

**Twenty-First Century Police Brutality against  
African Americans:  
The Case of Ferguson, Missouri,  
and the “Black Lives Matter” Movement**

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## Abbreviations

ALM	All Lives Matter
BJS	Bureau of Justice Statistics
BLM	Black Lives Matter
BlueLM	Blue Lives Matter
DOJ	Department of Justice
FPD	Ferguson Police Department
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
WLM	White Lives Matter
XLM	X Lives Matter

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## **Introduction**

African American history is riddled with violence, as early as Africans' very arrival on the continent as slaves. Their fight for freedom became a fight for equality after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, as the southern states passed segregation laws and racial discrimination, although not institutionalized, remained pervasive in the North. Resulted a century of social, economic, and political inequalities for black people in the entire country, punctuated by lynching, and white supremacist attacks carried in impunity. As the Civil Rights Movement rose in the 1950s, marches and demonstrations for racial equality were met by a virulent opposition, leading to the murders of many civil rights activists and the assassinations of leaders Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Yet, the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act were passed and effectively made segregation and any other form of racial discrimination illegal. Since then, a variety of policies has been implemented to decrease the opportunity gap between black and white Americans, and, with the election of Barack Obama in 2008, a substantial part of the population has come to believe that racism mostly is an issue of the past, and that equality for African Americans has finally been reached. However for some scholars, this colorblindness has led to another form of blindness about racism, which only has deepened racial inequalities as policies instituted to decrease them have been reduced or abandoned. Yet as the death of an unarmed black young man by a police officer spurred massive protests in the small Missouri city of Ferguson in 2014, the debate on racism in America started again through the notion of a systemic racist police brutality.

Police brutality is a societal issue that has been the subject of many studies, by academics but also former officers, who have tried to understand its origins, its extent, its perpetuation, its repercussions on society, and how society reacts to it. Research on racially biased police brutality has also been prolific, especially during the second-half of the twentieth century, as some instances sparked demonstrations and even riots. However, secondary sources are still scarce on the events that followed Michael Brown's death – and thus on the Black Lives Matter movement – since they only happened a few years ago, and at the time, nothing indicated that the protest movement would be lasting and would reach such a scale.

I chose to research this issue because even though I have never considered myself to be ignorant of racism and police brutality anywhere in the world, I was deeply shocked by the events that occurred in Ferguson, Mo, in 2014. I remember reading different online

newspapers regularly, *Le Monde* and *Le Nouvel Obs* for the French ones, the *BBC* and *The Guardian* for the British ones, and *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* for the American ones. Indeed, I heard about what had happened through social media at first, and was hoping to have had a distorted version of the facts, as it often happens; and then I was anxious to get different perspectives (namely from other countries), in order not to have too biased sources and try and balance the flow of information available. I closely followed the events for months, and watched the Black Lives Matter movement rise, with astonishment, wonder and fascination. I witnessed demonstrations and protests being organized, support coming from the entire country and the entire world, but also saw the opposition to this tsunami of indignation increase, with various movements such as All Lives Matter, White Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter. Thus, in order to fully understand the importance and the scale of racist police brutality and the protests that ensued, I decided to make them my research project this year.

This thesis explores the factors that led Michael Brown's death to spark a string of nation-wide protests: the context of tensions between police officers and black people, the disproportionate rate at which black people are killed by officers, and the lack of repercussions when these deaths are questionable. It also focuses on the stakes and the impact of the Ferguson protests on society, studying the Black Lives Matter movement – its origins, the novelty in its goal and actions, etc. – as well as the other movements that emerged first on social media to oppose it. This research will help analyze how divided the American population is and how such divisions can be accounted for.

