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The Black Lives Matter Movement's Use of Digitized Media and the Prospects for Antiracist Struggle in the United States, 2013 onwards

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Dedication

To my family, you mean the world to me.

Abstract

The present dissertation examined the Black Lives Movement (BLM) in order to explain its origins, motivations, and goals. It focused on the adopted strategy, the employed means, and efforts deployed by the BLM movement's activists to provide a better explanation of the views, prospects, and effects of this contemporary movement regarding the issue of racial injustice in general, and the issue of racially-motivated police violence in particular. In addition, this work compared the movement under study to the Civil Rights Movement to demonstrate that the BLM movement is a continuation of America's historical racial struggle. More precisely, this research work investigated BLM virtual activism as well as the roles of digital media in expanding and strengthening the movement. The aim was to explore whether this revolutionary movement, which largely depends on digital activism, has brought any refinement to resolve the issue of police brutality against Black people in the American society since 2013, or it has failed in voicing Blacks' demands and aspirations. Finally, this dissertation concluded that BLM use of social media did not only raise awareness and debates on race in the United States but reached far audiences as well. Nonetheless, despite the fact that the BLM movement has brought large and diverse groups together to share knowledge, personal experiences, and organize around police violence; racial inequality still persists in the American society.

ملخص

تتناول هذه المذكرة حركة حياة السود مهمة من أجل شرح أصولها و دوافعها وأهدافها. كما تركز على البحث في الاستراتيجيات المعتمدة و الوسائل المستخدمة والجهود المبذولة من طرف نشطاء هذه الحركة لتقديم أفضل تفسير لآفاق وتأثيرات هذه الحركة المعاصرة فيما يتعلق بقضية العنصرية بشكل عام، وقضية عنف الشرطة على وجه الخصوص. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يقارن هذا العمل حركة حياة السود مهمة بحركة الحقوق المدنية لإثبات أن حركة حياة السود مهمة هي استمرار للنضال ضد العنصرية في أمريكا. و عليه، يبحث هذا العمل في النشاط الافتراضي لحركة حياة السود مهمة بالإضافة إلى أدوار الوسائط الرقمية في توسيع وتقوية الحركة. حيث أن الهدف من ذلك هو استكشاف ما إذا كانت هذه الحركة الثورية، التي تعتمد إلى حد كبير على النشاط الرقمي، قد أحدثت أي تحسين لحل مشكلة عنف الشرطة ضد السود في المجتمع الأمريكي منذ عام 2013، أم أنها فشلت في التعبير عن مطالب وتطلعات السود. في النهاية، تشير نتائج الدراسة إلى أن استخدام حركة حياة السود مهمة لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لم يرفع الوعي والمناقشات حول العرق في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية فحسب، بل وصل أيضاً إلى جمهور عالمي. وعلى الرغم من أن هذه الحركة قد ربطت مجموعات كبيرة ومتنوعة معاً لتبادل المعرفة والخبرات الشخصية والتنظيم حول مشكلة عنف الشرطة العنصري؛ لا يزال عدم المساواة العرقية قائماً في المجتمع الأمريكي.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ALM	All Lives Matter
BLM	Black Lives Matter
BPM	Black Power Movement
BLMGNF	Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation
CORE	The Congress of Racial Equality
CRM	Civil Rights Movement
CW	Civil War
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
MBK	My Brother's Keeper
MIA	Montgomery Improvement Association
NACCP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
USA/US	United States of America/ United States
WHO	World Health Organization
WW	World War

Introduction

For four centuries now, racism has been a central piece of the American scene, affecting ethnic minorities who have endured the burden of unfair laws, social segregation, criminal behavior, and oppression over history. African Americans have been discriminated since they ever landed on the American shores as slaves. President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation ended the act of slavery, and later on Martin Luther King had a major role in ending ensuing segregation during the Civil Rights movement.

Yet, African Americans continued to endure systemic racism in their everyday lives, and they fought back in every way they could. Influenced by the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), the 21st century has known several grassroots movements intended to highlight political and social issues. Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a social and political movement that emerged in 2013 as a response to the murder of Trayvon Martin and became an international cause. It spotlighted racism in law enforcement, fought all forms of racially motivated violence against Black people, and demanded justice from systematic racism.

The statement "Black Lives Matter" suggests denunciation of the unfair killings of Black people by the police, because in the United States Black people are far more likely to be killed by the police than by White people. The phrase also proposes that black lives are as valuable as white lives in the American society and, accordingly, they should be treated equally.

The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was first used in 2013 after the murder of Trayvon Martin, by three Black community organizers; Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi. These three black brave women gave voice to the movement against the systemic anti-black racism facing their communities. In 2014, the movement expanded after the police killings of two unarmed Black men, Eric Garner and Michael Brown. Large demonstrations denouncing these deaths in the name of Black Lives Matter (BLM) grabbed national and international

attention. Since then, the movement continued to play a basic role in protesting against police brutality and racism.

The BLM movement is often compared to the CRM of the 1960s for the similarities in message, tactics, and influence. Both movements used non-violent strategies to influence change. While the CRM's goal was to remove Jim Crow segregation laws against Black people, the BLM movement's goal is to start a conversation and provide a unified voice on an issue of racism that has gone on for far too long. It seeks to eliminate systemic racism, which is embedded in society's social fabric and affects violence against Black people. Moreover, the crucial role played by modern digitized media and the decentralized form of leadership are two factors that differentiate BLM movement from the CRM.

Throughout the second decade of the twenty-first century, social media has displayed an ever-growing power in joining large audiences with global issues. Unlike traditional sources of media, the large variety of available social media platforms allow people to post their real everyday experiences, through raw lenses and free from restrictions; which makes it more favored as a news source among the younger generations.

Similarly, this is the case with social movements that use social platforms as a basic ground for their buildup. BLM movement is an ideal case of social media mobilizing political involvement and helping the movement spread through assembling new activists. The term 'digital activism' was coined to describe this form of activism that makes use of the Internet and digital media as key platforms for mass mobilization and social or political action.

Through the BLM movement's many public protests and marches, organized in the past few years, attention has been given to the issue police brutality against African Americans. Even though presidential responses towards the movement differed since 2013; yet, federal legislation policies are being proposed by advocates and organizers of the movement to the Congress of the United States, and a ray of hope can be seen in their promises.

The main intention of the present study is to focus on the adopted strategy, the employed means, and efforts deployed by the BLM movement's activists; to provide a better explanation of the views, prospects, and effects of this contemporary movement regarding the issue of racial injustice in general, and the issue of racially-motivated police violence in particular. It is, hence, imperative to explore whether this revolutionary movement, which largely depends on digital activism, has brought any refinement to resolve the issue of police brutality against Black people in the American society since 2013, or it has failed in voicing Blacks' demands and aspirations.

The main questions of this research work aim to understand the history, motives and objectives of the movement, and the role of BLM virtual activism in its quest to end racial inequality against Black minorities. Accordingly, this research answers the following questions: Why does racial discrimination still exist in the USA? How did the antiracist struggle in the US change since the CRM? What is police brutality? And what is its relation to racism? What are the measures taken by the federal authorities to deal with the issue? What does "Black Lives Matter" stand for? What are the goals of the BLM movement?

Other questions include: How did the American mainstream respond to the movement? How did the global audience react to the movement? What are the similarities and differences between BLM and CRM? What is virtual or digital activism? And how does it help the BLM movement? How do the movement's organizers use digital social media to help scale the cause and reach a broader audience? What is the government's stand concerning the issue of state violence against Black people? What are the prospects of the BLM movement regarding systemic racism against African Americans?

The topic under discussion has attracted the attention of many scholars, researchers, and politicians. Accordingly, to display the importance of this study it is crucial to provide a literature review in order to stress some of the major scholarly works that have already tackled

many aspects related to the main theme of this study. Of great importance are the scholarly works that examined the issue of police brutality against black people and the BLM movement; and the academic works that highlighted digital activism and the role of social networking sites in strengthening the BLM movement.

In his book *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea*, Christopher J. Lebron provides a historical background on the Black struggle tradition naming a number of important intellectual contributors in that tradition. He believes that BLM for African American invokes a deep feeling as ancient as the desire to be free from slavery, and to appreciate its depth, one must know about the social and political thoughts and philosophies behind the movement.

Violence against Black Bodies: An Intersectional Analysis of How Black Lives Continue to Matter, edited by Sandra E. Weissinger, Dwayne A. Mack, and Elwood Watson, is another valuable source that describes the ways in which discrimination is spread throughout every aspect of the Black lives. The writers claim that Black deaths at the hands of police forces are just one form of the Black deaths in western societies. They see it as a piece of the racial order; an order which is made to produce trauma and discrimination; an order that affects many aspects of life from police practices that affects it physically, to media's stereotypes and biases that cause emotional traumas. They believe that such violence based on race is a basic component of the identity of Northern American social and political life.

In their paper "An Existential-Humanistic Perspective on Black Lives Matter and Contemporary Protest Movements", Louis Hoffman, Nathaniel Granger, Jr., Lisa Vallejos, and Michael Moats distinguish BLM as a contemporary social movement from previous movements, for its focus on decentralized structure of leadership; which means, decisions are made by many members not just one central charismatic leader. The paper also explores the BLM movement's reliance on digitized media to address global audiences.

In his book *Black Software: The Internet and Racial Justice, From the Afronet to Black Lives Matter*, Charlton D. McIlwain believes that the success of BLM, the strongest and most visible racial justice movement in the USA since the 1960s, is not a mere coincidence. It is rather because of the right and practical use of online power to strengthen the movement. He claims that African Americans' participation in the invention and evolution of the Internet, exposes both the constraints and opportunities for utilizing digital media to advance racial justice in the United States and across the world. He adds that social networks have the ability to connect participants and build connections between affiliated activists, journalists and public officials. Besides, participants can control algorithms to affect search outcomes in their favor; raise awareness and public visibility towards racial injustices and police violence against black people; and use content across digital space to instruct and organize large audiences.

“Scaling Social Movements through Social Media: The Case of Black Lives Matter” written by Marcia Mundt, Karen Ross, and Charla M. Burnett, explores the potential role of social media in aiding movements expand, focusing on the case study of BLM movement. Moreover, the article points up the potentials created by social networks for constructing connections, assembling participants and concrete resources. The authors also reviewed the risks associated with using social media as a platform for scaling up.

The BLM movement can be placed in the historical context within the long tradition of the African American struggle for racial equality in the United States. Therefore, the historical method will be used to explore the history of African Americans in the United States, and to review the long aftermath of civil liberation struggles of the 1960s until the emergence of the BLM movement. Furthermore, the descriptive analytical method will be used to analyze the BLM's motivations as well as the events and protests that occurred since 2013 and resulted in the growing of the movement.

The descriptive analytical method is also used to examine the role of digitized media in both the foundation and the expansion of the movement in order to give a detailed explanation on the possibilities offered by social networks for building relations and assembling members. In short, the historical and descriptive analytic methods are employed to establish facts in order to arrive at conclusions concerning the understanding of past and present events, as well as anticipating future events.

The present dissertation is structured into three chapters. The first chapter which is entitled “Racial Protest Movements in the United States: A Historical Background”, explores the history of the struggle of Black people in the United States. It focuses on the roots of racism as well as the beginnings of the African Americans’ resistance in the 19th century. The chapter tackles in details the Civil Rights Movement era, the post- Civil Rights Movement era, and the 21st century activism against systemic racism.

Under the title of “Black Lives Matter in 21st Century America”, the second chapter sheds light on the origins of the BLM movement and the follow up events. More precisely, the chapter tackles the issue of racially motivated police violence in the United States. The chapter examines the movement’s motives and goals, and gives accounts to the reasons behind the success of the BLM movement. This chapter concludes with a comparison between the Civil Rights Movement and Black Lives Matter movement.

The third chapter is entitled “Focus on Social Media and Black Lives Matter Movement”. It anatomizes the use of digitized networks as a backup to the movement. The chapter provides a conceptualization on the phenomena of online or virtual activism and its prospects for a long-lasting social change. This chapter also discusses the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, George Floyd's death, and the 2020 presidential election on the BLM movement. Finally, this chapter discusses how BLM is linked to prior racial struggles, as well as how the movement may maintain its success.

Chapter One

Racial Protest Movements in the United States: A Historical Background

Without grasping the past, it is impossible to deal with the present. Thus, to understand the Black Lives Matter movement as part of the long racial struggle of African Americans, one should go back in history to comprehend the roots of racism as well as the beginnings of the African Americans' resistance. The present chapter tells the history of African Americans' resistance since the nineteenth century until the twenty-first century before the emergence of Black Lives Matter.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section covers the pre-Civil Rights Movement period by means of providing convincing answers to the following questions: When did the Black struggle for freedom from slavery start? What characterized that struggle? Did African Americans get their freedom easily? How did the Reconstruction era benefit Blacks? Why did the Reconstruction fail? And how did the lives of Blacks change after its failure?

The second section tackles the most prominent civil rights struggles in the 20th century with the aim to find conclusive answers to this set of questions: How was the first half of 20th century for African Americans? What is the Civil Rights Movement (CRM)? What influenced such movement to emerge? What is the Black Power Movement (BPM)? What makes this movement different from the CRM? What are the legacies of both movements on Black community? In addition, how did the media cover African Americans' activism in the twentieth century?

Likewise, the main intention of the third section is to scrutinize the post-Civil Rights era. This will be achieved by providing appropriate answers to the following relevant questions: What are the main views on race and racial justice that developed after the Civil Rights

Movement? How did African Americans enter the twenty-first century? Moreover, how did "the Age of Obama" affect African Americans?

1.1. Pre-Civil Rights Movement Period

The pre-Civil Rights era covers the gap between the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s. This span of time reminds the African Americans of the uneasy years between the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in January 31, 1863, which marked the beginning of the end of slavery; and the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which recognized the African Americans as US citizens and guaranteed their rights. The pre-Civil Rights period was an unsafe and a turbulent time for African Americans, as they attempted to assert their rights as US citizens in a hostile nation that refused to grant them those rights.

1.1.1. Blacks' Long Struggle for Emancipation and Freedom

Efforts to promote the quality of life for African Americans are as old as the United States. The Blacks' resistance and freedom demand tradition can be traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this long period of time, African Blacks were first abducted from Africa and then sold into slavery in the American colonies, where they were forced to serve as indentured servants and laborers in the tobacco and cotton industries. In the British colonies, many Blacks' revolts were documented. Manisha Sinha argues that the real structured anti-slavery activism has its origins in the abolitionist movement¹, which aimed at bringing an end to the institution of slavery. She adds that abolition was a "radical, interracial movement" that dealt with the long-standing issues of "exploitation" and "disenfranchisement" as it centers African Americans in it (1).

Ibram X. Kendi argues that the Revolutionary War, which took place between the thirteen British colonies in America and Great Britain, was not fought to end slavery. However, the enslaved African Americans took advantage of the conflict to liberate themselves, they started

the fight against slavery (30). Nevertheless, as Merton L. Dillon claims, the anti-slavery movement soon declined because of the abolitionists' failure to convince slaveholders of the iniquity of their practices. Slaveholders, who considered the presence of large numbers of free 'Negroes' within the community was dangerous to society as to be intolerable (169).

After years of tension between Northern and Southern states, Americans fought Americans in the Civil War (CW) for more than four years (1861-1865). David W. Blight believes that a key issue in the Civil War was states' rights. The Southern states intended to exert their authority over the federal government so that they could nullify federal laws they did not agree with, particularly laws restricting the South's ability to own and transport slaves. Another factor was westward expansion. As America began to expand, new territories and states were formed. The South wanted the new states to be pro-slavery states, while the North wanted them to be free states. As a result, Southerners, whose economy was based on slavery, felt endangered and turned to the only option they believed was available to them: secession, which led directly to war (4).

Although President Abraham Lincoln was not an abolitionist and had no intention of saving or destroying slavery, his Emancipation Proclamation, issued on January 1 1863, was the first step towards ending slavery (Kendi 65). The Emancipation Proclamation, which made the end of slavery a goal of the war, declared that, "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free." (National Archive "The Emancipation Proclamation" 1) While the Emancipation Proclamation did not abolish slavery in the United States, it gave hope to millions of African Americans and changed the course of the war.

In addition, Steven Hahn clarifies that the Proclamation allowed freed slaves to join the Union army and navy to help free those who were still slaves. By the end of the Civil War, more than 186 000 African Americans had fought and many of them died in the effort to

preserve the Union and end slavery. However, it was not until the adoption of the thirteenth amendment on December 18, 1865, that slavery was officially abolished in the United States.

1.1.2. African Americans' Fight for Equal Citizenship Rights and Equality since Reconstruction

During Reconstruction, freed African Americans gained several significant rights and freedoms. However, within the same period and in the years following Reconstruction, many of these rights were lost. Indeed, many African Americans became victims of violence exercised by groups who used terror to prevent Black citizens from voting. Besides, throughout the United States, African Americans faced discrimination and inequality in jobs, housing, and education. In the South, Jim Crow laws enforced strict separation of the races in schools, theatres, restaurants, and other public places. Consequently, African Americans intensified their struggle for justice and equality by means of protests and demonstrations.

