

# **The Black Lives Matter Movement, 2013–2018**

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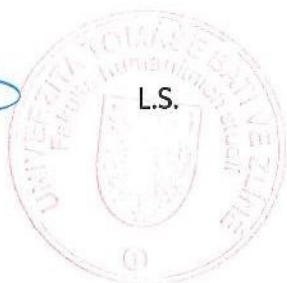
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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá hnutím Black Lives Matter, které posledních pět let bojuje proti rasové nerovnoprávnosti a policejnímu násilí záměrně mířenému na černochoy. První část popisuje historii boje černochoů za vytouženou svobodou a shrnuje dvě nejznámější hnutí za práva černochoů. Poté jsou analyzovány důležité faktory, které ovlivnily rasovou nerovnoprávnost ve Spojených státech. Poslední část tvrdí, že hnutí Black Lives Matter, nepřispělo ke zlepšení podmínek černochoů, a proto boj černochoů za rovnocenná práva musí pokračovat.

Klíčová slova: Black Lives Matter, černá rasa, Spojené státy americké, rasismus, segregace, nerovnoprávnost, lidská práva, policejní násilí, protesty, výtržnosti

## **ABSTRACT**

This bachelor's thesis deals with the Black Lives Matter movement, which for the last five years has fought against racial disparity and police violence, which is aimed deliberately at blacks. The first part describes the history of blacks' struggle for freedom and summarizes the two most-known movements for blacks' rights. Further, it analyses important factors that have influenced racial disparity in the United States. The last part argues that the Black Lives Matter movement has not contributed to an improvement of blacks' conditions, meaning the black struggle for equal rights must continue.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter, black race, United States, racism, segregation, inequality, civil rights, police violence, protests, riots

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I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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## INTRODUCTION

Blacks have been oppressed in the United States since the beginning. Despite the fact that the Reconstruction era granted some liberties for American blacks, the Jim Crow laws that followed soon showed them ‘their place’ in society. Unequal socioeconomic conditions represented one difficulty for blacks. The next were violent white supremacist groups, which were lynching blacks by the thousands, as well as scientists, who ‘proved’ blacks’ lower status. The situation became better in the middle of the twentieth century with the emergence of the two-pronged Civil Rights Movement. One of its components, peaceful demonstrations resulted in a series of laws that improved blacks’ basic liberties. Another component the Black Power movement with its militant approach, taught blacks self-pride as well as defensive tactics. However, after the disappearance of both movements in the 1970s, there was no other significant movement fighting for racial equality. This changed in 2013, when three women created the Black Lives Matter movement in a response to rising violence targeted against blacks, mostly by law enforcement officers. The movement, which originated on social media, soon moved to the streets. Its memorable slogan and decentralized organizational structure invoked mixed reactions within the United States. Half supports them due to their fierce rhetoric and ways of expression, while the other half criticizes them because of violence and riots stemming from their protests. The movement continues in the struggle of its predecessors in order to finally accomplish black equality. However, this remains elusive mainly because of its overwhelming focus on criminal injustice, lack of political activity and loosely coordinated structure. The movement’s participants agree on the problem, but they disagree on the course of action needed to find a solution to it. This lack of unity not only makes the movement ineffective but is actually increasing the American racial divide.

## 1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### 1.1 The Antebellum Era

The Constitution of the United States, written in 1787, remains a much admired legal document.<sup>1</sup> However, the Constitution incorporated a few controversial clauses in support of black chattel slavery, possibly the most disturbing of which was the three-fifths clause, which considered a slave as three-fifths human for the purpose of balancing power in the House of Representatives. Then there was the Fugitive Slave Clause, which stated that slaves who ran away from their master had to be delivered back to their owner. And the last was the maintaining of the African slave trade until 1808.<sup>2</sup> The original Constitution did not include the word “slavery” because this term was considered too divisive. Rather it was substituted by “person held to service or labor.”<sup>3</sup>

By the turn of the nineteenth century, northern states abolished slavery entirely or gradually. However, slavery persisted for many years in New York and New Jersey, and cities such as Philadelphia and Boston.<sup>4</sup> In the nation’s capital, the slave trade remained legal until 1850, and slavery until the Civil War.<sup>5</sup> Southerners deemed abolition impossible in the South, as they knew how important this institution was for their economy, and were worried about the possible menace of releasing millions of poor and uneducated blacks into society.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.2 The American Civil War

The main reason the Civil War erupted was over the identity of the western territories, namely would they be slave or free.<sup>7</sup> Slavery had become a source of frequent political disagreements. Lincoln in 1858 indicated the impossibility of the existence of both freedom and slavery in the United States with his “a house divided against itself cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Vorenberg, *Final Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth N. Addison, “*We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident...*”: *An Interdisciplinary Analysis of the Roots of Racism and Slavery in America* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009), 282; Vorenberg, *Final Freedom*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Addison, “*We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident...*,” 281.

<sup>4</sup> David Brown and Clive Webb, *Race in the American South* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 68–69.

<sup>5</sup> “Washington, D.C.’s Slave Trade,” The White House Historical Association, accessed February 15, 2018, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/washington-d-c-s-slave-trade>.

<sup>6</sup> Susan-Mary Grant, and Brian Holden Reid, *Themes of the American Civil War: The War Between the States*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 24.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Bestor, “The American Civil War as a Constitutional Crisis,” *American Historical Review* 69, no. 2 (January 1964): 330, 327–352. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1844986>.

stand” speech, so when he won the presidential election, separation of the southern states became inevitable.<sup>8</sup> Northerners did not want to allow slavery to expand into new territories and claimed that the west should be based on a free labor ideology, but southerners disapproved.<sup>9</sup> The Confederate secession was fueled by the effort of prominent southern planters to protect slavery from the emancipation proposed by Republican Party.<sup>10</sup>

The Civil War began on 12 April 1861, with the firing on Fort Sumter, a U.S. fort in Confederate territory.<sup>11</sup> In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which gave freedom to some but not all southern slaves. Black men who escaped slavery often joined the military, with approximately 186,000 of them serving the Union. Despite serving the Union, black soldiers still had to tolerate racism within the Union army. Blacks’ involvement in the war contributed to them gaining citizenship rights after the war, which ended in April 1865.<sup>12</sup> The end of the war freed approximately four million slaves and canceled chattel slavery.<sup>13</sup> Although, blacks got freedom, public prejudices against them did not disappear.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.3 The Reconstruction Era

The Reconstruction era, which sparked the first attempts to promote civil rights in the United States, began in 1865 when the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was passed.<sup>15</sup> With total emancipation on the horizon, southern whites became fearful of black vengeance, like what occurred in the West Indies, in particular in Haiti.<sup>16</sup> In the 1850s, during the antebellum era, the majority of southern slaves worked on the cotton plantations, producing the region’s main export.<sup>17</sup> The Civil War had a negative effect on the Southern economy. The war was costly, and planters now had to pay wages to freedmen. Ultimately, chattel slavery was replaced with sharecropping. This system was

<sup>8</sup> Brown and Webb, *Race in the American South*, 149.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>11</sup> Addison, “*We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident...*,” 364.

<sup>12</sup> “Civil War,” A&E Television Networks, accessed January 18, 2018,

<http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/american-civil-war-history>; Brown and Webb, *Race in the American South*, 168–69.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph S. Himes, Jr., “The Natural History of Social Conflict in White-Negro Relations,” *Phylon* (1940–1956), 10, no. 1 (1949): 53, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/272217>.

<sup>14</sup> Merton L. Dillon, “The Failure of the American Abolitionists,” *Journal of Southern History* 25, no.2 (May 1959): 176, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2954611>.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas S. Massey, “The Past and Future of American Civil Rights,” *Daedalus* 140, no.2 (Spring 2011): 40, [https://dx.doi.org/10.1162/DAED\\_a\\_00076](https://dx.doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00076).

<sup>16</sup> Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 40.

<sup>17</sup> Brown and Webb, *Race in the American South*, 126.

based on the renting of the land by a landlord in exchange for a share of the crops produced on that land by a tenant; however, the working conditions were not dissimilar from those of chattel slavery.<sup>18</sup> Yearning for independence led to the disappearance of black women from the fields, which contributed to a labor shortage.<sup>19</sup>

Efforts of the southern planters to maintain the plantation system and control black labor resulted in the introduction of black codes, which were issued in 1865 and 1866.<sup>20</sup> The black codes communicated legal rights to black people, however, blacks were not considered as citizens but “freedmen.”<sup>21</sup> The codes restricted, for instance, land ownership, marriage permission, and legal actions. Such restrictions were designed to maintain the black labor force. Leading the way with the black codes were Mississippi and South Carolina, both of which instituted severe labor restrictions, including forced contracts which almost always favored the employer. Other southern states followed, passing anti-enticement and vagrancy laws with stiff punishments, including corporal punishments. Moreover, black children, for a variety of reasons, could be removed from their families and apprenticed to whites.<sup>22</sup> Northerners were outraged by such codes, claiming they undermined the basic ideology of free labor.

Reconstruction created new conditions for better state and economic order. With the Reconstruction Act of 1867, all states had to ratify the fourteenth amendment, which gave black men voting rights, and further, the right to hold office, and equal law protection.<sup>23</sup> The fourteenth amendment of 1868 also finally ensured citizenship to all blacks, and the fifteenth amendment of 1870 ensured the voting rights to all citizens regardless of race.<sup>24</sup> Congress issued its first civil rights acts in 1866 and 1875, and southern states had to amend their constitutions. The Union military was sent to the South, and was empowered to look after compliance of the new acts there.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John J. McDermott, “Reconstruction and Post-Civil War Reconciliation,” *Military Review*, 89, no.1 (January–February 2009): 68–69.

<sup>19</sup> Foner, *Nothing but Freedom*, 44.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>21</sup> Addison, “*We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident...*,” 201–02.

<sup>22</sup> “Black Codes,” A&E Television Networks, accessed January 15, 2018, <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-codes>; James T. Currie, “From Slavery to Freedom in Mississippi’s Legal System,” *Journal of Negro History*, 65, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 118–19. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2717050>; Foner, *Nothing but Freedom*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> A&E Television Networks, “Black Codes”; Foner, *Nothing but Freedom*, 52; Addison, “*We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident...*,” 202.

<sup>24</sup> Addison, “*We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident...*,” 202.

<sup>25</sup> Massey, “The Past and Future of American Civil Rights,” 40.

