

## UCLA BLM – Student Reflections, 6/5/2020

**Kelechi Okpara** (rising MS2 and one of the MAPS coordinators of SNMA, reader):

Ahmaud Arbery

Breonna Taylor

George Floyd

Tony McDade

Eric Garner

Trayvon Martin

Tamir Rice

Sandra Bland

Atatiana Jefferson

Philando Castile

Oscar Grant

Emmett Till

If we were to list the names of all of the black cis and trans men and women we have watched murdered by police or lynched by racist members of our society this past decade...we would stand here for hours.

If we were to list the names of all of the black cis and trans men and women who have been murdered and brutalized by police but whose injustices have not been captured on camera... we would stand here for weeks.

Members of this protest, if we were to list the names of ALL of the black cis and trans men and women who have had their communities over policed, their members arrested, their livelihoods threatened, their young men and women harassed on their way to school, their access to healthcare stripped away, their ability to access affordable housing diminished, their feeling of safety eroded away in this country that their ancestors were forced to build...

If we were to list the names of the indigenous peoples whose lands we are standing on today, whose livelihoods that have also been looted from the moment the founders of this nation set foot on this land, and who are still being disenfranchised and brutalized like no other population....

If we were to stand here today for the lives of every immigrant child separated from their families and every undocumented American working to support our nation but have trouble accessing even basic care at some hospitals...I am telling you all that we would stand here today and never sit down.

None of these events are disconnected. All of these point to a profound fact that we all must realize: Our country is sick. It is taught to be sick. It has been feverish with the heat of racism and xenophobia for half a millennia. It still has the cold chills of apathy and ignorance so ingrained in its culture that it doesn't even realize that this fever has never broken and that it is slowly killing the potential of this country.

Please, look around at everyone standing next to you. The majority of us are healthcare professionals or studying to be so. Some of us are doctors who wear these white coats because we took an oath. An oath that told us to "apply for the benefit of the sick, all measures which are required." But, what does it mean when the sickness is our very society? Many took an oath to "prevent disease whenever we can, for prevention is preferable to cure." But what does it mean when the disease is allowed to ravage the bodies of black and brown communities from the moment this nation was created?

We are gathered here today because we must also realize that OUR white coats are also stained with the blood of black men and women. When we watched George Floyd's murder, many of us instantly demanded the arrest of all four police officers who callously took that man's life away...as we should. But what about the County Medical Examiner who first tried to tell us that the man we watched murdered died from underlying causes? Who should hold them accountable? What about the countless black men and women who have died from preventable disease BUT were fearful of a medical system that has experimented on their bodies for centuries? Or the black men and women who have died from preventable illness because they could not get access to health insurance and could not receive the best care that our society can provide? They all passed away from the same illness that we are protesting today. They were suffocated by the weight of social inequity and racism within our own healthcare system.

Today, as we join countless other brave Americans protesting across the nation, I want us to first look deep into our own hearts. Before we can stand as allies for the communities we serve and before we can work to heal this nation, we must first diagnose our own apathy. We must actively work to decolonize our minds and our attitudes. We must make sure that our intentions are as pure as our resolve. We cannot waver when we call for equity in our medical education system. We must not waver when we call for a reevaluation of OUR hospital

protocols and policies to be mindful of the traumas that people of color are exposed to. We must stand firm in our resolve to extend our work outside of the wards and into the sick bays of our government legislative branch. I'll be honest...we are going to be standing here for a long time until justice reaches every corner of our society...I hope you're ready.