

RADICAL TEACHER

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Teaching Celia in the Age of Black Lives Matter

by Brandon R. Byrd



BLACK LIVES MATTER MARCH, JULY 2016 (IMAGE: BRANDON R. BYRD)

Introduction

The response of black activists to the acquittal of George Zimmerman on charges of second-degree murder in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin was swift. Three black women, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, wasted no time in initiating #BlackLivesMatter, a call to action and Twitter hashtag that has since blossomed into a chapter-based national organization. It has also achieved intellectual clarity as it has grown in size and stature. The official website of Black Lives Matter proclaims that when “we say Black Lives Matter, we are broadening the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state.” In fact, the movement does much more than just call attention to “the ways in which Black lives are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity.” It acts. Black Lives Matter boldly asserts that it “is working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise.” In short, the “call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation.”¹

There is no doubt that Black Lives Matter has inspired new ways of conceptualizing and combating threats to black life in the twenty-first century United States. But its defiant call for black liberation is, of course, rooted in a long history of black radical thought and action. In one of the first substantive attempts to define black radicalism, historian Cedric J. Robinson called it “a specifically African response to an oppression emergent from the immediate determinants of European development in the modern era and framed by orders of European social life from the inception of Western civilization.”² For Robinson, W.E.B. Du Bois embodied black radicalism because of his critiques of U.S. capitalism, political structures, and bourgeois culture. In more recent years, scholars have broadened the conceptual scope of black radicalism to include black women and organic intellectuals, working-class black people who understood the challenges confronting their communities and scorned the ideologies of the dominant class even if they did not enjoy the same relative privileges as traditional black intellectuals such as Du Bois.³ In that sense, no historical figure better exemplified the black radical tradition than Sojourner Truth. To borrow the words of historian Ula Y. Taylor, Truth was not only quotable but also prophetic. She “isolated the core of issues that black radicals continue to struggle with and organize around today.”⁴

Truth was remarkable. She was not incomparable, though. This essay addresses one of her contemporaries and fellow radicals, an enslaved teenager named Celia who killed the white man who owned her after years of sexual abuse. The infamous court case that led to her execution centered on the rights (or lack thereof) of enslaved women. But it revealed something much larger and much more enduring, too. Put simply, Celia’s life offers a profound example of the systemic threats to black lives that have pervaded U.S. history and the resistance that black people have forged in the face of state-sanctioned

efforts to render them powerless. Indeed, I argue that the central lesson of Celia’s resistance and her trial has been made clearer in the age of Black Lives Matter. Students who relate to the language of black liberation captured by the three black women who have crafted the most trenchant challenge to racial discrimination today are better equipped to analyze and empathize with Celia’s response to the systems of racial and gender oppression that pervaded her era. Historians must seize this opportunity. Rather than avoiding the impulse to make connections between the past and the present, we should encourage students and fellow teacher-scholars to take a multigenerational approach to the study of black radicalism, protest, and resistance. In doing so, we can best illuminate the differences between the worlds of Celia and the activists behind Black Lives Matter, appreciate the common visions of black liberation and social justice that animated both, and point the way to a better understanding of black radicalism and black resistance in the United States.⁵

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Historians know very little about Celia before 1850. It is certain that she lived in Audrain County, Missouri, a small agrarian settlement located in the central part of the Show Me State. She was enslaved, but to whom? Her first master(s) could have been any number of white farmers or planters who migrated from the east to the frontier communities along the Missouri River in the hopes of profiting from land seized from American Indians and labor wrought from African Americans. It is possible that one or more of her earliest masters used Celia as a cook, for she would assume similar household duties at a later point in her short life.⁶

In 1850, Celia became the property of a white man named Robert Newsom. Newsom was a Virginian who brought his wife, adolescent son, and infant daughter to Missouri sometime between 1819 and 1822. They settled in Callaway County, a frontier settlement adjacent to Audrain, in a moment when Missouri was at the center of a national debate on slavery. A little more than a decade after the U.S. government acquired the territory of Missouri as part of the Louisiana Purchase, the influx of thousands of white settlers from the border South raised its population beyond the threshold required for statehood. When the territorial government of Missouri applied for statehood, northern members of Congress demanded that it abandon slavery as a condition for entering the Union. Missourians who had emigrated from slaveholding states were incensed. As congressmen considered an amendment that would require Missouri to prohibit the further importation of enslaved people and introduce measures for the gradual

emancipation of enslaved people already residing in the territory, some white Missourians issued sardonic toasts to an insane proposal whose supporters deserved no less than "a dark room, a straight waistcoat, and a thin water gruel diet."⁷