### 1.3.1 The Ku Klux Klan

The newly gained freedom for blacks upset many white Southerners, prompting the establishment of the first Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in 1866. The Klan quickly escalated into a terrorist organization, the main goal of which was to enforce white supremacy, deprive blacks of their newly gained political powers, and to have absolute control over them.<sup>26</sup> The government tried to stop violence by the Ku Klux Klan and Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871.<sup>27</sup> Even so, the total number of KKK victims was in the thousands.<sup>28</sup> Although the first KKK broke up, violence did not stop and more than one hundred blacks were massacred by the White League in 1873.<sup>29</sup> In 1876, Republican Rutherford B. Hayes was awarded the presidency in exchange for the withdrawal of all federal soldiers from the South. This action ended the Reconstruction Era, which offered the first considerable government attempt to enforce black civil rights.<sup>30</sup>

## 1.4 The Jim Crow Era

When the U.S. military exited the South, legislators in the southern states established a new racial segregation system called Jim Crow. The first state that required such a law was Florida in 1887, where blacks were separated from whites in public accommodation. Mississippi edited its constitution in 1890 to limit blacks' voting rights and move them out of politics.<sup>31</sup>

The Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court decision of 1896, which allowed for separate train cars for whites and blacks, marked the beginning of the national Jim Crow Era. According to the Supreme Court, the "separate but equal" doctrine did not violate the fourteenth amendment's equal protection clause, and therefore, it was a legitimate reason for segregation.<sup>32</sup> Voting rights once given to the blacks were taken away again. Blacks were told how to use public facilities, and they could not choose places to live, work, or

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<sup>26</sup> David Chalmers, *Backfire: How the Ku Klux Klan Helped the Civil Rights Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 1; Himes, Jr., "The Natural History of Social Conflict," 54.

<sup>27</sup> Brown and Webb, *Race in the American South*, 175.

<sup>28</sup> Chalmers, *Backfire*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Brown and Webb, *Race in the American South*, 175.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 176; Manning Marable. *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945–1982* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), 7–8.

<sup>31</sup> Massey, "The Past and Future of American Civil Rights," 40; Addison, "*We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident...*," 203.

<sup>32</sup> Addison, "*We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident...*," 203–204; Anne Walk and Leslie Brown, *Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 12.

study.<sup>33</sup> The segregation also related to hospitals, schools, libraries and other public institutions.<sup>34</sup> In the same way the justice support for blacks was limited, as they were prohibited from taking part in juries, and black defense attorneys were prohibited.<sup>35</sup>

Jim Crow laws spread throughout the nation, and racial segregation created conditions similar to chattel slavery. Blacks endured violence and lynchings, at the hands of white supremacists. Records document 4,743 lynchings before 1968, and more than 72 percent of the victims were blacks.<sup>36</sup> Racial discrimination also existed in the northern states, and though northerners refused, slavery they did not consider blacks as equal. The situation for northern blacks worsened with the Great Migration, 1915–1930. As the black population increased, so did discrimination.<sup>37</sup>

In the 1930s, in response to the Great Depression, President Roosevelt issued the New Deal social program, which incorporated racial segregation. Blacks were not allowed to exploit any type of social or economic support that the New Deal provided, as well as benefits of the Social Security Act, or the Federal Housing Association.<sup>38</sup> In order to explore the psychological effects of segregation on black children, psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark conducted an experiment now known as “the doll test” in 1940. The black children were exposed to white and black dolls, and the couple observed the children’s behavior. The majority of children preferred the white doll, proving an inherent feeling of subordination among blacks.<sup>39</sup>

After the Second World War, it became difficult to maintain racial oppression, as black veterans, who had fought for freedom, returned to the United States and demanded civil rights. In these years were founded many political organizations, whether white or black, which supported racial equality, among them the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). In 1948, President Harry Truman cancelled racial segregation within the US Army, which assured him blacks’ votes and helped him to win the presidential election,

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<sup>33</sup> Walk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Guffey, “Knowing Their Space: Signs of Jim Crow in the Segregated South.” *Design Issues*, 28, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 47, accessed January 25, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41427825>.

<sup>35</sup> Walk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*, 12–13.

<sup>36</sup> “History of Lynchings” NAACP, accessed January 20, 2018, <http://www.naacp.org/history-of-lynchings/>.

<sup>37</sup> Massey, “The Past and Future of American Civil Rights,” 41.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>39</sup> “Brown at 60: The Doll Test,” NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, accessed March 1, 2018, <http://www.naacpldf.org/brown-at-60-the-doll-test>.

and outlined the beginning of the new civil rights era.<sup>40</sup> The Supreme Court overruled *Plessy v. Ferguson* in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case of 1954 and abolished racial segregation in schools, and when Rosa Parks in 1955 refused to leave a bus seat to a white man, she inspired others to a series of peaceful protests against Jim Crow laws, such as bus boycotts and sit ins. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, was the most extensive document supporting civil rights until that day, and abolished discrimination in public facilities such as housing, schooling, employment and judiciary. Furthermore, it also restricted organizations that supported discrimination, from gaining federal funds.<sup>41</sup> The Civil Rights Act was important for blacks, as it simplified the enforcement of the Voting Right Act of 1965, which removed suffrage discrimination, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which offered equal opportunities for blacks in housing practices.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Massey, "The Past and Future of American Civil Rights," 41–12.; Marable. *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, 24–25.

<sup>41</sup> Addison, "We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident...", 202; JBHE Foundation, "Rosa Louise McCauley Parks," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 1, no. 6 (Winter, 1994–1995): 18, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2962437>.

<sup>42</sup> "Civil Rights Act of 1964," A&E Television Networks, accessed January 21, 2018, <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-act>.

## 2 ACTIVISM FOR RACIAL EQUALITY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

### 2.1 The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement lasted from the middle of the 1950s to the late 1960s.<sup>43</sup> However, many historians claim that the movement's roots reach much further back.<sup>44</sup> The earlier activism from the late nineteenth century created a pattern for the first organized movements operating on a national level, for instance, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909.<sup>45</sup> The public became widely familiar with the "civil rights" term in 1946, when President Truman created the President's Committee on Civil Rights. Although the "civil rights" term should not be associated only with the African-American race, the higher focus on the antidiscrimination policy caused this perception not only among scholars, but also among the general public.<sup>46</sup>

If there were any situations that ignited the idea of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), then it was the *Broad v. Education* decision of 1954, and the brutal lynching of Emmett Till of 1955. Especially Till's lynching prompted young black students to become radicalized and engaged in activism.<sup>47</sup> The CRM is characterized as a conglomeration of organized movements or organizations that had similar goals, which were achieved through mass protests and demonstrations.<sup>48</sup> Amongst the well-known organizations taking part in the CRM were the NAACP, the CORE, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).<sup>49</sup> The primary goal of the CRM from its beginning was to terminate Jim Crow policy. This goal

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Greene, "South Carolina and the Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement," *Patterns of Prejudice* 49, no. 5 (November 2015): 501, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1103445>; Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Christopher W. Schmidt, "Legal History and the Problem of the Long Civil Rights Movement," *Law and Social Inquiry* 41, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 1081–82, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/lsi.12245>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1084.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1094–95.

<sup>47</sup> Aldon D. Morris, "A Retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement: Political and Intellectual Landmarks," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25, (1999): 521–22, accessed February 3, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/22351>.

<sup>48</sup> Richard H. King, "'How long? Not long': Selma, Martin Luther King and Civil Rights Narratives," *Patterns of Prejudice* 49, no. 5 (November 2015): 479, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1103443>.

<sup>49</sup> Lance Hill, *The Deacons: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 17.



was replaced in the mid-1960s with an effort to ensure equal social and economic rights.<sup>50</sup> The most remarkable feature of the CRM were nonviolent mass protests.<sup>51</sup>

The Montgomery bus boycott, which began in Alabama in 1955 and lasted for a year, was one of the first major protests, which proved that a huge number of blacks could unite and demonstrate against Jim Crow racial segregation.<sup>52</sup> The boycott was organized by the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), led by Martin Luther King Jr. The nonviolent manner of the protest was important as every violent effort to demolish the movement would have been shared throughout the country by media. The Supreme Court decided that bus segregation in Alabama was unconstitutional; therefore this boycott signaled the first important win for the CRM.<sup>53</sup>

Among important events credited to the CRM were the Greensboro sit-ins of 1960, in which black students demonstrated against segregated lunch counters. Then came the Freedom Rides of 1961, organized by the CORE, checking local observances of bus desegregation in the South. In 1963 it was a Birmingham demonstration, followed by the famous March on Washington, attended by 250,000 Americans. The SCLC organized another mass march in 1965, from Selma to Montgomery, attempting to achieve black voters' registration.<sup>54</sup> However, participants of both the Birmingham demonstration and the Selma march were encountered by police who attacked marchers in an effort to dissolve the movement. The media coverage of the resistance contributed to worldwide attention and resulted in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.<sup>55</sup>

In 1968, Martin Luther King Jr., the leader of the SCLC, was assassinated. His death outraged people nationwide, who immediately started rioting. Following these violent events, the CRM was connected mainly with riots, and with the origins of the Black

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<sup>50</sup> King, "How long? Not long," 474.

<sup>51</sup> Morris, "A Retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement," 524; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no.4 (March 2005): 1263, accessed February 2, 2018, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/ows/seminars/tcentury/movinglr/longcivilrights.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Morris, "A Retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement," 524.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 524–25.

<sup>54</sup> "Events," Civil Rights Digital Library, accessed February 17, 2018, <http://crdl.usg.edu/events/>.

<sup>55</sup> Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 208.

Power Movement (BPM).<sup>56</sup> The CRM had a significant impact on other social movements, concerning race relations, which emerged later.<sup>57</sup>

The CRM undoubtedly contributed to black progress since the 1970s.<sup>58</sup> After attaining the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the movement secured better individual liberty for disadvantaged Americans.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, impoverished blacks were disappointed that their daily lives did not improve. Conditions improved only for a small number of prominent blacks. The voter registration of southern blacks grew from 25 percent in 1956 to 66 percent in 1970, and the number of black elected officials increased, from 103 in 1964 to 1,469 in 1970; however, these officials made up just 0.3 percent of the total. The income of black families doubled from 1959 to 1969, and the poverty rate declined from 48 percent to 30 percent, but the huge racial gap was not erased. Whites became more tolerant towards blacks, and the violence against them ceased in the South, but the whites' antipathy against blacks did not diminish. The hyper segregation in the American cities persisted, and the unemployment ratio remained stable, from 1954 to 1970, in a 2:1 ratio, meaning blacks were twice as likely to be unemployed.<sup>60</sup> According to a survey that measured black opinion on the matter of racial discrimination, from 1968 to 2000, 58 percent believed that the CRM was successful while 42 percent of respondents had been disappointed with the movement's achievements.<sup>61</sup>

## 2.2 The Black Power Movement

The term "black power" refers to the control of a black person over their own life. The Black Power Movement (BPM) naturally aligns with this idea and was decisive for the elevation of blacks worldwide.<sup>62</sup> While the CRM is openly celebrated as a successful social movement that improved living standards throughout the United States, the BPM is considered the very opposite to the CRM. Due to their provocative voices and combative

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<sup>56</sup> Greene, "South Carolina and the Legacy," 498; Philip S. Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), xxxvi.

