Racism and police brutality: exploring the impact and cultural significance of the #BLACKLIVESMATTER organisation in the USA.

Victoria Afam-Anadu
Racism and Police Brutality: Exploring the impact and cultural significance of the #BLACKLIVESMATTER organisation in the USA.

By Victoria Afam-Anadu

Aim: The aim of this project is to examine the objectives and achievements and how these have an impact and significance that the BLACKLIVESMATTER organisation has and will have on the present day community and the future generation of youths in the USA.

Introduction

Racism can be primarily said to have begun in the wake of the slave trade in the 15th century. Although slavery has been abolished, racism seems to be a growing problem around the world. Police Brutality, on the other hand, seems to be an emerging issue in the media over the past 5 years and caused a stir in black communities all over America. Irrespective of colour, race, sexual orientation or belief, the thing that we all share together is that we are alive. This act of taking the lives of others whether justly or unjustly, I believe that it is more psychological than intentional. Racism, at its roots is a psychological issue taking base at the idea of associations.¹ Our brains works or processes things better in clusters for faster processing. It puts things in groups and those groups have characteristics and those characteristics are gotten from personal or outside sources. The way that the media showcases the people who live in the “ghetto or the hood” registers in the brain of their viewers. So you see a black man in saggy baggy jeans and a really large shirt with tattoos - your brain takes all this information in and suggests that he probably has a gun. Your natural mechanism is to protect yourself because these characteristics are what you have associated with danger. Any sudden movements like running will cause you to put up defence mechanisms. It is really sad that the man’s life may be lost and racism will be used as a cover for it. We need to rewire

ourselves psychologically and tweak our associations. In all, one way to move forward is to start portraying ourselves and others in appositive light. Not all black people in hoods are gang members—these people have families that they love and are loved by. If the associations can be changed and we'll start to see people past colour and race to who they really are. “There is no such thing as race. None. There is just a human race. Scientifically, anthropologically, racism is a construct—a social construct. And it has benefits. Money can be made off of it, and people who don’t like themselves can feel better because of it. It can describe certain kinds of behaviour that are wrong or misleading. So it has a social function, racism—Toni Morrison.” These such issues have caused the rise of movements such as the #BLACKLIVESMATTER organisation.

Her story

Black lives matter organisation was founded on July 13, 2013. The organisation began with the hashtag #BLACKLIVESMATTER on social media after the death of Trayvon Martin. Founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, the movement sees itself as an


emerging intervention for black people who seem to be targeted for downfall. Their protests particularly got attention in 2014 after the death of 18-year old Mike Brown who was killed at the hands of Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson. #Black Lives Matter is working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise⁵.

Case Studies of Police Brutality

Evaluating the Sandra Bland case

Name: Sandra Bland
Age: 28 years
Death: ruled as a suicide, found hung in a jail cell on July 13, 2015
Place: Waller County Texas
Reason for arrest: minor traffic violation on July 10 in which the police officer alleged that he was assaulted by her.

Protests sprung up with accusation of racial violence. This case sprung up a lot of conspiracy theories having dealing with her mugshot although the autopsy has been showed and ruled as a suicide.

Questions?

1. Why was she photographed in a yellow jumpsuit rather the clothes that she was seen wearing in the video that was released?

   Waller County Sheriff Glenn Smith, said in a press release, “Depending on how many inmates are being processed … an

---

inmate’s photography may be taken in their original clothing or
the inmate may be dressed in orange.”

2. Why was there a garbage bag in her cell?
   There is no substantial reason why there was a garbage bag in
   her cell.

3. Why would she kill herself if she wanted to sue them and was
   about to start a new job?
   The family of the deceased see no reason why she would want to kill
   herself. Her sister says that Sandra called from jail and told her that a
   trooper had held her down with his knee on her back before her arrest
   and that she thought she had fractured her arm. And they had
   discussed coming to get her bailed out the next day. She was also
   about to start a new job which from friends and family, she was
   excited about and had moved from Chicago to Houston just for.

4. The markings on her wrist or the pain she complained about
   when they put the handcuffs on her; does it relate to the fact
   that she committed suicide?
   Sandra Bland had markings on her wrist according to the Waller
   County jail officers. In the video released of the arrest, she is
   seen complaining of pains in her wrist when she is handcuffed.

5. If the police claimed that she was suicidal then why would they
   put her in the cell?

---

7 Http://heavy.com/author/tomwcleary46/. "Sandra Bland Mugshot: 5 Fast Facts You Need to

   2016.