It is likely that Newsom celebrated the resolution to this debate, the Missouri Compromise, that admitted Missouri to the Union as a slave state and presaged future federal appeasement of southern demands. By 1850, Newsom had carved out a prosperous existence on the banks of the Middle River, a minor tributary of the Missouri. His wife had since died but his family now included two more children, a son and a daughter born in Missouri. Both of Newsom's daughters and three of his grandchildren lived on his farm. So did four enslaved men and one enslaved boy. Their labor sustained the property

prosperous and, according to the pro-slavery logic of the antebellum South, respectable.⁸

In many respects, Newsom was representative of his community. By 1850, more than half of the white families in Callaway County were slaveholders and enslaved people constituted approximately 40% of the population of the county.⁹ Those white families implied that their reliance on human bondage did not degrade them. Instead, it brought them honor and prestige. One white resident of Fulton, the county seat, boasted to the *Missouri Republican* that his town was a place where "an elevated tone of morals pervades the community." Situated "in rich farming country" and "peopled with some of the choicest society (numbering among it many old Kentucky and some Virginia families)," Fulton was apparently "blessed with literary institutions of a high order and the great charities of the state, and the scene of scarcely any intemperance." It was, from the perspective of that newspaper correspondent, the epitome of Anglo-American civilization.¹⁰

Decades after the tenuous resolution reached in the Missouri Compromise that civilization continued to rest on the assumption that the freedom of white men was unassailable. Newsom certainly ascribed to that belief when he purchased Celia sometime during 1850. As historian Melton A. McLaurin puts it, Newsom's motivations for purchasing Celia deviated from those underlying the acquisitions of the enslaved men now laboring on his farm. To the public, Newsom could present Celia—then only fourteen years old—as a domestic servant responsible for the upkeep of his household. In private, he could exploit her in more sordid ways. From the moment that Newsom responded to advertisements or local gossip and set out on a wagon to buy Celia in neighboring Audrain County, the sexagenarian slaveholder regarded the young black girl "as both his

property and his concubine."¹¹ He deemed Celia's feelings about the arrangement inconsequential. Newsom made that clear during the return trip to Callaway County when he raped Celia for the first of many, many times.

*Celia a slave, belonging to Robert Newsom
says that she killed her master
on the night of the 23rd day of June
1855—about two hours after dark
by striking him twice on the head
with a stick, and then put his
body on the fire and burnt it
nearly up. She took up the ashes
in the morning after day light, after
breakfast, the body was not
entirely burnt up. I took
up the ashes and bones out of the
fire place in my Cabin where I
burnt the body and emptied them
on the right hand side of the
path leading from my cabin to
the stable*

*I wrote to Subscribed
before the 23rd day
of June 1855—
D. M. White J. P.*

*Celia her
mark*

TRIAL STATEMENT OF CELIA TO JUSTICE OF THE PEACE JUNE 25, 1855 (SCAN: KATHLEEN HALL)

owned by Newsom who, by then, was in his sixties. According to the 1850 census, the Newsom farm consisted of eight hundred acres (much of it improved land) worth about \$3,500. Thanks to the backbreaking work of its enslaved occupants, it produced more than 1,200 bushels of grain each year in addition to substantial amounts of wheat, rye, corn, and oats. The farm featured sizable herds of livestock, too. The enslaved men owned by Newsom tended to eighteen horses, six milch cows, twenty-seven beef cattle, seventy pigs, twenty-five sheep, and two oxen, worth a collective total of \$1,000. Of course, those enslaved laborers were also chattel. Their worth augmented their considerable work. Both made Newsom

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Teaching State of Missouri v. Celia