<sup>57</sup> Morris, "A Retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement," 523.

<sup>58</sup> Wayne A. Santoro, "Was the Civil Rights Movement Successful? Tracking and Understanding Black Views," *Sociological Forum* 30, no. S1 (June 2015): 627, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/socf.12181>.

<sup>59</sup> King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Santoro, "Was the Civil Rights Movement Successful?," 628.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 627.

<sup>62</sup> A. P. MacDonald Jr., "Black Power," *Journal of Negro Education* 44, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 547, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2966639>.

approach, the BPM went down in history as one of the most significant social movements of the twentieth century.<sup>63</sup>

The BPM had its roots in the 1950s, when young black activists began to follow ideas proposed by Malcolm X and by radical organizations such as the Afro-American Association and Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM).<sup>64</sup> Students had founded many organizations in urban environments (Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, Oakland, etc.) prior to the BPM.<sup>65</sup> The BPM began in 1966, when two prominent black activists, Stokely Carmichael and Willie Ricks, declared “black power” during the Meredith March Against Fear.<sup>66</sup> Not only did Carmichael play an important role in the BPM, but he was also an eager activist for the CRM. As a member of the SNCC, Carmichael participated in many protests including the Freedom Rides; however, frustrated with the CRM achievements, he decided to choose another way to confront racial problems.<sup>67</sup> While the CRM activists had a peaceful approach to fight racial inequality, and exploited legal ways to meet their requirements, the BPM activists fiercely called for equal citizenship and cultural freedom.<sup>68</sup> The main difference between the two movements was that while the CRM strived for integration into white communities, the BPM, on the other hand, pursued the control over their own communities.<sup>69</sup>

The BPM significantly caught the attention of the world at the 1968 Sumer Olympics in Mexico City, when two black American sprinters, John Carlos and Tommie Smith, used the BPM salutation, as they raised a fist with a black glove on, and bowed their heads during the US national anthem, while standing on a medal podium. This behavior outraged the majority of Americans, but the courage of the black athletes, who exploited such an important event to express their dissatisfaction with the racial issue of

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<sup>63</sup> Peniel E. Joseph, “Reinterpreting the Black Power Movement.” *OAH Magazine of History* 22, no. 3 (July 2008): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1093/maghis/22.3.4>.

<sup>64</sup> Peniel E. Joseph, “Black Liberation without Apology: Reconceptualizing the Black Power Movement,” *Black Scholar* 31, no. 3–4 (Fall 2001): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2001.11431152>; Peniel, “Reinterpreting the Black Power Movement,” 5.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph, “Black Liberation without Apology,” 11.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*,” 9.

<sup>67</sup> Yohuru Williams, “Black Power beyond the Slogan,” *Transition* 115 (2014): 87, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2979/transition.115.87>.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph, “Reinterpreting the Black Power Movement,” 4.

<sup>69</sup> James A. Tyner, “‘Defend the Ghetto’: Space and the Urban Politics of the Black Panther Party,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 1 (March 2006): 106, accessed January 26, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3694147>.

their country, induced sympathies of millions worldwide. As a result, both sprinters were suspended from the U.S. athletic team, and moreover, received dozens of death threats.<sup>70</sup>

### 2.2.1 The Black Panther Party

The Black Panther Party (BPP) was founded in 1966 as a local political organization by two black students, in response to rising poverty and worsening social conditions for blacks.<sup>71</sup> It took just two years until the BPP escalated into a national organization. The party had around 2,000 members with 32 chapters in 15 states.<sup>72</sup> From the beginning, the party fought against racial oppression of blacks, however, in 1968 the party changed their focus to the class struggle. The BPP started to cooperate with other white or third world revolutionary organizations in the United States. As a result, the main ideology of the BPP was a mixture of black nationalism and Marxism-Leninism.<sup>73</sup> The BPP included various protection programs into their campaigns, focusing on the well-being and protection of seniors and children.<sup>74</sup> However, the most controversial program was the police-patrol alert. The point of this program was that selected armed members would patrol the streets for suspicious police activities in the streets, which only worsened the relationships between the BPP and the police force.<sup>75</sup>

The BPP was an object of much political repression; in fact, by 1971, 92 legally repressive acts had been filed against the BPP in the Oakland Bay Area.<sup>76</sup> This political repression led to the dissolution of the party. One reason was the arrests of party leaders, and another reason was the inclusion of the party in the Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO), which was designed by the FBI to destroy political organizations that were considered as a threat to the government; and the BPP was ranked high on their list.<sup>77</sup>

The BPP significantly contributed to blacks' struggle for freedom, inspiring blacks to revolt against discrimination and American capitalism. Their violent approach was a

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<sup>70</sup> Ben Cosgrove, "The Black Power Salute that Rocked the 1968 Olympics," *Time*, accessed March 25, 2018, <http://time.com/3880999/black-power-salute-tommie-smith-and-john-carlos-at-the-1968-olympics/>.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>72</sup> Charles E. Jones, "The Political Repression of the Black Panther Party 1966–1971: The Case of the Oakland Bay Area," *Journal of Black Studies* 18, no. 4 (June 1988): 417, accessed January 26, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784371>.

<sup>73</sup> Jessica C. Harris, "Black Nationalism: The Black Panther Party," *Journal of Negro History* 86, no.3 (Summer 2001): 415, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1562458>.

<sup>74</sup> Tyner, "'Defend the Ghetto'," 110.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>76</sup> Jones, "The Political Repression," 420–421.

<sup>77</sup> Harris, "Black Nationalism," 415.

new feature. It inspired racial minorities around the United States to create their own organizations, but also women's or anti-war movements. The party gained support from countries worldwide, as for instance South Africa, Uruguay, Israel and many more.<sup>78</sup>

“Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them,” wrote Assata Shakur, a member of the BPM. This sentence basically sums up the main impact of the movement. The BPM did not achieve such tangible results as the CRM with the Civil Rights Act; nevertheless, The BPM taught black people that real freedom comes from inside, stimulated their awareness about their pride and power, and taught them how to unite and fight against oppression.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 420.

<sup>79</sup> Marte White, “The Black Power Movement,” *Odyssey*, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/black-power-movement>; Winston A. Van Horne, “The Concept of Black Power: Its Continued Relevance,” *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 3 (January 2007): 371, accessed January 26, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40034781>.

### 3 RACIAL DISPARITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

#### 3.1 Racial Profiling by Law Enforcement

The current reality in the United States is that there is a higher probability that a black man will be arrested, sentenced and imprisoned than a white man. While whites do not see any sign of discrimination in the American justice system, blacks are skeptical of this statement, and do not believe in the fairness of the police or the judiciary.<sup>80</sup>

Official records prove that more than half of those murdered by the police have been of a black or Hispanic race, moreover, only a few indicted officers have been sentenced for using excessive force. Nevertheless, official data on police killings are incomplete because police departments in the United States work differently according to state or local jurisdictions. Thus, standards for collecting and releasing data differ by state.<sup>81</sup> According to the latest data collected by the Mapping Police Violence website, 1,147 people were killed in the United States in 2017. Detailed analysis reveals that 170 of these were armed with a knife, while 149 of the victims were unarmed, with the majority of the unarmed victims being non-white. Officers were charged with a crime in only 13 cases.<sup>82</sup>

The reason why minorities have a higher tendency to commit a crime stems from unequal socioeconomic conditions. Some policies such as stop-and-frisk or traffic stops should be racially neutral, but they have been unequally applied to blacks.<sup>83</sup> In New York City in 2017, stop-and-frisk discrimination ran rampant: over half of those targeted were black, while another third were Hispanic.<sup>84</sup> Many whites, mainly because of their cultural heritage, stereotype blacks as being more inclined to criminality and violence.<sup>85</sup> Due to high levels of racial and ethnic profiling among police officers, the number of killings of

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<sup>80</sup> Jon Hurwitz, and Mark Peffley, "And Justice for Some: Race, Crime, and Punishment in the US Criminal Justice System," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 2 (June 2010): 457–458, accessed February 28, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20743157>.

<sup>81</sup> Nazgol Ghandnoosh, "Black Lives Matter: Eliminating Racial Inequity in the Criminal Justice System," Sentencing Project, accessed March 2, 2018, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/black-lives-matter-eliminating-racial-inequity-in-the-criminal-justice-system/>; Wesley Lowery, *They Can't Kill Us All: The Story of Black Lives Matter* (London: Penguin Books, 2017), 111.

<sup>82</sup> "2017 Police Violence Report," Mapping Police Violence, accessed March 2, 2018, <https://policeviolencereport.org>.

<sup>83</sup> Sentencing Project, "Black Lives Matter."

<sup>84</sup> Philip Bump, "The Facts about Stop-and-frisk in New York City," *Washington Post*, accessed March 2, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/09/21/it-looks-like-rudy-giuliani-convicted-donald-trump-that-stop-and-frisk-actually-works/?utm\\_term=.c72ad19d295b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/09/21/it-looks-like-rudy-giuliani-convicted-donald-trump-that-stop-and-frisk-actually-works/?utm_term=.c72ad19d295b).