In order to assess the relationship between African Americans and the police, it was essential to rely on the multiplicity of secondary sources on African American history, and on police brutality in the United States; the vast number of studies available allowed for a balanced overview. However secondary sources are lacking on the events at the core of the research, namely the anti-police brutality protests that started in 2014. Indeed, because these events are recent, it is complex for scholars to analyze the scope of the BLM movement and the shift in media representation of such events, while they are still occurring. On the other hand, primary sources are abundant: every black and mainstream news outlet covered the protests at length, as did individual people via social media – sharing accounts, pictures and videos of the events as well as their reactions to them –, and various organizations issued reports on the situation (and a number of organizations were even created as a result). These sources were confronted and taken with a necessary step back to determine any possible bias. Following the increased news coverage of police killings of black people, many opinion polls



have been conducted, which helps establish how divided the American population is on the question of police behavior, but also on the role of the government in this matter.

To conduct this research, I relied on secondary sources when establishing the historical context of today's African Americans' place in society, and a mix of primary and secondary sources when studying the racial inequalities that persist, the debate over a post-racial society, and the relationship between police officers and black people – i.e. the lack of black people in the police force and its consequences, racial bias, distrust, etc. On the other hand, primary sources were almost exclusively used when dealing with what happened at Ferguson in 2014, and with the BLM movement. Indeed, news articles from various outlets and a few social networks allowed to analyze the social and political repercussions of the protests. The relation between mainstream news and the opinion of most of the population – as they influence each other – was analyzed, especially since the influence that the protests had on the news is relatively unusual. Moreover, a detailed research of the significance of social media in the BLM movement was conducted: given the importance social media have in everyday life nowadays, it seemed relevant to analyze the presence of BLM on Twitter – which is at the origin of the movement – and Facebook – the most used social medium among Americans. Some of the few available secondary sources on the topic have been of great help for this part. The research on Twitter – a social media platform that played an important role in the protests – provided significant pieces of information on this social medium which requires payment to give access to some of its user data. As there were no statistics or data available on the matter, and since Facebook's search engine did not allow for a filtered search, I created a database categorizing the thousands of Facebook groups and pages which concerned Black/All/White/Blue Lives Matter, according to a few criteria (number of people, frequency of posts, etc.). This database enabled a comparative study of these movements on Facebook, and allowed me to articulate theories about their importance. However, this research has limitations, as some more detailed indications could have helped paint a more precise picture: very little information is obtainable about closed groups and there are hidden groups only visible to members; some pieces of information are extremely difficult to retrieve (especially for a single person with a limited amount of time), such as the date of creation of the group/page, the number of active members out of the total amount, and the periods when people joined a group or liked a page.

Thus, in order to address the issue of police brutality against African Americans in the twenty-first century, this work will start with a brief presentation of the place occupied by the black community in society through a selection of key events in history and their impact on

today's society; the second part will be an overview of police brutality, zooming in on brutality against black people; third, the circumstances of Michael Brown's death and the aftermath will be under scrutiny, from the protests, their representation in the news, and their consequences, to the change of this representation in the media; finally, the BLM ALM WLM and BlueLM movements will be analyzed, alongside the role that social media played in these movements.

# **I The Place of African Americans in the United States**

In order to understand the issue at hand, it is necessary to go back to its roots, which is the place the black community occupies and has occupied in American society.

## **1 Slavery, Segregation and the Civil Rights Movement**

The forced immigration of Africans turned into slaves in the British colonies and then the United States is a major, and very well-known episode, in American history. To justify the enslavement of an entire part of the human race (by the British colonists and others), the notion of racism was key, which historian Alden Vaughan defines as such: “a belief that races exist and that members of one or more races are innately inferior in certain characteristics, usually in intelligence.”<sup>1</sup> Anthropologist Richard J. Perry adds to that definition the notion that this belief exists in order to justify social discrimination, and thus presents the rhetoric behind the implementation of racist slavery:<sup>2</sup>

With the onset of slavery as a basis for economic growth, the systematic and massive coercion of populations who differed from Europeans in culture, language, and physical appearance became an essential aspect of the Euro-American economic structure.<sup>3</sup>

Perry also underlines that the notion of race and of the inferiority of certain races came primarily from the English culture, and that skin color was not always a factor of racism, since at the time, the English deemed the Irish as part of an inferior race. However, economics and politics have always been central aspects of racism: as the English justified their massacres and land appropriation in Scotland through their racial superiority, the white Americans justified enslavement.<sup>4</sup> The English colonization process demanded stricter separations between the colonists and the locals than other colonizing countries, implementing segregation early on.<sup>5</sup> The colonies and then the United States continued this process not only with their African slaves but also with Native Americans, often using religion as another justification of the inferiority of these groups, especially among the Puritans (for instance because they were not Christians and not monotheists, because their skin color could not make them descendants of Eve and Adam, arguing that maybe God had created races separately and thus, unequal, or because they were descendants of Ham, son of

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<sup>1</sup>Alden Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) ix.

