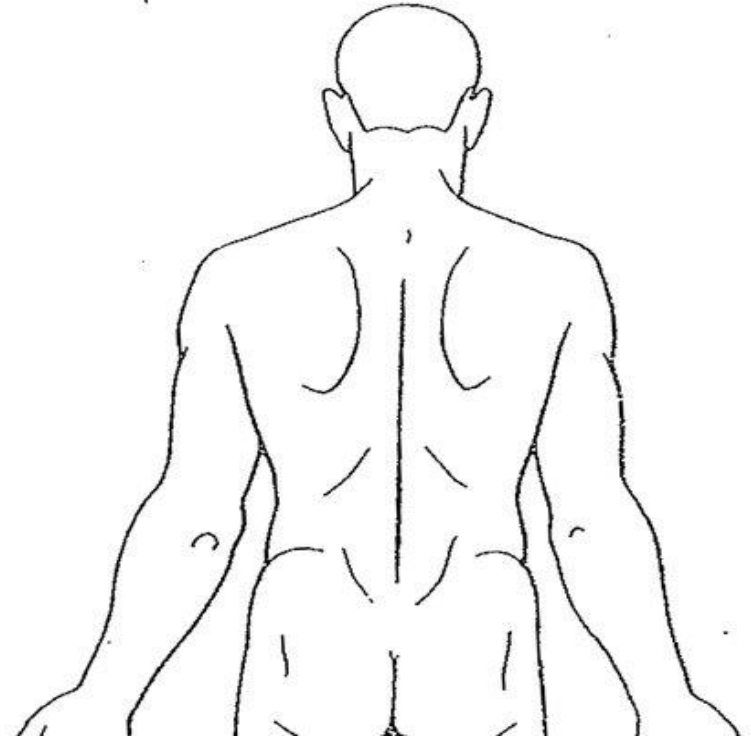
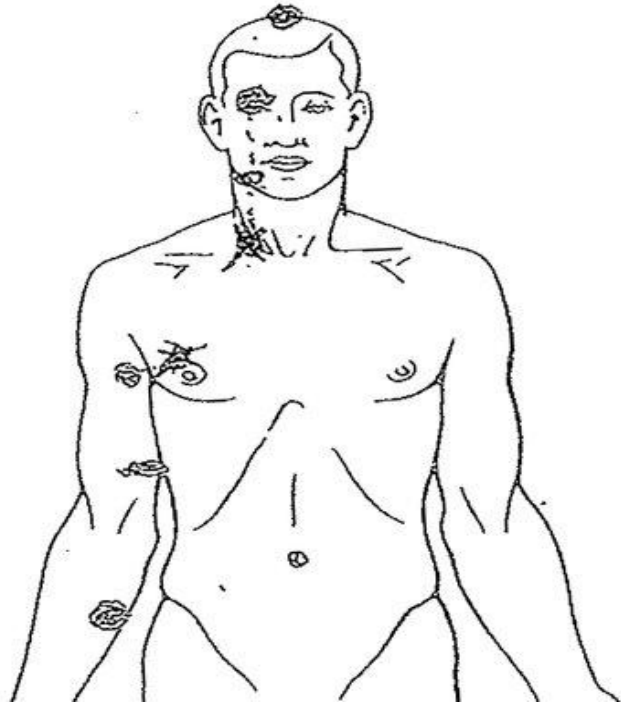


# Entry, re-entry and exit perforations, Preliminary autopsy report



*Martyrs in American Culture: Case Studies*

This summer, we focused on three identities that are often linked in Shakespeare's plays: the soldier, the martyr, and the traitor.

