, to limit contact with northern Blacks and whites, to prohibit Blacks from owning guns and ammunition, and to enforce strict curfews that forbade Blacks to be outdoors or in specific locations at certain times of the day.

Those statutes, developed for the regulation of enslaved populations, are the genesis of contemporary laws that seek to regulate, confine and control Blacks. Following the Civil War and abolition of chattel slavery, pro-slavery forces strategized to maintain the control of a now free labor force. The 13th Amendment abolished slavery except for those convicted of a crime. The text of the 13th Amendment reads as follows:

1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.
2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

The construction of vagrancy laws allowed Blacks to continue to be held in involuntary servitude. These laws criminalized unemployment, poverty and Black leisure time. The first vagrancy laws originated in England as an evolution of earlier “poor laws” which sought to penalize unemployed, able-bodied individuals. Vagrancy laws were used to punish undesirable or “immoral” persons considered to be dangerous because of their “potential for engaging in criminal conduct.” These laws criminalized a person’s social status rather than bad acts. During the colonial era, the United States developed similar laws based on the English model. In 1837, the Supreme Court, in Mayor of *New York v. Miln* (1837) issued the following *obiter dictum*: “We think it as competent and as necessary for a state to provide precautionary measures against this moral pestilence of paupers, vagabonds, and possible convicts; as it is to guard against the physical pestilence….”[[3]](#footnote-3)

In codifying practices, purportedly, in the war on drugs, numerous urban areas attempted to enact “anti-loitering” laws. For example, in 1992, the city of Chicago adopted an anti-loitering law (Chicago Municipal Code 8-4-015 (1992) that aimed to restrict gang related activity, particularly as it related to violent crime and drug trafficking. The law defined loitering as, “remain(ing) in any one place with no apparent purpose.” Police officers were given the right to disburse such persons of, in the event of resistance/disobedience, the offenders could be jailed, fined or given community service. However, in 1999, the Supreme Court of the United States (*Chicago v. Morales*, 527 U.S. 41) ruled the law unconstitutional stating that it was ambiguous and didn’t provide citizens with clear guidelines as to what was and was not acceptable conduct. In 2000, in an attempt to circumvent charges against the unconstitutionality of the ordinance, Chicago adopted a revised version of the ordinance which defined loitering as “remaining in any one place under circumstances that would warrant a reasonable person to believe that the purpose or effect of that behavior is to enable a criminal street gang to establish control over identifiable areas, to intimidate others from entering those areas, or to conceal illegal activities.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Despite the admission of Champaign police that they do not have a gang problem—as witnessed by Afro 220 student, Brian Thompson during his ride-along with local police—groups of Black men gathered on the streets, in front of homes or on the corners, are stereotyped by the police as unemployed, mischief making, miscreants. Young men and boys who may otherwise by law-abiding citizens gathered to socialize and engage in leisure time activities are stereotyped as possible gang members and criminalized. Blacks from the North End community are routinely stopped, forced to show identification in order to have their names run through a database to check for outstanding warrants, searched, subjected to drug dogs and have their privacy and human rights violated. This was certainly the case with 17 year old Brian Chesley.

On March 30, 2007, Brian was walking an 8 year old home when he was stopped by Champaign in Frederick Douglass Park after they had left the gymnasium following a late night basketball game authorized by the Champaign Park District. Brian was attacked by three officers, pepper sprayed, and sent to the hospital. He was convicted and sentenced to serve 100 hours of community service. His lawyers sought to have the verdict overturned claiming that Champaign police officer Andre Davis was not authorized to stop Chesley, and that doing so was “selective enforcement of the law.” The park district had allowed a late, open gym causing those who had participated to have to exit through the park that the officer claims was closed. Stopping citizens, primarily Black citizens, and forcing them to present identification on demand is reminiscent of requiring enslaved Blacks to show permits to be off their plantations or South African pass laws. As a class we concluded that despite the signing of the 1865 Emancipation Proclamation and the adoption of the Reconstruction Amendments, new Jim Crow laws centered around the criminalization, incarceration and extermination of Blacks demonstrates that, as a group, African America has yet to achieve full civil and human rights.

Afro 220: The Class

On the first day of class, I had students read and discuss a short piece on interviewing. Towards the end of the class, I had them write down a few questions they would use to interview a classmate in order to introduce them to the rest of us. This exercise was done, not just as an icebreaker, but also as an introduction to the ideas of positionality (who has the power), voice and representation. How they represented their interviewee was how we came to know that person. The lesson learned was the moral and ethical obligations we have towards our subjects when we engage in research: “First do no harm.”

