



Language

[J. Struggles for Racial Justice \[1\]](#)

[J.1 Black Lives Matter \[2\]](#)

History and strategies of the movement

The rise of Black Lives Matter in 2013, during Barack Obama's second term as US president, marks a new phase in the long struggle for equality and justice by Black people in the US. It demonstrates that, despite the historic gains of the Civil Rights Movement (see section A.3 'The Civil Rights Movement and Black Power in the USA: 1955-68' in Vol. 1 of this web guide for historical background and bibliography), a new generation still urgently needs to confront racism in many forms, especially in the police. The US movement has inspired a response in Black communities in other countries with a legacy of discrimination and vulnerability to police prejudice and varied forms of police violence. Campaigns have been launched in France, the UK, Canada, and Australia and also in Brazil.

The Black Lives Matter movement started taking shape in 2013 in the US in response to the shooting of 17-year old Trayvon Martin by neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman, in Miami Garden, Florida in 2012. After Zimmerman was acquitted of murder by a jury, online exchanges between Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi – three radical Black organizers – culminated in #BlackLivesMatter as a political slogan and the name of a new movement.

The 'Black Lives Matter Global Network' aims to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. The main affirmative traits of the movement, in the words of the creators of it, are as follows:

"We are expansive. We are a collective of liberators who believe in an inclusive and spacious movement. We also believe that in order to win and bring as many people with us along the way, we must move beyond the narrow nationalism that is all too prevalent in Black communities.

We must ensure we are building a movement that brings all of us to the front.

We affirm the lives of Black queers and Trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. Our network centers those who have been marginalized within Black liberation movements.

We are working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise.

We affirm our humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.

The call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for all Black lives striving for liberation."

The project developed into a member-led network of more than 40 chapters, established in 40 different cities in the



United States founded on a group-centered model of leadership. The decentralised structure of the movement enables its chapters to organise in a manner best suited to each local area, whilst also allowing them to act in concert, as when the founders publicly declared their decision not to support any of the candidates in the run-up to the US Presidential election in 2016. Modes of protest include Internet and social media activism, demonstrations and rallies, and the occupation and blocking of highways.

Since 2013 protests have been taking place every year in response to the killing of Black people by police, with few admissions of responsibility by, and prosecution of, law enforcement officers. The police shooting of unarmed 18-year-old Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, on 9 August 2014 led to weeks of angry protest, joined by many from across the USA; the mass response helped to promote an organised movement. Some other notorious cases that fuelled the development and reinforcement of the movement were: the death in July 2014 of 43 year-old Eric Garner held down in the street by New York City police – a video of his death and final words 'I can't breath' was publicised around the world; the shooting in Cleveland, Ohio, of 12 year-old Tamir Rice, who was throwing snowballs and holding a toy gun, in November 2014; and the death of Walter Scott, Freddie Gray and Jamar Clark in 2015. Although not related to police shootings, another case that sparked rage amongst Black communities and Black Lives Matter supporters was the murder of nine African Americans on 17 June 2015 at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, by 21 year-old Dylan Roof. Besides the timing of the killings, this case also resonates in the building up of the BLM movement because Dylan Roof declared in its aftermath that he was hoping it would spark a race war.

As #BlackLivesMatter developed over the years, the hashtag has been utilized as a platform and organizing tool. Other groups, organizations, and individuals have started using it to expose anti-Black racism across the US. In fact, other campaigns intersected with #BlackLivesMatter, such as #SayHerName, a nationwide protest against the killing of Black women and girls by the police.

The social movement aimed at protecting Black lives has expanded to include several other organisations and activists. This network is still referred to as 'Black Lives Matter' and includes initiatives such as Campaign Zero, The Movement For Black Lives and #Vision4BlackLives initiated in 2015. The relevance of Campaign Zero to the Black Lives Matter movement is encapsulated in a ten-point political agenda set by Brittany Packnett, appointed by President Obama as a member of the Obama 21st Century Policing Task Force together with Samuel Sinyangwe; DeRay Mckesson, and Johnetta Elzie. The purpose of the agenda is to reform police practices related to the use of force, police training, recruitment and oversight; to secure independent investigations and prosecutions of police members, and ensure community representation within these contexts, as well as in relation to other goals that are specifically related to the BLM movement. To have an overview of the detailed project see <https://www.joincampaignzero.org/solutions/#solutionsoverview> [3].

