Growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood, I have often felt out of place. Being brown-skinned, I am no stranger to prolonged looks in the hallways or stares around town. It’s almost as if my skin color has made me appear to others as some type of criminal, although I have done nothing wrong. Without knowing me or my values, others have judged me and come up with a conclusion for who I am. Marc Lamont Hill’s “Nobody” describes the fates of several black individuals — deemed as “nobodies” — who have faced similar forms of discrimination.

In recent years, black males such as Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner have died due to quick judgment and racial bias against them. Martin, a teenager, was simply going back home from a 7-Eleven when he was pursued and ultimately killed for appearing “suspicious” as he ran. Martin was not treated as a human ought to be, rather he was treated as “nobody.”

To perceive a person as “nobody” is to disregard their worth and their basic human rights. Garner, too, was treated with blatant disrespect, presumably due to the color of his skin. Minding his own business, he was continually harassed by police officers. While claiming he had done nothing wrong, he was put in a chokehold that led to his death, despite posing no imminent threat. While unjust, this type of prejudice is and has been present in the United States since colonial times: African Americans and poor individuals typically being the targets.
Such prejudice is extremely dangerous and can even prove to be fatal, as evidenced in “Nobody.” Preconceived notions and racism are factors that have lead to the dehumanization of many so-called nobodies: those who “don’t belong” in society; hence, people who are ignored, mistreated, and exploited. Too many times people have been treated this way and are stripped of their fundamental human rights, when in actuality all people are deserving of respect at the very least.

While reading the book, the Franciscan values of discovery, community, and individual worth were evident and play a large role in understanding the situation of those who are nobody in America. The value of discovery is displayed by the persistent curiosity and demand of the African American community for the truth and for justice of its victims. Victims such as Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Freddie Gray, and Eric Garner were not just that; their stories were a pillar of hope for the future. If justice was not served, then the cycle of unnecessary violence and harassment against blacks would perpetuate. Their discovery of the truth, willingness to do so, and failure to accept utter lies was crucial.

The value of community is very prominent throughout “Nobody.” When word came out claiming Eric Garner provoked the police, the black community pressed back and made it known that Garner did no harm. Video footage even validated their statements. The black community stood in unity and solidarity for the injustice and violence faced by Garner. Similarly, the community stood strong for Freddie Gray, who had been mistreated by police officers. They investigated the situation and made sure that the truth was delivered. The disregarded community of nobodies made sure their voices were heard and that they, indeed, were somebody.

The very title, “Nobody,” illustrates the Franciscan value of individual worth. In the United States, poor black individuals have been treated as if they are nobody and worthless by
society. This negative attitude against such people has been a major factor for the “acceptance” of brutality and violent treatment of blacks by some. The perceived individual worth of those deemed as nobody is not reciprocated. In fact, these people believe, as they should, that they are worthy of equality with their white counterparts. The combination of discovery for the truth, a strong community backing, and the belief in one’s own worth is necessary for the reversal of society’s attitude toward those often regarded as nobodies. The injustice observed in the country has taught the lesson that everyone, regardless of color or creed, should be treated equally and no one deserves to be stripped of their basic rights as a human. No one is a nobody.

(Christian is a biology major from River Vale, New Jersey.)