The primary readings for the course were:

* Joao Costas Vargas, *Catching Hell in the City of Angels Life and Meanings of Blackness in South Central Los Angeles*. University of Minnesota Press (2006)
* Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*. Zed Books (1999)
* Mazama, Ama (Ed*). The Afrocentric Paradigm*. African World Press (2003).
* Selected chapters from *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, Mazama, Ama (Ed).
* Selected chapters from D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics and Performance*. Sage Press (2005).
* Michel Foucault. Discipline & Punish (1975), Panopticism. Discipline. Foucault.Info. Retrieved January 22, 2010, from http://foucault.info/documents/disciplineAndPunish/foucault.disciplineAndPunish.panOpticism.html
* The State: a lecture delivered at the sverdlov university. Marxists.org. Retrieved March 11, 2010, from http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/jul/11.htm
* Wacquant, L. From slavery to mass incarceration. Rethinking the ‘race question’ in the US. *New Left Review* (2002).
* Additionally, students had to identify and read literature relevant to their individual studies

 The syllabus was designed to increase the students’ critical apprehension of the dynamics involved in the construction and function of the State (Lenin, 1919), the role of the police in the State (Foucault, 1975), the evolution of Black containment and criminalization from the period of enslavement to the contemporary moment (Wacquant, 2002), theories of community and neighborhood (Chaskin, 1997), and culturally sensitive ways of performing research in marginalized communities (Madison, 2005; Smith, 1999). I also provided links to youtube videos (music and documentaries), online journal and newspaper articles, documentaries and websites through email and an online learning environment, COMPASS. All of these resources combined to provide the students the analytic tools to deconstruct, make meaning of and theorize the phenomena of police violence against unarmed citizenry.

The second week of class I invited two members of the community, Brian Dolinar, editor for the local independent newspaper and Martel Miller, a local African-American male who had begun a police monitoring program. Both of these speakers had actively been involved in the case since Kiwane’s death to speak to the class. They provided useful information that helped the students think about the area of research they would like to pursue as it related directly to Kiwane’s death, as well as to the phenomenon of police brutality against Black citizens throughout the country. I also invited Kerry Pimblott, a doctoral student in history, to serve as guest lecturer. She had worked with a local activist organization, C-U Citizens for Peace and Justice researching the case. Professor Abdul Alkalimat lectured the students on the dynamics of the state via a 1919 transcribed lecture of Vladmir Lenin on The State. Professor Thomas Weissinger gave a presentation to the students on library resources available to them on subjects related to Kiwane’s killing.

The students selected a diverse array of topics that included ethnographic studies that assessed youth perceptions of police, the role of alternative schools and their configuration in the school-to-prison pipeline theory, police-community relations from the perspective of the police, the history of policing in the Black community, community violence and its impact on Black mothers, and the ways in which Black youth are criminalized during their early developmental phases.

The final consisted of a paper and an in-class presentation. While the paper was a traditional, APA formatted document, I encouraged students to use nontraditional ways of presenting data to the class, i.e. through performance, video, authoethnography, poetry and song. Elizabeth Clark, Erica McKinney, Antionette Moore and Tolani Odutayo created edited videos. Daneke Anderson and William Arnett used raw footage formatted on DVDs. Tanesha Clausell and Kortney Fox used Powerpoint slide shows with embedded Youtube videos. Justin Allen created a website and Cleveland Pitts wrote and performed a poem.

Student Abstracts

*Comparative Women Perspective: Police Brutality and Community Structure*

Antionette Moore, Junior, Child and Adolescent Development (Afro minor)

My proposed research will compare the perceptions of Black women on how police brutality affects the black community structure and the black youth lives, in three very different Black communities in the state of Illinois: Austin and Lawndale in Chicago, a large urban setting, and Champaign area, a small, semi-rural, college town area where Blacks are 12% of the county population. My findings focus on the negative relationship between the police and the black community, the nurturing and protective roles of “othermothers” in the black community, and the rationale behind policing practices in the black community. My proposed research questions: Why is police brutality increasing in the black communities? What do “othermothers” perceive to be the cause of police brutality in black communities? Is racial profiling on Black youth a result of their race or the symbolic community in which they live?

*Age: An Irrelevant Factor in Criminalizing Black Male Youth*

Tanesha Clausell, Graduating Senior, English (Afro Minor)

Over the last century, there have been a number of violent acts inflicted on young black men stemming from police brutality. As an outsider to exactly what is to be a young black male, this project is geared toward observing issues of black masculinity among black male youth, and the role in which race plays as an antagonist for their incrimination. Upon explaining this epidemic, I will draw from case studies of Kiwane Carrington, George Stinney, and a young black male whose name has gone unreleased to the public whom I will apply the alias “Invisible Teen”, which all involve cruel and unusual treatment on behalf of the police. These cases, along with thousands of unmentioned cases that have occurred within the United States, are representative of the violence inflicted on young black men from police brutality, and has by far exceeded the expectations and rules governing the treatment of adolescents within the judicial system. These sadistic acts expose the thesis of this paper, which explains how age becomes a most irrelevant factor in ways in which police determine the young black male’s innocence, intent, punishments, future, and character.