1.1.2.1. The Reconstruction Era

After the Civil War, rebuilding the South turned to be a tremendous task; just as troubling was the job of protecting the newly won rights of freed African Americans. Justin Behrend declares that, during the period of Reconstruction, which lasted from 1865 to 1877, Congress passed and enforced laws that promoted civil and political rights for African Americans in the United States and especially in the Southern states. As a result, African Americans in the South gained several important rights and freedoms (32).

Right after the abolition of slavery in 1865, racist organizations emerged to diminish the effect of the thirteenth Amendment and abuse African Americans. One of the most brutal organizations was the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), as Elaine Frantz Parsons states, The KKK emerged after the Civil War as a response to the problem of Southern White defeat. The Klan began as club for Confederate veterans in Pulaski, Tennessee. In June 1866; however, it quickly grew into a racist organization. The Klansmen felt the stern responsibility to restore

their collapsed society. They were determined to eliminate and eradicate all Blacks and their White supporters. Using violence, the Klan terrorized and prevented African Americans from exercising their rights. For the following decades, thousands were captured, beaten, and lynched² (30).

Behrend mentions that in 1866, the United States Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, which declared all male persons born in the United States to be citizens, regardless of their race, color, or prior condition of slavery or involuntary servitude. He claims that this Act was intended to empower Blacks to sign and execute contracts, own and sell land, and file cases in court. Nevertheless, these rights, particularly in the South, were abused by Whites (44).

In 1867, the US Congress passed the Reconstruction Act, which divided the South into five military zones, each under a major general. David K. Fremon argues that the Reconstruction Act's aim was to supervise the return of Southern states to the Union, to encourage federal officers to assist in the formation of new regimes in the South, and to ensure that former slaves' civil rights were secured during their journey to freedom. Under the 1867 Reconstruction Act, new elections were held, and Black men were able to vote. Following the elections, Southern states drafted new constitutions that Congress would approve only if those proposed constitutions allow Blacks to vote. A former Confederate state could only rejoin the Union after that (4).

Behrend affirms that despite the Southern Whites' efforts to prevent Blacks from exercising their newly obtained right to vote, the great majority of Blacks who registered to vote showed resulted. Previous slaves rose through the ranks of politics and government. They worked as lieutenant governors or state secretary in their respective states³ (120). The Reconstruction era provided for more than just Black votes. For this matter, Andrew E. Taslitz assures that the Congress feared that the Civil Rights Act would be declared

unconstitutional by the Supreme Court; hence, it passed the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, which guaranteed citizenship to any immigrants born or naturalized in the United States (12).

Marsha Ziff declares that in 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified. It granted the right to vote for all American citizens regardless of their race or color. Five years later, the 1875 Civil Rights Act outlawed discrimination in hotels, railways, theaters, and other private companies that provide public services. Many that did not cooperate were subjected to harsh fines and jail sentences (44). As African Americans started to secure their political power and began the long march toward greater social and economic equality, Southern Whites reacted with panic and outrage.

The Ku Klux Klan fought against Reconstruction governments and local leaders, through bombings, lynchings, and mob violence. Michelle Alexander explains how the Klan's terrorist "redemption" was successful, as the federal government removed its forces from the South, African Americans and their "egalitarian racial order" supporters were abandoned, and the government "no longer made any effort to enforce federal civil rights legislations" (31).

Once again, Southern Whites exercised their dominance through enforcing laws defining any insignificant activities such as "mischief" and "insulting gestures" as crimes, and punishments against these offences were forcibly used against Blacks (Alexander 31). By the late 1870s, discriminatory practices were used against Black citizens including discriminating them in public facilities, preventing them from exercising their right to vote, and using violence against them. Sinha believes that the failure of Reconstruction was due to the lack of sight of "abolitionists" and the determination of those who opposed a democratic nation where whites and blacks exercise the same rights:

During the Civil War and Reconstruction, the enslaved and their radical allies pushed the nation to realize their ideal of an interracial democracy. And for a brief period, as W. E. B. Du Bois wrote, the slave stood in the sun before being shoved

back into the shadows. The overthrow of Reconstruction had little to do with the alleged poverty of the abolitionist vision and a lot to do with the enduring power of abolition's opponents. When the horror of racial injustice settled in again, not just the formerly enslaved but democracy as a whole suffered. The fate of American democracy lay not in the hands of the powerful, with their dreams of wealth and empire, but in the postwar movements for racial, gender, and economic autonomy. (6)

As she quotes from William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, also called W. E. B. Du Bois⁴, for the brief period of the Civil War and Reconstruction, African Americans lived under the sun, claiming and gaining their rights before they were pushed back to the darkness. Sinha added that, the destiny of American democracy rested in the hands of postwar struggles for racial, gender, and economic autonomy, not in the hands of the powerful (6).

1.1.2.2. Life under Jim Crow

By the late 1870s, Reconstruction's popularity diminished quickly. Most republicans backed away from the ideas of racial equality and the power of federal authority that emerged after the Civil War. Reconstruction became associated with a futile attempt to uplift the society's lower classes. The Supreme Court made decisions to limit the laws of Reconstruction, and the era, where the federal government took the responsibility to preserve the rights of former slaves, came to an end.

After the failure of the Reconstruction, African Americans' hopes of equal life as Whites were quickly crushed, and a new term of discrimination against them began. On this issue, Ziff argues that Southerners constructed an elaborate system of rules and laws to separate Blacks from Whites in nearly all walks of life. This system of segregation, which would last for many years, was called "Jim Crow"⁵ (55). Without the help of the White community,

Blacks were segregated, denied the right to vote, and subjected to verbal harassment, and aggression.

Even though the Jim Crow laws were enacted for the first time in the Northern states, they never approached the same level of racism, brutality, and sadism as they did in the South. Where massive inequalities marked every facet of daily life. Blacks had different public facilities, schools, hospitals, swimming pools, parks, toilets, restaurants; they even could not drink from the same water fountains or sit in the same section of bus or train as whites. Even death did not end this segregation, since Blacks had separate funeral homes and separate cemeteries from Whites (Fremon 6). As Douglas A. Blackmon claims, the Jim Crow era, which lasted for almost a century, was “slavery by another name” (146).

By the 1890s, Jim Crow laws spread and reached all districts and states. Despite the segregation, White hostility by both state governments and racist organizations, against African Americans, intensified. However, it was in 1896, when segregation became firmly legalized. Micheal J. Klarman notes that the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*⁶ reached the United States Supreme Court, which legally gave the states the power to require segregation (9). Briefly, as Richard Wormser reports, the Jim Crow regime caused exclusion of Blacks in social, economic and cultural areas of society (97).

Segregation was based on the “Separate but equal” doctrine. Harry E. Groves explains that the doctrine implies that Whites and Blacks are of equal races, yet they must live separately from one another. Southern governments strictly enforced the “separate” but ignored the “equal” (68). Two years later, in 1898, the Supreme Court once again authorized White supremacy by granting states the right to prevent Blacks exercising their right to vote (Klarman 11).

As oppressive as the Jim Crow laws were, it was also a time when many African Americans around the country came up to take leadership positions in the fight against these

laws. Three of the prominent names of this era were Ida B. Wells, Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. Ericka E. Miller explains how Ida Bell Wells-Barnett, a schoolteacher in Memphis, became an activist against the Jim Crow laws after she was forced to leave a first-class train car designated for White people only in 1884. Wells successfully sued the railroad and won in the lower courts; however, the case was reversed once it reached a higher court. That injustice infuriated Wells, who was convinced that unless African-Americans stood up to oppression, they would become disillusioned and defeated (42).

Audrey Thomas McCluskey states that Ida B. Wells wrote and edited for many newspapers while teaching. In 1889, she became a part owner of a newspaper, known as the *Free Speech and Headlight*. Traveling through the South, Wells attacked the disfranchisement laws, talked about the issue of the sexual abuse of Black women teachers, opposed segregation in schools and encouraged armed self-defense for African Americans. After a mob torched her newspaper and threatened her life, Wells fled to the North, where she continued to oppose the Jim Crow regime and lynchings (88).

In the early 1870s, Booker Taliaferro Washington was determined to study at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia, a renowned institution for Black youth at the time. He climbed his way up until he became the president of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in 1881 (Blight 251). Rutledge M. Dennis asserts that Washington urged his fellow African-Americans, the most of whom were poor and uneducated agricultural laborers, to give up their political power, insistence on civil rights and higher education for the time being. For he felt that, the first necessary step towards gaining recognition and favor from the White mainstream, is to acquire wealth and culture (5).

Reginald K. Ellis states that by 1900, Washington's influence extended beyond Tuskegee. He founded the National Negro Business League, which offered funds and advice to help Black businesses prosper. Unlike Wells who stressed action, Washington called for patience,

accommodation, and self-help. He did all it took to get along with Whites, and he mostly kept silence on injustices since he was not a victim of them. His gradualist approach for advancement did not challenge Jim Crow, but rather emphasized reconciliation (15).

Gerald Horne acknowledges that Washington's methods enraged many Black activists and critics led by W.E.B. Du Bois, who became the first African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1895. Later in 1898, Du Bois became a professor of history and economics at Atlanta University. There, he held an annual meeting to address Black issues (XIII). While he agreed with Washington's idea of Black self-help, Du Bois believed that Washington's accommodation "practically accepted the alleged inferiority of the Negro". He felt that Black people needed political rights in order to become economically stable (Du Bois).

According to John David Smith, Du Bois' disagreement with Washington over how African Americans should react to the Jim Crow Laws encouraged him to form his own civil rights group "The Niagara Movement" in 1905, which called for the end to segregation, disenfranchisement, and brutality against Black people (434). Yet, within five years, the movement failed, Angela Jones believe that The Niagara Movement's failure was because of its lack of membership, skepticism of sympathetic Whites, and its reliance on discursive means (discursive protest that aimed to convince Americans that integration should be implemented) (76). As Blacks lost their political and civil force, the United States of America entered the twentieth century.

1.2. Civil Rights Protest in 20th Century America

The beginning of the twentieth century in America witnessed a proliferation of Jim Crow laws in the South. Signs of 'WHITE ONLY', 'WHITE ONLY SERVED HERE', 'NO BLACKS ALLOWED', and 'PARK RESERVED FOR WHITES' spread everywhere. Violence against African Americans reached its peak and thousands of Blacks paid for White racism with their lives. Charles H. Wesley declares that the first two decades of the twentieth

century were very rough for African Americans. They witnessed, not only social and political segregation, but even efforts were made by White scholars to develop and support theories to assure the biological, cultural, and historical inferiority of Negroes (558). Social and political scholars were joined by pseudo-scientific literature and fiction seeking selfish support of a racial hypothesis, to maintain the superiority of Whites and inferiority of the Blacks (541).

In his article, “The African American “Great Migration” and Beyond”, Stewart E. Tolnay talks about how the economic deprivations suffered by Southern Blacks, the unsatisfactory labor conditions and harsh segregationist laws, forced many Blacks in the late 1800s to emigrate towards the North. The North seemed to have more-promising opportunities for themselves and their children. He adds that the WWI and WWII produced a rapid expansion in the defense industry, which created “the golden” economic opportunity for Southern Blacks and encouraged them to seek labor demands in the North (214-16). By 1930, more than 1.5 million of African Americans migrated to Northern provinces, which led to change the social structure there (Census Bureau).

Although the physical, mental, and spiritual abuse by Whites continued, African Americans survived. Fremon believes that they endured hardships thanks to resources in their own community: “First and foremost were their families and the black churches. Pastors in these churches did more than preach. A minister might be a teacher, job counselor, recreational director, babysitter, and informal legal advisor” (10). African Americans founded their own religious, social, and fraternal societies that provided services to the Black community and served as a source of pride.

After the failure of the Niagara Movement in 1905, August Meier and John H. Bracey, Jr. reveal that Du Bois and other White and Black activists were determined to form another organization with the goal of securing the basic citizenship rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments of the Constitution. The National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was born in February 1909 in New York City, as a response to the race riot of Springfield, Illinois in 1908⁷. The founding members of the organization included Mary White Ovington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ida Wells-Barnett, and other activists who were concerned with the challenges that faced African Americans. For the next half century, the NAACP devoted considerable efforts to cases involving injustice before the courts, especially in the South. It was greatly involved in attempts to protect the lives of individual Blacks from Whites mob violence and lynchings (4-9).

As stated by Richard Wormser, the NAACP stressed legal action to correct existing injustices. It sent investigators to record Southern brutalities in rural communities. Du Bois headed the organization's journal *The Crisis* for its first 24 years. The journal was a huge success and it became very influential, covering race relations, Black culture and women suffrage. However, Du Bois' interest grew in communism, which caused him problems with the organization and eventually led him to leave the NAACP in 1948 (184). Nonetheless, the organization continued to perform and had a great leading role in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

Despite the fact that there is no much certainty regarding the end of the Jim Crow era among historians, most agree that it lasted until the mid-twentieth century. Michelle Alexander believes that the Jim Crow regime was showing signs of weakness years before the *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*⁸ case in 1954, which typically traced the end of this era (35). She argues that those signs of weakness included: First, "the increased political power of Blacks due to migration to the North and the growing membership and influence of the NAACP, particularly its highly successful legal campaign challenging the Jim Crow laws in federal courts" (35). Second, "the influence of the Second World War", the obvious contradiction between the country's opposition to the Nazi Germany's crimes against European Jews, and the country's continuing presence of a racial caste system, which was

proving humiliating, and seriously undermining the country's reputation as the "free world" leader. Another sign was the growing fear that without greater equality for African Americans, they would become vulnerable to communist influence, given Russia's commitment to both social and economic equality (46).

1.2.1. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s

Blacks' ancestors were born into slavery. The generations that followed suffered the wrongs of racism and exclusion. African Americans had been admonished and disrespected throughout US history. Then, in the mid-1950s, the long struggle for racial equality developed into an extraordinary mass Civil Rights movement. The question that must be posed here is: What did Black Americans want? They simply sought to be able to use public places as White people did. They required enforcement of their constitutional right to vote. They demanded a fair chance when applying for jobs and housing.

Inequalities existed in all aspects of life, but not everyone was willing to accept them without a struggle. At every turn, Blacks were reminded of their second-class status. They had to attend schools that were separate and of inferior quality. They had to drink from separate water fountains, eat at colored restaurants, and ride in colored railroad cars. At concerts and movies, Black and White teenagers had to sit in separate sections, divided by ropes. In short, segregation, or separation because of race, appeared in all aspects of daily life. T. V. Reed argues that, in most cases, courts sided with the white-controlled sides, even when the injustice was obvious (6). However, after almost a half-century of blacks' efforts and court decisions, a movement for civil rights by African Americans accelerated.

The factors that affect the end of an era are what influence the beginning of another. Therefore, very much alike the signs advanced by Alexander, and that weakened the Jim Crow regime, Reed believes that there were five main sets of large-scale changes that

provided preconditions which were seized by the Black community to organize their movement:

(1) “Population shifts and economic changes”: changes in the workforce and the economy, both geographically and occupationally repositioned the black population. The Great Migration of blacks to the north, the declining importance of Southern agriculture, and industrialization, all created large Black communities and brought a certain type of unionization which gave rise to a sense of collective power (7).

(2) “Racial pride and resentment in the wake of World War II”⁹: the irony that many African Americans fought in segregated military units during the WWII while being exposed to US propaganda emphasizing liberty, justice, and equality, supported them with their first sight into a world with no black inequality (7).

(3) “New federal policies, stemming partly from Cold War realities”: The Cold War against the Soviet Union brought new pressures for the federal government to bear. With the US government claiming to be the leader of the “free world”, the Southern segregation system became an international embarrassment (8).

(4) “The example provided by anticolonial struggles in the Third World”: the rise of anticolonial struggles in the 1950s and early 1960s especially in Africa provided inspiring examples for African Americans (9).

(5) “New political strategies and tactics culled from the tradition of nonviolent civil disobedience: the development of a new set of political ideologies, strategies, and tactics. The influence of the nonviolent revolution led by Mahatma Gandhi in India, claiming independence from Britain in 1948, reached African Americans and inspired them to seek their freedom through peaceful strategies (10).

As many historians regard the *Brown vs. Board of Education* as the end of the Jim Crow era, others perceive it as the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement era. The latter

refers to the powerful force for change that emerged in the mid-1950s and had its greatest impact in the 1960s (Reed 2). However, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald trust that the Civil Rights Movement began gathering resources for mass mobilization well before the 1950s (1220). The Civil Rights Movement's most visible target was the system of racial apartheid in the South known as segregation.