One of the most challenging lessons in my "African American History to 1877" course comes when we address the moment when Celia brought that pattern of abuse to an end. On that day, I begin by telling students one brief fact: on the night of June 23, 1855, a girl named Celia killed a man named Robert Newsom. They know and are told nothing more. After presenting the limited information

about historical figures then unknown to them, I next divide students into three groups. One group is tasked with finding out who Celia and Newsom were and explaining what compelled Celia to kill Newsom, the second group must define the central questions raised during the ensuing trial that pitted the government of Missouri against Celia, and the third group is assigned the job of identifying the result of the trial and clarifying the rationale of the ruling. Each group then must write their findings on the board and present them to their classmates. At the end, after we have uncovered the background of *State of Missouri v. Celia*, dissected the case, and analyzed its aftermath, students are asked to consider the historical implications of the trial. After sharing their thoughts with a partner, we then discuss our responses as a class.¹²

The only documents available to students during this assignment are those taken from "Celia, A Slave, Trial (1855)," an excellent internet resource created by historian Douglas O. Linder as part of his *Famous Trials* website.¹³ The documents from the pre-trial period include a warrant authorizing inquiry into the death of Newsom, testimony from one of Newsom's sons at the inquest hearing, the verdict of the inquest jury, and an arrest warrant for Celia. The records from the ensuing trial of Celia on charges of first-degree murder are just as complete. Students are provided with the testimonies of seven witnesses for the prosecution and two witnesses for the defense in addition to the judge's instructions to the jury. Also included are the jury instructions proposed by the defense and the prosecution, the final verdict, a failed motion to set aside that verdict, and a Missouri Supreme Court order denying Celia a stay of execution. There are even bills recording the profits gained by the prosecuting attorney, jurors, and witnesses in the case. The lone record from Celia is a sworn statement given before two justices of the peace.

Working together, students are able to piece together the life, trial, and death of Celia from these primary sources. The documents make clear the pain that Celia endured. Jefferson Jones, a white resident of Callaway County and one of the witnesses for the prosecution, gave sworn testimony that Celia had informed him that "the old man . . . had been having sexual intercourse with her." While he could not recall whether Celia said that Newsom "forced her on the way home from Audrain County"—it "was heard that he did"—Jones was certain that Celia asserted that her second child was Newsom's.¹⁴ Other witnesses corroborated that testimony. William Powell, a neighbor of the deceased Newsom, a fellow slaveholder, and a witness for the prosecution, informed jurors that Celia told him that Newsom kept "forcing her while she was sick." She had become pregnant with her third child. Her compromised "condition" was well-known within the community and the changes to her appearance were apparent to neighbors including Powell. Just as obvious was the fact that Newsom felt no need to stop his assaults on Celia even as she prepared to give birth to another child whose father would become its master.¹⁵

The sources do not just show the students black suffering, though. Instead, they also offer keen insights into black resistance. A number of the witnesses for the prosecution admitted that Celia had taken a number of

steps to compel Newsom to stop raping her. Jones told jurors that Celia had entered into a relationship with a man named George, who was also enslaved on the Newsom farm. That relationship had not dissuaded Newsom. In fact, George, feeling emasculated, had warned Celia that "he would have nothing to do with her if she did not quit the old man." Of course, Celia was trying to do just that. According to Powell, Celia had "threatened [Newsom] that she would hurt him on the condition that he would not leave her alone." She had "told the white family" about those threats, too. The hope that Newsom's daughters, one of whom was barely older than Celia, would sympathize with her and come to her aid was misbegotten. Neither of them did.¹⁶

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Celia thus took matters into her own hands. On the morning of June 23, 1855, Newsom told Celia that he would come to her cabin that night. The reason was obvious. Newsom followed through on his promise and went to the cabin despite Celia's assurance that "if he came she would hurt him." When Newsom approached Celia, his face low over hers, Celia grabbed a stick that she had placed in the corner of the cabin earlier that day. She struck him once on the head. Newsom slumped to the floor. Celia struck him again. The second blow killed her rapist. An ensuing investigation confirmed that, to conceal her act, Celia then burnt Newsom's body in her fireplace. In the morning, she concealed some of the larger bone fragments under the hearth and the floor of her cabin and carried Newsom's ashes into the yard. She would later enlist the help of one of Newsom's grandsons, who welcomed Celia's offer to "give me two dozen walnuts if I would carry the ashes out."¹⁷