*Police Residency: Issue or Hype*

Tolani Odutayo. Graduating Senior, History

It is not difficult to discover that in the United States issues consistently arise surrounding the police and African-Americans. On October 9, 2009 those issues were compounded, as an unarmed 15 year old boy named Kiwane Carrington was shot dead by a police officer in Champaign, Illinois. As expected, the North end of Champaign was filled with outrage, as this was not the first time that questionable tactics have been employed on members of their community. From that outrage came the suggestion for Champaign police to have a residency requirement for their police officers, citing negative perceptions of residents as a possible contribution to Kiwane’s death. This suggestion banks on the idea that a police officer who is from the community will understand community members more, and have a greater concern for the community itself. Despite this logical reasoning, facts supporting this theory are hard to come by, which makes it difficult for said measure to ever pass through city politicians. Yet in the place of this lack of facts to support a residency requirement would be successful, is the history of the over-policing of African-Americans, and the theological concepts which can connect the police department’s separation from the North end community to the poor quality of policing, and in effect, pinpoint it as a potential contributing factor to Kiwane’s death.

*Champaign Police Perspectives on Policing*

Bianca Zaharescu, Sophomore, African American Studies

This study will investigate Champaign police perspectives regarding their role in the Champaign-Urbana community, the communities themselves that they police, and instances of negative or tragic interactions between them and the community, such as the fatal shooting of fifteen-year-old Kiwane Carrington in October 2009. My analysis will be grounded in the words and responses of members of the Champaign police force, gathered first hand. This study aims to better understand what police members themselves are thinking, for the aim of opening the type of dialogue that can facilitate the aforementioned positive movement from within the police force as well as from the community. My findings show that differing understandings of the role of history between the community and the police are one of the central factors in continuing to negatively shape community-police relations through distrust and lack of understanding. The conclusion of my research is that increased honest and meaningful conversation between the Champaign police force and members of the African American community, in particular, will be critical to making any genuine progress in police-community interactions and dynamics.

*Police Disconnect: A Study of Police and Community Relations*

Brian Thompson, Sophomore, Psychology

Throughout the country there have been a number of fatalities committed by the police in marginalized communities and brought down upon marginalized peoples. This seems to be a trend in American society dating back to the American Slave Trade. Continuing this trend after the abolishment of slavery with the Jim Crow era where countless individuals were beaten, murdered, and lynched on a daily basis. These tactics transitioned into the modern society creating modern forms of oppression where covert and institutional racist ideals followed by oppressive acts have reached their pinnacle. This succession of acts brings into question the role of Law Enforcement in modern society. Are they in place to ensure the safety and well-being of the individuals in the communities they serve or are they merely mid-level enforcers set in place to colonize and subjugate “deviant” American societies? In order to get the answers that many of us seek I will attempt to assess police relations with community members in hopes increasing their understanding of what is seen as black “deviant” communities.

*Black youth on police brutality and lack of action*

William Arnett, Junior, History

My research project involved me researching ten Black youths from both urban and suburban neighborhoods on their views of police brutality. I began my research expecting to find evidence that Blacks in America are policed more harshly than Whites. While I did acquire enough evidence to strongly support this theory, I had to rely on my interviews to help me draw a concluding solution to the issue. From them I gathered that police are viewed as positive forces to many Black Americans, but they can’t be trusted to do their jobs correctly. It was generally agreed that police are above the law and as such, they often break it. Unless there are consequences for their actions, they will continue their abuse, most often at the expense of Blacks, or other minorities. The purpose of my research is to inform people about the seriousness of the situation, because many people see police brutality as a long forgotten chapter in history.

*In Their Own Words*

Erica McKinney, Graduating Senior, Broadcast Journalism (Afro minor)

Throughout the United States relationships between the police and black youth is both challenging and dysfunctional. This is so for many different reasons. One of the main reasons for the tension in these relationships is the heavy policing in black communities or the lack of trust between the two parties. Another reason for these attitudes: the fact that many African-American witness first hand police brutality and harassment. In the Champaign-Urbana community this is clearly seen through the relationships that North End residents have with the Champaign police department. The murder of Kiwane Carrington, a 15 year old Champaign resident that who was shot and killed by the police, has only intensified the negative relationships between the two groups. In my work, my intent was to explore how African-American teens view the police. Specifically, through in-depth interviews I sought to uncover the perceptions that young, Black females have concerning the police and how these perceptions developed.