Alexander believes that the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case set the stage for the Civil Rights Movement; because it was different from earlier decisions, which eroded the "separate but equal" doctrine, yet let the Jim Crow survived in the South. The *Brown vs. Board of Education* case threatened not only to abolish segregation in public schools, but also the entire system of legalized discrimination in the South (36). Wormser argues that the Brown decision inspired other civil rights actions, especially in the South (281). However, only few of the local struggles received dramatic attention, namely the Rosa Parks' arrest and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which resulted in the end of segregation in public buses¹⁰. Added to these fights, was the confrontation at Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957, when federal troops had to be called in to protect Black students whose efforts to integrate public schools in that city was met with violent White resistance¹¹ (Reed 19).

Tyler Weinblatt argues that the Civil Rights Movement had three major goals: "An improvement of African American economic conditions, voting rights, and desegregation". In each of these areas, civil rights leaders including Martin Luther King Jr., Whitney Young, and John Lewis, wanted to improve African American conditions in absolute terms, as well as to close the gaps with whites to achieve racial equality (15).

King used techniques and strategies rooted in nonviolent civil disobedience in order to end the persecution of African American individuals. He headed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), founded in 1955 and helped establish the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), founded in 1957. The SCLC was an organization that aimed at obtaining

African American civil rights. Moreover, he assumed that direct actions based on principles of non-violence would attract the attention of the mass media. The result would be that Blacks could be presented as victims of White violence (Weinblatt 16).

Having local branches in many states, other active organizations during the CRM included the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), founded by James Farmer Jr. in 1942, which pursued principles that rejected segregation and discrimination while using nonviolent means, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The latter was founded in 1960 by Ella Baker and John Lewis to give younger Black people, who wanted to see direct outcomes of the movement, a voice in the CRM.

Strategies of the active organizations in the Civil Rights Movement differed but the goal was one. According to Michael Jay Friedman, the NAACP followed the legally oriented approach to fight segregation, while the SCLC chose a more aggressive path by launching “Crusade for Citizenship,” which was a voter registration effort. The SNCC opted for the nonviolent occupation of ‘Whites only’ public spaces, also known as Sit-Ins¹². Even though students were denied service, they sat quietly until the places closed. They risked being arrested, or even beaten by Whites. However, this last tactic proved to be very effective, and many organizations adopted Sit-Ins in stores, restaurants and public laundries. By the 1960s, the Sit-Ins movement spread in much of the country (37-38).

Another nonviolent method, which was used for the first time by the CORE organization, was the Freedom Rides. Despite the Supreme Court’s ruling that barred segregation in interstate bus travel and its facilities, exercising that right was not as clear as possessing it. Accordingly, African Americans, in groups, launched bus rides especially to Southern states. In many cases, they were met with arrests and violence; yet, they endured the dangers and held to their Gandhian nonviolent resistance (Friedman 39).

Demonstrations also played a large role in the CRM nonviolent struggle. As stated by John A. Kirk, the March on Washington proved to be one of the movement's most enduring and celebrated spectacles. Organized by the 'Big Six'¹³, 300.000 Americans gathered on the mall in Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963, to protest for jobs and freedom. Kirk adds that each of the 'Big Six' addressed the crowd that day, except for Farmer. Yet in popular memory, the day has become synonymous with Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, where he captivated the audience and encouraged them to keep the fight for their battle against racism going (138).

King began his speech by linking the civil rights cause to earlier unfulfilled promises¹⁴. He urged African Americans to refrain from hating each other and protesting violently. He encouraged them to recognize their White supporters and work together to achieve their goal. He recognized the hardships Blacks had and have to suffer, and described that suffering as redemptive. King said, "I have a dream that one day, [...] little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers" (King).

Civil rights activities and demonstrations between 1954 and 1968 were undoubtedly impactful. They eliminated legal segregation and created affirmative action programs. According to Douglas S. Massey, between 1964 and 1968, at least four major civil rights acts were passed: the 1964 and 1968 Civil Rights Acts¹⁵, the 1965 Voting Rights Act¹⁶, the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act¹⁷, and the 1968 Housing Act¹⁸ (41-45). Each piece of legislation attempted to fix racial issues that existed at the time. Taken together, these acts advanced the main priorities of civil rights activists of the time: improvement of black economic opportunity, voting rights for African Americans, and desegregation (Weinblatt 11).

Negatively affected by severe government repression, and by the assassination of Martin Luther King, the civil rights protests declined in activity by the end of the 1960s. Hence, discouraged by the slow pace of change, some young urban blacks abandoned Martin Luther

King's philosophy of nonviolence and integration, and turned to radicalism and black separatism. Reed believes that the Civil Rights movement began to fall apart because almost everything that could be done by law was done. He further argues that with the death of King, many activists started questioning the effectiveness of the nonviolent tactics in the struggle to achieve equal treatment under the law, which led to the shift to a more violent phase in that struggle (39).

1.2.2. The Black Power Movement of the Late 1960s and Early 1970s

Most White Americans believed that racial conflict was a southern problem. They even assumed that the racial problem was being resolved. However, the conditions for violent revolt had been building for years. The gains of the CRM had not improved life in the urban ghettos of the North and West. Most Blacks were stuck in rundown neighborhoods where many could not find work. The high jobless rates discouraged many ghetto residents, who believed they had no chance of escaping abject poverty. To many urban Blacks, nonviolent protest did not seem likely to change things for the better.

For an increasing number of African Americans, the CRM's peaceful strategies did not go far enough. Protesting segregation, Sit-Ins, and Freedom Rides, they believed, failed to resolve properly the suffering and powerlessness forced on so many Black Americans by decades of racial injustice. Accordingly, a radical movement with competing philosophies emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s, known as the Black Power Movement (BPM). Some Blacks saw it as a part of a movement toward Black separatism, while others found in Black power a celebration of Black identity.

The Black Power Movement advocated unity, community building, a celebration of Blacks' African heritage, and self-determination. Leland Ware argues that Black Power advocates believed that African Americans should aim at reconstructing their own communities rather than integrating into the White-dominated society (1089). While King and

his followers found their inspiration in the nonviolent teachings of Ghandi, BPM activists preferred Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey. New organizations developed new cultural, political, and economic programs and grew memberships that reflected this shift.

Kwame Ture, known as Stokely Carmichael, the SNCC's charismatic leader¹⁹, was the first who yelled "Black Power" as a political slogan in the 1966 march in Mississippi. Black Power meant Black political and economic control of predominately Black communities in the Deep South (Ware 1089). In their 1968 book, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, Carmichael and Hamilton defined Black Power as "...a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations. It is a call to reject the racist institutions and values of this society" (44).

Peniel E. Joseph argues that Black Power also expressed Carmichael's break with King's belief in nonviolence and its end goal of racial integration that he once believed in. Instead, he linked the concept to the ideology of black separatism, which was articulated by Malcolm X, whose radicalism and early black militant groups in the 1950s produced the BPM (*The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* 7). Yet, it was after his death in 1965 that Malcolm X's philosophies of black self-defense, black economic autonomy, and racial pride influenced 1960s radical organizations, such as the Black Panther Party²⁰, and the Black Women's United Front²¹. Amy Jana Cohen such organizations established new cultural, political, and economic initiatives and attracted memberships that mirrored their change from peaceful to non-peaceful (32).

Through organized protests for Black Studies, efforts to integrate the Black Arts into independent and established institutions, and the push to seize dominance of major American cities by political power, the movement attempted to change American democracy by promoting radical goals (Ware 1090). Reed believes that within the BPM's vast array of

political ideologies, it succeeded in revolutionizing Black consciousness in ways that continue to echo today and have profound political importance. He claims that the legacy of the BPM lies in its impacts on the Black community, and on the new intellectual field of Black studies (43).

As a result of political violence²², exile of activists, internal struggles, deaths, and a general lack of focus by national organizations, the BPM struggled and eventually declined in late 1970s. Joseph argues that to evoke the death of the Black Power revolution in a “linear” way is to consider Black Power only in its national context. Yet, some activists efforts’ at the local level remain examples of the Black Power’s continuation and relevance in black neighborhoods during the decline of the national movement (*The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* 248).

1.2.3. The Legacies of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement

Unlike Reed, Joseph believes that the BPM did not emerge after the decline of the CRM, it rather existed alongside the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s, and certain activists simultaneously participated in both movements. He adds, African American political culture in the 1960s and 1970s was much more complicated, diverse, and heterogeneous than regular narratives of that era have represented. Accordingly, despite the differences in ideologies, strategies and goals of both movements, their legacies in the Black community are related (“The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field” 775).

Outrageous forms of racial discrimination and government-supported segregation of public facilities came to an end. In the South, anti-Black violence declined. Black candidates were elected to political offices in communities, where they had once been barred from voting, and many of the leaders or organizations that came into existence during the 1950s and 1960s remained active in southern politics. Southern colleges and universities that once excluded blacks began to recruit them (Reed 102).

Joseph claims that the growth, development, and institutionalization of Black studies programs and departments in American colleges and their goal of implanting the quest to redefine black identity with practical roots in communities through cultural centers, independent schools, poetry, dance, theater, and aesthetics; also remain a defining legacy of the era (“The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field” 776). According to Leon F. Litwack, the civil rights period of the twentieth century transformed American democracy by serving as a model for other group progress and group pride efforts including women, students, Chicanos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Puerto Ricans to pursue their own aims of eradicating segregation and obtaining equal treatment (20).

1.2.4. The Role of American Media in Covering Twentieth Century Racial Protest Movements

For much of the history, Black America was overwhelmingly ignored by the mainstream media, with the White press only reporting on Black criminal activities and never on Black injustices. It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that media attention shifted to America's Black people. Since that time, it started to expose the inequities they faced to both national and international audiences.

Margaret A. Blanchard believes that without the advent of television, the CRM would not have been as successful, or even achieved the same level of popularity as it did (373). In the beginning of the 1950s, television was a novelty item owned only by high income, white households. Majority of other households received their news through radio, newspapers, and magazines. Throughout the 1950s, television purchases rapidly increased, and by the 1960s, it took over as the dominant form of media with the majority of households owning television in their homes. At the same time, the Civil Rights Movement came to prominence.

Blanchard claims that the media coverage of the civil rights era knew three distinct phases. The first phase started with the Brown decision in 1954. The media in this phase focused on

covering major events such as the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 and conflicts regarding public school desegregation, Little Rock, Arkansas. This stage also covered Martin Luther King's "subsequent rise to prominence" (373). The second phase, Blanchard adds, was characterized by the mass public demonstrations, Sit-Ins and Freedom Rides, and which resulted in outlawing segregation in public facilities. During this phase, journalists were seen as allies and supporters of activists. Both, print and broadcast journalism covered the events with news and photos. The third phase represented the radical shift of Black activism. During that period, media coverage became problematic, for it captured the Black Power era as a tragic ending to the civil rights story, where King's dream was lost to militancy and insanity; hence, most Black Americans began to suspect and show distrust in the information given by the White-dominated media (374).

Despite the fact that in many occasions, Civil Rights leaders criticized press and television for covering the activities and demonstrations without investigating the discrimination problem facing African Americans and caused the demonstrations in first place; the mainstream American media was very influential in shaping every day Americans' opinions on the movement. How the White media covered the struggle for Black freedom was basic to the movement itself for, it defined its nature, chronology, and achievements in popular understanding and memory (Goodwin).

1.3. Post-Civil Rights Movement Era

African Americans did not emerge from the Civil Rights Movement fully integrated into the American society. This was shown by the relatively high number of Blacks who remained poor, undereducated, and imprisoned. Nonetheless, the CRM resulted in ending legal segregation and the growth of a sizable Black middle class. However, even in the twenty-first century, race relations are still a controversial issue in many parts of the American society.

In addressing issues of race and racial justice in the United States, Roy L. Brooks offers what he calls the four leading theories of race in the post-civil rights era, and attempts to distinguish between their diagnoses of racial injustice and their prescriptions for overcoming it. The four views on which Brooks focuses are traditionalism, reformism, limited separation, and critical race theory (XV).

Traditionalists believe that the main obstructions to black advancement are found within Black communities and people, so their prescriptions are focused around individual self-help (Brooks 15). While acknowledging internal problems, reformists also see ongoing racism and discrimination as primary external factors that sustain the race problem today. They, hence, prescribe both internal self-help in the form of promoting healthy Black families, and external measures through governmental policies aiming at undermining racism and racial discrimination (37).

Brooks opines that limited separation agrees with reformism in terms of the problem's diagnosis, but proposes a different solution, namely African Americans should organize their own communities, and civic organizations to further their goals (65). Externally, critical race theorists see how the problem of race in the American society is linked to the problem of power. Continuous White dominance and Black subordination are viewed as the main cause of racial disparity. Yet, according to Brooks, they propose nothing in the way of a solution (90). Brooks claims that no theory is absolutely accurate or wrong, each theory is built around what he regards as the central civil rights question of the day (109).

To sum up, the struggle for racial justice was one of the most important social movements of the twentieth century. By rooting out legal segregation and winning the right to vote, African Americans established their claim to real political power. The CRM, on one hand, brought forth remarkable social opportunities for Blacks in the last decades of the 20th century. This is seen today in the high numbers of wealthy and influential Black Americans

(such as Oprah Winfrey, Tiger Woods, and Michael Jordan). In recent years, Blacks have increasingly won election to powerful positions, including Black congressional representatives, governors, presidential delegates (such as Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell), and of course, the presidency itself with the election of Barack Obama (Brooks XII).

On the other hand, the Civil Rights Movement did not fully end segregation, because the majority of African Americans still face racial crises until today. Asafa Jalata affirms that following industrial and business transformation, African Americans have experienced disproportionately high unemployment rates, with a poverty rate in the twenty-first century that is comparable to that of the 1960s. Because of modern modes of social and judicial segregation, African Americans have the highest imprisonment rates of any ethnic group, especially in the southern states (107).

Even nowadays, racial prejudice remains a serious problem, and the economic hardship of millions of Blacks continues. Nonetheless, the Civil Rights Movement had an impact that extended far beyond its immediate goals. It has influenced every group seeking to reform American society in the last decades. Many organizations of women, Indians, Hispanics, and others; all have relied on the tactics and lessons of the CRM to assert and promote their interests.

1.3.1. The Struggle for Racial Justice in the Age of Obama

The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States was a defining moment in American history. Barack Obama has arrived to this historic epoch through the middle passage, slavery, and racial segregation, which were sad events that marked the history of racial injustice in the United States. African Americans, including Obama, were and are still aware that so many of the disparities facing the African American community can be directly traced to inequalities passed on from earlier generations that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and the Jim Crow laws.

With a significant number of White votes (43% according to Pew Research Center), Barack Obama was elected the forty-fourth president of the United States of America on November 4, 2008, accomplishing a victory of historic significance. In many ways, Obama's election victory was seen as a triumph over America's history of racial prejudices. Many of his supporters hopefully believed that his election signified a radical change in American race relations and thought that racism was dead. They saw him as an end to America's obsession with race and expressed their hopefulness that Obama's electoral campaign promises based on change and optimism would make a difference.

Obama's opponents, meanwhile, argued that a Black man in the White House would legitimize Blacks as a group posing a threat to white dominance. Whites perceived him as a symbol of all Blacks and, therefore, thought him unworthy of the office and prejudicially opposed him. Regardless of these views, Obama's election to the presidency renewed the topic of race and racism again either explicitly or implicitly.

More than three decades into the post-Civil Rights era, the "Age of Obama" began on the day of his election to the last day of his tenure. Since he was elected President of the United States, a sense of a post-racial America was on the horizon. In reality, a large number of African Americans felt optimistic about the prospects of the country achieving racial equality in the immediate future. Bertin M. Louis, Jr. and Wornie L. Reed viewed that his election as the first Black President of the United States represented a victory over a disabling record, defiance against the American racial state, and change in racial attitudes against Blacks among a predominantly White electorate (78). By and large, the election of Obama as president was celebrated as a historical triumph on America's racist past. In many ways, Barack Obama's election victory was seen as a triumph over America's history of racial prejudices.

While many contended that the election showed that, the American society moved beyond race and the nation overcame the race problem, and despite many assumptions about the Obama era being “post-racial”, most experts agree that racism is still alive. They argued that it proved nothing and that racism remained as much an entrenched part of the American society as ever. Many Americans lived under the false notion that the country had become a post-racial society and America has become a happy tale of assimilation. However, reality was just the opposite.

Brooks believes that even in the “Age of Obama”, the racial scene was marked by two contradicting racial dynamics: racial success and racial despair. For one thing, there was Barack Obama sitting in the White House; for another thing, there were other Black citizens sitting in the jailhouse or wasting away in a bad public school. This duality meant that American society was not post-racial society by any means; it rather suggested a continuity of the race problem (XIII).

Many African-Americans, in particular, voted for President Obama in the hopes of alleviating the pain of economic and political obstacles to collective Black advancement in the United States. However, as stated by Louis and Reed, after the initial “euphoria” surrounding the election of the first Black president of the United States, a troubling trend arose in the Obama administration that deserved investigation. For when it came to social justice, President Obama did not use the presidency as a podium to bring attention to the need to resolve racial inequities, something that would help Black citizens; he rather had generally avoided mentioning ethnicity, race, and its negative impact on African Americans' collective well-being (79).