<sup>85</sup> Thomas E. Nelson, Kira Sanbonmatsu, and Harwood K. McClerking, "Playing a Different Race Card: Examining the Limits of Elite Influence on Perceptions of Racism," *Journal of Politics* 69, no.2 (May 2007): 418, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2007.00540.x>.

blacks and Hispanics has risen, even though records proved that minorities are twice more likely to resist arrest than whites. Still, this indicates that the accountability and practice of the officers is insufficient and should be improved upon.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.2 Mass Incarceration

The American penal system grew significantly between 1972 and 2000, increasing in size at least six times. Roughly twelve percent of blacks in their twenties were imprisoned by 2002. Experts suggest that imprisonment became a natural part of life for young blacks growing up in poor neighborhoods.<sup>87</sup> The latest surveys predict that one out of three black men will be imprisoned at least once in their life. The strict enforcement of drug offense laws, focusing unevenly on blacks, is one of the main reasons for their incarceration. When a person is released from a prison, the criminal record is an obstacle preventing them from successfully reintegrating into society, as convicted criminals are deprived of social programs and voter rights, and have problems finding employment or housing.<sup>88</sup> The latest reports suggest that there are almost 2.3 million people incarcerated in the United States.<sup>89</sup> Such a huge number of incarcerations is due not to rising criminality (in fact criminality rates are similar to those from the 1960s), but to the strict penal system and law enforcement.<sup>90</sup> Another reason is that many people have been arrested but not convicted. About 4.6 million people are supervised on parole, or given probation. These people are allowed to apply for a bail, however, only if they can afford to pay it. Otherwise they remain arrested, awaiting trial. About 40 percent of total incarcerated are black, while 39

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<sup>86</sup> Sentencing Project, "Black Lives Matter.,"; Robert Lewis and Noah Veltman, "Resisting Arrest in Black and White," WNYC, accessed April 24, 2018, <https://www.wnyc.org/story/resisting-arrest-black-white/>.

<sup>87</sup> Becky Pettit and Bruce Western, "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in U.S. Incarceration," *American Sociological Review* 69, no. 2 (April 2004): 151, accessed March 2, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3593082>.

<sup>88</sup> Jennifer Jee-Lyn García, and Mienah Zulfacar Sharif, "Black Lives Matter: A Commentary on Racism and Public Health," *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. 8 (August 2015): e28. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302706>.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Wagner and Wendy Sawyer, "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2018," *Prison Policy Initiative*, accessed March 2, 2018, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2018.html>.

<sup>90</sup> Becky Pettit, and Bryan L. Sykes, "Civil Rights Legislation and Legalized Exclusion: Mass Incarceration and the Making of Inequality," *Sociological Forum* 30, no. S1 (June 2015): 596, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/socf.12179>.

percent are white. These numbers are alarming considering that whites comprise 64 percent of the U.S. population, while blacks just 13 percent.<sup>91</sup>

However, the American justice system undertook significant reforms by 2017. Legislators from various states made their justice systems fairer, thereby lowering the number of prisoners. Reforms relate to conditions of probation, or to the introduction of a new evaluation system that takes racial disparity into account. Further, North Carolina and New York, which prosecuted teenagers as adults, adopted the reforms for judging them within the juvenile justice system. Another improvement relates to criminal records, which should not be required from applicants in the early stage of admissions by universities and employees. In the United States, many prisoners and people on probation or parole are not allowed to vote. Alabama and Nebraska are in the process of refining their laws allowing persons convicted of misdemeanors to vote.<sup>92</sup>

### 3.3 Residential Segregation

Residential segregation in the United States is an important measurement for assessing racial inequality. American cities report high racial segregation rates. Such rates generally stem not from income disparities but from racial discrimination within the housing market.<sup>93</sup> Housing segregation influences a community's behavior and development, and the socioeconomic conditions of its residents, regardless of their individual personal characteristics.<sup>94</sup> Black neighborhoods are linked with high rates of unemployment, mortality, welfare dependency, and criminality. Therefore, worse institutions, for instance schools, are located in these neighborhoods, which perpetuate blacks' prevailing subordinate status to whites.<sup>95</sup>

The latest data on racial segregation in the United States shows that although the segregation is declining, results are still high; specifically segregation levels in the largest cities are between fifty and twenty percent. Blacks are, for example, profiled by real estate agents, who are intentionally showing blacks houses in "black" neighborhoods only,

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<sup>91</sup> Prison Policy Initiative, "Mass Incarceration;" "Top Trends in State Criminal Justice Reform, 2017," Sentencing Project, accessed March 4, 2018, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/top-trends-state-criminal-justice-reform-2017/>.

<sup>92</sup> Sentencing Project, "Top Trends."

<sup>93</sup> Ruth D. Peterson, and Lauren J. Krivo, "Segregation and Black Urban Homicide," *Social Forces* 71, no. 4 (June 1993): 1004. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2580128>.

<sup>94</sup> Camille Charles Zubrinsky, "The Dynamics of Racial Residential Segregation," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19, (2003): 167, accessed January 25, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036965>.

<sup>95</sup> Peterson and Krivo, "Segregation and Black Urban Homicide," 1004.



despite the fact this technique had been prohibited by the Fair Housing Act of 1968.<sup>96</sup> Lower housing support, decreased income levels, combined with steadily increasing rent rates, means that non-whites often spend more than a half of their income on rental or lease payments. According to a study from 2013, 23 percent of black households paid at least half of their income in rent. Blacks encounter racial disparities even when applying for a loan, as they have to pay higher interest rates than whites with similar incomes.

Experts suggest that residential desegregation can be achieved by concurrently following two actions. The first is the need to boost poor people's mobility into wealthy areas by increasing tax incentives. The second include special policies designed to encourage development in poor neighborhoods.<sup>97</sup>

### 3.4 Employment and Education

Until 1980, there was black progress in employment and income, however, after 1980 the progress slowed.<sup>98</sup> The National Urban League notes that the average unemployment rate of American blacks is two times higher than of whites, and, the situation in specific cities is even worse. Similar trend prevails in the area of household income. The average annual income of black households, according to 2014 report, was 35,481 dollars, while whites earned 59,662 dollars. The results varied in different areas but in no place did blacks surpass whites.<sup>99</sup> Net worth, which indicates the wealth of a person, was thirteen times higher for whites in 2014, when compared to blacks.<sup>100</sup> The effective way to tackle the employment inequality is to achieve full employment, meaning that government boost job growth, and exploit methods of tight labor market. This would enable low-skilled workers to negotiate better wages and quit a job without a risk of not finding a new one.<sup>101</sup> It is

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<sup>96</sup> Rajjini Vaidyanathan, "Why Don't Black and White Americans Live Together?," BBC, accessed March 4, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-35255835>.

<sup>97</sup> Sam Fulwood, "The United States' History of Segregated Housing Continues to Limit Affordable Housing," Center for American Progress, accessed March 4, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2016/12/15/294374/the-united-states-history-of-segregated-housing-continues-to-limit-affordable-housing/>.

<sup>98</sup> Pettit, and Sykes, "Civil Rights Legislation," 593.

<sup>99</sup> Tanzina Vega, "Where the Biggest Inequality Gaps are in America," CNN Money, accessed March 5, 2018, <http://money.cnn.com/2016/05/17/news/economy/income-inequality-race-america/index.html>.

<sup>100</sup> Fredrick C. Harris, "The Invisible Hands of Racial Inequality in the USA," *World Social Science Report, 2016: Challenging Inequalities; Pathways to a Just World*, 104, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002459/245948e.pdf>.

<sup>101</sup> Danny Vinik, "Fixing Inequality in America Starts by Getting Back to Full Employment," Business Insider, accessed March 5, 2018, <http://www.businessinsider.com/fixing-economic-and-racial-inequality-starts-with-full-employment-2013-12>.

proven that there is higher probability for a white man with a high school education and a criminal record to get a job than it is for a black man with a similar education without a criminal record.<sup>102</sup>

Although racial discrimination within the U.S. educational system experienced great progress during the twentieth century, there is a prevailing racial segregation in public schools, which is based on practices from the Jim Crow era.<sup>103</sup> The educational disparity of children goes hand in hand with the economic issues of their parents. About three quarters of minority students are from poor families, while only one third of white students hail from low-income families.<sup>104</sup> In 2011, 40 percent of black children were attending schools in which 90 percent of the students were minorities, an increase of 35 percent since 1991.<sup>105</sup> A survey carried out by the Government Accountability Office in 2014 revealed that American public schools are still separate and unequal. In December 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act was introduced, which should be protect disadvantaged students and offer equal opportunities to all children.<sup>106</sup> Time will tell if it works.

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<sup>102</sup> Harris, "The Invisible Hands," 105.

<sup>103</sup> Adam Gamoran, "American Schooling and Educational Inequality: A Forecast for the 21st Century," *Sociology of Education* 74 (2011): 136, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2673258>; Grover J. Whitehurst, "New Evidence on School Choice and Racially Segregated Schools," Brookings Institution, accessed March 6, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/new-evidence-on-school-choice-and-racially-segregated-schools/>.

<sup>104</sup> Gamoran, "American Schooling," 137; Ronald Brownstein, "The Challenge of Educational Inequality," *Atlantic Monthly*, accessed March 6, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/05/education-inequality-takes-center-stage/483405/>.

<sup>105</sup> "Black Lives Matter: A New Movement Takes Shape," *International Socialist Review*, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://isreview.org/issue/96/black-lives-matter>.

<sup>106</sup> Bobby Scott, "America's Schools Are Still Segregated by Race and Class. That Has to End," *Guardian*, accessed March 6, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/may/19/america-schools-segregation-race-class-education-policy-bobby-scott>.

#### 4 THE OBAMA PRESIDENCY

The administration of the first black American president, Barack Obama, gave rise to the next important movement for black equality.<sup>107</sup> The presidential election of 2008 recorded the highest black voter turnout since 1968, at 64 percent. For comparison, there were two million fewer black voters in the presidential election of 2004.<sup>108</sup> The election of Obama was widely celebrated among blacks, for it came at a time when blacks really needed support.<sup>109</sup>

American blacks believed that unequal conditions in the United States would finally change with a black president. However, Obama did little for American blacks' wellbeing.<sup>110</sup> When Obama began with his administration, civil rights activists reached out to him, asking whether he could put forward any policy that would improve blacks' high unemployment rates. His response was that he as a president has to act in the best interest for all Americans and not only a selected group of people.<sup>111</sup>

When Obama declared, "we've got no time for excuses," during his speech in front of graduating college students, it sounded like the high poverty and unemployment rates are just blacks' fault. Obama and his office were hesitant in addressing blacks' issues and black communities continued to suffer.<sup>112</sup> During his presidential campaign of 2008, Obama dedicated an entire speech to racial issues in the United States, but after his election he talked about it only when necessary. Obama, together with some black Democrats, believed that blacks themselves are responsible for their bad conditions. This belief was another obstacle for black activists.<sup>113</sup>

During his second presidential campaign of 2012, he delivered a speech that did not suggest that things should be getting better for blacks. Rather, it seemed like an effort to secure whites' votes, as he said "I'm not the president of Black America. I'm the president of the United States of America."<sup>114</sup> Despite these words, black voters broke another record in the presidential election of 2012, with a turnout of 66 percent.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 10.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>110</sup> *International Socialist Review*, "A New Movement Takes Shape."