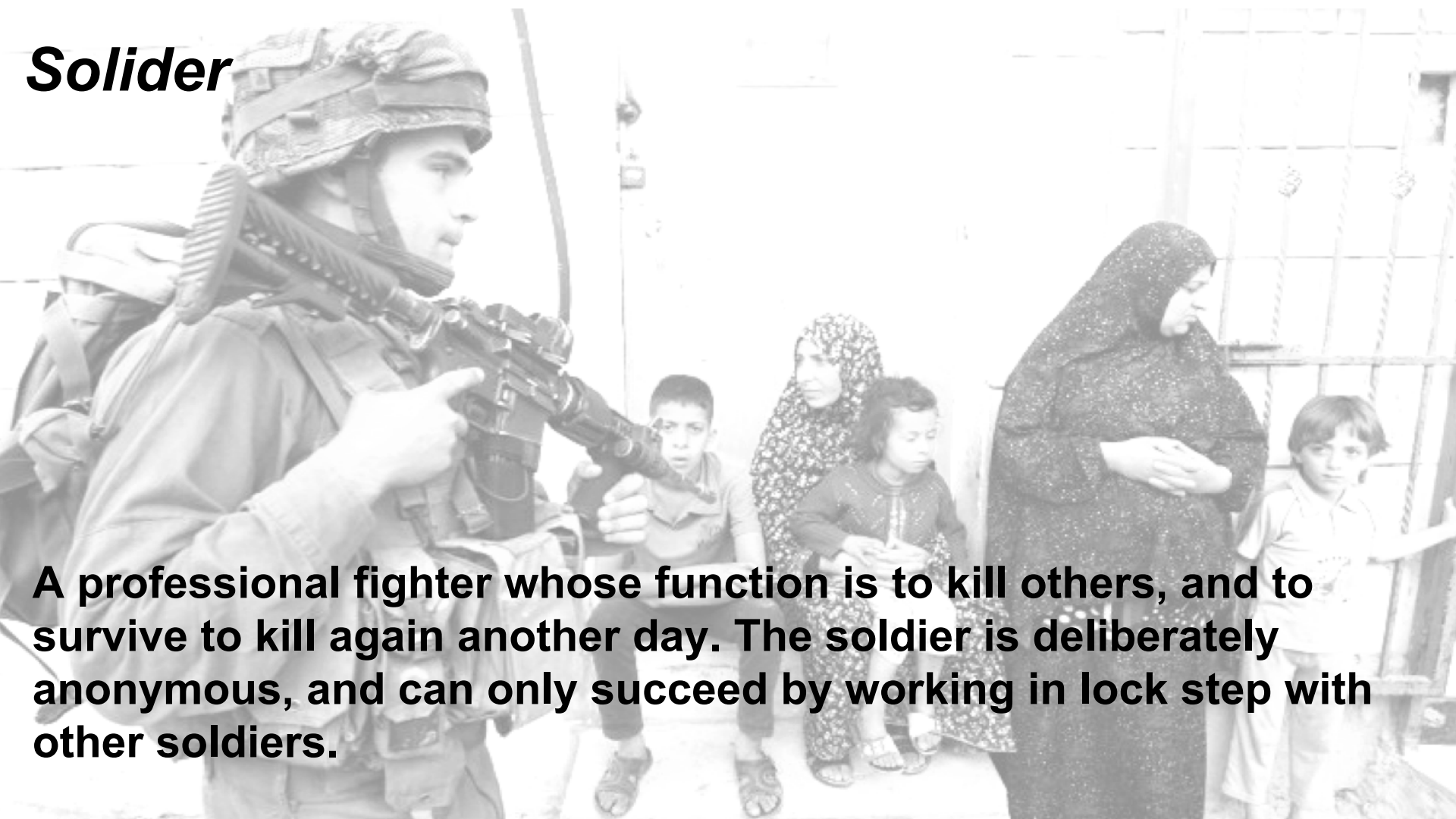
In these plays, soldiers who die exceptionally brutal deaths as a result of political unrest are transformed into either martyrs or traitors, but Shakespeare deliberately makes it difficult to determine which label best fits the character.

The plays demonstrate that the terms “martyr” and “traitor” are highly relative and mutually constitutive; you cannot have one without the other.

They also make it clear that soldiers are often transformed into martyrs or traitors by emphasizing their “otherness,” usually around race and gender.