The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) entered a new phase when it released its six-point policy agenda at the end of July 2016 (immediately after both the Republican and Democrat national conventions), in order to have a voice in the electoral debate, but also to mark their independence from both political parties and presidential candidates. The agenda for legal, political, social and economic reform adopted by the Movement's over 50 constituent organizations is organised under six headings. These encapsulate the key goals to be achieved by a wide range of measures:

- 'Ending the War' against Black people, which includes proposals to 'demilitarize' law enforcement, end criminalisation of Black youth, halt dehumanising practices in the justice system and stop mass surveillance of Black communities;
- 'Reparations' for the heritage of slavery and continuing systematic discrimination, for example in education, the economy and housing;
- 'Invest-Divest', i.e. reallocation of government funds at all levels away from criminalisation of Black people and towards their education, employment and welfare;
- 'Economic Justice' for Black workers and communities including tax changes to redistribute wealth, state and federal job programmes, trade union rights - especially in the 'On Demand Economy', and support for autonomous economic institutions,
- 'Community Control' over laws and policies directly affecting Black people, including participatory budgeting;
- 'Political Power' for Black people, for example by reforming electoral laws that tend to disenfranchise them, and promoting democratic control.



The programme outlined is both radical and ambitious, and combines, as the M4BL 'Platform' explains, a vision for the future with immediate policy steps that are needed. Therefore under 'Economic Justice' it includes far-reaching goals, such as ending exploitative multinational trade agreements, e.g. the Trans-Pacific Partnership, as well as financial support for local cooperatives and legislative backing for local credit unions and insurance services. Under each of the six goals the policy agenda elaborates on the kinds of legislation or policy change required at the local district or city level (where Black Lives Matter activists had already had some legislative successes), state level and federal government level, the targets for campaigning (e.g. Congress or federal agencies), suggests model legislation, and lists existing bodies which may provide resources for campaigns. Although the movement springs out of Black communities, it recognizes 'a shared struggle with all oppressed communities' and appeals to 'those who claim to be our allies' to help create a new world. Goals such as promoting worker rights and ending privatisation of services (especially of police and other criminal justice related services, but also education), ending capital punishment, or reducing military expenditure, clearly imply the need for such alliances.

Black Lives Matter is focused on policy change in the US, but the Platform expresses solidarity with those around the world experiencing 'the ravages of global capitalism and anti-Black racism, human-made climate change, war, and exploitation', and includes international goals. Sometimes global aspirations and proposals relating to local communities coincide, as in the call for divestment from multinational industries producing fossil fuels and investing in community-based renewable energy supplies, both a contribution to reducing climate change. The B4LM policy programme is available in several languages including French, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic.

The 'Platform' that elucidates that elaborates this programme in full can be accessed at the address <https://policy.m4bl.org/> [4].

Some questions about the commitment of BlackLivesMatter to nonviolence followed two events in July 2016. On 7th July 2016, five police officers were killed, and seven injured in Dallas, Texas, by Micah Xavier Johnson who allegedly stated that he was upset by the killing of Black people. And on 17th July 2016 six police officers were killed following the shooting of Alton Sterling, which led to street protests by BlackLivesMatter supporters. Despite harsh anti-white statements by some individuals and right-wing critiques of the movement as racist, the BlackLivesMatter movement has not been designated a hate group. Several declarations by the founders clarified the fact that BlackLivesMatter's commitment to nonviolence is not an absolute amongst the movement's participants. It is generally accepted as a preferred policy, but it is modified by explicit statements recognising the need to use any appropriate tactics or forms of direct action that would further the aim of eradicating racism and institutional repression. (For the view on nonviolence as a central principle of direct action, see the interview with Patrisse Cullors, one of the BLM founders, at <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-patrisse-cullors-black-lives-matter-2017-htmlstory.html> [5]).

Readings – Black Lives Matter

[Beyond the hash tag: Black Lives Matter is becoming a conventional political movement](#) [6], The Economist, 22/10/2018, pp. 36-36

Brief assessment of developments since shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson in 2014, quoting from Patrice Cullors, author Jamala Rogers (*Ferguson is America*, 2015) and Barbara Ransby (*Making All Black Lives Matter*) and local residents.

