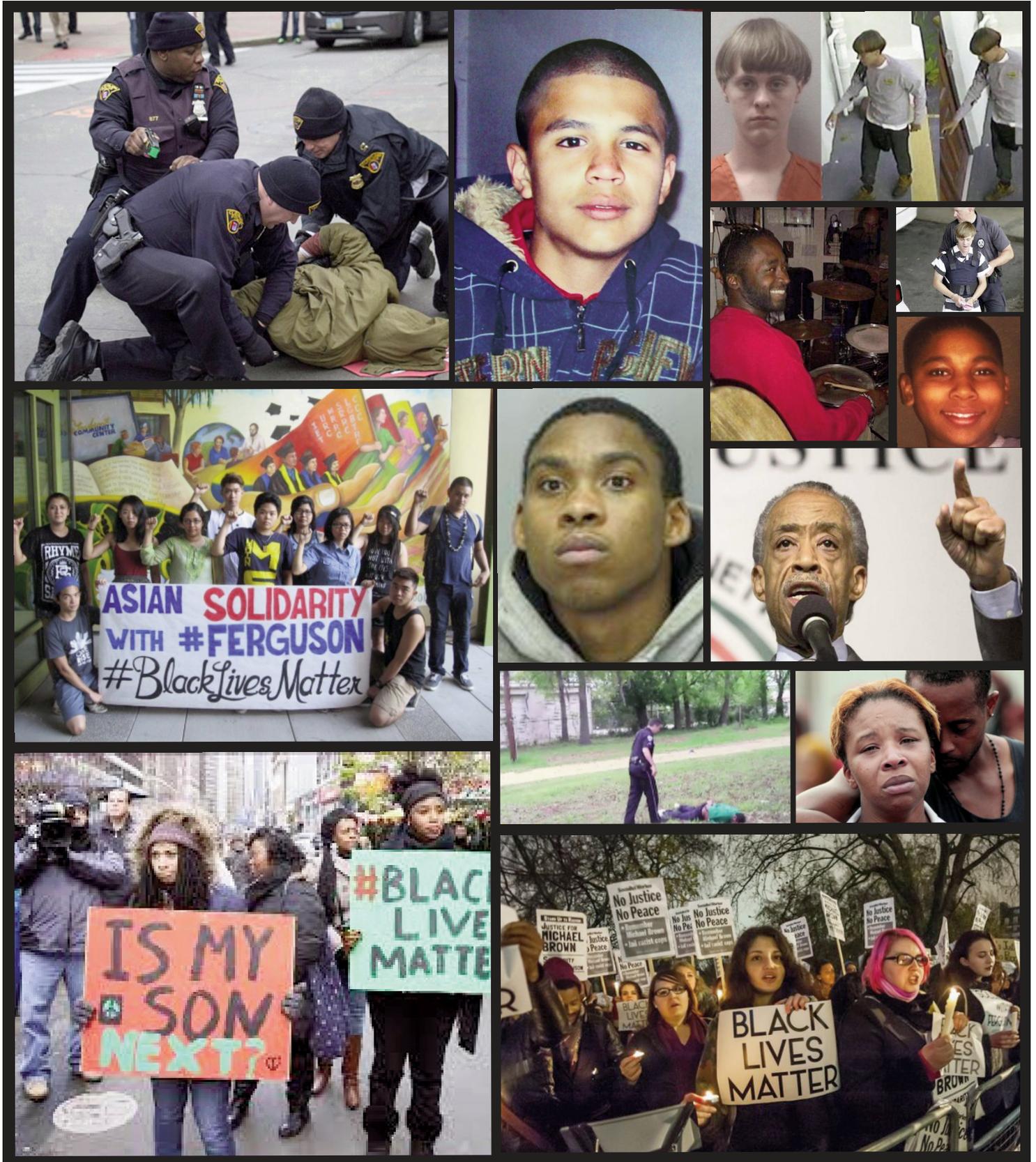


In Memoriam: Many Thousands Gone



No more auction block for me,
No more, no more,
No more auction block for me,
Many thousands gone.

No more peck o' corn for me,
No more, no more,
No more peck o' corn for me,
Many thousands gone.

No more driver's lash for me,
No more, no more,
No more driver's lash for me,
Many thousands gone.

No more pint o' salt for me,
No more, no more,
No more pint o' salt for me,
Many thousands gone.

No more hundred lash for me,
No more, no more,
No more hundred lash for me,
Many thousands gone.

No more mistress' call for me,
No more, no more,
No mistress' call for me,
Many thousands gone.

(Alan Lomax, *The Folk Songs of North America*, 1960)

Why were they here? Why had they found us? Because they knew Clifton? Or for the occasion his death gave them to express their protestations, a time and place to come together, to stand touching and sweating and breathing and looking in a common direction? Was either explanation adequate in itself? Did it signify love or politicized hate? And could politics ever be an expression of love?

Over the park the silence spread from the slow muffled rolling of the drums, the crunching of footsteps on the walks. Then somewhere in the procession an old, plaintive, masculine voice arose in a song, wavering, stumbling in the silence at first alone, until in the band a euphonium horn fumbled for the key and took up the air, one catching and rising above the other and the other pursuing, two black pigeons rising above a skull-white barn to tumble and rise through still, blue air. And for a few bars the pure, sweet tone of the horn and the old man's husky baritone sang a duet in the hot, heavy silence. "There's Many a Thousand Gone." [...]

It was as though the song had been there all the time and he knew it and aroused it; and I knew that I had known it too and had failed to release it out of a vague, nameless shame or fear. But he had known and aroused it. Even white brothers and sisters were joining in. I looked into that face, trying to plumb its secret, but it told me nothing. I looked at the coffin and the marchers, listening to them, and yet realizing that I was listening to something within myself, and for a second I heard the shattering stroke of my heart. Something deep had shaken the crowd, and the old man and the man with the horn had done it. They had touched upon something deeper than protest, or religion, though now images of all the church meetings of my life welled up within me with much suppressed and forgotten anger. But that was past, and too many of those now reaching the top of the mountain and spreading massed together had never shared it, and some had been born in other lands. And yet all were touched; the song had aroused us all.

(Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 1952)

We dedicate this issue to the many thousands gone.