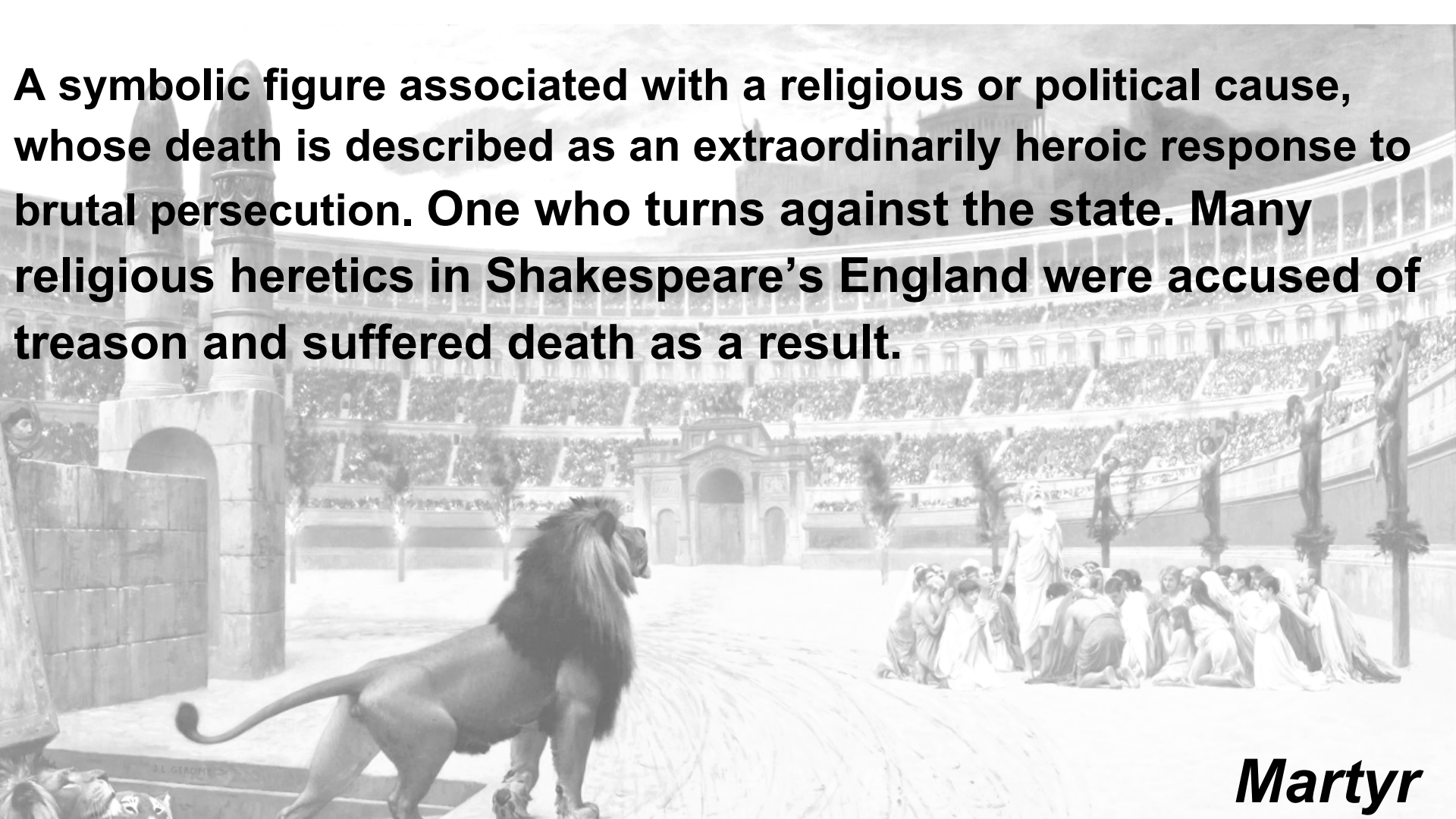
In 21st-century America, the martyr is linked in similar ways to the figure of the terrorist.

# ***Solider***



**A professional fighter whose function is to kill others, and to survive to kill again another day. The soldier is deliberately anonymous, and can only succeed by working in lock step with other soldiers.**

**A symbolic figure associated with a religious or political cause, whose death is described as an extraordinarily heroic response to brutal persecution. One who turns against the state. Many religious heretics in Shakespeare's England were accused of treason and suffered death as a result.**



***Martyr***



# *Traitor*

**A symbolic figure associated with a religious or political cause, whose death is described as an extraordinarily heroic response to brutal persecution. The term functioned the same way in 16<sup>th</sup>-century England as the term “terrorist” does in contemporary America, though the terrorist is racialized in ways that the early modern traitor was not.**

# ***Terrorist***



A symbolic figure associated with a religious or political cause, whose death is described as the result of fanaticism and/or psychopathy. The terrorist often kills others as well as themselves.

as well as

# ***Case studies***

The following slides demonstrate how the the soldier, martyr, and traitor/terrorist continue to collide in contemporary American culture.