[The Big Story: Black Lives Matter](#) [7], [March 2018], New Internationalist, 2018, pp. 12-25

Introductory article by Amy Hall summarises the growth of BLM in the USA, discusses its global potential and spread to other countries, and notes the relevance of BLM in the UK. Jamilah King comments on the US movement, both on its strengths and the divisions within it. Other articles examine how BLM relates to a history of 'a policy of black extermination' in Brazil, and to the struggle by Aboriginal people in Australia.

[The Race Issue. Black and White](#) [8], [April 2018], National Geographic, 2018, pp. 79-149

In this special issue on race in the US, Michele Morris recounts how demographic changes across the US are



challenging white Americans' perception of their majority status. She also discusses attempts to re-create a narrative that could reflect more than white Christian ethnicity as the only identity framework of US history. Michael A. Fletcher reports the personal stories of people of colour who had suffered traumatic experiences of stop-and-search by police officers on the basis of their racial profile. Clint Smith examines two major and prestigious colleges that have experienced a recent surge in enrolment of black youth and the rise of new forms of Black activism. Finally, Maurice Bergers reports on the work by photographer Omar Victor Dopi on slave revolts, independence movements, social justice quests. The events represented range from 18th century's Queen Nanny of the Maroons, known for her ability to lead Jamaican slaves to liberation from British colonialism, to 21st century's 12 year-old Trayvon Martin, whose shooting by a white neighborhood watch volunteer inspired the birth of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Akuno, Kali, [Pillars of Change](#) [9], [Feb/Mar 2018], Red Pepper, 2018, pp. 34-35

Describes the movement behind the 2017 election (by 93 per cent of the vote) of Chokwe Antar Lumumba as Mayor of Jackson, Mississippi. He is committed to implement the 'Jackson Plan' for participatory democracy, promotion of public services and a local economy based on cooperatives and other forms of popular organization. The Plan, which is promoted by the Jackson People's Assembly and the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM), represents the kind of participatory local initiatives envisaged in the Black Lives Matter 2016 Platform. A longer version of this article is available in Akuno, Kali and Ajamu Nangwaya, *Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination*, Daraja Press, 2017, and at: www.mxgm.org [10]

Anderson, Carol, [White Rage: The Unspoken Truth Of Our Racial Divide](#) [11], New York, Bllomsbury, 2016, pp. 256

White Rage, by Professor of African American Studies Carol Anderson, centres on a discussion on race, more specifically on the foregrounding of whiteness and the continuing threat that structural racism poses to US democratic aspirations. She provides an historical account of landmark moments in US history, namely the end of the Civil War and the Reconstruction; the reaction to the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954; the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965; the disenfranchisement of Black communities in the aftermath of Reagan's War on Drugs; and the mass protests in Ferguson, Missouri, triggered by the shooting of Mike Brown in 2014. Through her analysis, Anderson argues that white rage erupts as a backlash at a moment of Black progress and therefore needs to be placed at the centre of US's national history. In this light, *White Rage* is an attempt to illustrate how whiteness is positioned at the core of state power, and how it permits the reinforcement of a system that systematically disadvantages African Americans.

Camp, Jordan T. ; Heatherthon, Christina, [Policing The Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter](#) [12], London and New York, Verso , 2016, pp. 320

Policing the Planet extensively examines the 'broken windows policing', a practice through which minor crimes are pursued as a way to prevent major offences. It simultaneously offers a critique that places this particular policy at the centre of a broader neoliberal project for social order and illustrates how its application contributes to the expansion of the punitive and discriminatory capacities of the state.

Through the contributions of several authors, parallels are drawn between the enforcement of US policies against the domestically racialised and criminalised, and the "war on terror" and the use of drones and surveillance technologies abroad. The work contextualizes the Black Lives Matter movement in a wider context, and emphasises its attempts to globalise its struggle and create a new form of global solidarity by highlighting similarities between the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and the Israeli siege of Gaza in the summer of 2014.

The book offers a platform for debating alternatives to neoliberal and imperialistic policies, and provides element that might serve to foster the political imagination needed for constructing alternative futures.

