

FINDING HUMANITY BEYOND THE HEADLINE

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Background

Sean Bell, Philando Castile, and Amir Locke are just a few of the many Black lives that were stripped at the hands of America's violent vigilante police force. Professor Shana Redmond's experimental piece "The Dark Prelude: Black Life Before Mourning" promotes the recovery of Black life by analyzing individual music choices and moments of joy. In response to the sensationalized and dehumanizing nature of media reports on traffic stops and no-knock warrant home invasions, this creative non-fiction explores the musical choices made by Black individuals as a response to and refusal of destructive power structures.



Sean Bell

Moments after celebrating his bachelor's party, Sean Bell was shot by New York City police. Since his 2006 murder, his fiancée has become a vocal activist, campaigning for his story to be told through visual media. Over a dozen artists have referenced Sean Bell in their music. From David Banner to Nicki Minaj, artists across genres illustrate the pain and trauma of constantly experiencing Black death and suffering.

Methods

- An investigation of internet and social media sources from each victim's family members
- Archives of music platforms, blogs, interviews, and podcasts hint at the stories not yet told—the ones that represent individual humanity.

In this way, this research serves as a powerful and novel form of resistance against the narratives sanctioned by those whose lives were not intertwined with the subjects.



Amir Locke

Amir Locke was only 22 years old when he was fatally shot by Minneapolis Police in February of 2022. His interest in music was lifelong. From African drumming and dance classes to entertaining himself at Sonic Edge Studios while his father recorded songs, Locke found himself in the throes of the music scene from a young age. He and his older brother Andre Jr. bonded over their shared interest in music creation and production and, in the following years, began to follow in their father's footsteps.

Conclusion

The preliminary research that I conducted for "Dark Prelude: Black Life Before Mourning" is just the beginning of a much larger and increasingly pertinent project and conversation. It asks what it means to "say their names." It forces us to look between the headlines, into the families and daily lives of victims of state violence



Next Steps

Many further questions remain unanswered. As I conducted this research, I found it interesting to see a trend in responses from family members, particularly parents and partners, in how they became more active on social media following the death of their loved one. At the same time, it was moving to see how they sought support from their community on various platforms and received compassionate responses through comments, reposts, and more. The sense of community through Instagram comments alone was poignant. Amir Locke and Sean Bell are just two of the countless names of those whose lives were taken by police violence. Further studies must expand on this research and continue the work, no matter how difficult it may seem. Keep saying their names and telling their stories.

References

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