The connection between these three figures reveals one of the most important goals of state violence: to separate those who are fit to live from those who are marked to die.



# Bowe Bergdahl





Bowe Bergdahl is a twenty-eight-year-old United States Army Sergeant who was held captive by the Taliban for almost five years from June 2009 to May 2014. The Taliban released Bergdahl in May of 2014 in exchange for five Taliban members who had been held at Guantanamo Bay.



Bergdahl's reputation has been attacked by Fox News pundits and some Republican congressmen who say he is a traitor for criticizing US military policy. They also claim that he betrayed his fellow soldiers when he left his post and walked off unarmed toward the Pakistan border.



Bergdahl's critics have also noted that his father, "looks like a Muslim" because he grew a long beard and learned to speak Pashto.



© Courtesy of Sun Valley Ballet School

Some have insinuated that Bergdahl is “narcissistic” and “anti-American” because he studied ballet.



Others have circulated a photo that appears to show Bergdahl with Badruddin Haqqani, a senior commander for the Haqqani network.

These accusations impugn Bergdahl's loyalty (he deserted his post and therefore is not a soldier), his status as a white American (he criticized the war effort and his father looks like a Muslim), and his gender (he's not a real man if he studied ballet).

As our theoretical readings demonstrate, the terrorist is often described using racial and sexual stereotypes. Bergdahl's critics use these stereotypes to transform him from a soldier into a terrorist, a threat to the state.

Such language works to justify violence against foreign "others," both at home and abroad.



**Christopher Dorner**



Christopher Dorner was a decorated veteran and a former Los Angeles Police Officer. On July 28, 2007 Dorner and Officer Teresa Evans responded to a disturbance call where they encountered Christopher Gettler, a man who lives with schizophrenia and dementia.

Two weeks later, Dorner filed an internal report claiming that Evans had repeatedly kicked Gettler while he lay handcuffed on the ground. A review board found that Dorner's accusations were untrue and he was immediately fired. Three separate appellate courts would subsequently side against Dorner and with the LAPD.



Dorner believed that his life had been ruined because he had attempted to protect and serve the American population by blowing the whistle on police brutality.

In February of 2013, Dorner enacted his revenge on the LAPD, leaving four people dead.

In the aftermath of the shootings, Dorner was transformed from a loyal soldier who put his life on the line in defense of the state into a traitor/terrorist who posed a threat to that same state.





But many saw him as a hero. Protesters marched through the streets of LA, decrying police violence and corruption. Dorner's lengthy manifesto was shared thousands of times on various social media forums and his name was tagged on walls throughout the United States.

For an untold number of people, Chris Dorner was a freedom fighter.



Others were more concerned about how police would retaliate.





On February 12th, 2013, members of the LAPD tracked Dorner to a cabin in the mountains. The cabin was burned to the ground after the officers fired tear gas into the building.

After examining the body found on the site, examiners concluded that Dorner had shot himself.

The LAPD believed it had successfully eliminated another terrorist.

But for those who rallied against police violence and in support of Dorner's vengeful conquest, his death made him a martyr.

In Christopher Dorner's mind, his role was always the same: to serve his country and the American people.



**Michael Brown**





On August 9, 2014, an unarmed 18 year-old, Michael Brown, was shot to death in Ferguson, Missouri by police officer Darren Wilson. Brown's body lay in the street for four hours before it was removed. Police also stalled in releasing the name of the officer, who has yet to be charged.

Community members organized massive protests, which were met with armored trucks, tear gas, rubber bullets, and stun grenades.





Brown has been claimed as a martyr by various actors in this political situation. Some community members place him in the tradition of Trayvon Martin and Emmett Till.

In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, his mother asked:

“Do you know how hard it was for me to get him to stay in school and graduate? You know how many black men graduate? Not many. Because you bring them down to this type of level, where they feel like they don't got nothing to live for anyway. ‘They’re going to try to take me out anyway.’”