Jordan T. Camp is an assistant professor of American studies at Barnard College in New York. He researches and



teaches about racial capitalism, expressive culture, gentrification, political economy, policing and prisons, militarization, social reproduction, social theory, and the history of social movements in the United States.

Christina Heatherthon is an Assistant Professor of American Studies at Barnard. She is a scholar and historian of anti-racist social movements.

Davis, Angela Y., [Freedom Is A Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine And The Foundation Of A Movement](#) [13], Chicago, IL, Haymarket Books, 2016, pp. 180

In this series of interviews conducted by Frank Barat - activist for human rights and Palestinian rights -, Angela Davis reflects on the importance of Black feminism, intersectionality, and prison abolitionism for today's struggles. She discusses the legacies of previous liberation struggles and makes connection between the Black Freedom Movement and the South African anti-apartheid movement, as well as between the events in Ferguson and Palestine. The core message of the book is the emphasis on the importance of establishing transnational networks of solidarity and activism.

Angela Y. Davis is a political activist (who supported the Black Panthers in the late 1960s and became widely known in 1971 when arrested on false charges), scholar, author, and speaker. She is an outspoken advocate for the oppressed and exploited, writing on Black liberation, prison abolition, the intersections of race, gender, and class, and international solidarity with Palestine.

Hill, Marc Lamont, [Nobody: Casualties Of America's War On The Vulnerable. From Ferguson To Flint And Beyond](#) [14], New York, Atria , 2016, pp. 273

African-American Studies scholar and policy analyst Marc Lamont Hill examines the interlocking mechanisms of unregulated capitalism, public policy, and social practice in the US. His work starts recounting one of the most salient event that gave birth to the Black Lives Matter movement: the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. More precisely, the narration spans different periods of time, starting with the grand jury testimony of Darren Wilson, the officer who killed Michael Brown, and then looks back at the 1939 World's Fair and Le Corbusier's lofty ideas about urban renewal. It moves forward in time again to the development of the Pruitt-Igoe public housing projects in St. Louis, completed in 1955 and demolished twenty years later, with many of the displaced residents having to move to Ferguson and face a climate of socio-cultural deprivation. Hill terminates his narration in Flint, Michigan, where the American city's population ended up being poisoned by lead in the water.

Hill's work is an account of the systematically disadvantaged identities - "those marked as poor, black, brown, immigrant, queer, or trans" – by a system that treats them as nobody, and makes them disposable, vulnerable and invisible. This work has been praised for enriching the contemporary canon of US civil rights literature not only because it captures the systemic nature of inequality in US society, but also because of his positive conclusion on the transformative power of organising, the most recent version of which lies in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Khan-Cullors, Patrisse ; Bandele, Asha, [When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir](#) [15], New York, NY, St. Martin Press, 2018, pp. 257

When They Call You A Terrorist is the story of Patrisse Khan-Cullors, one of the co-founders of the Black Lives Matter movement. It collects her reflections on humanity, on her life and activism since early age, her brother's first-hand experience with police brutality, and on the founding of a movement for racial justice and its development during the Trump era.

Lebron, Christopher J., [The Making Of Black Lives Matter](#) [16], New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 216

This work presents a concise and accessible history of the rhetoric and activism that has laid the foundation to the modern #BlackLivesMatter movement. Drawing on the work of earlier Black public intellectuals, such as Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston, Anna Julia Cooper, Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, and Martin Luther King Jr., it prompts readers to understand the thoughts, demands and emotions of African



Americans in order to understand their activism and the history of Black thought in the face of contemporary anti-Black law enforcement.

Christopher J. Lebron is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Johns Hopkins University. He specializes in political philosophy, social theory, the philosophy of race, and democratic ethics.

Lowery, Wesley, [They Can't Kill Us All: The Story Of Black Lives Matter](#) [17], London, Penguin, 2017, pp. 256

A front-line account of the police killings and the Black, young activism that sparked the birth of the racial justice movement Black Lives Matter. Lowery, a *Washington Post* reporter, provides the narration of the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014, and the weeks of protests and rioting that broke out in the aftermath. He also challenges readers with the question of why so little progress has been made on the racial front during Barack Obama's presidency, despite its promise and potential for such a transformative advancement.