9 Montgomery, David. "New Details Released in Sandra Bland’s Death in Texas Jail." The New
The Waller county officers claimed that they had an inkling or an idea that the late Sandra bland was or had suicidal motives which leaves more doubt as to why they would put her in detention rather than move her to a psychologist or rather have plans for such occurrence.

6. Why would an activist against police brutality kill herself while in police detention?

This was part of the confusion of people who protested against the fact that she committed suicide. She was a known activist against police brutality and the fact that she had gone into custody and killed herself was a shocker to everyone who had heard or listened to her.

7. How did the Black Lives Matter organisation react to the case?

Riots arose after the ruling of the case as a suicide and protesters then rioted until the street where she was killed was renamed after her.

---

Evaluating the Michael Brown case

---

Name: Michael Brown
Age: 18 years old
Death: shot on August 9, 2014
Place: Ferguson, Missouri
Reason: Physical Assault of officer

This led to the Ferguson riots which began the day after the fatal shooting of the teenager. The teenager was shot at least six times in the head and right arm. The St Louis grand jury decided on 24th November not to charge Officer Wilson over the killing after examining evidence from the shooting and hearing from 60 witnesses.

Evaluating the case

1. Why did the shooting happen?
   Officer Darren Wilson says that the teenager fit the description of a suspect in a convenience store theft. The Officer asked him and his friend, Dorian Johnson to step onto the sidewalk. After which the officer and Brown engaged in a scuffle in which the teenager attempted to grab his gun. This led to two shots being fired inside the vehicle. One of the bullets hit Brown’s hand. ¹¹

2. Did Michael actually steal from the shop?
   CCTV footage, which was later released by the police, shows Brown stealing Cigarillos from a convenience store. ⁵

3. Why was he shot more than once?
   Accounts from different witnesses of the scene claim that Brown was seen walking towards the officer when he was shot. Others say that he had his hands up in surrender while some say the shooting happened while Brown ran from the officer. Walking towards the

police would seem like he was going to attack the officer after the previous altercations in the police car.

4. Why was his body left out for hours?

The body was left out where he fell for 4 hours. This allowed for people in the neighbourhood to see the body lying lifeless in the street with blood flowing from his head. This further increased the rate of riots as pictures and videos of the body were taken and uploaded on to social media. There is no notable reason why the body was allowed to remain in the eye of the public. The only reason that could be of mention is the time that it would take to get detectives to the scene. 12

5. The reaction of the black lives matter organisation to the case?

This was the actual case which led to the blow up of the black lives matter organisation. The organisation got particular attention after the case got into the eyes of the media and social media. The hashtag #BLACKLIVESMATTER was how the organisation was known on all social media. The matter blew up on social media especially twitter where there were over 100k tweets about the issue. The shooting caused protests that lasted for weeks all over the area. This case led to the Ferguson riots which occurred due to the decision of the federal courts to not indict Officer Wilson. The case brought about people coming to areas where the riots were occurring offering their help and assistance. 13

---


The Guiding Principles of the Black Lives Matter

On the website of the Black Lives Matter organisation, is are a list of 12 guiding principles. The list is meant to be the rules and laws which the movement abides by.

However, none of these principles refer to the black men or boys by which the movement has used to gain momentum in the media and public.

One of the guiding principles is titled Black Village and it states Black Villages - We are committed to disrupting the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and “villages” that collectively care for one another, and especially “our” children to the degree that mothers, parents and children are comfortable. 14 This principle seems to be saying that they are encouraging the increase of black homes with single mums.

However in the present day black community where 50% of the homes are without their fathers and the most of the obstinate sociable ills are linked to the absence of the children’s fathers. Moreover, the negative outcomes correlated to father absence disproportionately affect the black boys and men who Black Lives Matter says it wants to protect. 15

There is also another principle called Black Families and it states we are committed to making our spaces family-friendly and enable parents to fully participate with their children. We are committed to dismantling the patriarchal practice that requires mothers to work

---


“double shifts” that require them to mother in private even as they participate in justice work.

It starts off talking about family and parents but ends up fixating only on the mothers. Also it has a principle dedicated to black women but nothing for the black men or boys who they so vehement to protect. It seems like they are trying to deny black men the right and honour to be good husbands to their wives and good fathers to their children.16

However the issues which are highlighted on their website do disproportionately affect black lives in different ways. It is very strange that the main issue which they seem to be pushing the most at the present time is not seen on their website.