The enthusiasm for that radical act of defiance is evident as students work through the documents. But it is often matched by a palpable dismay about the way in which white Missourians conducted their investigations into Newsom's death and the state of Missouri carried out Celia's trial. On June 24, 1855, Powell and other members of a search party intimidated George and compelled him to point them in the direction of Celia's cabin. Once there, the search party used half-truths and threats including separation from her children to cajole a confession out of Celia. In a sworn statement given before two justices of the peace, she admitted "that she killed her master . . . by striking him twice on the head with a stick, and then put his body on the fire." That statement would become one of the last times that Celia would have the chance to speak on her behalf. In accordance with Missouri law, Celia could not take the stand at her own trial, held in October 1855. Instead, Circuit Court Judge William Hall, the man presiding over the case, made sure that the white men and women who could participate in the trial delivered a swift conviction. He instructed the jurors, some of them slaveholders and all of them white men ranging in age

from 34 to 75 years, to disregard testimony that demonstrated that Celia had acted in self-defense. He also rejected the proposed jury instructions provided by Celia's attorney, a man who was also a slaveholder. Instead, Hall informed a jury that contained not a single peer of Celia's that "the defendant had no right to kill [Newsom] because he came into her cabin and was talking to her about having intercourse with her or anything else." At a time when debates about slavery again roiled Missouri and neighboring Kansas, such instructions assured that the jury would reinforce the absolute power of slaveholders and return a guilty verdict.¹⁸

After various students in my most recent African American history survey course suggested that Celia embodied the unique challenges faced and considerable resistance offered by enslaved women, one student, looking downward, murmured four simple words: "Black Lives Didn't Matter."

On several occasions, students have demonstrated the least amount of surprise at the aftermath of the trial. By the time we encounter Celia, our class has studied the violence that erupted after the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act overturned the Missouri Compromise, left the fate of slavery in Kansas to a popular vote, and ignited the passions of slavery's defenders and opponents alike. As pro-slavery mobs of Missourians swarmed into Kansas at the behest of prominent politicians in both states, it stood to reason that the pro-slavery sympathizers then sitting on Missouri's Supreme Court would refuse an appeal from the defense. Indeed, the state of Missouri refused a stay of execution and Celia died on the gallows on the afternoon of December 21, 1855. Before then, she delivered a child while imprisoned. It was stillborn.¹⁹

Celia and Black Lives Matter

In the past, students have consistently risen to the challenge of interpreting what the life and death of Celia can reveal to historians. For instance, in our discussions following the individual group presentations and the think-pair-share exercise, students routinely reach the conclusion at which many professional scholars have stopped. Echoing the words of historian Annette Gordon-Reed, they correctly surmise that "most particularly . . . Celia's case highlights the special plight of black women, whose bodies were used for manual labor and for the sexual gratification of white men."²⁰ They note that Celia can be understood as an archetype of enslaved women and enslaved black womanhood. Having been introduced to the pioneering scholarship of Deborah Gray White in a previous lesson, the students know that white men demanded submissiveness and domesticity from white women but still considered white women beautiful and worthy of protection. They understand that Celia experienced a much different form of sexism, one squarely rooted in her

blackness. She did not have access to the same anti-rape protections as white women in Missouri. Her children could be sold at a whim. Endless and unrequited labor was her expected fate. To paraphrase White, Celia's story is a powerful confirmation of the transformative effect of race on the experience of black womanhood during the antebellum era and beyond.²¹

This past semester was different, however. This time there was a concerted attempt to bring the focus to the beyond—to place it on the implications of Celia for today, not just the antebellum era. After various students in my most recent African American history survey course suggested that Celia embodied the unique challenges faced and considerable resistance offered by enslaved women, one student, looking downward, murmured four simple words: "Black Lives Didn't Matter." Those four words offered by the normally quiet student said it all. The case was about much more than Celia. It even transcended the exploitation of enslaved women. By linking *State of Missouri v. Celia* to Black Lives Matter, the black female student identified the ways in which justice systems beholden to white supremacy have never been and can never be considered just. She connected the hanging of Celia to the state-sanctioned deaths of numerous black men, women, and children that have come to light in recent months and years.