<sup>2</sup>Richard J. Perry, *‘Race’ and Racism: The Development of Modern Racism in America* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 2.

<sup>3</sup>Perry, 124.

<sup>4</sup>Perry, 128.

<sup>5</sup>Perry, 129.

Noah whom he cursed to be a servant because he once saw him naked).<sup>6</sup> Later on, other arguments were used to argue for racial inferiority, such as the size of the brain (measured thanks to the size of the skull) which was seen as proportional to intelligence.<sup>7</sup>

As the thirteen colonies became one new nation, a paradox emerged: the Declaration of Independence states that: “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the Constitution, without using the word “slaves” nor explicitly condoning slavery, plans for the Southern states slaveholders’ Congressional representation with the “three-fifths of all persons” clause in Article One, Section Two.<sup>9</sup> This contradiction marks not only the fragmentation of the nation over the question of slavery, but also the complexity of the status of African people, considered as “persons” when it comes to the organization of the government, but not considered as Americans when it comes to the right to vote, freedom, equality or even marriage: the anti-miscegenation laws passed in many states prove that blacks were seen as people enough to marry not just among themselves but white people too, and thus white supremacists and slave traders felt it necessary to establish this limit to dehumanize them in order to preserve the white race and the slave trade.<sup>10</sup>

For Southerners, Africans were a disposable workforce, property, often with no more value than cattle. As such, they were subjected to atrocities: they were kidnapped from their homeland and forced into servitude, families were separated, their identities, culture and heritage were denied (for instance through a renaming process), they were the victims of rape and other sexual assaults, as well as all sorts of physical violence that could lead to their death, starvation, death by exhaustion, etc. Furthermore, many restrictions on their way of life applied, sometimes passed as a state law, such as the fact that they were not to be taught how to write nor read, to assemble (to avoid the organization of rebellions), they were not allowed to travel without their master’s written permission, nor to exercise their non-Christian faith, etc.<sup>11</sup> As property, they were entirely at the mercy of their masters, most of the time until their death. An unequivocal example is the *Dred v. Sandford* case of 1857, when the Supreme Court judged that a black man could not sue his master for killing his wife and daughter

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<sup>6</sup> Perry, 136-138.

<sup>7</sup> Perry, 140.

<sup>8</sup> “The Declaration of Independence” (*US History*, nd. Web. 15 Oct. 2016). <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>

<sup>9</sup> “Constitution of the United States” (*Bill of Rights Institute*, nd. Web. 15 Oct. 2016). <http://billofrightsinstitute.org/founding-documents/constitution/>

<sup>10</sup> Vaughan, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Worth, *Immigration to the United States: Africans in America* (New York: Fact on Files, 2005), 23-25.

because as a slave he was not a citizen, even though he had been a free man residing in the North and sold into slavery in a southern state.<sup>12</sup>

Though various arguments were used to justify slavery, they were progressively debunked or deemed insufficient, especially in the nineteenth century when more and more Northern Americans became abolitionists. Yet, not all of them preached for racial equality: even though they did not condone the enslavement of Africans, some did not want them to have equal rights, or assimilate, but advocated for them to live separately and even to send them back to Africa.<sup>13</sup> Even during the Civil War, which notably aimed to end slavery, Northern states did not allow black men to join the military at first, and then only did so in segregated troops. Furthermore, the Confederate soldiers treated blacks especially harshly, without following the rules of war, since they considered them as out of place property and unworthy opponents.<sup>14</sup> However, participating in the war effort was of the utmost importance for black people:

