

Black souls matter

By [David Henson](#)

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What does it mean to observe All Souls Day in the year of #BlackLivesMatter?

What does it mean to commemorate the dead in a year in which 957 were shot and killed by police?

What does it mean to talk about All Souls in a world where, to many white people, the phrase “black soul” has frequently referred to a person whose soul is cruel, evil, vile, and beyond redemption? Does it mean that, to much of white Christianity, all souls are actually white, not black? Because white is pure and black is dirty?

For too long in Christianity, light and white have been associated with sinlessness, purity, and God. For too long in Christianity, darkness and blackness have been associated with sin, evil, and Satan. But, as James Cone explains, God is black, and the whitewashing of God and Christianity has enabled all manner of atrocities against people of color throughout history.

So today, as we remember the dead with a heightened awareness of police brutality thanks to #BlackLivesMatter, we can expect more of ourselves and our observances, especially those of us who are white. We know All Souls Matter. Maybe today requires us to say aloud, “Black Souls Matter.”

In fact, I don’t see any way to observe the commemoration of the dead without staring into the startling reality that unarmed black men are *seven times* more likely to be killed by police.

How else do we commemorate the dead in a year in which an unarmed 12-year-old boy was shot within a few seconds of a police officer arriving at a playground and in which this killing was found *reasonable*? How else do we commemorate the dead in a year when a young black man’s spine was maimed in a police van?

How else do we commemorate the dead in a year in which black woman died because she was driving while black in the wrong Texas town? How else do we

commemorate the dead in a year in which nine black people were massacred while praying in Charleston? How else do we commemorate the dead in a year in which a black drummer needs help with his car and winds up shot dead by a plain-clothes cop?

How else do we commemorate the dead, those executed at the hands of the state? I don't know. But I know we must begin by saying their names:

Freddie Gray. Corey Jones. Sandra Bland. Kindra Chapman. Sheneque Proctor. Natasha McKenna. Tamir Rice. Samuel Dubose. John Crawford. Walter Scott. Clementa Pinckney. Cynthia Hurd. Susie Jackson. Ethel Lee Lance. Depayne Middleton-Doctor. Tywanza Sanders. Daniel Simmons. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton. Myra Thompson. Jeremy McDole. Christian Taylor. Darrius Stewart. Albert Davis. Eric Harris.

Shall we continue? Because the list goes on. And it spans generations of black people who were lynched, tortured, and murdered.

So today as you remember those who have died, remember especially those who have died as black victims of white supremacy, those beloved bearers of God's image who were murdered by the state. Go down the list of those who have been killed by police, executed by the state, lynched by a white mob. Name them. Remember them. Know that their souls matter. And when you've read enough to be sick to your stomach, remember there are so many more in unmarked slave graveyards, unremembered victims, souls forgotten save by God.

Remember their stories and their humanity. Remember their black bodies that bore the terrible stripes and bullets of white sin. Remember their crucifixion. Now imagine these victims in their risen power. Imagine them as our great cloud of witnesses, surrounding us, calling us to throw off every sin that hinders humanity and entangles us with death.

Then may God give us strength and may God share with us God's righteous anger that we may act in justice and love, grief and repentance.

*Originally posted at [Henson's blog](#)*