Obama’s election should not be seen as the milestone that ended racism in American society even though his political success is regarded as the one major event that has fueled the post-racial narrative in American society. Although Obama’s election is a great achievement,

it is an accomplishment as confined and constrained by race as it is an accomplishment that transcends race. Obama's political success has hinged on his continued deft management of the racial divide in the United States (Bobo and Dawson 13).

As Charles Gallagher assures, since Obama took office, many incidents proved not only that post racialism did not exist, but that racism was more prevalent in politics and in the media than ever before (24). Kristen Clarke believes that a close and careful analysis of some events that emerged during the 2008 presidential election revealed striking evidence about the enduring legacy of racism and persisting levels of vote discrimination in a number of communities around the country (241).

Indeed, since his inauguration, President Obama encountered many civil rights incidents with a strategy of denying racism rather than confronting its very existence in America. Generally speaking, although race relations were a constant subject of public discussion, president Obama was neutral and never engaged in a sustained discussion about the matter (Clarke 125). His reaction made visible the myth of a post-racial United States.

Accordingly, many African Americans became convinced that the Age of Obama was not really in their benefit. This could and can be seen in the areas of housing, employment, and the criminal justice system, where adverse effects of institutional racism on Blacks, much of which occurred during Obama's tenure. Thus, African Americans must let go of their hopes and continue to push, on their own, the current racial order so that they can collectively live better lives.

Endnotes

¹ The abolitionist movement/ abolitionism, was a structured effort to end the practice of slavery in the United States, which took place from about 1830 to 1870 (The Editors of History).

² Lynching is a form of violence in which a mob, without trial, executes a presumed offender, often after inflicting torture and corporal mutilation (Geoffrey).

³ In 1870, Sixteen African Americans were elected to the House of Representatives. In the same year, Hiram Revels of Mississippi became the first black U.S. senator (Fremon 5).

⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the most remarkable activists and Black protests leader in the USA during the first half of the 20th century (The Editors of Biography).

⁵ Thomas “Daddy” Rice, known as “Jim Crow”, a white American, began his strange career as a minstrel caricature of a Black man in 1828, to amuse white audiences. Later he became a depiction of White Racism (Pilgrim).

⁶ Homère Plessy decided to challenge the segregated setting, by deliberately seating himself in the White section of a train, he later was arrested for refusing to change his seat. The case resulted in legalizing segregation (Urofsky).

⁷ The Springfield race riot of 1908 was a two-days mass racial violence committed against African Americans by a mob of white Americans in Springfield, Illinois, after two black men suspected in rape, were arrested and transferred out of the city by the Sheriff city (Fremon 17).

⁸ In 1951, Topeka, Kansas. Linda Brown, was rejected in an all-white school close to where she lives and had go to a far segregated school. Linda’s father claimed that Linda was denied the best education because the two schools were not ‘equal’. Similar cases reached the court, so it decided to lump all the cases together with Brown as one lawsuit. In 1954, the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice Earl Warren ruled that segregated schools were inherently unequal, and thereby declared segregation in public education to be unconstitutional (Fremon 19).

⁹ Three years after the WWII, with the efforts and pressure of black veterans, President Harry Truman issued the Executive Order 9981 to end segregation in the Armed Services (Reed 7).

¹⁰ Rosa Parks, an African American woman, was arrested for refusing to yield her bus seat to a white man. The incident resulted in the Montgomery Bus Boycott which was a mass protest by African American citizens from December 1955 to December 1956, in the city of Montgomery, Alabama, against segregation policies on the city's public buses. The U.S. Supreme Court ultimately ordered Montgomery to integrate its bus system (The Editors of History).

¹¹ After the end of segregation in schools in 1954, a group of nine Black students were blocked from entering the formerly all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in

September 1957. President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent federal troops to escort the Little Rock Nine into school (Reed 20).

¹² Sit-Ins dated back to Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent resistance campaigns for Indian independence from Britain (Friedman 37).

¹³ The Big Six included James Farmer, Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis, A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young (Kirk 138).

¹⁴ Referring to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Declaration of Independence and the Constitution (Kirk 140).

¹⁵ This act ended segregation in public places and banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. Proposed by President Kennedy and signed by President Johnson (Massey 41).

¹⁶ This act outlawed the discriminatory voting practices adopted in many southern states. Signed by President Johnson (Massey 42).

¹⁷ Granted equal access to quality education, signed by President Johnson (Massey 44).

¹⁸ Prohibited discriminations concerning the sale, rental and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin or sex, signed by President Johnson (Massey 45).

¹⁹ SNCC became a radical group under Carmichael, who was elected as the chairman of SNCC in 1966 (Ware 1090).

²⁰ Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale formed the Black Panther Party, in Oakland, California, in 1966. The initial goal of the group was to guard African American neighborhoods in order to protect civilians from police brutality. The Panthers eventually developed into a Marxist revolutionary group that called for the arming of all African Americans, the release of all African Americans from jail, and the payment of compensation to African Americans for centuries of exploitation by white Americans (Garrett Albert Duncan).

²¹ BWUF is a federation of activists and organizations dedicated to the "abolition of every possibility of oppression & exploitation." ("Black Women's United Front" Unity and Struggle).

²² The FBI and other government agencies waged a war against African American protestors. The Black Power activists, and other Black groups were investigated by the FBI's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) that used tactics such as: spying, wiretapping computers, charging people with crimes based on flimsy testimony, circulating rumors, and even assassinating famous activists (Ware 1097).

Chapter Two

Black Lives Matter in 21st-Century America

Throughout the American history, Black people have been murdered, mistreated, and subjected to systemic institutional and economic oppression and racism. Black resistance, that started in the nineteenth century, continues today in the twenty-first century with the Black Lives Matter movement. The current chapter undertakes the Black Lives Matter movement. The first section answers the questions: Why does America need the BLM movement, when it claims to be a color-blind society? How did the BLM movement emerge? What are the motivations behind the BLM movement? What are the BLM movement's goals?

The second section answers the questions regarding the BLM movement's impact on general awareness and on racial justice and equality: How is BLM movement responsible for spreading awareness about racism in the United States? Why is the participation of White Americans in and support to the BLM huge, and why it is important? How did BLM affect political campaigns? How did the federal and state levels react to the movement?

The third section answers the following questions: What are the different internal conflicts within the BLM movement? What are the sources of such conflicts? How can BLM overcome these internal conflicts? Why is BLM facing the All Lives Matter (ALM) backlash? What is the relation between ALM and colour-blindness? How does the ALM response threaten the BLM movement?

The fourth section answers the questions regarding the similarities and differences between the Black Lives Matter movement and the twentieth century Civil Right Movement: Why does scholars compare the BLM to the CRM? Is the BLM a continuation to the past CRM? What are the similarities between he the BLM and the CRM? What are the differences between these two movements?

2.1. The Black Lives Matter Movement: Origins, Motivations and Goals

Every century brings a new racial justice battle for African Americans in the United States. Despite twenty-first century common narratives of the US being a post-racial and colorblind society, racism and its structural manifestations are anything but a thing of the past. In fact, as Dorothy A. Brown noted, nineteenth and twentieth century racism in the US was “blatant”, undisputed, and purposeful. However, twenty-first century racism is more “subtle”. Today, it is more difficult to show deliberate racial discrimination, and as a result, its presence is frequently debated (1485).

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, like the Abolition Movement of the nineteenth century and the Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century, has emerged in the twenty-first century, demanding an immediate end of racist violence that Black bodies continue to endure at every aspect of life, and not just by forms of state-sanctioned violence and the criminal justice system. So, the question that must be asked is how did “the post-racial”, “colorblind” America reach a point where it needs a Black Lives Matter movement?

The answer to this question according to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor is that America simply has never been a post-racial society, for racism is embedded in the culture of the country and institutionalized through laws and administrative practice, and the racist past of the country has not yet past. In addition, the Black struggle is a fight that is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws – racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is revealing the evils that are profoundly ingrained in the entire framework of the American culture. It highlights systemic rather than superficial faults, implying that the underlying issue to be addressed is fundamental societal reconstruction (2).

2.1.1. The Movement’s Origins

Much like the direct-action campaign that followed the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, and other civil rights campaigns throughout American history, BLM began as a response to a

court case. The killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman as well as the jury's decision in Zimmerman's criminal prosecution sparked outrage and highlighted what would become a troubling trend that undisputedly has made its mark on America's consciousness.

The story of the movement that seeks to redeem a nation began in the evening of February 26, 2012, when Martin Trayvon was walking through a Sanford, Florida community wearing a hoodie and holding only a soft drink and some candy. George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, suspected Martin and summoned the police, despite the fact that Martin had not done anything criminal, his only possible crime seemed to be walking while Black. Despite being instructed by the 911 operator to stand down and keep his distance, Zimmerman instigated a confrontation that escalated in a scuffle that ended with him shooting seventeen-year-old Martin dead (Lebron XI).

Barbara Ransby notes that when it became evident that Florida authorities had no intention of pursuing Martin's killer, protests in the streets were held and several new national or regional organizations were formed, notably Million Hoodies Movement for Justice¹, Dream Defenders², and Black Youth Project 100³, all calling for the prosecution of Zimmerman (41). The efforts of the protestors proved results, as Garrett Chase reports, on March 19, 2012, the Justice Department and the FBI announced the start of an investigation into Martin's killing. Three days later, a petition on Change.org advocating for Zimmerman's arrest exceeded 1.3 million signatures. Marches were held in cities around the country, as Trayvon's hooded sweatshirt, which he was wearing when he was killed, became a political symbol of resistance to racial profiling and the prosecution of Black youth. Finally, on April 11, 2012, Zimmerman was formally charged with second-degree murder (1093).

Those who were furious when the story of Martin's death first broke, were enraged even more on July 13, 2013, when George Zimmerman was found not guilty following a widely publicized jury trial (Lebron XI). According to Amanda Neil Edgar and Andre E. Johnson, the

only reason a trial was held in the first place was because of the persistent demonstrations in the streets and on social media, together with pressure from Martin's family, compelled local officials to reevaluate the first decision of not charging Zimmerman (2).

The jury's sentence may have been not guilty, but to many outside the courtroom, George Zimmerman's acquittal was an injustice. Xhercis Méndez believes that Martin was seen as yet another casualty in the war on Black lives and a reminder of the extent to which Black lives were deemed disposable, killable, and structurally less worthy within the context of the United States (96). Indeed, his death, trial, and acquittal served as yet another reminder of the systemic disparities that inject violence into communities of color, as well as the urgent need for dramatic reform in a legal and state governance system that feeds on the elimination of Black existence.

Jennifer Chernega points that in reaction to the verdict, #BlackLivesMatter founders Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Collurs established the hashtag as a means to give words to their thoughts and, in turn, bring to light what was happening in that specific, but not exceptional, moment of violence (237). In a Facebook post, Alicia Garza wrote "a love letter to Black people" in response to the verdict stating, "Black people, I love us. We Matter. Our lives matter. Black lives matter", which in turn prompted Patrisse Collurs to put a hashtag in front of the phrase, and #BlackLivesMatter was born (Emerging Us "How a Hashtag Defined a Movement"). The hashtag would be the start of what would eventually grow into the Black Lives Matter movement.

The three women decided to create an online space for the movement to grow, and for others to join and spread awareness. As Cullors writes in the website, "Alicia, Opal, and I created #BlackLivesMatter as an online community to help combat anti-Black racism across the globe." (Black Lives Matter "6 Years Strong"). #BlackLivesMatter has grown as a means to bring awareness to the unjustified shootings of unarmed Black people. The phrase has since

been popularized and has become a rallying cry for all suspicious deaths or unjustified homicides of Black people, particularly concerning law enforcement. Despite the hashtag's rapid spread, using social media and the internet to facilitate widespread awareness; yet, during the year of 2013, #BlackLivesMatter remained an article on social media.

Ransby asserts that the political context in which Martin was killed is important in setting the stage for the birth of a movement. Trayvon Martin was murdered four years into Barack Obama's presidency, on the eve of his re-election in 2012, Black citizens had had enough of systemic racism, and the "Age of Obama" did not put an end to it. As a result, the case sparked the largest resurgence of Black protest in over four decades (44).

By the end of 2013, #BlackLivesMatter had not yet become a movement in the traditional sense. Nonetheless, it had become a topic of discussion, frequently seen in social media posts and, on occasion, getting traditional media coverage, because it touched on the rising dissatisfaction with racial inequity in the judicial system (Chase 1099). In 2014, America would witness the transition from social media discussion to rallying cry, as Black Lives Matter, the movement, came into existence.

On July 17, 2014, in Staten Island, New York, Eric Garner, a forty-three-year-old Black man, died after being placed in a chokehold by White police officer Daniel Pantaleo, while in police custody. Weeks later, on August 9, Michael Brown, a Black teenager, was shot and killed by a White police officer, Darren Wilson, in Ferguson, Missouri (Dawson 28-29). People's exhaustion, sadness, frustration, and anger at the dehumanizing trauma inflicted by racism finally boiled over. Amanda D. Clark et al. report that Brown's death led to the Ferguson protests, which turned into full-fledged violence that lasted for weeks. The riots were so violent that Missouri Governor, Jay Nixon, proclaimed a state of emergency and dispatched the Missouri National Guard to deal with the riots⁴ (146).

Whereas the Zimmerman conviction sparked emotions of racial inequity, the brutal killings in Ferguson and Staten Island drastically increased the tension. The demonstrations occurred in Ferguson and Staten Island first, and then reached many other states, as Berk Çetin et al. note, the manifestations were just a response of systemic, institutionalized racism that had been the norm in Black communities (8). Rachel Herzing declares that in the months following Garner and Brown murders, Grand juries found neither assaulting officer Pantaleo nor Wilson guilty of misconduct. Their deaths, like Dontre Hamilton's months before them, or Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Tanisha Anderson, Roshad McIntosh, Akai Gurley, Ezell Ford, Michelle Cusseaux, Alex Nieto, and hundreds of others, prompted discussion over how to address the police assaults on Black communities (214).

The year of 2014 marked the successful and widely acknowledged transition of Black Lives Matter from a call to action on social media to a nationwide, organized civil rights movement. The same year saw as well the creation of Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation (BLMGNF), which is “a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.” It is a decentralized organization with multiple chapters based in various cities in US, UK and Canada, dedicated to organizing and continuing activist activities in the Black Lives Matter movement (Black Lives Matter “About Black Lives Matter”).

The BLM movement is also a call for racial justice for all Black lives, even those who have historically been marginalized including women, transgender, queer, and disabled bodies. The movement has created power to bring justice, healing, and freedom to Black people across the globe (Black Lives Matter “Herstory”). In this respect, Joe Macaré claims that both the movement and the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter work to create a level of recognition that violence against Black bodies cannot be separated from the ways in which

these forms of oppression are constituted both, by and through structural articulations of power, which the police are deeply a part of (25).

According to the movement's website, there exist over 40 chapters of the BLM organization worldwide (Black Lives Matter 'About Black Lives Matter'). In addition, the hashtag has been a trending topic on social platforms since 2014. Nevertheless, the movement reached its peak in June 2020, when more than 15 million people turned out in nearly 550 places across the United States⁵, protesting against the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, by White Minneapolis police officer who knelt on Floyd's neck for several minutes, on 25 May 2020 (Buchanan et al.).

The rapid spread of a bystander's video of Floyd's last moments sparked large protests in places across the United States and across the world. The tragedy changed public opinion in the United States and in the whole world in favor of the Black Lives Matter movement while attracting widespread attention to the issue of ingrained racism in American society (Anderson et al.). As a consequence, on April 20, 2021, Floyd's killer, former police officer Derek Chauvin, was convicted guilty of murder and manslaughter. Chauvin, faces a minimum sentence of 75 years in prison (Hayes et al.).

2.1.2. The Movement's Motivations

From its wide perspective, the BLM movement continues the tradition of challenging racism, discrimination and violence enacted on Black bodies. However, from a narrower perspective, the movement's primary motivation is the specific issue of police brutality, which overwhelmingly targets Black people in the same way racist laws of slavery and Jim Crow did. According to their own website, the BLM works to "...eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes." (Black Lives Matter "About Black Lives Matter"). Thus, police brutality and systemic racial inequalities have sparked the formation BLM movement. Yet, there are other

significant issues that the movement has tackled over the years and which include, feminism, rights of queer and trans people, justice, oppression of other minorities, and persons with disabilities.

Sandra E. Weissinger et al. believe that the social activism of the BLM movement was triggered by the reality that Blacks are dying by law enforcement at an alarming rate, and society has been left to grapple with why these lives are being taken in similar, brutal ways. Driven by rage, deep sorrow, and a desperate need to find answers to the “why”, Black people went to the streets to protest the demise of their own community (2).