Every black man who enlisted or received a commission, every opportunity for marching to the front of the assaulting army, every shackled man, woman, or child rescued from bondage placed people of color closer to their intended objective: preserving the Union, perhaps; winning universal freedom for the enslaved, undoubtedly; but equally important, attempting to bequeath to America a new national identity predicated on true equality and recognition of an African-American birthright.<sup>15</sup>

Though all slaves were officially freed in 1863 through President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, their freedom was ensured by the Thirteenth Amendment added to the Constitution abolishing slavery in every state, their recognition as citizens through the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and the Fourteenth Amendment giving black people the same protection as whites under the law, which forbade cases such as *Dred v. Sandford* to ever happen again. Yet, racial inequalities persisted.<sup>16</sup> At the end of the Civil War, Jim Crow laws were even more implemented than before in both the South (where the separation was due to the difference of social status) and the North (where many white people shared the commonly spread idea in the South that black people belonged to an inferior race, and thus could and should not be treated equally and live among them).<sup>17</sup> However, if in the North it was a segregation de facto, in the South it became de jure in 1896 when the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy V. Ferguson* in favor of segregation with the infamous "Separate but Equal" doctrine,

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<sup>12</sup> *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857); Gloria Browne-Marshall, *Race, Law, and American Society* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 6-7.

<sup>13</sup> Perry, 141

<sup>14</sup> Colin A. Palmer ed., *Encyclopedia of African American Culture and History: The Black Experience in the Americas*, Vol. 2 (New York: Thomson Gale, 2006), 479-482.

<sup>15</sup> Palmer, Vol. 2, 482.

<sup>16</sup> Browne-Marshall, 116-117.

<sup>17</sup> Palmer, Vol. 3, 1176-1177.

making segregation in public spaces constitutional.<sup>18</sup> Racial inequality was also seen in politics, with the systematic disenfranchisement of black people in the South through various means (various tests to determine eligibility, threats, physical violence, etc.) which prevented black men from being American citizens on yet another level, alongside poverty, unemployment, racist assaults and social exclusion.<sup>19</sup>

These state-sanctioned inequalities led many members of the black population to organize, and at the turn of the twentieth century, movements and organizations emerged to denounce and protest them.<sup>20</sup> However, the entire black population did not agree with these movements, and a part was rather satisfied with a status quo. Even the leaders of the early movements at the very beginning of the twentieth century were not united behind the same demands, and some of them, such as Booker T. Washington, did not aim for an immediate desegregation and equal rights, but advocated for a more progressive cooperation between the two communities. Others, such as W.E.B Du Bois and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which was created in 1910, fought long and hard against legal racial discrimination. The NAACP focused its battles in courts, while other organizations focused on the general population, through marches, demonstrations, public speeches, alternative newspapers, etc. The end of the Second World War encouraged and fueled the desire for equality, as black soldiers had fought overseas for freedom and against tyranny and Nazism only to come home to segregation (especially since some experienced equal treatments from European soldiers and not from white American soldiers). Violent altercations between blacks and whites increased, and the Cold War paradox did not help appease the black population, as once more the United States presented itself as the leader of the free world, yet allowed white supremacy and racial discrimination. In order to avoid certain escalations, some Presidents passed executive orders in favor of equality: in 1941 Roosevelt created the Fair Employment Practices Committee to negotiate the cancellation of the March on Washington Movement organized by A. Philip Randolph, and Truman desegregated the armed forces at the end of the 1940s.<sup>21</sup> Another major victory of black activism happened a few years later, in 1954, when a lawsuit brought by the NAACP led to *Brown v. Board of Education*, where the Supreme Court recognized that the “Separate but

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<sup>18</sup> Idem; *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

<sup>19</sup> Palmer, Vol. 5, 2245; Alton Hornsby ed., *A Companion to African American History* (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 272-273.

<sup>20</sup> Palmer, Vol. 2, 471-472.

<sup>21</sup> Palmer, Vol. 2, 473.