*The Death of Kiwane Carrington: North End Perspective*Daneke Anderson, Graduating Senior, Sociology (Afro minor)

Exposure to violent acts committed on youth by police is a major issue that needs to be addressed in order to prevent future occurrences. African American youth are being gunned down by individuals that have been sworn to serve and protect. A young teen named Kiwane Carrington lost his life at the hands of a Champaign officer. The proposed study is a qualitative, ethnographic study that seeks the voice of Black men who frequent the barbershop. The barbershop has historically been an important venue in the Black public sphere for critical discussion. Through these interviews, I aim to give a voice to individuals who have, heretofore, been voiceless. This study also serves the aim of discovering alternate ways or procedures the community would like to see implemented by the police that will give community members hope that another teen will not lose his or her life randomly like Kiwane Carrington.

*SLAVE PATROLLING AS A PRECURSOR TO THE CURRENT POLICING OF BLACKS IN CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS: A Sociohistorical Perspective of Slave Codes, Black Codes and Illinois Laws*

Justin Allen, Junior. Sociology

This study will track the progression of slave patrolling tactics to the way Blacks are being patrolled in Champaign, Illinois. The study will follow the transition of slave codes to current Illinois laws. The ways in which slave codes and current Illinois and Champaign laws were written to control, track, suppress and kill slaves will be detailed in this paper. The findings reflect that the link between slave patrolling and current Champaign policing of Blacks still exists. This study will examine how current Illinois and Champaign laws are rooted in slave and Black codes of the past. The results will show slave codes and Black codes have led to current Illinois and Champaign laws that allow, and promote the controlling, tracking, suppression and killing of blacks for economic gain and social control. This study will also explore events of Champaign police misconduct, abuse and murder ranging from 1969 to 2010.

*Where is the Unity between the Campus and the Local Community? Focusing on Student Involvement at the University of Illinois in the North End of Champaign*

Elizabeth Clark, Junior, African American Studies

As in the racial history of America, Champaign is still divided by train tracks separating race and class.  The North End of Champaign, where the majority of the Black community is located, is constantly dealing with issues of exaggerated police surveillance, harassment, and police brutality.  In previous years, universities have been known as institutions of protest and political activism.  This brings forth the question of how students of the University of Illinois respond to the injustice which takes place in their local community, outside of campus, such as the killing of Kiwane Carrington. Earnest T. Stringer (1996) states, “Community action research is a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems (Smith 127).”  Through interviewing a diverse group of the university’s students this research seeks to find the perception of students in terms of community involvement, with goals of increasing their awareness and desire to take action.

*Criminalization of the black youth through the education system*

Kortney K. Fox, Graduating Senior, Chemistry (Afro Minor)

Kiwane Carrington, an unarmed, 15 year old, African-American male shot and killed by police, was not only a victim of an “accidental” murder he was also a victim of criminalization by the school he attended and the location he lived in. Kiwane attended the R.E.A.D.Y. program which is an alternative school. Many students like Kiwane are quickly labeled and targeted by state and local law enforcement due to the fact that they reside in the low income communities and attend alternative schools. Examining the constructs that have created these systemic forms of oppression that have been institutionalized into the school system will better equip activists with the knowledge to make a change. I will look at all the possible constructs that cause students that attend alternative schools to be criminalized. In addition, I plan to explore the panopticon structure that is present in alternative schools along with the connection between literacy and freedom for students that attend alternative schools in hopes to draw a connection between Kiwane’s death and the criminalization of students that attend alternative schools.

Conclusion

The goal of the course, which also became the goal of individual students, was to give voice to members of Champaign’s African-American community and provide useful information to the community and concerned individuals in order to facilitate positive transformation Though this was my first time teaching a research methods course, I used the opportunity to critically engage the students in an issue of vital importance to the Black community. As a course offered by the Department of African American Studies, I felt it was necessary to construct a dialogic pedagogical approach that combined theory and application in order that students understand how to use the power and privilege of intellectual development for the sake of their local and global communities. Politics are local. How we as scholars and researchers respond to the needs of our local communities requires us to identify, explore and create best practices that can be extended nationally and globally in the pursuit of just social relations and quality of life experiences for global citizens.

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1. http://www.archive.org/stream/ChampaignPoliceDepartmentUseOfForcePolicy/CPDUseOfForce1009#page/n0/mode/1up [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more on police shootings of unarmed Black citizens see Terry Howcott’s Ravaged Cultures at the following link: http://terryhowcott.com/closeup.asp?cid=9&pid=1235&offset=61 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. New York v. Miln, 36 U.S. 102 (1837), Justia.com [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Petrovic, Gang Research.net [↑](#footnote-ref-4)