In their book, *Policing Black Bodies: How Black Lives are Surveilled and How to Work for Change*, Angela J. Hattery and Earl Smith acknowledge that the BLM movement brought national attention to the specific tensions between the police and Black communities across the United States. The most important of these issues are the police killings of unarmed Black men and women as well as the over incarceration of Black bodies. Yet, this contentious relationship between the police and the Black community is nothing new nor it is limited to the tragedies that get the news’ attention. Indeed, police have been “policing” the Black community from the very moment Black people arrived on this continent (5).

Felicia Rose Asbury points out that despite the way police violence is often portrayed as working independently of the state, its material and ideological expressions are part of a wider state-based power system (4). For that matter, INCITE! provides a critical study of the relationships between the police, prisons, and systemic forms of oppression:

[Law enforcements] represent the front lines of the criminal injustice system, and are often primarily responsible for determining who will be targeted for heightened surveillance and policing, enforcing systemic oppressions based on race, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, immigration status, class and ability, and feeding people into the prison-industrial complex.

In this way, INCITE!'s definition reveals how these overlapping material and ideological conditions shape the everyday makings of police brutality and other forms of state-based violence by situating law enforcement as a primary facet of the criminal justice system, and thus as a part of a larger structure of state-based operations of power (“Stop Law Enforcement Violence”).

Consequently, as Asha Rosa et al. argue, police violence is and always has been state-sanctioned violence. “We must understand police violence to be rooted in historical and systemic anti-Blackness that seeks to control, contain and repress Black bodies through acts of repeated violence” (96). In the same logic, Francesca Bordonaro and Dale Willits believe that violence against Black bodies, or even occurrences of Black deaths, are tied to a historical social fabric which positions Black life as being something that is expendable (107).

Since the emergence of the movement, the issue of police violence and its relation to racism has prompted many investigations. As stated by Cassandra Chaney and Ray V. Robertson, the number of Black people killed by police officers in "post-racial America" continues to rise. Police in America kill citizens at a higher rate than any other developed nation (498). Indeed, Black people are three times most likely to be killed by police than other Americans. Besides, “Black people were 28% of those killed by police in 2020 despite being only 13% of the overall US population.” (“Police Violence Map”)

After Brown's death in 2014, there was an increase use of body cameras among police forces as a tool to help hold officers accountable and make departments more transparent. In her 2018 report for the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Shelley S. Hyland reveals that more than 7,200 law enforcement agencies had acquired body-worn cameras for police officers since 2015. She adds that almost 38% of the agencies did not have a specific policy controlling the use of the body-worn cameras. Approximately, 60% permitted an officer engaged in an incident to examine the tape without having to make a formal request, raising issues about

whether an officer utilized the footage to clarify his statement or interfered with the tape. In addition, more than 80% of police departments and sheriff's offices with 500 or more full-time officers permitted informal access to their recordings (2-10). In commenting on these numbers, Abdollah Tami believes that body-worn cameras are not always helpful in police misconduct cases, and that is partly because law enforcement often writes the rules on how the videos will be used and whether to be available for public or not.

In another report by Elle Lett et al. on the relation between the use of body cameras since 2015 and police violence against Black people, the results show that the rate of fatal police shootings for African Americans is constant from 2015 to 2020 despite the increased use of body-worn cameras (2). In other words, body-worn cameras for police officers have not lived up to promises of exposing police brutality acts against Black bodies. Despite the increased attention on the police violence issue and even with the efforts of the BLM movement, 98.3% of killings by police from 2013-2020 have not resulted in officers being charged with crimes (“Police Violence Map”).

In addition to police violence, the BLM movement has been spotlighting the wide array of structural inequalities that produce violence within Black communities. Méndez explains structural inequalities as the sets of conditions (persistent poverty, lack of access to health care, school-to-prison pipeline) and institutions (the legal system, heteropatriarchy) that ensure some communities are systematically denied access to their full rights as citizens and relegated to a lesser humanity (98). Cullors and Asha Bandele refer to these conditions as the environment that makes the Black community or any other group members in general, as disposable and therefore more available for exploitation (60).

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues that contemporary racial inequalities are reproduced through “New Racism” practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial. These racial inequalities exist in a colorblind society, which makes that racism a “color-blind racism”

(Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States 3). He adds that this post-racial American racism is characterized by the following elements: “(1) the increasingly covert nature of racial discourse and practices, (2) the avoidance of direct racial terminology, (3) the elaboration of a racial political agenda that eschews direct racial references, (4) the subtle character of most mechanisms to reproduce racial privilege, and (5) the rearticulation of some racial practices of the past” (“The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, “Post-Racial” America” 5). Through these structural inequalities, Blacks and Whites remain mostly separate and unequal in many areas of social life like the areas of housing, the economy, and the justice system.

Accordingly, the BLM movement emerged out of the need to continue the Black liberation struggle for freedom. Its overall goal is to fight the colorblind racism and change the structures and systems in the American society, that treat black lives like they do not matter. One of these systems is the criminal justice system, which is the system of law enforcement that is responsible for the unnecessary deaths of many Black innocent people.

2.1.3. The Movement’s Goals

Despite the American mainstream's lack of comprehension of the BLM movement and its criticism toward the movement for lacking specific aims, the founders of Black Lives Matter have attempted to address the demands and goals of the movement on their website. They stated in various interviews what the movement means to them, and what ideals they intended to represent with it. As Black Lives Matter increased in size and scale as a social movement, its objectives that are not only restricted to police brutality but “include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state.” became clear and apparent (Black Lives Matter “Herstory”).

One major goal of the movement, as stated in the official website, is to “center... those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements.” Other demands include: ending

White supremacy, swift and transparent legal investigation of all police shootings of Black people, official governmental tracking of the number of citizens killed by police, disaggregated by race, the demilitarization of local police forces and “defunding” the police (Duignan). As K. Taylor expresses, the movement’s demands focus on the issue of police violence in order to retain focus, not to narrow the movement’s broad reach and its intention of ending all kinds of systemic racism. She adds that the slogan "Black Lives Matter" is brilliant in its capacity to “articulate the dehumanizing aspects of anti-Black racism in the United States”. The movement's long-term strength will be determined by its ability to reach a vast number of people by linking the problem of police violence to other ways in which Black people are oppressed (162).

The BLM movement is intentionally intersectional and focuses on human rights. It is a multidimensional campaign that rejects focusing only on race, since doing so re-marginalizes the already marginalized intersectional identities which include women, trans, queer, and disabled folks. As Kimberlé Crenshaw, a major influence to the movement, argues, intersectional identities are subject to “overlapping patterns of power” and produce a convergence of vulnerability to social control and oppression. By taking a more intersectional approach, BLM can more fully unfold a “range of social and institutional practices that produce and sustain social categories and infuse them with social meanings” (1425). Put simply, in order not to exclude or marginalize any voice, BLM connects itself to gender-identity activism and highlights the importance of their focus on complex gender issues and other identities, to bring out the issue of gender-based violence to racial violence.

Tanika Siscoe states that the BLM aims at moving the nation away from colorblindness and making it color conscious. Alexander believes that it is necessary for the American society to pay close attention to the laws, policies and practices on racial and ethnic groups, and to consciously aim to ensure that prejudices, stereotypes, and systemic arraignment do

not create unnecessary damage or harm to any individual or group because of race (17). So, instead of being colorblind and ignorant to the injustices that racial minorities face, American nation must discuss race openly and acknowledge that racism still exists and these minorities still experience it in many areas in their daily lives.

In their policy agenda, released in 2016, and titled "A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom and Justice." BLM activists and advocacy groups joined forces to offer six core demands. The demands include:

1. End the war on Black people.
2. Reparations for past and continuing harms.
3. Divestment from the institutions that criminalize, cage and harm black people; and investment in the education, health and safety of Black people.
4. Economic justice for all and a reconstruction of the economy to ensure our communities have collective ownership, not merely access.
5. Community control of the laws, institutions and policies that most impact us.
6. Independent Black political power and Black self-determination in all areas of society.

To meet those objectives, the organization proposed a series of measures, including the demilitarization of police and an end to systemic assault on Black youth. They advocate for the enactment of state and federal laws that recognize and redress the effects of slavery, as well as the passage of H.R. 40⁶, which would establish a commission to explore reparations ideas (T. Lee).

In addition to shedding light at the multi-layered oppression of some groups, the BLM movement also frames policy goals by raising awareness of police brutality and the need for reforming the criminal justice system. In 2015, BLM activists released a 10-point plan called "Campaign Zero". The latter urges policy changes and proposes laws on federal, state and local levels. As stated in the official website of the campaign, the plan called for:

- Ending "broken windows" policing, which aggressively polices minor crimes in an attempt to stop larger ones.
- Using community oversight for misconduct rather than having police decide what consequences officers face.
- Limiting the use of deadly force.
- Independently investigating and prosecuting police misconduct.
- Increase the number of civilian first responders who reflect the communities they serve.
- Requiring officers to wear body cameras.
- Invest in rigorous and sustained training for the police.
- Ending for-profit policing practices.
- Demilitarization of the police.
- Implementing police union contracts that hold officers accountable for misconduct.

(Campaign Zero "Take Action")

Activists also called for #DefundPolice and #InvestInCommunities, which imply reducing police department budgets and investing the freed-up funds in community social services, such as health care, housing and education (Defund the Police "What we Need"). Yet, it remains evident that BLM's ultimate goal, like previous struggles, is to stop the demise of Black folks, eradicate racial discrimination which fundamentally structures the American society, and eliminate all the disparities between Black and White communities that still exist in the United States and can be seen in systems of labor, housing, education, voting, healthcare, and justice.

2.2. Impacts of Black Lives Matter on Awareness and on Racial Justice and Equality

Over the last several years, the Black Lives Matter movement has tried to increase public awareness of the issue of American law enforcement's perceived discrimination towards African Americans. The group gained national attention and became widely associated with

the current Black struggle for equality because of their numerous public rallies and marches. The group has evolved to provide a strong and unified voice to those whose thoughts are all too frequently drowned out by their oppressors' voices. This unification of individuals helps to legitimize and strengthen the movement as a whole.

BLM has clearly affected the dynamic of modern society in terms of embedded racism by calling attention to it and raising public awareness. Devin Iorio, in his article “The True Impact of Black Lives Matter”, claims that the actual worth of the movement resides in the voice and attention it brought to an issue that has persisted for far too long (2). The organization has been the topic of conversation on virtually all media outlets over the past years. In addition, it has as well gained attention from powerful government leaders such as former President Obama who responded to the collective outrage and protest in 2014 by creating “My Brother’s Keeper” (MBK), a program aimed largely at addressing the issues of young men and boys of color⁷. MBK’s efforts, which include giving mentoring and career opportunities to build a path to the middle class, as well as developing policies to reduce inequality for kids of color, continue to be overwhelmingly effective in changing the lives of young men and boys of color throughout the United States (Sanacore 153-155).

By, no longer, accepting the unfair aspects of everyday society, BLM encourages more people to become aware of the issue of systemic racism and how it is embedded in the law enforcement, and participates in fighting to address it. In a survey conducted in 2016 by Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Gretchen Livingston from the Pew Research Center, it was revealed that general awareness of the BLM movement and the issue of inequality in the justice system, are widespread among Black and White American adults, with 65% of African Americans and 40% of White Americans saying they support the movement.

The movement’s influence on the issue of persistent systemic racism can be best seen in the participation of White Americans in the movement. Because, for the big majority of

African Americans, it is automatic to support and be part of movements that call for racial equality; nonetheless, this is not the case for White Americans. Jesse Washington in his article “Why did Black Lives Matter Protests Attract Unprecedented White Support?” explains that White Americans’ participation in the BLM movement is unlike anything the previous Black Freedom movements have ever seen. He adds that the 2020 protests have seen huge White support for a number of reasons: the coronavirus lockdown with no sports, school, family activities, vacations or other recreational pursuits that normally divert citizens’ attention.

In addition, the issue of systemic racism has become more prominent in the American recent culture, with athletes, celebrities and movies tackling that problem, which raised people’s awareness and created the environment for them to respond angrily in the demonstrations. The third reason according to Washington is Trump’s “phobias and racism” that enraged people, especially the young White population. Thus, Whites’ participation in BLM has helped push concepts such as systemic racism and White privilege into the mainstream.

Some BLM local chapters are seeking to extend the movement’s impact to reach presidential campaigns, as John Eligon of the *New York Times* points out that “Local affiliates of the Black Lives Matter organization have disrupted numerous Democratic presidential campaign events, pushing the candidates to support policies to end mass incarceration and police brutality.” Thus, BLM has succeeded in making race relations one of the most crucial concerns for presidential candidates. Additionally, there have been many reactions to BLM at the federal and state levels, including the implementation of executive orders and legislations. BLM has influenced over 106 laws established to address police violence since its founding (Çetin et al. 17). According to the official website of Campaign Zero, state-level legislation adopted from 2014 to 2019 are compatible with Campaign Zero's policy goals, with most laws focusing on the use body cams (29 laws) and on limiting the use of lethal force (24

laws). Community representation and police demilitarization received the least attention, with only one law sanctioned for each demand (Campaign Zero “Solutions”).

The massive protests, that followed George Floyd’s death in May 2020, intensified the calls for systemic change in American policing. A new report by Ram Subramanian and Leily Arzy shows that, from May 2020 to May 2021, at least 30 states enacted one or more statewide legislative policy reforms mainly targeting one of three areas directly connected to the circumstances of Floyd’s killing. These three areas are: “use of force; duty for officers to intervene, report, or provide medical assistance in cases of police misconduct; and policies relating to law enforcement misconduct reporting and decertification”.

It is a fact that the BLM movement has raised awareness of institutional racism in the judicial system as well as police violence. However, systemic racism in the legal system is only one aspect of the cruelty endured by Black communities. The oppression also includes institutional racism within social, environmental, and economic sectors, which has a direct impact on systemic and oral health. Hedwig Lee, associate director in the center for the study of race, ethnicity and equity, believes that the BLM movement, so far is focusing on the issue of police violence against African Americans. Yet, to tackle systemic racism properly, BLM activists need to address other areas like housing, education and poverty as heavily as they are addressing police brutality. She adds that, dealing with these areas “higher up the pipeline”, reduces the occurrences of the micro interactions “police interactions with Blacks” and improves the quality of life for African Americans (Behind the News “What is Black Lives Matter? George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, All Lives Matter, Systemic Racism Explained”).

2.3. Political Divergences within the Movement and External Threats

The BLMGNF is made up of thousands of organizers in different chapters across the United States, and dozens of associated organizing groups. While they are united under the same BLM umbrella and have similar aims, reaching agreement on critical choices has been

difficult, especially since the audience for their work has increased dramatically, as has the desire for answers to the challenges they are battling. Maya King declares that most of the movement's internal conflicts developed between local chapters and national leaders over the group's direction, methods to achieve their goals, sexuality, and money. She believes that such conflicts happen because of the movement's "no central hierarchy" structure which provided organizers equal say in decision-making, but eventually, created uncertainty over who is properly linked with the movement and who is not.

Since its inception, as Russell Rickford claims, the movement has rejected links to mainstream electoral politics, which has long been a sterile field for the pursuit of genuinely progressive transformational goals. When Black Lives Matter activists learned of the Democratic Party's formal endorsement in autumn 2015, they immediately denounced the declaration of support and affirmed their commitment to autonomy. However, some elements of the movement plainly want to speak with, rather than simply confront, elites such as Hillary Clinton. Much of the movement appears to be characterized by a strong mistrust of electoral politics, which creates some disagreements with those who want the movement to seek a more political path (5).

Another dispute within the BLM movement organizing groups was over how to pursue their goals of stopping systematic racism and ending law enforcement violence against Black people. Some radical organizers suggested to go beyond reformism and pursue a revolutionary path (Rickford 5). While the movement called for "reform the police" and "defund the police", some leftists within it had called for "abolish the police", which implies straight-up doing away with the entire prison industrial complex (Cineas).

Gender and sexuality seem to have caused the most serious divergences within the BLM movement. Despite the fact that Black women have been at the vanguard of the campaign, some supporters continue to define the movement in terms of a traditionally masculine civil

rights movement. For its part, the corporate media regularly portrays police violence and extrajudicial killings as issues solely for Black men and in most cases neglect the killings of Black women by law enforcement (Rickford 5).

Campaigns such as “Say Her Name” emerged within the BLM movement to combat the marginalization of Black women's stories, who face alarming rates of incarceration police violence in distinctly gendered ways, such as sexual harassment and assault. On this point, Marcia Chatelain and Kaavya Asoka state that ‘Say Her Name’ documents and analyzes Black women’s voices and experiences of police violence and explains what women lose when society ignores them. Without ‘Say Her Name’ leaders, men, and people of the United States fail to see how laws, policies, and the culture that underpin gender inequalities are reinforced by America’s racial divide (54).