Past and Current Achievements and Setbacks

Activists from the Black lives Matter movement met individually with Presidential Candidates Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders in 2015 to discuss reform and racial injustice. This made both candidates speak about their agendas to battle criminal justice issues, which commensurate with black lives. This led to mothers of killed teens, in November, also got to meet with Hillary Clinton to discuss gun reform policies in America. Also in November, black student activists at the university of Missouri came together to oppose racial issues that they say have afflicted their campuses for years. Their various actions such as hunger strikes and refusal to play sports such as football led to the

resignation of the university president, Tim Wolfe. In the University of California, the black students united to confront the university’s disputable $30 million expenditure into private prisons. The university dropped the deal after discussions with their university’s African Black Coalition group. The student group wrote that the investments were “ethically embarrassing” and that private prisons turn “black, brown and immigrant bodies into profit under the guise of rehabilitation.”

This signals a significant achievement for student-led activism and their battle against racial injustice. Black students have been empowered, and now have a voice which allows them to fight for their beliefs and have a say in issues which directly and indirectly affect their lives.

Their Say Her Name Campaign raised consciousness about police violence against black women. Black women activists fought to raise awareness about the racial and gender equality that black women face all around the USA. The campaign was launched by community organisations and was a national one. Activists also protested the Confederate flag and fought for its removal from public spaces such as the South Carolina statehouse. The flag which stand as a symbol of white supremacy and racism has been removed from the Ole Miss University after a demand from their students. Another campaign launched was the Campaign Zero, a project that hopes to stop police violence by bringing in an understandable list of agendas for police reform. The campaign goes for both police officers at federal and state level as a way of decreasing racial partiality and receiving more intensive training to prevent police brutality against black Americans.

All these campaigns allowed for the voices of the black community to be heard and recognised in the society. Achieving the major goal of the movement in great ways that have gained them recognition and also allowed for the spread of their goals, aim and achievement all around the globe.


The issues of the black transgender community also gained cognizance as black transgender activists joined together with the black lives matter organisation to amplify the danger and torment that transgender people face in the society.

The road where Sandra Bland, was stopped for a traffic violation, two months after she was found dead in her cell was renamed Sandra Bland Parkway after local protesters came together to contest, at the city council building, that her legacy should live on and the request was granted. Musicians have also decide to use their platforms to voice out their concerns over the racial issues that the black community faces. Artists such as John Legend and Alicia keys were involved in a one-night benefit concert which aimed to place the spotlight on the racial injustice and bias that our society still dwells in. 19

The February 2015 issue of the essence magazine and cover was devoted to the Black Lives Matter organisation. In December of the same year, BLM was a contender for the Times magazine Person of the year award.

The various issues highlighted by the movement have allowed for the growth and success of the black communities. The black community has been strengthened and encouraged despite the poverty rate and high crime rate in the communities.

Perhaps the most notable change that Black Lives Matter has helped bring about is the increased use of body cameras by police, a technology that could have an important role in fostering greater accountability by law enforcement agencies.

The Black lives matter has also managed to cross the Atlantic and come over to the United Kingdom. Although the chapter in the UK, have a slightly different agenda, the basis for the protests and demonstrations seems to be of the same kind.

Although the Black Lives Matter organisation have had various successes, they have had a few major and minor setbacks. Critics have said that the BLM does not consider black on black crime as an issue.

---

Although majority of the crimes in the black community are black on black crimes, the black lives matter organisation does not seem to consider this fact. The majority of police brutality crimes are 32% whites and 28% blacks.

Impact and Cultural Significance of the BLM

BLM started out as an organisation which fought for the acclaimed police brutality against black lives. Although they do carry the voice of peace and trying to create a means to end the racial injustice which is presumably disproportionately affecting black lives in the USA. BLM has seemed to cause a great backlash of more hate in the society. As protesters carry placards, some peaceful while others out scheming for blood as revenge for their brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers etc.

According to statistics, every 28 hours, a black man, woman or child is killed by police or vigilante law enforcement. And according to the black lives matter organisation, these deaths lead to 25.1% of black women living in poverty which is bigger than any other ethnic group in the USA.\(^{21}\) Though all these figures are true, the organisation refuses to accept the fact that these issues affect not only the black race but affect the whole population. Police brutality has been an issue in the American society for quite a while and although they have succeeded in bringing the matter to light, they are some issues that the organisation have to reckon with.