<sup>111</sup> Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter*, 142.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>113</sup> *International Socialist Review*, "A New Movement Takes Shape."

<sup>114</sup> Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter*, 12.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

During Obama's administration, recommendations were made to police departments providing instructions on how to treat violent suspects and situations.<sup>116</sup> Due to rising tensions between law enforcement and black communities, Obama granted 75 million dollars to the Justice Department for body cameras in 2015.<sup>117</sup> Further, Obama granted pardons to hundreds of people convicted of nonviolent drug crimes, and implemented other procedures that reduced mass incarceration of blacks. Lastly, he established a mentorship program My Brother's Keeper for young black men. Notwithstanding these moves, according to a CNN/ORC survey in 2016, 54 percent of Americans believed that race relations in the United States worsened during Obama's presidency.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Kevin Liptak, "Obama's Candid Reflections on Race," CNN, accessed March 15, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/12/07/politics/obama-race-legacy/index.html>.

<sup>117</sup> David Jackson, "Obama Team Will Fund Police Body Camera Project," *USA Today*, accessed March 31, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/05/01/obama-police-body-cameras-josh-earnest-baltimore/26696517/>.

<sup>118</sup> Liptak, "Obama's Candid Reflections."

## 5 THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

Police brutality has been the most common reason for black uprisings. Violence is just the beginning of a problem, and in the case of Black Lives Matter (BLM), the situation was not different.<sup>119</sup> The BLM story began in 2012 when an unarmed black teenager, Trayvon Martin was shot and killed by neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman. Zimmerman, of Hispanic Ethnicity, decided to pull the trigger because he considered Martin suspicious, as he was wearing a hoodie while walking through a neighborhood. Although Zimmerman called the police first, he did not follow the operator's instructions and started a quarrel, which resulted in the death of seventeen-year-old boy. Zimmerman was arrested and tried, but was proclaimed innocent in 2013.<sup>120</sup>

This decision ignited protests nationwide, and inspired three black women, Opal Tometi, Alicia Garza, and Patrisse Cullors to act. The first step took place on social media, with a post containing the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. The hashtag went viral across the Internet and caught the attention of American citizens, who transferred it to the streets.<sup>121</sup> The movement was born and other groups were using the slogan in its demonstrations against anti-black related issues across the United States.<sup>122</sup>

Another incident of police brutality happened in the summer of 2014, when a black man, Eric Garner, was encountered by police officers in New York. Garner, who was suspected of selling illegal cigarettes on the street, got into an argument with Officer Daniel Pantaleo. When Pantaleo attempted to arrest Garner, Garner did not follow Pantaleo's commands. In an effort to arrest Garner, Pantaleo used a chokehold clutch, a prohibited technique, which led to Garner's death. The entire incident was on camera. The video depicts Garner saying "I can't breathe" to the officer multiple times. Pantaleo was tried but found innocent.<sup>123</sup> Many blacks were disgusted with the verdict and went to the

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<sup>119</sup> Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter*, 10.

<sup>120</sup> Christopher J. Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), x–xi.

<sup>121</sup> "Herstory," Black Lives Matter, accessed March 8, 2018, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/herstory/>; Russell Rickford, "Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle," *New Labor Forum* 25, no.1 (2016): 35, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1095796015620171>; Mychal Denzel Smith, "How Trayvon Martin's Death Launched a New Generation of Black Activism," *Nation*, accessed March 8, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/how-trayvon-martins-death-launched-new-generation-black-activism/>.

<sup>122</sup> Black Lives Matter, "Herstory."

<sup>123</sup> Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, 5–6; "Father of Six Dies after NYPD Police Chokehold," ABC News, YouTube video, 1:57, posted July 7, 2014. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_s8JklrBSlk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_s8JklrBSlk).

streets, protesting in form of die-ins, marches, walkouts, and other type of demonstrations. Slogans used in these protests were “Black Lives Matter”, inspired by the famous hashtag, and “I can’t breathe” inspired by Garner’s last words.<sup>124</sup>

In August 2014, eighteen-year-old boy Mike Brown was shot, in Ferguson, Missouri. Brown and his friend had stolen a box of cigarettes from a local liquor store. Later on, a police officer, Daren Wilson, stopped both men for jaywalking. Shortly after their encounter, Wilson and Brown began to argue. The argument led to a fist fight and resulted in the shooting of the unarmed Brown while he was running away from Wilson. Wilson fired twelve shots, hitting his target at least six times.<sup>125</sup> Some witnesses said that Brown had his hands up, shouting “Hands up, don’t shoot!” These words became a rallying cry across the United States, despite the fact this claim proved to be false.<sup>126</sup> The fact that Ferguson’s police left Brown’s dead body lying on the street for almost five hours outraged Ferguson’s citizens.<sup>127</sup> That day as angry crowds gathered, Ferguson and St. Louis police departments sent dozens of officers in riot gear and tactical vehicles to disperse the crowds.<sup>128</sup> Protests that lasted for weeks developed from non-violent rallies into riots. Armed vandals were robbing, destroying, and burning down Ferguson’s businesses as well as their own neighborhoods. The police were using rubber bullets and tear gas to stop them.<sup>129</sup> Another round of protests occurred in November 2014, when a jury proclaimed Officer Wilson innocent of the killing of Mike Brown. This time protests were not only local but national.<sup>130</sup>

“If I had a son, he’d look like Trayvon ... When I think about this boy, I think about my own kids.” These words were spoken by President Obama after the killing of Trayvon Martin. Further, he added that the case would be investigated in detail. Nevertheless, he did not utilize his presidential position to push the case forward, even though that was what blacks anticipated from him when they elected him president. Moreover, Obama defended the jury decision, claiming the United States is a “nation of law” and people should respect

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<sup>124</sup> Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter*, 173.

<sup>125</sup> Lowery, *They Can’t Kill Us All*, 22–23; “What Happened in Ferguson?,” *New York Times*, accessed March 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/13/us/ferguson-missouri-town-under-siege-after-police-shooting.html>.

<sup>126</sup> Lowery, *They Can’t Kill Us All*, 24.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>129</sup> *New York Times*, “What Happened in Ferguson?”

<sup>130</sup> “Ferguson Unrest: From Shooting to Nationwide Protests,” BBC, accessed March 8, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-30193354>.

the jury decision. He also noted that people themselves should think about how to prevent similar cases in the future, rather than addressing the judicial system or law enforcement.<sup>131</sup> Following the Ferguson unrest, President Obama, due to rising criticism of the usage of equipment against rioters, prohibited the sale of some military equipment to local police departments.<sup>132</sup>

The first Ferguson protest was fundamental for the BLM. Cullors and Darnell Moore organized the Black Live Matters national ride during Labor Day weekend, which was attended by more than six hundred people. When various activists from different cities returned home from Ferguson, they established eighteen official BLM chapters in their communities. Currently the BLM has more than 40 chapters around the world. Later on the Black Lives Matter Global Network was founded, which is a worldwide respected decentralized organizing project with a set of uniform principles. The goal of the project is to develop a network of self-confident blacks and support the growth of new black leaders.<sup>133</sup> The BLM is globally represented by activists who are protesting against racial inequality under the movement's slogan.<sup>134</sup> For instance in Ireland, the BLM was represented by the Movement of Asylum Seekers and the Anti-Racism Network Ireland.<sup>135</sup>

In April 2015, Freddie Gray, who had a history of drug related crimes, ran from a police patrol in Baltimore, Maryland. The police officers gave chase and detained him. They found a knife in his pocket, which they incorrectly deemed illegal. On these grounds, Gray was arrested and forcefully loaded into a police van, all the while screaming from pain. The journey to the police station took 30 minutes, during which the van made four stops. Officers did not provide Gray with medical treatment, despite the fact he was begging for it. When the van arrived to the station, Gray was already in a coma and taken to a hospital. He died a week later of his injuries. An autopsy revealed that his death was

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<sup>131</sup> "Barack Obama's Original Sin: America's Post-racial Illusion.," *Guardian*, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/13/barack-obama-legacy-racism-criminal-justice-system>.

<sup>132</sup> Gregory Korte, "Obama Bans Some Military Equipment Sales to Police," *USA Today*, accessed March 26, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/05/18/obama-police-military-equipment-sales-new-jersey/27521793/>.

<sup>133</sup> Black Lives Matter, "Herstory."

<sup>134</sup> Morgan Winsor, "Black Lives Matter Protests Go Global, From Ireland to South Africa," ABC News Network, accessed March 9, 2018, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/black-lives-matter-protests-global-ireland-south-africa/story?id=40546549>.

<sup>135</sup> Dean Bowen, "Why Black Lives Matter Is a Global Issue," Global Poverty Project, accessed March 14, 2018, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/black-lives-matter-movement-uk-europe/>.

due to spinal cord injury. Gray had broken three vertebrae and injured his voice box. According to medical experts, these injuries were consequences of excessive force.<sup>136</sup>

His death started a series of peaceful protests, which lasted for a week until his funeral. The protests burst into a riot right after the funeral. Rioters were looting shops, setting buildings and cars on fire, and damaging businesses. In a response, police used pepper spray to disperse the protesters when it was necessary. The riots resulted in more than two hundred arrested adults and at least 30 juveniles. More than twenty police officers were injured during the riots.<sup>137</sup> Estimated damages reached nine billion dollars, according to a federal survey.<sup>138</sup> Among the two hundred arrested adults was DeRay Mckesson, who is a prominent BLM activist. An anonymous police officer sued the BLM after the Baltimore riots. He claimed that Mckesson injured him with a rock during the demonstration, thus the movement was responsible for the attack. However, a judge decided that the BLM cannot be sued, as it is a social movement, and dismissed the lawsuit.<sup>139</sup>

The difference between Baltimore and Ferguson is that Baltimore is controlled by black politicians. Dominance of white officials was considered to be the main problem of Brown's killing. It follows that in Baltimore it was a result of a bad black political establishment.<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless, Baltimore officials learned lessons from Ferguson's riots. Baltimore's department provided protesters with detailed information of the case as soon as possible. The police left nonviolent protesters to vent their emotions, instead of using excessive militant force. Moreover, the protesters were allowed to march through city center and were not concentrated in a small area.<sup>141</sup>

Six officers involved in Gray's case, three of whom are black, were charged with manslaughter and murder. Nevertheless, due to insufficient evidence, all charges were dropped in 2017. Baltimore's police department, was also investigated which agreed to

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<sup>136</sup> Lowery, *They Can't Kill Us All*, 132–133; "Freddie Gray's Death in Police Custody – What We Know," BBC, accessed March 21, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-32400497>.