Additionally, the BLM movement speaks with many voices representing a broad array of demands. In many cases, local demands do not meet with national demands of the movement. Another internal issue is related to financing, with many chapters reporting that they did not get financial assistance from the movement. According to King, the problem stems from the fact that there are several groups claiming to be affiliated with the BLM movement but are not actually affiliates of the BLMGNF, which is in charge of distributing funds that it receives from donors, to its chapters.

In some cases, chapters break their affiliation with the Black Lives Matter Global Network when disagreements occur; but they continue the activism they have been doing for years under the BLM banner (Cineas). Nonetheless, external opposition remains by far the most serious challenge to the movement. The slogan "Black Lives Matter" has sparked outrage and resentment in some quarters. Many Americans continue to practice the art of deception, using expressions such as “All Lives Matter,” “Police Lives Matter”, and “Blue Lives Matter”. Even outspoken critics of anti-Black violence have denounced aggressive resistance, instead

of issuing "calls for healing and injunctions against anger." Such pleas, aim to divert, discredit, or repress Black protests (Rickford 6).

One of the biggest campaigns against the BLM twisted the name of the movement into a response entitled All Lives Matter (ALM). Siscoe explains that the majority of Americans using ALM phrase are distorting BLM into becoming anti-White rather than a pro-Black movement. By doing this, they are not actually hearing the issues that are being expressed and they are rather concentrating on the "Black" component of the BLM movement (5). She adds that the reaction from ALM dismisses the BLM declaration and movement. It disregards the inferred "too" at the conclusion of BLM and implies that there is an inferred "only" at the start of BLM. The ALM reaction neglects the message, the movement, and the problem of colorblind racism in America by doing so (16).

One criticism leveled against the BLM movement is that it must go beyond protests if it is to attract public support and effect change in the American society. This is a justification used to try to deflect the attention that the BLM movement is bringing to America's colorblind racism. The ALM reaction is the result of a colorblind culture. It is used as an effort to put an end to the BLM movement and any race discourse (Siscoe 17).

In his article "The Black Lives Matter Movement and Why the Response of All Lives Matter is Misleading", Scott Loken affirms that it is obvious that 'all lives matter'. However, in our modern complicated world, where people are assessed based on all of their categorized distinctions, one must admit that Black lives have been neglected in the obviousness of 'All Lives Matter'. Besides, the problem of police killings and brutality would not be contested if Black lives were included in the "All Lives Matter" counter-statement (76). Indeed, the systemic racism that exists in America today is what brought the need for BLM. As Garza explains, "...the reason why we don't use All Lives Matter, is because that's obvious, but it is also a utopia that we don't live in" (Emerging Us "How a Hashtag Defined a Movement").

Dewey M. Clayton notes that, declaring “Black Lives Matter” does not imply that other lives of Whites or police are unimportant and do not matter. BLM activists will assure you that they are not anti-police or anti-white. They recognize the police's challenging responsibility in preserving order in their community. They are, however, opposed to terrible enforcement techniques, such as shooting African Americans first and asking questions after. They are opposing the terrible racist systems that still treat Black people as disposable (27). As a result, the ALM reaction can be a danger to the BLM movement as it attempts to distract popular attention away from the still-existing issue of racism and instead, it asserts that ‘all lives matter’ in post-racial America, including Black lives.

2.4. Black Lives Matter and the Civil Rights Movement: Similarities vs. Differences

The Black Lives Matter movement is often seen as “the new Civil Rights Movement”. As social justice movements, both have evolved out of the need to continue the Black liberation struggle for freedom. While the CRM demanded ending the Jim Crow system, and granting basic equality for African Americans in the 20th century; the BLM movement has focused on police violence against African Americans. In media, the two movements are usually compared for their parallels in message and influence. Taking into consideration the infancy of BLM, this section examines the similarities and differences between the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Lives Matter movement through the following factors: (1) tactics used, (2) issue framing and goal focus, (3) leadership styles, (4) intersectionality, and (5) technology role.

The largely successful strategies and tactics employed during the CRM have become a model of inspiration for social movements throughout the world. These strategies primarily consist of nonviolent protest in the form of boycotts, Sit-Ins, and Freedom Rides. Today, BLM adopted many of the same nonviolent direct-action techniques, like the “die-ins” where protestors lie in the routes and block traffic. Stanley Kirshner-Breen states that in both times,

protestors have used peaceful civil disobedience to bring attention to their cause, build popular support, and gain political influence. Another example of tactics is the boycotts, which were used by both movements as a tool to increase awareness and promote their goals. The Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955, which involved 42,000 people, lasted for 381 days and economically crippled the municipal bus service resulting in the end of segregation in all city buses. In 2014, BLM joined Walmart workers to boycott shopping at Walmart on Black Friday, which resulted in an 11 percent loss of sales over that time period.

In terms of issue framing, both movements have followed a distinct approach. Clayton explains the difference in issue framing between the two movements as follows. The CRM emphasized fundamental democratic values and human rights such as equality, freedom, and justice for everyone. Furthermore, the CRM remarkably expanded these principles into a master frame that transformed the civil rights issue into an American concern. While BLM does not use the same framing, it has struggled to convince mainstream Americans that its issues are part of the national identity. One significant distinction in the framing of BLM is for the greater objective of "Black humanity" (27).

As a matter of goals, both movements tried to identify and dismantle racism and its impact on Black people's lives. Aldon Morris believes that BLM is a continuation of CRM; even though the aims of both movements have altered. The CRM focused on ending the Jim Crow regime and gain civil and political rights, including voting and housing rights for African Americans. Today BLM aims at ending systemic racism that is responsible for state-sanctioned violence against African Americans. This systemic racism that does not affect law enforcement system only, but all life areas.

Kirshner-Breen believes that both movements worked to achieve change. However, while the CRM was fighting against overt racism through segregation laws; the BLM movement is fighting a far more covert type of racism. The BLM intends to rebuild political structures

drastically, including law enforcement and the prison industry. These very complex systems cannot be simply altered by repealing a single legislation or a single Supreme Court decision. The CRM worked to change the visible racist legislations and laws, and the BLM movement is working to change how race is perceived in the American society.

Another major difference is the leadership structure of the two organizations. In his article, "The Next Civil Rights Movement", Political scientist Frederick Harris has noted that BLM has rejected the CRM's "charismatic leadership model": the concentration of decision-making power in the hands of few individuals. This top-down structure imposes a high reliance on centralized leadership, which may be readily replaced due to self-interest or assassination (like in the case of Martin Luther King Jr.). As a result, the leadership, the organization, and ultimately the entire movement collapsed. BLM, on the other hand, is highly decentralized and unstructured. It rejects the concentrated power paradigm in favor of a "group-centered paradigm of leadership, rooted on ideals of participatory democracy." Thus, BLM is an accumulation of social activists and organizers taking a stand against police violence, disenfranchisement, and systemic racism.

Along with being top-down structured, the CRM was also male centered and many of its leaders being preachers from the Black church. In her essay "Gendered Legacies of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Leadership," Traci C. West examines how the Black church's hierarchical structure paralleled the CRM's leadership hierarchy. While females would make up the majority of church membership, males would predominate in pastoral leadership roles among the clergy (50). An article by Jeanne Theoharis stresses how the CRM hindered influential women, like Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Ella Baker from taking on leading roles in organized marches such as the March on Washington. Hence, the CRM was criticized for being exclusive, for it expelled and ignored the efforts of women in the movement.

Contrastingly, the Black Lives Matter movement is an intersectional movement that centers the lives of those who have historically been marginalized and creates relational approaches to understand how those lives interconnect and the intricacies of their experiences (Clark et al. 149). BLM was founded by three women, two of whom identify as queer; hence, it largely attracted women, queer, and trans people. Unlike the CRM, the presence of women in BLM movement is much more visible than that of their male counterparts, even in social platforms. Consequently, due to the changes in leadership structure that grant equal and even greater positions to women, the BLM movement has created an accepting and inclusive environment for people to join and support the movement (“Leadership”).

The difference in technology is mainly noticeable in how the two movements got recognition. The BLM movement was established on social media and has since utilized it as a tool in many areas of its organizations. Thanks to social media, BLM no longer needs to rely on conventional news channels to distribute and control its narrative. BLM is able to reach hundreds of millions of people worldwide in seconds, via the use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. In addition to using social media to share news information and activists’ views, it is also used to mobilize local and national supporters for events (Jones-Eversley et al. 7). Obviously, the CRM did not have access to such revolutionary means. The CRM activists had to rely on traditional news sources such as newspapers, television, and radio, which they had ‘limited’, almost no control over (Kirshner-Breen).

In this regard, despite their differences, both the CRM and the BLM movement have the same ultimate objective of eradicating racism in the American society. Yet, there is today a widespread enthusiasm about the success and effectiveness of the BLM movement, considering the potentials of twenty-first century digital media to empower citizens and enable democratic participation. Many studies have been performed on how these digitized media provide great opportunities for social engagement, particularly for marginalized groups

that have been victims of traditional media stereotypes. Since its inception, the BLM movement had used social media platforms in its activism; hence, it provides an excellent example of the capabilities of modern digital networks in promoting social change.

Given these considerations, the BLM movement has long been and continues to act as a source of hope for African Americans seeking to deconstruct the issue of racism and achieve the justice and relief they have long sought. Drawing inspiration from the 1960s and 1970s Black Activism, the BLM movement activists used the nonviolent techniques with the newly developed digitized media to quickly reach thousands of like-minded people across the country, creating a Black social justice movement that seeks to end the discussion about race, not just in the United States, but globally.

Endnotes

¹ The Million Hoodies Movement for Justice, was founded by Daniel Maree in 2012, after Trayvon Martin's murder to protect young minorities from racial profiling and gun violence. It includes more than 50,000 members and college chapters across the United States (The Olbios Team).

² The Dream Defenders was founded in April 2012 in Sanford, Florida, and it has been active ever since, it organizes Black and Brown youth to build power in Black communities, promoting safety and security – away from prisons, deportation, and war – and towards healthcare, housing, jobs and movement for all (Dream Defenders “Our Story”).

³ Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100) is a national campaign, “a transformative movement campaign to put an end to the different forms of gender violence that Black women, girls, femmes and gender non-conforming people face every day” (Black Youth Project 100 “About BYP100”).

⁴ The Ferguson protests started peacefully; however, the police responded with a highly armed presence meant to contain demonstrators and prevent rioting, but the situation spiraled out of control as anger at police and the aggressive response toward largely peaceful demonstrations boiled over into violence (Lopez).

⁵ According to research by Erica Chenoweth of the CARR Center for Human Rights Policy, 15 million to 26 million people in the United States have participated in George Floyd protests, with an average of 140 protest per day across the US.

⁶ H.R. 40 is the “Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act.” More specifically, it is a proposal for the establishment and financial budgeting of a committee dedicated to researching and evaluating the effects of slavery on African Americans in modern society. The number 40 refers to “the unfulfilled promise” the United States “made to freed slaves: that after the Civil War, they would get forty acres and a mule” (Sikora).

⁷ MBK was criticized for overlooking the broader community concerns being put forth by the women of BLM, as well as, it neglects women by focusing on addressing the challenges facing young men and boys of color only (Méndez 97).

Chapter Three

Focus on Social Media and the Black Lives Matter Movement

This chapter anatomizes the use of digitized networks as a backup to the BLM movement. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section is devoted to provide a conceptualization on the phenomena of online or virtual activism and its prospects for a long-lasting social change. It answers the following questions: In which modern media outlets are different than traditional media for minorities? What is digital activism? How do social movements make use of digital media? What are the challenges created by digital activism? How did BLM activists use digitized networks in their favor? What are the roles social media platforms play in expanding the BLM movement's reach?

The second section explores the effect of COVID-19 pandemic and the death of George Floyd on BLM. It answers the following questions: How did COVID-19 pandemic change the forms of protesting? In what ways social media was helpful for BLM during the pandemic? How did BLM reach its peak after George Floyd's death? How did the presidential election of 2020 affect the BLM movement?

The third and fourth sections aim at connecting BLM to previous racial struggles, and to anticipate its future in the fight for racial justice in the United States. The following questions will be answered in these sections: How does the BLM movement fit into the long tradition of racial fight? How is it connected to the CRM of the 1960s? Will the BLM movement achieve the needed change in America? Can BLM be considered as a success since 2013? How can the new administration of President Joe Biden help in the racial fight of African Americans?

3.1. The Role of Digital Media in Black Lives Matter Online Activism

Since the beginning, traditional mass media has been co-opted by the colonist, or White-hetero male culture, resulting in stereotypes such as the Black criminal dominating the Black narrative. African Americans were portrayed in the media as a dangerous, inferior "other,"

outside of White culture or the perceived "normal" (Diuguid and Rivers 122). Patricia Hill Collins defines the stereotypes created by the dominant group as "controlling images," which are "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear as natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (70). By creating unconscious racial prejudice, media-driven personalities affirmed a racial hierarchy. This prejudice continues to justify the treatment of African Americans as second-class citizens.

Because mainstream media exclusively portrays the dominant viewpoint, more alternatives that are trustworthy were needed. Jasmine Tudor believes that social media in the 21st century gave the oppressed African Americans a new voice of power. By utilizing modern digitized media, the BLM movement has been able to bypass the prejudiced traditional mass media, and while having no traditional means of power, it has been able to disseminate its story with millions of people. Although an online social movement faces challenges such as decentralization, abusive responses from other online users, and "fake news," the power that social media has offered the disadvantaged is revolutionary. Ultimately, for the first time in US history African Americans have control over their narrative (1).

In fact, Brooke Auxier claims that African Americans, as an underrepresented group, trust social media for news, as well as for political activism more likely than their counterparts. With the absence of the "controlling images," that are managed or created by bigger organizations, they can control their narrative and expose the colonist as false, and destroy the established "other" stereotype. This deconstruction of implicit racial bias can eliminate the colonists' justification for supremacy and expose the systemic bias in American political practices, bringing the United States closer to social equality.

Indeed, social media is a public sphere in which everyone can participate. This accessibility of social media, which does not require users to pay for access, enables BLM social media pages to maintain an online presence with a large number of followers, which

improves protest participation and leads to more successful fundraising efforts. Leaders in the BLM movement utilize social media to share event timings and locations. Supporting each other's events by posting the details on their own pages also helps with larger turnouts. Social media may even be viewed as a gathering place for like-minded people to share experiences and knowledge in a safe environment.

3.1.1. Digital Media and Activism

The advent of digital networked technologies has resulted in the convergence of distribution of channels and communication forms such as social media. The significant economic, social, and political effect of networked technology on social movements has been at the forefront of the discussion of new age activism and its effectiveness. Tyler Goodridge states that this new activism known as digital activism or cyber-activism has transformed the initial function of social media platforms into a vehicle of collective action. Participation in movements is diverse and extensive, particularly through digital media. Because it does not fit the classic idea of grassroots mobilization, digital activism has been particularly challenging to describe (12).

Marcela A. Fuentes, however, believes that digital activism can be simply defined as a type of activism in which the Internet and digital media are used as important venues for public mobilization and political action. Moreover, Goodridge notes that digital activism is “both static and fluid”. It can work in raising awareness on an online forum, organizing huge numbers of people through digital campaigns, or utilizing one's personal social media account to support or promote a social cause (13).

Human rights activism's primary goal is to advocate for disadvantaged and underrepresented people's rights while also attempting to alter political and social discourse. Tom Funk believes that social media technologies influence politics, as well as human rights activism. For him, they are ideal for organizing, distributing, and amplifying the voices of

people who are not given attention in mainstream media. Of course, activists in social and political grassroots movements throughout the world have long utilized social platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to disseminate the message. For many years, the social web has increased anti-World Trade Organization protests¹, Wikileaks news², Arab Spring uprisings³, Occupy Wall Street⁴, and fundraising campaigns for many causes (184-185). As Kamil Demirhan notes, the effects of social media may be, indeed, discussed alongside changes in politics and information and communication technology in the globalization process. The connection between social activism and politics has been enhanced because of this process (285).

Demirhan adds that the influence of political ideology and political organizations on the development of political activities has diminished. Nowadays, the effect of social foundations on social and political movements outweighs the strength of ideologies. The movements are more spontaneously formed, and they address people's social issues (286). Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg argue that individuals or social groupings prefer non-organized ways of engagement in the action process. New information and communication technologies (ICTs) play an important role in the growth of these social and political movements because they enable people, social groups, and unstructured organizations to communicate, exchange information, and engage (4).

In the same perspective, Bart Cammaerts claims that the influence of social networks can reach a global level. Social media fundamentally shift power relations in society, and create opportunities for disadvantaged groups to self-represent themselves, communicate independently, and organize transnationally (2). The BLM movement is the quintessential example of social media mobilizing political involvement, engaging average citizens, and promoting activism.

In understanding the role of social media in collective action, Marcia Mundt et al. believe that digital platforms influence social and political movements through offering opportunities for the movement to “scale up”, which is a process of expansion and internal strengthening that broadens the movement’s impact. They suggest: mobilization, coalition building and meaning making as the main opportunities social media creates in scaling initiatives for social change (1). The most apparent and intuitive relationship between social media and scaling is the ability of social media to mobilize new activists.

