St. Bonaventure University places a strong emphasis on the Franciscan values of Discovery, Community and Individual Worth. These values are extremely important and it is hoped that every individual has the same opportunity to experience and express them uniquely.

However, in the book “Nobody” by Marc Lamont Hill, we are shown that not everyone is granted the ability to explore these values. We are exposed to and submerged into areas of our society where these inequalities are prevalent. Some of these areas include Ferguson, Missouri; Baltimore, Maryland; Flint, Michigan, and many other places. Here, the citizens, “particularly those marked as poor, black, brown, immigrant, queer, or trans,” have had their vulnerability increased and lives made “more rather than less unsafe,” due to state violence and power abuse.

Community is a basic principle in today’s American society as well as one of the core values at St. Bonaventure. The term community brings about thoughts of inclusion, cooperation, and tolerance of all. While there are certainly many cases of strong communities throughout the United States, it cannot be ignored that there are just as many that are broken and in desperate need of reform. Throughout the book we are taken to areas of the U.S. where a sense of community is vacant. People are forced to settle for lives in places that are less than ideal and have problems with infrastructure, crime, and policing. The book highlights Flint, Michigan, a city in which impure water, contaminated with lead, was being piped into the homes of residents,
most of whom were of the vulnerable classes. The city of Flint had since been passed by in terms of economic standing after the leaving of General Motors and the city seemed to have also been left behind by the state. Actions to fix issues were slow to develop.

Another important Franciscan value is Individual Worth. This term means that each person is his own, with a unique purpose and sense of belonging. Every individual deserves fair treatment and kindness from others, regardless of racial, ethnic, or social class background. However, as displayed in the book, society has alienated certain groups of people as if they were an afterthought, a lesser priority, or disposable all together. As the book is titled, these people are made to feel as if they are Nobody. In Sanford, Florida, we saw a prime example of Individual Worth being denied and stripped from a young boy named Trayvon Martin. Martin was racially profiled because he was black and was reported “up to no good.” His killer was also recorded saying “they always get away.” This stereotyping directly led to his tragic death. Trayvon was carrying no identification and as the book says, “the police did not even afford him the dignity of a search through the community to inquire if a teenager was missing.” Thereafter he was left to lie deceased on the pavement, not as Trayvon Martin, but as Nobody.

A third value held highly is that of Discovery. Discovery is achieved when an individual is allowed to make strides intellectually, spiritually or on a personal level. The book cites the case of Sandra Bland, a black woman who had recently accepted a new job at Prairie View A&M. On her first day back to Waller County in Texas, she was pulled over by an officer for “not signaling a lane change.” Following the traffic stop, Bland was harassed by the officer, removed from the vehicle and ultimately arrested. Three days later she had hung herself in her cell. During this encounter, there were many actions wrongly taken that ultimately led to the death of Sandra Bland and not allowing her to pursue her wishes of discovery. The officer wished to overpower her and diminish her spirits. Her life was cut short unfairly.

In many instances, there is no opportunity for people to celebrate the values that St. Bonaventure holds dear, whether it is because of fear or because of circumstances forced upon them. Marc Lamont Hill chooses to highlight certain events in recent years in which discovery, community
and individual worth are all questioned. His book shows the low level of concern by the state in regard to the well-being and goals of individuals who are regarded as “Nobody.”

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