Wesley Lowery became renowned, together with other of his colleagues at *The Washington Post*, for establishing an informal database that collects information about the shooting of Black people by police officers in 2014 and 2015, in the absence of a comprehensive federal government database.

Lowery, Wesley, 'The Birth of a Movement', *Guardian* (17 Jan 2017), pp. 23-25.

This *Guardian* 'Long Read' article is an adapted extract from Lowery's book *They Can't Kill Us All*, London, Penguin, 2017. The article is available (free) at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/17/black-lives-matter-birth-of-a-movement> [18]

Morris, Monique W., [Black Stats: African-Americans By The Numbers In The Twenty-First Century](#) [19], New York and London, The New Press, 2014, pp. 240, p.b.

In this work, Monique Morris provides a statistical account on the lives of African Americans in the U.S. related to the field of education, environment, sport, health and justice system, military, politics, voting and civic engagement in order to highlight the disparity between racial communities.

Ransby, Barbara, [Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom In The Twenty-First Century](#) [20], Oakland, CA, University of California Press, 2018, pp. 148

Historian and activist, Barbara Ransby, explores the birth of the hashtag and social media platform #BlackLivesMatter by three Black activist women following the shooting of unarmed 17 year-old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, in 2012, and the acquittal of his killer, George Zimmerman. Through a series of interviews with its principal organisers, Ransby's narration contextualizes the origin of the Black Lives Matter movement in prison reform and anti-police violence reform policies, the establishment of Black youth movements, and radical mobilizations across the country dating back for at least a decade.

Rogers, Jamala, [Ferguson is America. Roots of Rebellion](#) [21], St. Louis, MO, Jamala Rogers, 2015, pp. 135

This work is collection of articles and essays exploring the roots and development of the fight for racial justice and human rights in Ferguson, USA. Political activist Jamala Rogers narrates the history of systemic racism and police violence in St. Louis and of the development of the Black Lives Matter movement in the region.

Stephens, Robert, [The Fire Next Time](#) [22], [Oct/Nov 2014], Red Pepper, 2014, pp. 29-31

Uses interviews with Black organisers to discuss disagreements about the best strategy to build on the mobilization resulting from the 2014 Ferguson 'rebellion' triggered by the shooting of Mike Brown. Notes in particular conflict between those working through the electoral process and seeking reform, and those focusing on resistance to the white power structure.



Taibbi, Matt, [I Can't Breathe: The Killing That Started a Movement](#) [23], London, WH Allen, 2017, pp. 336

Matt Taibbi discusses Eric Garner's life and work as a cigarettes dealer, and his subsequent killing by the police of New York that strengthened the Black Lives Matter movement and protest. He reports on how he become targeted by the police, and allegedly mistaken by police officers on the day of his death. He touches upon his problematic personal and health conditions, within the wider context of the criminalisation of drugs policies in the United States of America. The work expands on Garner's life and killing, contextualising its narration on the 2008 Bloomberg's policy of tax increase on cigarettes of 400% per pack, which – Taibbi argues – motivated Eric Garner to sell cigarettes to people who couldn't afford them. Additional contextualising elements to the analysis that Taibbi offers are the 'broken windows' policing, computerised policing and statistical analyses on crime rate and the inherently racialized imposition of order that stems from them.

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta, [From #BlackLivesMatter To Black Liberation](#) [24], Chicago, IL, Haymarket Books, 2016, pp. 180

In this analysis, activist and scholar Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor offers a concise history of the Black Lives Matter movement, and an account of how the eight years of Barack Obama's presidency led to a state of uprising against the constant killing of Black people. Writing from a Black radical, feminist and socialist perspective, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor argues against persisting forms of structural racism, such as mass incarceration, Black unemployment and police violence. While connecting the fight against cultural and structural racism to a broader anti-capitalist project, she provides a rationale that depicts how this scenario has the potential to reignite the advancement for Black liberation.

See also:

James Baldwin, [The Fire Next Time](#) [25], ([A. 3.b. Evolution of Resistance](#) [26])

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- [15] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2018/when-they-call-you-terrorist-black-lives-matter-memoir>
- [16] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2017/making-black-lives-matter>
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- [18] <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/17/black-lives-matter-birth-of-a-movement>
- [19] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2014/black-stats-african-americans-numbers-twenty-first-century>
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