Sahar Khamis and Katherine Vaughn point out that Facebook had a significant role in disseminating information and mobilizing participants during the Tahrir Square protests in Egypt⁵. They also note the importance of Facebook pages and groups in providing “safe spaces” for protesters to meet, as well as “a type of public commons for free speech” not available elsewhere (157). Likewise, Erich J. Sommerfeldt believes digital media is utilized not just to mobilize members, but also to mobilize necessary resources such as, mobilizing funding through digital crowd funding campaigns (349).

The second function of social media is coalition building, which suggests that social media creates room for online social networks that allow activists to deepen relationships and generate social capital (Mundt 2). As Bennett and Segerberg propose, social media makes it easier to form large and long-lasting interpersonal networks or coalitions by facilitating individualized and organizational sharing (3). According to Robert D. Putnam, the same aspects that are required to develop social capital in face-to-face encounters, such as social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust, can also exist in online transactions (7).

The third role social media play is in meaning making. Nikita Carney insists that considering social media as a “public sphere”, it is utilized not just to distribute information on movement tactics or actions, but also to shape the very discourse on problems raised by social movements (183). The building of the narrative is one of the major means through

which this meaning-making process occurs. Stephen Wright affirms that the significance of story construction rests in its role in the reaffirmation of collective identity. This is especially essential for disadvantaged groups, whose perspectives on their role in society are frequently challenged by dominant power systems (412).

In this regard, Donovan X. Ramsey sees that the process of developing a collective identity in the digital realm for Black Americans has emerged in a variety of spontaneous and often unexpected ways. One example is the emergence of “Black Twitter”. Black Twitter is a subset of Black Twitter users who use the platform for community “bonding activities”. To explain the difficulties of Black Twitter, Jeff Guo suggests that there is no definite number that identifies Black Twitter’s users. It may constitute 1,000 users or 1 million. It is the process of crafting a collective identity that defines the demographic. Those that claim the title frequently do so through a process of cultural meaning-making that involves utilizing certain hashtags or connecting with other Black users.

Additionally, Zara Baig insists that it is worth noting that online activism extends beyond hashtags and tweets. YouTube videos have shown to be a simple and successful way to educate people about human rights’ problems. Furthermore, the internet era has enabled people to seek assistance and, conversely, to provide assistance to strangers in need. This type of activism is displayed through lawyers providing free legal assistance to refugees via social media and live chats, which shows the power of technology in general, as well as the capabilities of social media in particular.

However, it is crucial to emphasize that social media does not only have a positive role in increasing activism and social movements involvement. Cammaerts argues that the manner in which information is dispersed in society, as well as the communication technologies that enable this distribution, have always been problematic, as governments and authoritarian

regimes have tried to control and restrict methods of communication that challenge the status quo.

William Lafi Youmans and Jillian C. York outline some of the limitations that social media platforms like Facebook can impose on grassroots' organizers who use them to disrupt or oppose governments. This includes prohibiting the use of pseudonymous or anonymous posts, counter-activism by regime actors to delete the accounts of important movement activists or completely shutting down the use of social media, and the doxxing⁶ of activists on social media by regime supporters. As they note, "social media tools that facilitate protest can also be used by repressive regimes and their supporters to dampen and disrupt opposition" (323).

Other challenges that face online activism are mainly due the easy accessibility of social media platforms. Themba Benjamin explains how the accessibility of social media platforms limits activists' ability to totally regulate who is or is not a part of the movement or how its main framing symbol is used (35). For example, not all groups who embrace the principles promoted by the BLM movement actually fit into the movement. Online activism, according to Evgeny Morozov, can also create problems in terms of potentially encouraging individuals to believe they have accomplished something merely by participating virtually, a tendency known as "slacktivism"⁷. This is not to say that digital activism is useless; nevertheless, virtual involvement, likes, and post sharing are insufficient to bring change.

In this sense, social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and YouTube all play a significant role in social movements' activism. These venues open up a world of opportunities for strengthening movements both internally and externally. However, as Mundt et al. point out, social media cannot generate and/or sustain movements for social change on its own. They contend that real change can only be achieved when social media is

combined with “ground-level activism,” which includes conventional means of organizing and demonstrating (10).

3.1.2. Digital media and Black Lives Matter

Born as a hashtag, the BLM movement has used social media as an essential weapon since its formation. The usage of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter in social media posts had been enabling for more personalized and far-reaching public discourse. Because of the accessibility of digital networks, huge and varied groups joined together to exchange knowledge, personal experiences, and organize around a common cause. The BLM movement demonstrates the potential of social media as a tool for transformational resistance, counter-storytelling, and civic engagement for marginalized Black Americans.

In his book: *Black Software: The Internet and Racial Justice, from the Afro-net to Black Lives Matter*, Charlton D. McIlwain explains that computing technologies have been used to reduce the threat that Black people bring to the current racial order, but also how Black people have embraced these new computing capabilities to establish community, prosperity, and wage a fight for racial justice. African Americans' participation in the invention and evolution of the Internet exposes both the constraints and opportunities for utilizing digital media to advance racial justice in the United States and across the world (7-8). BLM, fueled by digital tools, is the modern movement that demonstrates how far African Americans have come in their racial justice struggle. Since the death of Martin Trayvon, young activists across the country helped propel the momentum of the case, using digital media to keep the story alive and in the forefront of mainstream news, and pushing to hold Trayvon's killer accountable.

Trayvon Martin's tale, the teen boy buying Skittles and an Arizona Tea, became America's story after the case was first shown nationally on CBS's *This Morning*. By the end of March 2012, Martin's shooting had been mentioned over 600,000 times on Facebook. Trayvon Martin was the most trending hashtag for more than three months (Hightower). On the murder

of Trayvon, President Obama stated the following words: “Trayvon could have been me... Trayvon Martin could have been my son...”. This statement generated a fresh narrative about how the tale would be told in the public sphere (*Channel 4 News*).

Goodridge claims that it was no longer a tale about a gun-trigger vigilante who shot an unarmed teen in violation of Florida's Stand Your Ground act². Martin's death became a symbol of America's dread of Blacks, which still resonates in the communal consciousness of many citizens (19). Thousands of peaceful demonstrations erupted throughout the country, with the largest being a 30,000-person town hall event in Florida organized by the Martin's family. All the efforts paid off in April 11, 2012, almost two months after Martin's murder, as George Zimmerman was arrested for second-degree manslaughter (Hightower). On July 2013, after six weeks of trial, the six-person jury rendered George Zimmerman as not guilty on all counts (Alvarez and Buckley).

Following the announcement of the verdict, millions of people began to protest across the country, the hashtag was launched for the first time in Twitter on July 13, 2013. Anderson et al. report that the hashtag was slowly to gain popularity: During the second half of 2013, it appeared on Twitter a total of just 5,106 times. However, the death of Michael Brown in 2014 prompted immediate outrage in Ferguson and the hashtag was revived. The use of the BLM hashtag on Twitter from July 2013 through May 2018, reached an average of 17,002 times per day. Furthermore, BLM has spurred other hashtags related to events or political issues that have emerged throughout time, including #MeToo, #Resist, #SayHerName, #DefundThePolice and many others.

The speed and magnitude at which demonstrations were organized and took place directly after incidents of law enforcement unjustified killings of African Americans were extraordinary, and inherently due to the use of social media. As Baig notes, social media offers the ability to give authentic first-hand accounts of events. Posts are shared by people

who witnessed the events and incidents and has become a vital way to communicate incidents of injustice in general, and incidents against African Americans in particular which traditional media either omits, or presents with an underlying agenda. Traditional media, in fact, lacks the audience's trust, but social media does not. Furthermore, social media gives proof in the form of videos. Videos do not require interpretation and allow individuals to judge for themselves what they see. As a result, individuals are empowered and have faith in social media since content does not need to be authorized by anyone.

Besides, online activism is not limited in geography. As a result, the BLM movement's influence grew massively. African Americans have been able to call out anti-Black politicians, win crucial laws, and influence how African Americans are talked about around the world. Many people in Europe came to the streets to protest the disproportionate incarceration and death in custody of Black people in their own nations. The BLM movement's effect extended beyond criticizing overt racism and sparked debate about how racism has insidiously entered other sectors. For instance, petitions to decolonize the curriculum were widely tweeted in the United Kingdom.

Throughout the years, BLM activists disseminated information on how to educate oneself on Black history across many platforms, coupled with live footages of demonstrations, acts of resistance, and practical advices on where and how to demonstrate safely. The BLM movement has gained and sustained momentum through impassioned posts and first-hand accounts, assisting people in comprehending the significance of the movement and the reasons behind it, as well as the method in which it has cultivated profoundly significant and beneficial change (Simon).

Additionally, as Deen Freelon et al. observe, BLM's relative online activism success may be attributed to its focus on the specific issue of police brutality and its connection to the broader issue of racism. They note that “Unlike wealth or income inequality, police brutality

is concrete, discrete in its manifestations and above all, visual” (83). Visible events, like police violence, have a strong impact on individuals who witness them. For example, video of police officer Derek Chauvin's murder of George Floyd in May 2020 rapidly circulated online, raising the popularity of the BLM movement. Conversely, movements against things like wealth inequity are not as visual and thus are less suited for social media activism (Mundt et al. 3).

Through projecting the three main roles social media offers for social and political movements to “scale up”, discussed by Mundt et al. on the BLM movement, it becomes evident how this generation’s Black struggle is gaining prominence and support more than any other movement before it. In talking about mobilization in the BLM movement, Munmun De Choudhury et al. emphasize that social media play a major role in broadening the movement’s impact through mobilizing new members and resources. They view that Twitter has provided the fundamental infrastructure to this activist movement. Activists utilized social media to maintain their engagement and reflection on problems of race and policing, emphasizing the importance of these platforms in creating common understandings of ideology and a shared sense of movement identity (92-93).

The second function is coalition building, and BLM is an example of how social coalitions can be built online because all three elements Putnam explained for coalition building in social movements are present. First, BLM not only brings people together, but it also links individuals, and establishes social networks. Because it is so intertwined, “BLM makes local issues global” through its chapters in the United States and across the world (Freelon et al. 75). Second, Putnam believes that norms of reciprocity are critical in creating social capital (13). A reciprocity norm is a rule of human interaction that states that individuals must reciprocate the actions of others, thus people grow to expect others to act and respond in a specific way.

Diana Cordina Cascante notes that BLM activists distribute information via Tweets or postings, form Facebook groups around a certain issue, and exchange data with individuals outside the group. These are all online norms of reciprocity (15). Finally, the BLM movement helps to build social trust, which is the basis for social capital. Interactions between the BLM movement chapters' leaders and their followers online, both publicly and privately, develop trust. The sharing of ideas, intentions, and goals with the audience is what fosters that trust (19).

The third role social media play in the process of expansion is meaning-making, which is done mainly through the building of the narrative. The narratives of Black folks dying at the hands of law enforcement play a critical role in helping people identify some of the ways racial privilege works in American (Goodridge 15). The BLM movement uses digital media to frame those narratives to bring attention to the issue, raise awareness, and bring justice.

Therefore, the impact of social media platforms on the BLM movement is undeniably significant. Indeed, a big portion of BLM's public opinion stems from how the movement manifests itself on social media. The BLM movement activists have used digital media to promote conversations about racism in American politics, which proved to be effective in raising awareness of certain concerns. And once enough people are aware, societal change becomes a possibility.

3.2. Black Lives Matter and Social Media during COVID-19

The BLM movement reached a tipping point in 2020 despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, as massive protests continued to take place in the United States and around the world. Laurin-Whitney Gottbrath notes that anger has been growing since the March 13, 2020, police shooting of Breonna Taylor, in Louisville's West End. Not long after Taylor's story spread, the world watched a video on May 25, 2020, of George Floyd crying, "I can't

breathe," beneath the knee of a white police officer before collapsing in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

COVID-19 was initially detected in Wuhan, China in late December of 2019, and by March of 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) had proclaimed it a pandemic as the number of cases and deaths worldwide kept rising (Kaya 1). Life as we knew it changed due to the global COVID-19 health crisis, but social inequality, police brutality, and systemic racism did not stop. While the BLM movement predates COVID-19, Paolo Gerbaudo notes that the principles of the movement were brought to the forefront due to apparent inequalities in the impact of COVID-19 on individuals of minority groups (62).

According to Maria Godoy and Daniel Wood, when compared to other Americans, Black Americans account for a disproportionately higher number of COVID-19 cases and deaths. This is due to a combination of circumstances that make African Americans more vulnerable to the pandemic. Gregorio A. Millett et al. summarize these circumstances in two main points. First, because Black Americans are over-represented in transportation and service sector jobs, many of them are "essential workers" who are more likely to be infected with COVID-19. Second, because of the disparities in access to health care, the majority of Black residents ranked highest in un-insurance and limited health system capacity (2).

Ashish Goel and Latika Gupta note that in everyday life most people's lives are intertwined with social media and smartphone use (2). Yet, as a result of COVID-19 limitations, individuals began to rely even more on social media for information gathering. Because of increasing rates of internet connection during the pandemic, more individuals were aware of the ongoing abuse of African Americans in the US, which aided in the BLM movement's growth.

Moreover, social media have become a vital venue for mobilization, and coalition building for BLM activists. While no activism can be entirely successful online and must be

supported by more traditional ways of mobilization such as protests, social media have proven to be an important tool for BLM movement leaders and followers alike. As lockdowns caused individuals to lose their jobs, work from home, and be unable to travel, more people than ever before were able to engage in social movements (Gerbaudo 70).

The COVID-19 crisis has been characterized by strong social protest, not just for the BLM movement, but also protests ranging from mass flash mobs such as "clap for our carers" to solidarity actions organized by a range of activist organizations, to anti-lockdown rallies by right-wing parties. Undoubtedly, the BLM movement made of the COVID-19 pandemic a time of strong activism and protests. Even individuals, who did not join in the protests due to their fear of the COVID-19 virus, utilized social media to voice their support for the cause. According to Anderson et al., on May 28, 2020, two days after the video of George Floyd was uploaded online, almost 8.8 million tweets used the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, making this the highest usage of this hashtag in a single day since the beginning of the movement.

The COVID-19 limitations also had an influence on other classical means of protesting utilized by BLM activists. Traditional marches and rallies were marked mostly by social distancing and masks wearing. Other BLM protests took different paths, such as the destruction of statues of historical figures associated with racism. Protests with anti-racist sentiments in the United States and other nations targeted various symbols of institutional racism, such as the monuments of Confederate generals, Christopher Columbus, and those implicated in the Atlantic slave trade, by pulling them down (Gerbaudo 72).

Reilly E. Olson examined a few Instagram profiles associated with the BLM movement. She discovered that prior to COVID-19, the accounts exchanged instructional information about historical Black figures and current incidents of police brutality in the United States, as well as mobilization and planning demonstrations and marches. Following COVID-19 limitations and lockdown orders, these accounts altered a lot of their protesting methods to

“COVID-safe” ones including car caravans, zoom meetings, “phone zaps,” and they concentrated more heavily on distributing petitions. As the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, these organizations started exchanging information on in-person protests and rallies again, emphasizing on the measures of masks wearing and social distancing during the demonstrations. Some of the accounts have also begun to advocate for the reform of health disparities exposed by COVID-19 (15).

Despite the fact that the typical protesting was not safe during the pandemic, the US witnessed what Buchanan et al. call the biggest protest in the American history. Since the first protests began on May 26, 2020 in Minneapolis, there have been over 4,700 demonstrations, in an average of 140 per day. The demonstrations reached a climax on June 6, 2020 when half a million people gathered in over 550 locations around the country. In about 2,500 small villages and big cities, turnout ranged from dozens to tens of thousands. A flood of public support for BLM from groups such as the NFL⁸ and NASCAR⁹ may have inspired supporters, who would normally sit on the sidelines, to get engaged.

According to Mary Jordan and Scott Clement from *The Washington Post*, protests have also been profiting from the fact that America is a country that is more conditioned to demonstrating. The Trump administration's confrontational attitude on topics such as guns, global warming, and immigration has resulted in more demonstrations than any previous presidency since the Cold War. According to a survey conducted by Bianca DiJulio et al. of *The Washington Post* and the Kaiser Family Foundation, one in every five Americans has protested or participated in political demonstrations since the beginning of the Trump administration. Nineteen percent of them stated that they were new to demonstrating.

As a result, against the backdrop of a worldwide health crisis, BLM was able to continue and energize its ever-growing base through the use of social media. Life changed as a result of COVID-19, but the necessity for social reform and humanitarian action against systemic

racism and injustice did not. The pandemic actually highlighted racial disparities and abuse faced by people of color in America, and the BLM movement had to adapt with social media at the forefront of organizing and information distribution in order to achieve equality.

