

Significance of the Black Lives Matter Movement

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Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is one of the largest and most vibrant movements in the history of the United States. BLM movement is a sociopolitical movement that protests racism, violence, and police brutality against Blacks (Austin et al., 2016). It started in July 2013 following the release of George Zimmerman. Zimmerman had shot dead Trayvon Martin, an African American teen, in February 2012. Activists and participants in this movement took part in street demonstrations across the country. On social media platforms, #BlackLivesMatter became a trending hashtag nationally. The deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown in 2014 intensified street protests and demonstrations (Maraj et al., 2019). The BLM movement is important because it facilitated increased condemnation of racism and police brutality, brought inhumane actions of law enforcement to light, and showed the power of social media.

The movement has led to increased condemnation of racism and a significant reduction in racially aggravated violence and police brutality. Police have unjustly killed Blacks in the past. The deaths of African Americans, such as Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, and Eric Garner, sparked nationwide protests, leading to increased international attention to the issues facing Blacks (Maraj et al., 2019). At least 15 million people took part in the street protests in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd. News about Floyd's death made national headlines after Derek Chauvin, a Minneapolis police officer, kneeled on his neck for nine minutes. Essence magazine devoted its February 2015 issue to BLM (Moodie-Mills, 2015).

The protests of the BLM movement brought inhumane actions of law enforcement to light. Police actions were a major cause of violence and discrimination against Blacks (Austin et al., 2016). Police officers have been implicated in virtually all shootings that lead to the death of African Americans. These officers maim and kill unarmed Blacks. According to Fieldstadt

(2020), Chauvin kneeled on the neck of Floyd while the latter pleaded by repeatedly saying: “I can’t breathe.” Michael Brown was shot by police, leading to unrest and protests in Ferguson. Another African American man identified as Akai Gurley was shot and killed by a police department officer for New York City. The death of this 28-year-old man sparked BLM protests in New York City. Other African Americans that died because of police actions include Dontre Hamilton, Ezell Ford, Tamir Rice, and Antonio Martin (Maraj et al., 2019).

Finally, the BLM movement demonstrated the power of social media in expressing challenges and issues facing Blacks in society. The hundreds of protests and demonstrations that have occurred since the inception of BLM were largely successful because of social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Activists took to social media to share protest details and gain broader support (Faust et al., 2019). The pictures and videos particularly demonstrated police violence and brutality against Blacks. Protesters used different political slogans to express their dismay and anger at the brutality of law enforcement. Americans under 35 years constituted the largest percentage of protesters (Buchanan et al., 2020).

The BLM movement remains a major, influential force in the country. It spearheaded increased condemnation of discrimination and police brutality against Blacks, exposed inhumane actions of law enforcement, and demonstrated the power of social media in fighting racism and expressing fundamental issues affecting Blacks. Many films, literature, visual arts, and songs now depict and document the movement. Media outlets also provide material on racial injustice, police brutality, and several other issues the movement has been fighting fiercely since 2013. The number of Whites supporting the BLM movement has significantly increased in recent years. In 2020, over 40% of U.S. counties held BLM protests. Approximately 95% of these counties are composed of Whites (Buchanan et al., 2020).

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