

## Foreword to “Black Lives Matter: A Context for Teaching Mathematics for Social Justice”

By Jacqueline Leonard

The horrific deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and others in recent weeks require responses with our feet and our pens. While protesters—young, old, Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, LGBTQ+ and White allies—march in the streets of cities across the U.S. and around the world during a pandemic, it is incumbent on those of us with the power of the pen to offer solutions that promote social justice and anti-racism. Systemic racism and hegemonic practices, including zero-tolerance policies, squeeze the life and academic potential out of Black children in U.S. schools and choke Black people in marginalized communities who suffer from unemployment, poor healthcare, and undereducation (Taylor, 2016).

This chapter, written in 2018, speaks prophetically to the present civil discourse as it describes how lack of educational opportunity, beginning with *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, led to the Black Lives Matter movement. Teachers can use big data to help students understand unfair practices, such as *Stop-and-Frisk* and redlining, along with community issues, such as climate change and water quality. The ability to mathematize these problems empowers middle and high school students to organize data, present evidence, and lift their voices for change. Additional lessons that target elementary students are linked to this chapter. These lessons use children’s literature as the backdrop to teach mathematics for social justice. The stories of historical figures like Bessie Coleman and Cesar Chavez are integrated with the core curriculum to inspire and motivate underrepresented students to learn science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Black children are brilliant (Leonard & Martin, 2013), and Black Lives Matter—period. This rallying cry does not mean that other lives don’t matter. Instead, these facts should

serve as the impetus for teachers of mathematics to take a critical look at how they teach mathematics and other core subjects and reimagine education as it should be.