3.3. Connecting the Current Struggle with those of the Past

The BLM movement stands for the 21st century's fight for racial equality. Slavery, the abolition of slavery, the Jim Crow era, the Civil Rights Movement, and other historical events have all raised the issue of equality for African Americans. The struggle is more than just a battle with weapons; it is a battle against the racist ideology that still prevails in society. A racist ideology rooted in the primary racial groups of Blacks and Whites in the United States, with anti-Black racism expressed in White supremacy ideology. The struggle of African Americans is a fight against oppression that weighs down people's identities. It is the narrative of people gaining control of their own authority in order to secure their lives, self-respect, and potential for prosperity (Siscoe 9).

The racist ideology went through many changes since slavery, yet it never left the US history. Gilda Graff observes that during slavery, African Americans were seen to be of a lower race, inferior, and so deserving of enslavement. Following slavery, racist ideology focused on African Americans' incapacity as a culture and their lower IQ. As a result, they were subjected to Jim Crow segregation laws (121). The CRM challenged these overt forms of racism, and it was successful in convincing the government to grant Blacks essential citizenship rights. However, it did not put an end to racist ideology, which after the CRM shifted to covert racism or colorblind racism based on a group's cultural failings.

Throughout all of this time, African Americans were subjected to plenty of stereotypes that were, and are still embedded in many individuals' belief systems. These stereotypes are the product of the racist ideology. According to Evi Taylor et al., African Americans were portrayed as dumb, violent, and dangerous criminals. Even after the CRM, these stereotypes

remained and influenced educational outcomes, employment opportunities, socioeconomic status, and disproportional incarceration rates. The end result was the breakdown of African American families and communities. Educators, businessmen, and law enforcement officers frequently believe these prejudices, which impacts how they treat African-Americans (213).

Efforts to change social racial views during the presidency of Barak Obama, the first Black President in US history, were futile. However, as an antiracist social movement, BLM grew out of Americans' crushed hopes in Obama's presidency. It grew to offer possible societal-level alternatives for reducing racial prejudice and abolishing systemic racism. It is what LeBron describes as a "force demanding change in America" (xi). Over the last eight years, the BLM movement has developed into a multiethnic liberation movement that seeks to eradicate the systemic racism that affects African Americans in all life sectors, including the criminal justice system.

Gilbert C. Gee and Chandra L. Ford, define systemic racism as the complex interconnections of large-scale social institutions, practices, beliefs, and initiatives that create and sustain inequalities for racial minorities. The essential feature of structural or systemic racism is that these large-scale processes work independently of human intentions and acts, so that even if individual racism is absent, bad conditions and disparities for racial minorities would persist (119).

Indeed, racism can be observed in stereotypes and colorblindness. It can be overt or covert, individual or structural; yet, it has always impacted and continues to impact American systems such as healthcare, education, housing, and law enforcement. Even though the BLM movement focuses on ending racist policing of Black bodies, its ultimate aim is to end the racial persecution that the United States was founded on. For that matter, the movement has not only grown in size over the years, but has also gotten increasingly radical in its demands

for universal equality. Unexpectedly, this has strengthened rather than decreased its popularity.

Louis Hoffman et al. argue that the BLM movement focuses on pursuing justice, particularly in the law enforcement system, since racism in that institution is too visible to ignore. It is concrete, and its impact on African Americans is significant. He believes that in order for the BLM movement to thrive, it must have a focus as a starting point. That focus is the unjustified deaths of Black bodies at the hands of police forces (599).

According to Zack Beauchamp, police officers in America have developed a set of ideas about their job and its role in society. The philosophy maintains that the world is a dangerous place: officers are taught that they are always in danger and that the only way to ensure survival is to dominate the population they are supposed to protect. With the overwhelming majority of officer corps being white, male and straight; police ideology argues that officers are under attack by criminals and are not understood or appreciated by the general public. These beliefs, combined with widely held racial stereotypes, push officers toward violent and racist behaviors during intense and stressful street interactions.

Thus, BLM should not be seen as a separate movement for focusing on racist policing, but rather as part of a continuum that will persist until equality is achieved. K. Taylor argues that linking the BLM movement to the historical Black liberation struggle necessitates moving beyond the usual narrative that “Black people have come a long way but have a long way to go”. This, of course, says nothing about where to go. Yet, it necessitates an awareness of the roots and nature of Black oppression, as well as racism in general. Most significantly, it requires a strategy, a plan for moving from the present to the future. At its most fundamental level, Black liberation entails a world in which Black people can live in peace, free from the continual danger of a society that places little value on the great majority of Black lives. It would imply living in a world where Black lives actually matter (160).

3.4. Black Lives Matter and the Future of the Fight for Racial Equality in the United States

Structural racism has fueled inequity and reflected on America's long legacy of racial injustice. However, the push for Black liberation from state-inflicted violence has evolved into the BLM movement, one of the most influential social movements for racial justice in the post-civil rights era. BLM is not a new fight; it is a movement that finishes where previous efforts stopped. It looks ahead to the future and the hope for meaningful change.

Herbert G. Ruffin II believes that the BLM movement has been successful in creating a new mechanism for non-violently addressing racial inequality in the 21st century America. Its organizational structure relies on the legacies of previous reform efforts, such as the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, Pan Africanism, Africana womanism, the LGBT movement, and the Occupy Wall Street movement, while promoting its agenda through online activism. BLM, in particular, takes the feminist theory of "intersectionality" into practice by advocating for a unified focus on issues of racism, class, gender, nationality, sexuality, disability, and state-sanctioned violence.

Being this way, the BLM movement was able to mobilize people from all backgrounds to its cause. Ruffin II argues that to prioritize one social issue over another issue will ultimately lead to failure in the global struggle for civil and human rights. In this regard, Frank Leon Roberts claims that the BLM movement has always been more of a human rights movement than a "Civil Rights" one. The BLM's focus has been on fighting for a fundamental reordering of society in which Black people are not subjected to systematic dehumanization.

Accordingly; the movement can continue its success if it continues to focus on the rights of humans from all backgrounds. Also, as Char Adams notes, BLM has evolved to serve as a catch-all for pro-Black, anti-racist efforts that operate separately of the organization. This aided the movement in mobilizing a large number of individuals who believe in its cause.

Moreover, Hoffman et al. note that BLM has been effective in avoiding the potential pitfalls that social movements usually face. They name these risks: 1) danger of polarization, 2) danger of developing rigid ideologies and requiring others to ascribe to them, 3) risk of power struggles that cause self-destruct, and 4) danger of channeling powerful emotions toward destruction instead of change. As BLM grows, it will likely become more difficult it to avoid these pitfalls. However, the movement can continue to prove its success if it overcomes such problems (609).

Remmy Bahati regards the year 2020 as a milestone for BLM. The COVID-19 pandemic and George Floyd protests pushed the movement forward in greater ways. It made BLM a voice for Black liberation worldwide. The presidential transition from Trump to Biden administration was also an opportunity for BLM activists to take a step back and consider what is next in the ongoing fight against anti-Black racism and inequity in the United States. Bahati perceives the presidential transition this way; because, many sides criticized the BLM movement during Trump's presidency for "quieting" down. While in fact, since the beginning, BLM received such criticism from conservatives and extremists on the far right and from former President Donald Trump.

One of President Trump's first actions as president in 2016 was to launch a page on the White House website (*whitehouse.gov*) titled "Standing Up for Our Law Enforcement Community." This website purportedly included a notice meant for the BLM movement. He saw the movement as a threat to the nation and a 'symbol of hate'. As Leon Neyfakh pointed out, the webpage (which has since been modified) said: "The Trump Administration will be a law and order administration. President Trump will honor our men and women in uniform and will support their mission of protecting the public. The dangerous antipolice atmosphere in America is wrong. The Trump Administration will end it".

Nonetheless, Democratic President Joe Biden's incoming government has an opportunity to make a compelling argument for racial justice by describing the obstacles, highlighting areas of potential, and taking bold action to incorporate racial equality into America's social fabric. According to the White House website: "President Biden is putting equity at the center of the agenda with a whole of government approach to embed racial justice across Federal agencies, policies, and programs." (The White House "Priorities").

Only by actively rebuilding the social contract, beginning with a race-conscious approach at its core, can Americans begin to reduce the impact of growing destructive inequities and assist the nation in healing (Chui et al.). Working within the current legal system offers the BLM movement the best chance of success. Many individuals are now enthusiastic about racial justice, and almost everyone is aware of the issue. As a result, now is the moment to turn societal pressure into actual results.

Endnotes

¹ According to Katherine Casey-Sawicki, on November 30, 1999, Seattle was overrun by a global protest in response to a World Trade Organization (WTO) conference in the city. Environmental activists, union members and labor organizers, farmers, anti-globalists, conspiracy theorists, far-right politicians, black-clad anarchists, and dissatisfied people took to the streets, forcing the conference to be cancelled. The Seattle Battle encouraged many other activists around the world to protest against the WTO.

² Julian Assange established the whistleblower website Wikileaks. It was created in order to collect and spread classified documents and data sets obtained from anonymous sources and leakers (Francis Whittaker).

³ The Arab Spring was a wave of pro-democracy rallies and uprisings throughout the Middle East and North Africa that began in 2010 and 2011 and challenged some of the region's established authoritarian governments (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica).

⁴ Occupy Wall Street is the name given to a nonviolent protest movement formed in 2011 to highlight perceived inequities in the US financial sector following the 2007-2010 recession. It was built online and used web-based technology and social media to spark public discussion on wealth disparity in America (Wikipedia Contributors "Occupy Wall Street").

⁵ Tahrir Square was the hub of the Egyptian revolution of 2011 which unseated President Hosni Mubarak. Those protests marked the explosion of the Arab Spring (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica).

⁶ The term 'Doxing' is short for "dropping dox", dox is the slang for documents. Doxing is the act of revealing identifying information about someone online, such as their real name, home address, workplace, phone, financial, and other personal information ("What is Doxing: Definition and Explanation").

⁷ Slacktivism is an activity that uses the internet to support political or social causes in a way that does not need much effort, for example creating or signing online petitions ("Slacktivism")

⁸ NFL stands for the National Football League (Wikipedia Contributors "National Football League").

⁹ NASCAR stands for National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (Wikipedia Contributors "National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing").

Conclusion

For centuries, racism has been a pillar stone in the American society impacting African Americans, who have suffered of slavery, social segregation, violence and all types of oppression. The civil rights era of the 1960s ended segregation and brought social equality for African Americans. The racist ideology, however, remained both at the individual level as well as at the institutional level.

Slavery began in the United States throughout the seventeenth century to meet the needs of the rapidly expanding European colonies in North America. By the mid-nineteenth century, America's westward expansion and the abolitionist movement had sparked a huge debate about slavery that tore the country apart in the deadly Civil War. The adoption of the 13th amendment in December 18, 1865, officially abolished slavery in the United States. Though millions of enslaved people were freed, the legacy of slavery continued to influence American history.

During Reconstruction, freed slaves gained several significant rights. Within the same period and in the years following Reconstruction, however, many of these rights were lost. Indeed, many African Americans became victims of organizations like the KKK, who utilized terror to prevent Black residents from exercising their rights. Jim Crow laws were created after the legality of segregation to ensure severe segregation of races in schools, theatres, restaurants, and other public areas. African Americans suffered of racism, brutality, and sadism. The Jim Crow era was another kind of enslavement for Blacks.

While the Jim Crow era was terrible for African Americans, it was also a time when many African Americans across the country rose to assume leadership roles in the battle against segregation. Three of the prominent names of this era were: Ida B. Wells, Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. These figures among many others started the conversation

about racial equality and civil rights for African Americans. Their efforts paved the way for the Civil Rights Movement to emerge.

The long struggle for racial equality developed into an extraordinary mass movement that started in the 1950s. The Civil Right Movement intended to better African Americans' economic situation, provided them civil rights, and eliminated segregation. In each of these areas, civil rights leaders including Martin Luther King Jr., Whitney Young, and John Lewis, intended to enhance African Americans' conditions in absolute terms while also closing the racial gap with Whites in order to attain racial equality. The CRM activists utilized peaceful methods and legal approaches to achieve their objectives.

The Civil Rights Movement demonstrations and efforts resulted in the elimination of legal segregation and the establishment of affirmative action programs. However, by the end of the 1960s, civil rights protests had dwindled owing to heavy government persecution and King's death. As a result, King's nonviolent and integrationist worldview gave way to radicalism and Black separatism, and the Black Power Movement (BPM) was born. Malcolm X's views of Black self-defense, Black economic autonomy, and racial pride influenced BPM activists. These ideas changed the battle from peaceful to radical methods of opposing society's racist structures. The BPM struggled and finally faded in the late 1970s because of internal conflicts, activists' exile, and a lack of focus.

Black Activism of the twentieth century brought an end to the outrageous forms of racial discrimination and government-supported segregation of public facilities. In the South, anti-Black violence declined. Black candidates were elected to political offices in communities. Black studies programs grew with the goal of implanting the quest to redefine black identity with practical roots in communities through cultural centers, independent schools, poetry, dance, theater, and aesthetics.

In the post-civil rights era, race relations were/are still a controversial issue in many parts of the American society. Despite the remarkable opportunities brought by the Civil Rights Movement, which are seen in the high numbers of African Americans in powerful positions; today African Americans experience disproportionately high unemployment rates, and similar poverty rate to that of the 1960s. Thus, explicit racism of slavery and Jim Crow segregation ended, yet the racist ideology still prevails in the American society.

Barack Obama's election as the forty-fourth president of the United States of America was viewed as a victory over America's long history of racism. Many of his followers hoped that his election would mark a fundamental shift in the American racial relations and it would mean the eradication of racism. However, the "Age of Obama", which meant for many that America has become a post-racial society, was rather a disappointment for African Americans. Implicit racism remained influencing many areas of life, such as: housing, employment, healthcare, and the criminal justice system.

Triggered by institutional racism, which is responsible for increasing state-motivated violence against African Americans, the Black Lives Matter movement is an anti-racist social movement that emerged in 2013 as a response to the murder of Trayvon Martin. The movement gained prominence in 2014 after the deaths of two Black citizens, Eric Garner and Michael Brown at the hands of police forces. Since then, the movement has grown to become an international cause, spotlighting racism in law enforcement, fighting all forms of racially motivated violence against Black people, and demanding justice from systematic racism.

The BLM movement focuses on the issue of racially-instigated police brutality against Black bodies in order to link that problem to other ways in which Black people are oppressed. This way, the movement had addressed and still addresses the boarder issue of racism in the United States. Over the years, the movement has tackled other issues including, feminism,

rights of queer and trans people, oppression of other minorities, and persons with disabilities. This multidimensionality gave the BLM movement a large number of followers.

Like any other social movement, BLM has its share of a backlash. The counter response All Lives Matter (ALM) is perceived as distorting. It implies that BLM is an anti-White rather than pro-Black movement. The ALM reaction disregards the message, the movement, and the problem of colorblind racism in America by just focusing of the “Black” component in Black Lives Matter. In fact, the problem of police brutality would not be contested if Black lives were included in the “All Lives Matter” counter-statement.

Since its inception, the BLM movement has always been compared to the CRM. Both movements use nonviolent strategies to bring attention to their cause and build popular support. Regarding issue framing and focus, both movements worked to end racism. The Civil Rights Movement; however, emphasized fundamental civil rights and transformed it into an American concern. While BLM emphasized the issue of police violence, and it linked it the bigger issue of colorblind racism.

The leadership structure is also different in both movements. The CRM followed a centralized leadership model, while the BLM is highly decentralized, unstructured movement. Moreover, the CRM was criticized for being an exclusive male-centered movement; contrastingly, the BLM is an intersectional movement that centers and welcomes those who have been marginalized. Finally, the CRM did not have access to the technological revolutionary means of the twenty-first century, while the BLM movement’s large success is attributed to its use for digitized media.

Born as a hashtag, the BLM movement has used digitized media as an essential weapon since its formation. The BLM movement uses social media platforms in: mobilizing new members and resources, building social coalitions through information distribution and social trust, and meaning making through building the narratives of African Americans sufferings of

racism. In this manner, BLM used social media to raise awareness and debates on race in the United States to reach far audiences. Hence, large and diverse groups have come together to share knowledge, personal experiences, and organize around a common cause.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the BLM movement was able to maintain and invigorate its ever-growing base with the help of digitized media. The pandemic emphasized racial inequalities and mistreatment suffered by people of color in America, which influenced more people to support and fight with the BLM movement. Despite the limitations of COVID-19, the need for social transformation and humanitarian action to combat systematic racism and inequality remained as great as ever.

While the previous administration of President Trump attacked the BLM movement, claiming that America is a post-racial nation and that anti-racist groups such as BLM must be ignored, President Joe Biden, on the contrary, showed his support for the movement, putting racial equity at the center of his agenda and prioritized the fight to end systemic racism. The BLM movement activists have regarded President Biden's election as an opportunity to make a compelling argument for racial justice and to take bold action to incorporate racial equality into America's social fabric. Today, the BLM movement is regarded as the largest anti-racism movement in US history. The movement is determined to continue its struggle against systematic racism until equality is realized.

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