

Black Lives Matter: Culturally Sustaining, Responsive, and Relevant Pedagogy in Higher Education

by

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According to most scholars, “Black Lives Matter”, founded as a social movement in the United States, by Alicia Garza, Patrisse McCullors, and Opal Tometi, emerged as a result of the shooting death of teenager Trayvon Martin on February 20, 2012, in Sanford, Florida. George Zimmerman, who lived in the same neighborhood as Martin, shot and killed the 17-year-old, who was not armed. Despite Zimmerman’s claim, Martin was weaponless, carrying only a can of iced tea and a bag of candy at the time he was shot. However, Zimmerman stated during the trial that he felt threatened. But, months before the trial, many activists were most concerned about how Martin’s death was handled by the local police department, especially because of the many delays that took place in the identification of Martin’s body, the notification of his parents, and the entire investigation process that led to criminal charges against Zimmerman for second-degree murder. Zimmerman was ultimately acquitted on July 13, 2013. Soon after the trial ended, “Black Lives Matter” appeared intensely as a slogan on social media, particularly “Twitter,” as a platform to discuss a wide array of issues, particularly episodes of excessive force and violence used against African Americans, especially by those individuals who were in or affiliated with law enforcement organizations as well as right-wing groups.

The Black Lives Matter movement reached a higher level of visibility in its response to the 2014 death of Michael Brown, a teenager who was killed by a local police officer of the Ferguson Police Department in Missouri. More specifically, on August 9, 2014,

Officer Darren Wilson confronted Brown as he and a friend walked in the vicinity of his neighborhood, which was located about ten miles from St. Louis, Missouri. After Brown was killed by Officer Wilson some witnesses observed that Brown's body remained on the streets and unattended for hours. Thus, his death and the treatment of his body sparked massive protests throughout the town of Ferguson as well as throughout the nation. Most importantly, during the protests in Ferguson, the local police force regularly wore military-style uniforms and used tear gas, tanks, and assault weapons to break up the crowds. Several critics of the local police force commented on how a small police force gained access to such military-style supplies, weapons, and vehicles. In response, former President Barack Obama issued Executive Order 13688, which restricted access to some of these items and banded the use of such equipment. However, two years later, on August 28, 2017, President Donald Trump reversed the previous decree when he issued Executive Order 13809. Fortifying President Trump's actions was a growing opposition to the "Black Lives Matter" movement; from numerous groups and institutions which viewed the movement as anti-law enforcement and only focusing on the lives of African Americans.

Since 2012, some of the intense opposition to the "Black Lives Matter" movement has appeared with the use of phrases such as "All Lives Matter" and "Blue Lives Matter." Also, many opposition groups and organizations have falsely accused "Black Lives Matter" members of inciting police violence. For example, when Micah Xavier Johnson killed five police officers, some media outlets reported that Johnson was a member of the "Black Lives Matter" movement. However, very quickly, the Black Lives Matter organization issued a statement clarifying its (its) stance as a nonviolent protest movement. Furthermore, these points were discussed and decided in open court during the trial of Johnson, who was not a member of "Black Lives Matter."

In 2016, "Black Lives Matter" activists started protests and issued challenge to the two top Democratic Party Presidential candidates. Such activities, at times, disrupted campaigns and created focus groups to ask the presidential candidates their stance on topics such as police brutality, education, and poverty in different towns and cities.

This special edition of *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, a peer reviewed international publication, explores some of the same issues of the "Black Lives Matter" movement that have been highlighted here. Specifically, the essays contained in this volume include topics such as how the "Black Lives Matter" movement is expressed in the visual art world, how one can document the origins and development of the "Black Lives Matter" movement historically, how one can teach about the "Black Lives Matter" movement in a college classroom in the currently politically charged climate, and an analysis of the "Black Lives Matter" movement from an international perspective.

Overall, throughout this edition, each author makes a powerful contribution to the fields of African American Studies/History from a contemporary perspective. But, perhaps more importantly, each essay in this volume demonstrates that more research is greatly needed in a variety of areas when it comes to an examination of the origins,

development, and impact of the “Black Lives Matter” movement in the United States and abroad.