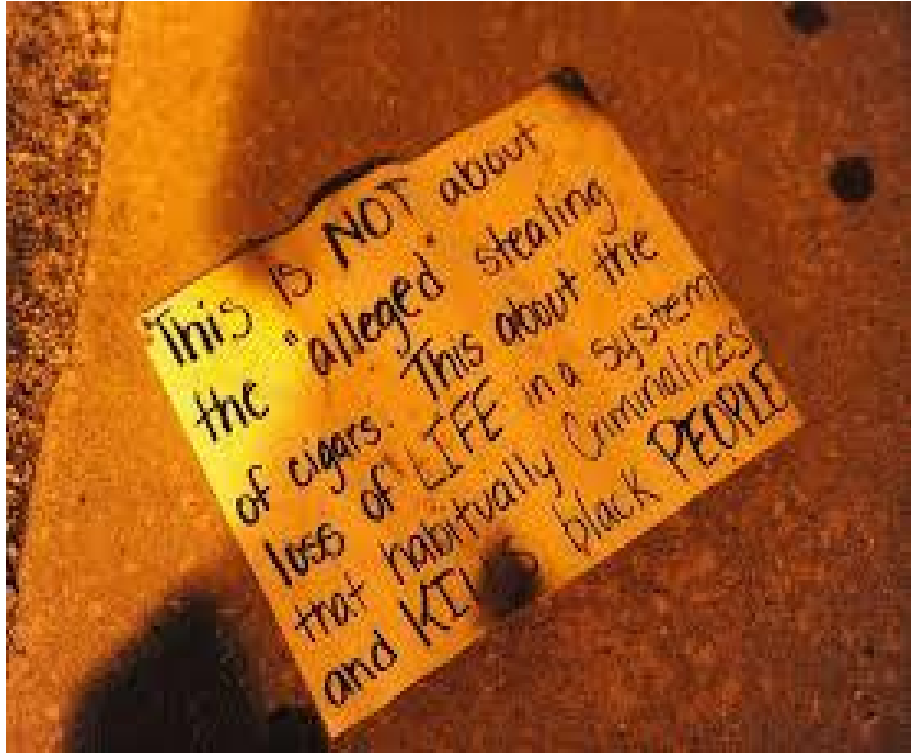


The officer who shot Brown, on the other hand, has been described as someone who was just “doing his job.”



Why arm the Ferguson police with military-style weapons?

Because their job, like the soldiers whose tools they inherited, is to kill, and to survive.



We need the armored vehicles because there is civil unrest. There is civil unrest because of police militarization and brutality.

There is police militarization and brutality because people of color need to be reminded of their function—which is to die, as needed.

In an August 17 speech, Sergeant Ron Johnson, who had taken over the policing of the protests, urged the largely African-American crowd to “thank [Brown] for the change that he is going to make in America.”

This language places Brown in the lineage of African-American martyrs like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.







But many members of the community don't want to be told that Brown's death will somehow be "worth it" in the end.

These protestors don't see themselves as martyrs, but as fighters who deserve to live.

Recap:

What do Bowe Bergdahl,  
Christopher Dorner,  
and Mike Brown have in common?

Like the Shakespearean characters we studied, these American martyrs illustrate the tenuous separation between those whose lives have value to the state and those who are disposable.

Bergdahl and Dorner posed a double threat to state security because they compromised the entire notion that one can tell a hero from a traitor.

As a young man of color, Brown understood that his life was always a threat to the state. But what purpose will his death serve? Will he be one more martyr to state violence, or will he become more than a symbol? How can our desire to commemorate the dead fuel our solidarity with the living?

Literary analysis allows us to see language at work, to see how it plays a role in supporting or challenging the status quo. But in order to put that analysis into action, we must attend to the day-to-day effects of state power.

The three of us recognize the privilege we hold. At the same time, we ourselves have experienced the effects of state power at different times in our lives, and we find ourselves drawing on those experiences in order to anchor ourselves in the project.

Our goal in creating these case studies was to make discourses of contemporary martyrdom more visible, but also to reckon with our own role in reproducing those discourses.