This was a profound and accurate connection captured in a clever rhetorical move. It was one that I had not anticipated. Unprepared to push the discussion in the direction that the student made available to our class, I facilitated an ensuing conversation that reiterated the ways in which black lives in the antebellum South only mattered to the extent that they were exploitable. Students pointed out that Missouri courts found that Celia was not authorized to use deadly force to protect herself against rape because that right was available only to white women. Whereas the sexual assault of a slave by a person other than his or her owner was considered trespass—a property crime—throughout much of the South, a court could not find an owner such as Newsom guilty of trespass against his own property.²² Put simply, we concluded, Celia faced the reality of what fugitive slave and abolitionist James W.C. Pennington called the chattel principle.²³ She was the product and victim of a time and a region in which living, breathing black people found themselves commodified. And it was not just a market or slave traders that assigned value to their bodies. Instead, it was also a legal system that paid \$104.50 to the sheriff of Callaway County, \$39.30 to each witness, \$20.00 to the prosecuting attorney, \$14.80 to the clerk of the Callaway County Circuit Court, \$12.00 to the man who provided meals to the jury, \$2.00 to the justice of the peace, and \$1.50 for each juror. In sum, taking the life of Celia was worth \$210.85, all paid to white citizens of the state of Missouri.²⁴

This was a fruitful discussion. But the student who found that "Black Lives Didn't Matter" in the antebellum South pointed towards a more meaningful lesson: Celia's life and death *do* matter. And students know that. It is clear to them that the assumptions about black life and black humanity that led to the state-sanctioned hanging of Celia also impacted the life and death of Sandra Bland, a

black woman found hanged in a Waller County, Texas jail cell after being arrested for a minor traffic violation. It is obvious that the American legal process was meant to defend the interests—even the depravities—of white slaveholders including Newsom and it is still supposed to protect white police officers including Timothy Loehmann, the Cleveland cop who opened fire on and killed Tamir Rice seconds after arriving at the park where the black adolescent was playing with a toy gun. The law has, of course, changed a good deal since the nineteenth century. Still, there is overwhelming evidence, available to students and teachers alike, that it was no more willing to protect a black boy enjoying a day at the park than it was to defend an enslaved girl attempting to protect her sexual and bodily integrity.

To be certain, the student who hinted at those connections did not just offer a useful lesson about the relevancy of the past, one that will shape my future teaching of Celia. Instead, she offered a striking illustration of the ways in which ideas spread and black radical movements blossom. Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, the founders of Black Lives Matter, have created a vibrant international organization dedicated to affirming the humanity of black people. But they have contributed to something much larger, too. If the assertion that “Black Lives Didn’t Matter” in a discussion of the experiences of enslaved people in the antebellum South is any indication, #BlackLivesMatter has become a key part of a transhistorical language of black liberation. It is a useful and effective way for a new generation to articulate complex thoughts about the singular, systemic, and enduring devaluation of black life. It is, to be sure, much, much more than a hashtag.

In essence, the unfolding story of Black Lives Matter is about the diffusion and translation of an idea. It is the story of how a generation of black millennials bearing witness to the promises and pitfalls of the Obama era have seized opportunities to express an expansive notion of social justice. It is a development unfolding in classrooms as well as civil rights organizations, a history shaped by ordinary students in addition to activists. The media has, I think, captured only part of that point. While it focused on Bill Clinton’s asinine caricature of Black Lives Matter activists as fools bent on “defending the people who kill the lives you say matter” or asked them to respond to attempts to delegitimize their work, the ideas incubated in their movement have already diffused across the world and transcended organizational boundaries.²⁵ They have breathed new life into our discussions of the black past while injecting new energy into our strivings for black liberation in the present.

So, while the future of Black Lives Matter may, as historian Jelani Cobb asserts, be unknowable, its impact is not.²⁶ In fact, it is quite clear. The deaths of black people at the hands of the state in Sanford, Florida, Ferguson, Missouri, Waller County, Texas, Baltimore, Charleston, Cleveland, Staten Island, and elsewhere revealed a crisis that birthed a movement that nurtured an ideology. That ideology—a set of ideas centered around the simple belief that black lives do and should matter—has influenced the way that a black student may see the world she inherited

and interpret the world she thought we left behind. It just might move her to think of Celia and know that “Black Lives Didn’t Matter.” How, then, can it not move us, too?

