

The
JBL Forum,
an Occasional Exchange

Black Lives Matter for Critical Biblical Scholarship

In his 2014 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, Fernando Segovia called for “a fusion of the critical and the political, the biblical and the worldly” (*JBL* 134.1 [2015]: 6). Segovia was not the first to do so; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza had done the same in her 1987 address. Indeed, the question of how the *Journal*, and the field, should relate to the world outside the academy has been debated since the *Journal’s* inception in 1881 (see “Editor’s Foreword: The *Journal of Biblical Literature* and the Critical Investigation of the Bible,” *JBL* 134.3 [2015]: 457–70).

The events leading to #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName, such as the killings of Trayvon Martin (Miami, February 2012), Rekia Boyd (Chicago, March 2012), Michael Brown (Ferguson, August 2014), Freddy Gray (Baltimore, April 2015), Tanisha Anderson (Cleveland, June 2015), Sandra Bland (Hempstead, Texas, July 2015), Korryn Gaines (Baltimore, August 2016), among many others, have been felt deeply both inside and outside the United States. One does not have to be a biblical scholar, or an American, to recoil at the senseless loss of lives and to deplore the persistence of violence, racism, and fear in society. But insofar as themes such as race, equality, justice, and the rule of law are present in the biblical corpus, and in the history of biblical scholarship, it seems appropriate to consider how our practices as scholars of the Bible—wherever we are located—are affected by these events and by the deeper social currents they reflect.

In this Forum, six scholars reflect on how racial violence and the movements that attempt to eradicate such violence intersect with the field of biblical studies, both as an area of research and teaching and as an academic guild, on the complex relationship between scholarship and the larger historical and social context within which we experience ourselves as scholars, as members of intersecting groups and communities, and as human beings.

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