<sup>137</sup> Donna Owens, "Baltimore Rising: Two Years After Freddie Gray's Death, Shaken City Mends," NBC News, accessed March 21, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/baltimore-unrest/city-divided-baltimore-mending-two-years-after-freddie-grays-death-n748101>; "Baltimore Riots Leave 20 Police Officers Hurt, One Person Critical," CBS Interactive, accessed March 21, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/baltimore-riots-leave-20-police-officers-hurt-one-person-critical/>.

<sup>138</sup> Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter*, 76.

<sup>139</sup> "Black Lives Matter Cannot Be Sued, Judge Rules after Police Officer Takes Action," *Guardian*, accessed March 22, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/28/black-lives-matter-police-lawsuit-deray-mckesson>.

<sup>140</sup> Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter*, 77–78.

<sup>141</sup> "Freddie Gray: How Baltimore Differs from Ferguson," BBC, accessed March 22, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-32458096>.



change their practices to avoid a federal lawsuit. Criminality in Baltimore has increased since the riots and is reaching new heights.<sup>142</sup>

While both victims in Ferguson and Baltimore had either a criminal record or started to argue with officers, the case of Philando Castile was different. Castile was stopped while driving his car with his girlfriend and four year old daughter in Minnesota in 2016. The police pulled him over due to a broken tail light. The officer asked Castile for a document of insurance and his driver license. Castile confessed to the officer that had a firearm in the car. Despite the fact that the officer heard him, Castile was shot seven times while reaching for his wallet. The officer was acquitted on all charges even though there was a dashboard video from a police car and a video on Castile girlfriend's phone. The shooting was followed by a weekend of protests across the United States.<sup>143</sup>

Obama met civil rights activists including some BLM leaders in 2016. The meeting was convoked to discuss how to establish mutual respect between blacks and law enforcement, as well as reforms in the criminal justice system. DeRay Mckesson, was amazed by the meeting and praised the president for a long and meaningful conversation. On the other hand, Aislinn Pulley, co-founder of the BLM chapter in Chicago, rejected the invitation for the meeting claiming it was fabricated for the media. This showed how different and inconsistent the BLM leaders were.<sup>144</sup>

Colin Kaepernick, a football player for the San Francisco 49ers, performed an action reminiscent of the BPM in 2016, as he refused to stand during the national anthem. He did it as a silent protest against racial inequality and police violence in the United States.<sup>145</sup> "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color," Kaepernick said. The next time, Kaepernick decided to kneel, and he was accompanied not only by other football players, but also by other

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<sup>142</sup> Jon Schuppe, "Justice Department Won't Charge Six Officers in Freddie Gray Death," NBC News, accessed March 21, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/baltimore-unrest/justice-department-won-t-charge-six-officers-freddie-gray-death-n800786>.

<sup>143</sup> Dana Thiede and Lou Raguse. "'I'm Not Pulling it Out': Newly Released Video Shows Philando Castile's Last Moments," *USA Today*, accessed March 31, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/06/20/dash-cam-video-shows-officer-shooting-philando-castile/414285001/>; Lowery, *They Can't Kill Us All*, 224–225.

<sup>144</sup> Jamiles Lartey, "Obama on Black Lives Matter: They Are 'Much Better Organizers than I Was'," *Guardian*, accessed March 15, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/feb/18/black-lives-matter-meet-president-obama-white-house-justice-system>.

<sup>145</sup> Nick Allen, "Colin Kaepernick: NFL Black Lives Matter Protests Recall Rebellious Spirit of 1960s Sporting Greats," *Telegraph*, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/18/colin-kaepernick-nfl-black-lives-matter-protests-recall-rebellio/>.

famous athletes.<sup>146</sup> Some of them kneeled and some raised their fist as did Carlos and Smith in the 1968 Olympics. Kaepernick's protest was widely criticized as it supposedly disrespects the nation, the flag, and all people who have fought for it.<sup>147</sup> Kaepernick opted out of his contract with the 49ers in March 2017 and has been unemployed ever since.<sup>148</sup> During a speech, President Donald Trump offended players participating in the protest and sharply appealed to club owners and the NFL to fire any player who refused to stand for the national anthem. His speech led the following week to the greatest participation in the protest, as many athletes and coaches throughout the United States took part.<sup>149</sup> The NFL lately issued a statement claiming that they will recommend that players stand during the anthem, but it will not be official policy.<sup>150</sup>

## 5.1 Structure and Tactics of the Movement

According to the BLM official website, the movement is an ideological and political organization that fights against state-sanctioned violence and oppression.<sup>151</sup> BLM is widely recognized for their protests over police brutality and for the first time became officially involved in politics when they joined the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) in 2016.<sup>152</sup> The BLM disagrees with a deeply-rooted stereotype of a typical black movement hierarchy led mostly by black heterosexual men. For that reason, the movement puts discriminated women, queers and transgender people, those who were not recognized for their work in the previous movements into the center of the BLM.<sup>153</sup> The movement's leadership was inspired by a system of participatory democracy.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Steve Wyche, "Colin Kaepernick Explains Why He Sat during National Anthem," NFL Enterprises, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000691077/article/colin-kaepernick-explains-why-he-sat-during-national-anthem>.

<sup>147</sup> Allen, "Colin Kaepernick: NFL Black Lives."

<sup>148</sup> "Colin Kaepernick Opts out of Contract, Becomes a Free Agent," Forty Niners Football Company, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://www.49ers.com/news/article-2/Colin-Kaepernick-Opts-Out-of-Contract-Becomes-a-Free-Agent/55f3952d-1f83-4682-bf97-3c423ab26fa8>.

<sup>149</sup> Patrick Jennings, "Colin Kaepernick: From One Man Kneeling to a Movement Dividing a Country," BBC Sport, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/sport/american-football/41530732>.

<sup>150</sup> Sean, Wagner-McGough, "NFL, NFLPA Statement: 'No Change in the Current Policy Regarding the Anthem'," CBS Sports, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.cbssports.com/nfl/news/nfl-nflpa-statement-no-change-in-the-current-policy-regarding-the-anthem/>.

<sup>151</sup> Black Lives Matter, "Herstory."

<sup>152</sup> Jaweed Kaleem, "Black Lives Matter Has Signed onto a Platform in Time for the Presidential Election. Here's What It Say," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed March 22, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-pol-black-lives-platform-20160801-snap-story.html>.

<sup>153</sup> Black Lives Matter, "Herstory.":; Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, xi–xii.

<sup>154</sup> Fredrick C. Harris, "The Next Civil Rights Movement?" *Dissent Magazine*, accessed March 12, 2018, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/black-lives-matter-new-civil-rights-movement-fredrick-harris>.

The BLM's chapters are led by various types of people from working or low-income classes through feminists to LGBTQ.<sup>155</sup> Besides their own chapters, the movement consists of many similar protest organizations as Hands Up United and We the Protesters.<sup>156</sup> Shanelle Matthews, the lead communications strategist for the BLM, stated that all BLM chapters are autonomous and have their own strategies. Nevertheless, all the chapters are uniform in their vision and goals. The reason for such independence is because every community has different needs and social backgrounds. The fact that a wide range of divergent people in the movement have their own strategies is a refreshing feature, but it is not always effective in achieving collective goals. For instance, the chapters often do not agree, whether abolition or reform is the best mean to achieve the goals.<sup>157</sup> The diverse nature of the chapters is the reason why the movement focuses mainly on local systems rather than on national. Further, Cullros suggests that organizing the movement is mainly spontaneous.<sup>158</sup> It is problematic to measure such a loosely organized movement, as everyone using their slogan on social media or in the streets can be considered as their supporter or member.<sup>159</sup> Experts on trans-cultural communication claim that although the chapters are a congenial system and are meaningful in diverse communities, the movement should create a unified structure and choose a few spokesperson who will be united in delivering the movement's needs, and who will help in building a representative image of the movement in the media. Otherwise, the impact of the movement will be reduced.<sup>160</sup>

As the movement is demanding an immediate termination of state violence against blacks, the BLM exploits slightly aggressive ways to achieve their goals.<sup>161</sup> Especially, the

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<sup>155</sup> Rickford, "Toward a Modern Practice," 35.

<sup>156</sup> Alex Altman, "TIME Person of the Year 2015 Runner-Up: Black Lives Matter," *Time*, accessed March 22, 2018, <http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2015-runner-up-black-lives-matter/>.

<sup>157</sup> Dipka Bhambhani, "The Communications Goals and Strategies of Black Lives Matter," *Haymarket*, accessed March 10, 2018, <https://www.prweek.com/article/1383011/communications-goals-strategies-black-lives-matter>.

<sup>158</sup> Ryan W. Miller, "Black Lives Matter: A Primer on What It Is and What It Stands for," *USA Today*, accessed March 16, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2016/07/11/black-lives-matter-what-what-stands/86963292/>.

<sup>159</sup> Sara Sidner and Mallory Simon "The Rise of Black Lives Matter: Trying to Break the Cycle of Violence and Silence," CNN, accessed March 17, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/28/us/black-lives-matter-evolution/index.html>.

<sup>160</sup> Chris Daniels, "Experts: Black Lives Matter's Decentralized Structure Is Holding It Back," *Haymarket*, accessed March 10, 2018, <https://www.prweek.com/article/1402521/experts-black-lives-matters-decentralized-structure-holding-back>.

<sup>161</sup> Rickford, "Toward a Modern Practice," 36.

very first protests in Ferguson gave the movement rather a militant nature.<sup>162</sup> Still, the BLM urges their members to protest peacefully and vigorously distance themselves from those protesters taking a violent approach.<sup>163</sup> As stated by co-founder Cullors “I believe in direct action, but nonviolent direct action. And our movement believes in that nonviolent direct action. But I do believe that our communities need to be defended.”<sup>164</sup> The movement’s militancy is reminiscent of the SNCC, and due to an insistence on human rights and self-definition rather than on social inclusion, the BLM is also compared to the BPM.<sup>165</sup>

Demonstrations of the BLM have taken place on various occasions and places such as sports events, highways, retail stores, but also police stations or municipal buildings. The most typical types of their demonstrations are walkouts, marches, and die-ins.<sup>166</sup> The BLM’s demonstrations enjoy multicultural support in major cities, and the movement has also has a support from medical students, who established the White Coats for Black Lives protests in more than seventy U.S. medical schools.<sup>167</sup> The BLM agenda spread across American universities and influenced students, who are protesting against racial segregation of brotherhoods or low recruitment of black students.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, the movement is also supported by some white leftists and has been occasionally supported by members of the Fight for \$15, which is a multiracial movement demanding an increase in minimum wage, even though the BLM does not identify themselves with labor issues or with trade unions.<sup>169</sup>

Roughly 96 percent of American blacks aged between 18 and 29 use some type of social network.<sup>170</sup> Therefore, social media are important tools for the BLM, as the range and speed of the coverage is enormous. The BLM uses it to organize demonstrations and making short statements, but also to share actual reports, or footages of police brutality.