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Conclusion

On the night of December 20, 1855, several white men came to Celia’s cell to interrogate the enslaved woman whose life the state of Missouri would take the next day. Their goal was to figure out whether Celia had help in killing Newsom. According to a newspaper writer who recorded the interrogation, Celia, as she had done on several occasions before, denied that “anyone assisted her, or aided or abetted her in any way.” She again insisted that her intentions were to injure Newsom, not kill him. Something had come over her, though. Adding a new detail to her account of the killing, Celia admitted that “as soon as I struck him the Devil got into me, and I struck him with the stick until he was dead, and then rolled him in the fire and burnt him up.” There was no indication of remorse.²⁷

Scholars have seen this confession and the invocation of the Devil as a final admission or attempted defense of temporary madness, insanity, or blinding rage.²⁸ That analysis is unconvincing. As cultural historians have shown, enslaved blacks in the antebellum South did not share the understandings of the Devil possessed by their white counterparts. Rather than viewing the Devil as a manifestation of pure evil, they often characterized him as a trickster or a conjure man. In fact, some of their folktales depicted the Devil as a semi-comic figure whom less powerful black people could and often did outmaneuver. In those renditions, the Devil often resembled and took on the observed qualities of white men.²⁹

What, then, did Celia’s allusion to devilish possession mean? How should historians interpret it? The answers to those questions deserve more careful consideration. While it is possible that, in accordance with contemporary accounts, Celia, “alone and desperate” succumbed to “fear, raging anger, insanity, madness, or the ‘instigation of the Devil,’” other possibilities exist.³⁰ It is quite conceivable that Celia was the most rational person involved in her trial. There is no question that it was a near suicidal act for an enslaved woman to assault her white master. But, as numerous slave narratives including those written by other black women show, enslaved people knew that the system of slavery and the structures of racism and sexism that reinforced it were irrational. Perhaps Celia was thus trying to make her actions comprehensible to her white interrogators and interlocutors. Perhaps she was telling them that, in the moment when Newsom leered over her,

she felt possessed not by the influence of the Devil but by the spirit of his surrogate, the white man. It was, of course, the white slaveholder who, in Celia's world, wielded the most influence, who had the most power to devalue and even take life. It would have been fitting for Celia to see herself as appropriating that power as she struck her fatal blow against Newsom.

Accordingly, Celia strengthens our understanding of Black Lives Matter just as Black Lives Matter improves our ability to empathize with Celia and interpret her trial. Too often black radicalism and black resistance have been pathologized. White physicians charged that runaway slaves *must* have suffered from drapetomania, a mental illness that caused them to yearn for freedom.³¹ White journalists suggested that Celia *must* have been mad to commit such a brazen act. Given that history, it should therefore come as no surprise that critics and skeptics including Barack Obama have labelled Black Lives Matter activists as irrational social justice warriors who cannot understand that yelling is a symptom of madness not an effective political tactic.³² It should be clear that those critiques distract from a fuller appreciation of the motivations and goals of black radicals, past and present. Just as Celia rejected the racial and gender hierarchies of her day, Patrisse Cullors and her peers have made it clear that they "are not asking for our humanity or worth" or a seat at the proverbial table. Instead, they "are demanding that the breath in our bodies guarantees our right to life, our right to freedom, our right to love, dignity, and respect."³³