The BLM organisation as it stands has become a major influence in the lives of black men, women and children in the USA and around the world. The organisation stands for justice, dignity and respect. They fight against racial injustice which disproportionately affects black people in the USA. This influence in the society makes their supporters or members take advantage of the power acquired.\(^{22}\) A major example is the Dallas shooting, on July 7th 2016 where there was a lone shooter, Micah Xavier Johnson who joined the BLM protesters before proceeding to attack the police officers in the vicinity of a building. He ended up killing five officers and injuring 9 others, the deadliest attack on law enforcement since the 9/11 attacks. Although the BLM group have released a statement disclaiming any involvement in the attacks, there’s still the fact that a lack of protests in the cases of Alton sterling and Philando Castile would not have led to a shooting and therefore blame does fall back on the movement for providing a platform for such to occur. Other times there have been incidents where protesters have left the designated past provided for the protest and gone to other areas to protest and also disrupt and disturb the peace of the people around the other areas. There have been disruptions during electoral campaigns and hijacking of microphones during different speeches to spread the


news about the organisation and the stories behind the stories that the media refuses to tell or partially tell.

On the other hand, the movement has really given the law enforcement agencies a rude awakening and highlighted the problems with the system. They have brought issues which on any other day would have gone unnoticed to light. Their decision to use social media as an outlet ultimately helped to get the movement itself awareness as it is the age of technology. They were able to reach out to the whole globe with their ideas, issues and solutions. This helped the movement to spread out all across the different chapters in different cities in America. The movement gives the black people a voice, in a country that refuses to acknowledge that they are human too. They have made themselves a force to be reckoned with as they represent and fight against a battle that has the plagued the people of colour for centuries and centuries too long.  

The movement has also released videos of the police brutality being done unto social media to allow for people to see what people of colour face on a regular basis. Activists all around the globe say that there will come a day of reckoning when the black people will snap and then the rest of the world will have to come to terms with what they have unleashed.

Oprah Winfrey voiced that concern earlier this year, saying, “What I’m looking for is some kind of leadership to come out of this to say, ‘This is what we want. This is what has to change, and these are the steps that we need to take to make these changes, and this is what we’re willing to do to get it.’” The Black lives matter organisation has come out with their list of intended achievements but seem to lack a structured manner for which they are going to use to develop and achieve this goals.

There is also the case of them hating white people relative to the slogan that they have adapted to use (#BLACKLIVESMATTER). Although the slogan does come with an unspoken ‘too’ which is Black lives Matter too.

---


And this problem has brought up other hashtags on social media such as #all lives matter. The movement has insisted that the slogan is one of inclusion not exclusion. The issues which are presently affecting the black community have become more pressing over the years which means that they have to campaign and protest to get justice. So by saying that Black lives Matter, it does not discredit the fact that white lives matter too, it just seeks to point out the problems with the justice system and how its racial bias and partialism has perturbed the black community for years.

The other case is the fact that the movement seems to hate police officers. And this led to the hashtag #blue lives matter. Seeming blaringly obvious with the Dallas shooting case, the movement affirms that they are not anti-police and they are part of a system which views black people as more dangerous and does not stress the fact that black people are also taxpayers who deserve to be treated with the same amount of respect as everyone else in the society. This should be able to allow for the rebuilding of trust between the police and black community.

“Actions speak louder than words, and the violent rhetoric BLM spews makes it hard to believe such a defence. Whether it be advocating for the murder of police, or racial segregation, BLM seems intent on reversing the Civil Rights movement, not launching a new one.”- The Analytical Economist


The fate of the Black lives matter movement in the age of Donald Trump’s Leadership

Although America as a country may still be coming to terms with the new leadership, the Black lives matter movement has quickly reaffirmed their stand on the issue.

The movement’s leaders have issued a statement saying “We affirm our existence. We affirm our right to not only live, but to thrive. To exist in a world where our humanity is seen and honoured. We are organizing to realize a world in which our faiths are held in esteem, our identities are respected and our families are prioritized. We deserve a world in which our children are protected, where our water is sacred, and where we are given a fair chance to decide our fates.” 27

---

The movement addressed the new leadership with the ideology that the work which they have been carrying out will be harder to achieve but most be done. Many activists predict a tougher time with Donald Trump’s election to presidency, from his promises of deportation.

His election has led to a rise in hate crimes against both the black community, the people of colour and the Muslim community. US attorney general Loretta Lynch spoke at an interfaith event held at the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) Centre. She highlighted the post-election spike in hate crimes that have targeted a variety of groups.