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<sup>162</sup> *International Socialist Review*, “A New Movement Takes Shape.”

<sup>163</sup> Sinder and Simon, “The Rise of Black Lives Matter.”

<sup>164</sup> Ann M. Simmons and Jaweed Kaleem, “A Founder of Black Lives Matter Answers a Question on Many Minds: Where Did It Go?,” *Los Angeles Times*, accessed March 17, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-patrisse-cullors-black-lives-matter-2017-htmlstory.html>.

<sup>165</sup> Rickford, “Toward a Modern Practice,” 37.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>167</sup> *International Socialist Review*, “A New Movement Takes Shape.”

<sup>168</sup> Time, “Runner-Up: Black Lives Matter.”

<sup>169</sup> Rickford, “Toward a Modern Practice,” 38.

<sup>170</sup> Elizabeth Day, “#BlackLivesMatter: The Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement,” *Guardian*, accessed March 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement>.

These pictures or footages attract attention of people faster than in the past, moreover, it puts pressure on police departments, which have to respond to the footage, like for instance in the case of Eric Garner.<sup>171</sup>

## 5.2 Backlash against the Movement

In 2014, two police officers were killed in New York. The Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA) labeled the BLM responsible for the killings. For this reason, the NYPD led a backlash against the BLM, and the PBA declared their version of a movement against violence executed on officers, ironically called Blue Lives Matter.<sup>172</sup> Blue Lives Matter has an important political meaning, as it suggests that colored people are more protected than members of law enforcement, who in fact suffer more. The countermovement has actually achieved some success, as its bills were introduced in 33 states by 2017. These bills secure hate crime protection for police officers, and assert that violence against them should be punished more strictly. Although, the bills were mostly rejected, they became law in Kentucky, and Louisiana, and in South Carolina, where it was slightly modified.

There were two additional cop shooting, executed by blacks, in Baton Rouge and Dallas, in 2016.<sup>173</sup> The first came in Dallas, during a peaceful demonstration of the BLM over the recent shooting of blacks in Minnesota and Louisiana. The attacker killed five police officers and injured seven more. During a standoff, the black marksman confessed to the police that he acted in order to kill whites and especially white officers. The reason for his anger was police officers who killing blacks, as well as BLM activities.<sup>174</sup> The second shooting happened ten days later in Baton Rouge, where a lone black shooter killed three police officers, one of whom was black, and injured another three. The shooting took place two weeks after the police shot Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, which was immediately followed by a BLM demonstration. Prominent members of the movement were sued by an anonymous police officer from Baton Rouge, who claimed that their

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<sup>171</sup> Harris, "The Next Civil Rights Movement?"

<sup>172</sup> *International Socialist Review*, "A New Movement Takes Shape."

<sup>173</sup> David Smith, "The Backlash against Black Lives Matter Is Just More Evidence of Injustice," *Conversation Trust*, accessed March 12, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/the-backlash-against-black-lives-matter-is-just-more-evidence-of-injustice-85587>.

<sup>174</sup> "Dallas Police Shootings: What We Know so Far," BBC, accessed March 26, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-36744368>.

fierce nature encourages blacks in committing violence.<sup>175</sup> The BLM's critics in general blamed the movement over both shootings. In response, the activists rejected all speculations that they were responsible for the attack and condemned it.<sup>176</sup> In late March 2018, the court decided not to file any charges against two officers involved in Sterling's shooting. Sterling was shot while pinned on the ground by the officers, who thought he was reaching for a gun.<sup>177</sup>

Another countermovement to the BLM came in form of All Lives Matter, which is based on an ideology of colorblind racism.<sup>178</sup> This ideology states that individuals should be prioritized before groups, and that people should not consider racial issues important in current society and get over skin color.<sup>179</sup> The All Lives Matter movement refuses the idea that blacks in the United States are treated unequally, and portrays them as aggressors in a currently colorblind society.<sup>180</sup> Another purpose of the phrase is to distract attention from the police brutality.<sup>181</sup> Notable supporters of All Lives Matter are the current U.S. president, Donald Trump, and the former mayor of New York City, Rudy Giuliani. Giuliani said in an interview that the BLM alone is racist as it divides society, adding "All lives matter: White lives, Black lives, all lives." Further, he added that the movement appears only when a white person kills a black person, and does not care about cases of black-on-black murder.<sup>182</sup> Garza, one of its co-founders, expressed herself about All Lives Matter as follows "The reality, of course, is that they do, but we live in a world where

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<sup>175</sup> Mike Kunzelman and Melinda Deslatte, "Baton Rouge Shooting: Gunman 'Was Seeking Put' Police in 'Ambush' on 6 Officers," Global News, accessed March 26, 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/2830774/baton-rouge-shooting-former-marine-shot-killed-3-officers-on-his-birthday/>; Katie Mettler, "Disabled Baton Rouge Police Officer Sues Black Lives Matter Over Ambush Shooting," Independent Digital News and Media, accessed March 26, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/baton-rouge-police-shooting-anniversary-black-lives-matter-sued-deray-mckesson-gavin-long-a7833411.html>.

<sup>176</sup> Lowery, *They Can't Kill Us All*, 225–26.

<sup>177</sup> "No Charges against Officers in Alton Sterling Death; Other Videos Are Coming," CNN, accessed March 29, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/27/us/alton-sterling-investigation/index.html>.

<sup>178</sup> David Smith, "The Backlash against ."

<sup>179</sup> Zuelma Valdez, "The Abandoned Promise of Civil Rights," *Sociological Forum* 30, no. S1 (June 2015): 619, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/socf.12180>.

<sup>180</sup> "The Backlash against Black Lives Matter Is Just More Evidence of Injustice," Conversation US, accessed March 13, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/the-backlash-against-black-lives-matter-is-just-more-evidence-of-injustice-85587>.

<sup>181</sup> Valentina Duarte, "'All Lives Matter' Was Created to Protect White Privilege," Odyssey, accessed March 13, 2018, <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/all-lives-matter-was-created-to-protect-white-privilege>.

<sup>182</sup> Conversation US, "The Backlash against Black Lives Matter."

some lives matter more than others. ‘All Lives Matter’ effectively neutralizes the fact that it’s black people who are fighting for their lives right now.”<sup>183</sup>

The BLM is, similar to previous movements for black liberation of the 1960s, monitored by the FBI.<sup>184</sup> According to files released by the US Department of Homeland Security and the FBI in mid-2017, the U.S. government considers the BLM as a potential threat and it has monitored their protests.<sup>185</sup> In one document, the FBI calls the BLM activists as “black identity extremists” combining them with domestic terrorist groups.<sup>186</sup>

### 5.3 The Black Lives Matter and Politics

The movement released a plan called Campaign Zero in 2015, containing ten policy goals against police forces. The plan requests a termination of the “broken windows” policy, community oversight over punishments of officers’ wrongdoing, setting of limits for using excessive force by the police, the independent investigation and prosecution of police wrongdoings, police representation according to the community it serves, more consistent training of police officers, a provision that officers wear body cameras, the termination of excessive for-profit methods, the prohibition of police from using military equipment, and an addition to police union contracts that makes officers responsible for their wrongdoing.<sup>187</sup> The Campaign Zero website is mapping the actions of individual states in enacting proposed legislation concerning police violence. According to the website, there have been 102 laws enacted since the creation of Campaign Zero, ten states enacted three or more goals from the Campaign Zero platform, and about nineteen states are considering police violence reforms.<sup>188</sup>

The BLM is known for their engagement in political gatherings.<sup>189</sup> Despite the fact that it interfered in many presidential campaigns, the movement issued an official

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<sup>183</sup> *Guardian*, “The Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement.”

<sup>184</sup> “FBI Report on Black ‘Extremists’ Raises New Monitoring Fears,” *Telegraph*, accessed March 29, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/19/fbi-report-black-extremists-raises-new-monitoring-fears/>.

<sup>185</sup> Sweta Vohra, “Documents Show US Monitoring of Black Lives Matter,” Al Jazeera Media Network, accessed March 29, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/documents-show-monitoring-black-lives-matter-171128110538134.html>.

<sup>186</sup> *Telegraph*, “FBI Report.”

<sup>187</sup> “Black Lives Matters Activists Outline Policy Goals,” BBC, accessed March 16, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34023751>.

<sup>188</sup> “Take Action,” Campaign Zero, accessed March 31, 2018, <https://www.joincampaignzero.org/#action>.

<sup>189</sup> Sinder and Simon, “The Rise of Black Lives Matter.”

statement in 2015, declaring that the BLM decided not to endorse any of the proposed candidates in the 2016 presidential election.<sup>190</sup>

The BLM interrupted Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns in Seattle and Washington in 2015. The activists got on a stage, and did not allow Sanders to speak.<sup>191</sup> This was not the first case when Sanders was interrupted by BLM protesters. The first encounter took place in Phoenix one month earlier, when protesters intervened in an event attended by Sanders and another presidential candidate, Martin O'Malley. In Seattle, the activists highlighted that since the Phoenix demonstration, O'Malley embraced criminal justice reform in his platform. Two activists continued that Sanders did not do enough for the promotion of racial equality and the improvement of the criminal justice system.<sup>192</sup> As a result, Sanders added prison reforms and racial justice to his platform a day after the demonstration.<sup>193</sup>

Hillary Clinton was also many times interrupted during her presidential campaigns by BLM protesters. In 2016, two protesters confronted her in South Carolina and demanded an apology for mass incarceration, as well as explanation of her past statements that black youth linked with gangs are "super-predators." Hillary apologized for her past statements a day after the confrontation and said that she would not use the same words again.<sup>194</sup> During the Democratic National Convention, she brought to the stage nine black mothers, who lost their kids due to police brutality or black-on-black violence. She was praised for the inclusion of both opposing groups, which is something that the BLM had been overlooking in their agenda.<sup>195</sup>

Another presidential campaign that was disturbed by the BLM activists was Donald Trump's, at rallies in Alabama and in New Orleans in 2016. The demonstrations occurred a

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<sup>190</sup> "Black Lives Matter Movement Refuses to Endorse Any 2016 Presidential Candidate," *Guardian*, accessed March 22, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/sep/19/black-lives-matter-endorsement-2016-presidential-candidate-election>.