In the same moment that Black Lives Matter offers reasoned vindications in the face of myopic critique, the University of Michigan has launched a new initiative entitled *The Celia Project*. It has hosted public talks and developed working papers related to a case that, in the words of its founders, "illustrates the centrality of state-sanctioned violence in the lives of enslaved women."³⁴ There is no question about the accuracy of that statement or the significance of this project in our current political climate. As Black Lives Matter continues to highlight the role of the state in the systemic devaluation of black life, teacher-scholars cannot afford to ignore the clear historical examples of state-sanctioned anti-black violence. We cannot overlook the parallels or even the differences between past and present. To do so—to address Black Lives Matter without understanding the story of Celia or offer dispassionate analysis of her life and death—wrongs our students. After all, many of them are making those connections on their own. I have learned that firsthand. Those eager learners deserve the opportunity to enhance their understanding of the realities of black suffering in America and the chance to see black resistance and radicalism as rational and worthy of serious consideration rather than condemnation. By teaching Celia in the age of Black Lives Matter, we can ensure that they have both. We can provide a space where students push beyond seeing a past in which black pain was the norm and "Black Lives Didn't Matter" to envisioning a world in which Black Lives [Do] Matter and social justice is a reality, not just a dream.

Notes

¹ "About the Black Lives Matter Network," Black Lives Matter, accessed May 21, 2016, <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>.

² Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Revised Edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 73.

³ The distinction between traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals emerges from the writings of Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci. See Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

⁴ Ula Y. Taylor, " 'Read[ing] Men and Nations: ' Women in the Black Radical Tradition," *Souls* 1, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 72-80.

⁵ In this essay, the author has expanded on and revised a blog post entitled "Celia, #BLM, and the Diffusion of Black Thought" posted on the African American Intellectual History Society blog. It is accessible at the following link: <http://www.aaahs.org/celia-blacklivesmatter-and-the-diffusion-of-black-thought/>.

⁶ Melton A. McLaurin, *Celia, A Slave* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 9-10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹⁰ (St. Louis) *Missouri Republican*, August 15, 1855.

¹¹ McLaurin, 19.

¹² Depending on the class length, I have also split this exercise over two class periods, i.e. investigative work on day one and presentations/discussion on day two.

¹³ Douglas O. Linder, "Celia, A Slave, Trial (1855)," Famous Trials (University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law, accessed May 24, 2016, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/frtrial/celia/celiahome.html>). On *State of Missouri v. Celia*, see also Annette Gordon-Reed, "Celia's Case," in *Race on Trial: Law and Justice in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 48-60 and Hugh P. Williamson, "Document: The State against Celia, a Slave," *Midwest Journal* 8 (1957): 408-420.

¹⁴ "The State of Missouri Against Celia, A Slave," October 10, 1855 in Linder, "Celia, A Slave, Trial (1855)."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ McLaurin, 103.

²⁰ Gordon-Reed, 49.

²¹Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Revised Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 5.

²² Excellent analysis of the legal understandings of Celia's crime is found in Wilma King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 37-56.

²³James W.C. Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W.C. Pennington* (1849; Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1971). Walter Johnson elaborates on this concept in *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 19-20.

²⁴McLaurin, 115.

²⁵ Sam Sanders, "Bill Clinton Gets Into Heated Exchange With Black Lives Matter Protestor," *National Public Radio*, last modified April 8, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/07/473428472/bill-clinton-gets-into-heated-exchange-with-black-lives-matter-protester>.

²⁶Jelani Cobb, "The Matter of Black Lives," *The New Yorker*, March 14, 2016. This question has become clearer since the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of more than fifty organizations including Black Lives Matter, released "A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom & Justice." For an outstanding explication of the

platform, see Robin D.G. Kelley, "What Does Black Lives Matter Want?," *Boston Review*, August 17, 2016, <https://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/robin-d-g-kelley-movement-black-lives-vision>.

²⁷McLaurin, 114.

²⁸*Ibid.*; King, 48.

²⁹ See Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom*, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 40, 57.

³⁰King, 48.

³¹ Samuel A. Cartwright, "The Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race," *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 6 (September 1851): 643-652. See also, Thomas Szasz, "The Sane Slave: An Historical Note on the Use of Medical Diagnoses as Justificatory Rhetoric," *Journal of American Psychotherapy* 25 (1971): 228-239.

³² Michael D. Shear and Liam Stack, "Obama Says Movements Like Black Lives Matter 'Can't Just Keep on Yelling'," *New York Times*, April 23, 2016.

³³PatrisseCullors, "#BlackLivesMatter Will Continue to Disrupt the Political Process," *The Washington Post*, August 18, 2015.

³⁴ "About Us," The Celia Project, accessed on May 26, 2016, <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/celiaproject/about-us/>.



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