“There is a pernicious thread that connects the act of violence against a woman wearing a hijab to the assault on a transgender man to the tragic deaths of nine innocent African-Americans during a Bible study at Mother Emanuel AME in Charleston, South Carolina,” she said. “There is a thread that links all of those and when one of us is threatened all of us are threatened.”

The work will definitely increase as the number of deaths has increased and the technique of rioting after every death or issue with the police will no longer be effective. The amount of people that will be needed for various protests or riots will be much more and the amount of energy and manpower, resources that will be needed for the demonstrations and rallies is unfortunately a skill in planning that different black lives matter chapters lack.

"Whether it was Richard Nixon unleashing a war on drugs or George Wallace's more overt war on black people, we’ve heard it all before and won't be fooled again," said Alicia Garza, a co-founder of Black Lives Matter. The terrifying vision that Donald J. Trump is putting forward casts him alongside some of the worst fascists in history," she added. "Black people and our allies have unequivocally demanded a new path forward for safety in our communities, one that involves real accountability for police. While our movement envisions a bright future where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, Trump is proposing a new, dark age

where police have carte blanche authority to terrorize our communities."

Their excesses, such as the mass ambush of police officers, have been blamed for putting Donald Trump in to the seat of the President, no matter how small it was they may have seemed.

Their continuous lack of caution and careful deliberation before proceeding into action on matters which they deem unjust, might just be the cause of their downward spiral over the course of the years to come.

**Conclusion**

There can be no doubt that the black lives matter have had an Impact on the society today. The movement has been like a light in the dark for the black community in various ways. Their consistent ways of protesting the injustice in the communities have helped to highlight the various forms of injustice and racial bias.

Though they have had many accomplishments, the survival chance of the movement is slim if they continue down the route which they have begun to take.

They have to stop the ambush killing of innocent cops. The Dallas shooting is a major example of where the movement could have said more to express that they are not involved in the case. The movement have said that they do not ally themselves with the situation above, they can do more to disassociate themselves with the happenings.

“According to Gallup, Americans’ respect for their local police force overall was on a gradual downward trend until the spate of ambush killings this year; in response to those killings, it has rocketed up to its highest level since 1968 (not coincidentally, another year with major, nationwide civil strife).”

---


Violence against violence will just lead to more deaths. And allowing members or supporters to cheer when things like this occur is terrible. Granted, they cannot control everything that goes on with their supporters, they can however reproach the people who tag them in such posts and reaffirm their stand on the issue.

Also they damage their credibility by continuation of protests and riots against cases where the facts are more than sufficient to prove that there was a just cause for what occurred. It’s okay to protest before the facts come out and when the situation looks like it will be going downhill. But when the facts have been clearly shown as in the Michael Brown’s case, then there is no need for further riots and, use up resources and energy over it. It was clearly proven that in the Michael Brown narrative that the “hands up, don’t shoot” was a flawed story. There is overwhelming evidence that the boy was in fact charging towards the officer when the shooting occurred.

A big issue of not having a direct focus on one thing. They lack the focus on one issue- either criminal justice reforms or racial justice reforms. Their rather violent and unreasonable put down of any one who said “all lives matter”. A phrase that was endorsed even by Hillary Clinton, and if even notable figures are put down by society for saying things then you send a message which clearly feels says that the rest of the public lives don’t matter and that you disagree with the fact that all lives matter. Although they may understand that what they mean when they say “black lives matter”, it does mean in any way, shape or form that the rest of the public will be able to assimilate the general, not literal meaning.
On the other hand, the movement does pose such a controversial stance in the community that it may allow for their continuous presence and views no matter how small or erratic.

The movement did not create racial bias but have been able to build up a movement competent enough to disintegrate silenced and hushed realities of a nation and culture which is built up on violence, division and racial bias.

“We’ve been floating this country on credit for centuries, and we’re done watching and waiting while this invention called whiteness uses and abuses us, burying black people out of sight and out of mind while extracting our culture, our dollars, our entertainment like oil -- black gold! -- ghettoizing and demeaning our creations and stealing them, gentrifying our genius and then trying us on like costumes before discarding our bodies like rinds of strange fruit.”— Jesse Williams

Compelling and Powerful words from Jesse Williams yet very true but hidden like secrets that have been untold for a thousand years.

**Bibliography**


Works Cited