<sup>191</sup> Stephen Hegg, "Tactics of Black Lives Matter," *Cascade Public Media*, accessed March 14, 2018, <https://kcts9.org/programs/in-close/tactics-black-lives-matter>.

<sup>192</sup> Peter Andrew Hart, "Bernie Sanders Shut Down by Black Lives Matter Protesters in Seattle," *Huffington Post*, accessed March 14, 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/bernie-sanders-black-lives-matter\\_us\\_55c68f14e4b0923c12bd197e](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/bernie-sanders-black-lives-matter_us_55c68f14e4b0923c12bd197e).

<sup>193</sup> Hegg, "Tactics of Black Lives Matter."

<sup>194</sup> Eugene Scott, "Black Lives Matter Protesters Confront Clinton at a Fundraiser," CNN, accessed March 22, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/25/politics/hillary-clinton-black-lives-matter-whichhillary/index.html>.

<sup>195</sup> Dahleen Glanton, "Hillary Clinton Isn't Afraid to Say Black Lives Matter," *Chicago Tribune*, accessed March 22, 2018, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/columnists/ct-clinton-black-lives-matter-glanton-20160727-column.html>.



week after Trump rejected to disavow the support of white supremacist groups, including also the KKK. However, Trump later posted on his Twitter feed that he rejected a former leader of the KKK, David Duke. The protest ended roughly in six minutes when security guards and police officers expelled the protesters from the event.<sup>196</sup>

Right after presidential inauguration in 2017, President Trump indirectly addressed the BLM and affiliated groups via the new White House website that he will support and protect lives of police officers, and terminate anti-police actions, which are executed by “the rioter, the looter, or the violent disrupter.”<sup>197</sup> In late August of 2017, Donald Trump announced that he is considering lifting Obama’s ban on the usage of military equipment by police departments during riots. Moreover, lawmakers are considering some laws that would reduce protesters’ rights and would charge a fee for protection provided by police services during nonviolent protests.<sup>198</sup>

The BLM movement openly and roughly criticized Donald Trump on their website, describing him as a liar who is “stomping on blacks’ faces”, whose administration resembles fascism. They accused him from breaking the laws and insulting foreign countries. Further, they stated that he benefits from crises, as for instance migration, and puts the military over the safety and security of the country. Moreover, they did not forget to remind him that conditions in black communities continue to decline and at the end, they appealed to all oppressed people to stop Trump’s agenda and join the movement in its activities.<sup>199</sup>

### 5.3.1 The Movement for Black Lives

The BLM became a part of a new coalition associating more than 50 organizations for black liberation, called the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), in 2016.<sup>200</sup> The M4BL has issued its policy platform, which is comprised of six demands, including the end of the

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<sup>196</sup> Jeremy Diamond, “More Than 2 Dozen Black Lives Matter Protesters Disrupt Trump Rally,” CNN, accessed March 14, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/04/politics/donald-trump-protesters-black-lives-matter/>; CNN, Sinder and Simon, “The Rise of Black Lives Matter.”

<sup>197</sup> Leon Neyfakh, “In One of His First Acts as President, Donald Trump Put Black Lives Matter on Notice,” *Slate*, accessed March 26, 2018, [http://www.slate.com/blogs/the\\_slatest/2017/01/20/donald\\_trump\\_puts\\_black\\_lives\\_matter\\_on\\_notice.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2017/01/20/donald_trump_puts_black_lives_matter_on_notice.html).

<sup>198</sup> Dani McClain, “Can Black Lives Matter Win in the Age of Trump?” *Nation*, accessed March 26, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/can-black-lives-matter-win-in-the-age-of-trump/>.

<sup>199</sup> “In Response to the State of the Union,” Black Lives Matter, accessed March 14, 2018, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/pressroom/responsestate-of-the-union/>.

<sup>200</sup> Vann R. Newkirk, “The Permanence of Black Lives Matter,” *Atlantic Monthly*, accessed March 15, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/movement-black-lives-platform/494309/>.

killing of blacks and mass incarceration, reimbursements for state violence, investment into black's wellbeing rather than incarceration, economic justice, control over law enforcement in black communities, and independent black political power. The goal of the platform is to interfere in U.S. politics through the M4BL allies, and therefore help to uphold their vision.<sup>201</sup> Before the emergence of the M4BL, the BLM and other similar black organizations were criticized by civil rights movement veterans, as well as by some politicians, for a lack of political activity and a lack of concrete policy proposals.<sup>202</sup> Rachel Gilmer, a leader of Dream Defenders, is aware that not every point of the platform could be implemented, but believes that as a whole it may dramatically improve blacks' conditions worldwide. While the BLM's main focus was on criminal injustice, cooperation with other groups means that the M4BL is targeting a wider spectrum of racial issues. The criminal injustice is supplemented by the education system and health care.<sup>203</sup> Nevertheless, the huge divergence of groups involved in the M4BL results in the disunity of groups' ideas and decision making.<sup>204</sup> The BLM together with the M4BL introduced Channel Black in the beginning of 2017, which is a training program with an intention to train and develop black leaders of the new generation.<sup>205</sup> In 2017, Cullors said that she could imagine BLM members as parts of both local and national governments in the next four years.<sup>206</sup>

#### 5.4 Achievements of the Movement

Proponents of the movement argue that activist pressure led to the wearing of body cameras by police officers nationwide. Further, police departments have begun firing police officers who are convicted of murders, and the American judiciary system has started arresting such officers, albeit a small number of them. However, the biggest achievement of the movement is said to be that the movement raised awareness of the

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<sup>201</sup> "Platform," Movement for Black Lives, accessed March 15, 2018, <https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/>.

<sup>202</sup> Kaleem, "Black Lives Matter Has Signed onto a Platform."

<sup>203</sup> Newkirk, "The Permanence of Black Lives Matter."

<sup>204</sup> "The Movement for Black Lives Responds to Recent Claims of a Fractured Coalition," Mic Network, accessed March 22, 2018, <https://mic.com/articles/180730/the-movement-for-black-lives-responds-to-recent-claims-of-a-fractured-coalition#.iTHtuvAn5>.

<sup>205</sup> Shanelle Matthews, "Why the Movement for Black Lives Is Using the Media to Build Empathy," Race Forward, accessed 15 March, 2018, <https://www.colorlines.com/articles/opinion-why-movement-black-lives-using-media-build-empathy>.

<sup>206</sup> Simmons and Kaleem, "A Founder of Black Lives Matter."

racial disparities and police violence within the United States, similar to what the CRM and the BPM accomplished in the 1960s.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter*, 14.

## CONCLUSION

Words such as oppression, struggle, and quagmire have been used to describe blacks' lives in America. Blacks suffered through tough working conditions, lynchings, racism, and unequal treatment, until the 1960s when the Civil Rights Movement supposedly gave blacks equality with whites. Yet, the deep-rooted racism and prejudices of American whites have hampered blacks until today. Law enforcement officers and the penal system have been predominantly targeting blacks, and continuous residential segregation has influenced blacks' occupational and educational possibilities. Though, the first black-looking president had given hope to blacks, living standards worsened and police violence rose. Black resistance began again in 2013 when a black teenager was shot to death and the shooter was acquitted. Following the acquittal, and later protests in Ferguson, Missouri, the Black Lives Matter movement was created.

The origins of the Black Lives Matter movement are reminiscent the origins of the Civil Rights Movement, which was spurred by the lynching of Emmett Till in 1955. On the other hand, violent protests in Ferguson, Baltimore, and Baton Rouge show greater similarity with the Black Power Movement and its aggressive "eye for an eye" approach. In spite of these similarities, the Black Lives Matter Movement differs from its predecessors in organizational structure, in that it has no single male leader and no centralized structure, and it also criticizes the treatment of women and other racial and ethnic minorities, as well as the treatment of the LGBT community. Its decentralized structure and message has proven problematic, as subordinate organizations are not able to agree on basic requirements of the movement. Another obstacle that has harmed the movement's image is the shootings of police officers that stemmed from tensions between blacks and law enforcement agencies.

In the 2016 presidential election, activists were disrupting candidates' campaigns, trying to persuade them to incorporate their visions into their platforms. Despite the fact that Hillary Clinton at least showed a concern about black lives, the movement as a whole decided not to endorse any candidate. Due to rising violence and the worsening well-being of blacks, the Black Lives Matter movement then adopted the Movement for Black Lives platform, which unifies more than 50 black activist organizations. The advantage of this coalition is a wider focus than just police violence, which was a frequently mentioned weakness of the Black Lives Matter movement.

After Trump's presidential inauguration in 2017, both sides showed their antipathy to each other. Trump declared that he would terminate anti-police violence and stop the disrupters. In response, the movement called Trump a fascist and appealed to people to stop his agenda. Trump also canceled those few laws passed by his predecessor, Barack Obama, to increase activists' rights.

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the Black Lives Matter movement, its impact on U.S. society, and blacks' rights. During its short almost five year history, the movement did not achieve many breakthroughs. Proponents of the movement are suggesting that the movement contributed to higher visibility of police violence, which is true. The United States experienced many riots in the last five years over the killings of unarmed black men by police officers. Still, 99 percent of involved officers were acquitted, and the number of killings is rather stable than declining. Further, the movement is credited with the wider usage of body cameras by police officers. However, the violence did not radically change, even though it is now recorded. The Black Lives Matter movement contributed to the struggle for blacks' equality by raising awareness of the problem, but it did not in fact achieve anything "tangible," as for instance the Civil Rights Movement.

There are a few reasons for the failure. One is the violence connected with its demonstrations, which harms the image of the movement and the perception of the racial issue by American citizens. Then there is the excessive focus on the justice system, at the expense of other problems of racial discrimination such as residential segregation, economic inequality, or health care. Another reason is the fact that the movement had not been politically active until 2016. But perhaps the biggest problem with the movement is its loose and chaotic organizational structure and varied opinions within its organizations, which differ in goals and practice. As their requirements are not uniform, it is hard to comply with their requests or meet their demands. It is hard to say what the movement will achieve with its recent political platform. However, as the movement refuses a coherent leadership structure and does not have a unified message or goals, and because the movement's actions have led President Trump to oppose it, the outlook for the Black Lives Matter is not good.

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