Equal” doctrine did not apply in schools, where inequalities were flagrant.<sup>22</sup> However, this victory was lessened by the fact that no time limit was imposed at first to actually desegregate the schools, which allowed for very long delays. Moreover, this decision angered many white Southerners, which led to a rise of racist violence and a revival of the KKK. Many boycotts followed, notably the bus boycott after the Rosa Parks incident, alongside many protests, marches, speeches, lawsuits. Slowly but surely black activists managed to gain legitimacy for their demands in the eyes of the government and part of the population, until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 effectively ended segregation in public spaces and governmental funding for this institution, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which made unlawful any attempt to discriminate against voters.<sup>23</sup> These Rights Acts finally brought full citizenship to the black community.

The way black people were called throughout history also reflects their place in American society. The word “negro” was first used in the 15<sup>th</sup> century to designate black Africans by the Portuguese and the Spanish, who used this adjective meaning “black” referring to their skin color, as opposed to their white skin. It finds its origins in the Latin “niger.” During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both populations used this term to designate Africans (free or enslaved), but also Native Americans, which underlines that at first it was not used to refer to a particular race. However, in English, it was specifically used for enslaved Africans, and then became a racial signifier, including a pejorative connotation.<sup>24</sup> Black slaves were also commonly referred to as “Africans” without distinction, and when distinctions were made, such as Ethiopians, Congolese, etc., they had been established by the white colonists and did not necessarily mean much to the slaves themselves. This phenomenon is due to the fact that slaveholders did not care much about the communities of their slaves and did not mind separating some and mixing others, even though some masters were regarding on the precise origins of slaves, as some had the reputation of being stronger, better workers, more submissive, and/or more resilient than others.<sup>25</sup> In the North, some free Africans thought it important to add the term “African” before the name of their churches, businesses, etc., until the 1830s when a few activists argued that the term should be abandoned in favor of “colored,” or simply removed.

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<sup>22</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>23</sup> Palmer, Vol. 2, 472-474.

<sup>24</sup> Kwame Natambu, “Origins of terms ‘Negro’ and Afrika” (*Trinicenter*, 2007. Web. 20 Oct. 2016).

<http://www.trinicenter.com/kwame/2007/0901.htm>

<sup>25</sup> Hornsby, 92.

After the Civil War, the designation “negro” was more and more used alongside “colored” by the black community, and the first letter of “Negro” was capitalized during the twentieth century in an effort to dignify the term. It then replaced “colored” as the socially proper way to designate black people until the 1960s; it was used for instance by W.E.B Dubois, Booker T. Washington, and Martin Luther King Jr., three prominent black Civil Rights leaders. However since the end of the 1960s, following the Black Power and the Black Arts Movements, it has been perceived as a reminder of the slave condition (implying that black men are inferior to white men, and thus owe them servitude), with the negative and offensive connotation it still holds today.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, its derivative “nigger” has always been socially judged as offensive and demeaning.<sup>27</sup> The term “black” has become a respectful designation, and holds a certain racial pride as well. “African American” only appeared in 1988 with activist Jesse Jackson, who promoted it as culturally and historically rich and representative, contrarily to “black” which – just like “Negro” and “colored” – only referred to the skin color.<sup>28</sup> While “Negro” is still socially considered as offensive nowadays – except in a historical context – and is often censored as “the n-word,” people from the black community use it, or the derivative “nigga,” to refer to each other in the same spirit as the Civil Rights leaders did, even if it is not condoned by many.<sup>29</sup> This term is seen as particularly offensive coming from a white person, since it is perceived as racist and as a reminder of the slavery they institutionalized.

On a more personal note, black people’s first and last names are also a reflection of their social place. Among themselves, African slaves often gave two names to their children (one for the close family and one for the others) which could sometimes change after significant life events, as per their culture. This tradition lasted well into the nineteenth century, and still happens nowadays. Nicknames were also frequently used within the slave community. However, the masters would often give slaves different names, European names, because they considered them easier to memorize and pronounce, but more importantly, it helped removing the slaves’ identity: they were stripped of all their belongings and often shipped naked from Africa to America, and masters often preferred to separate families to maintain an easier control. Moreover, Christian names also helped in spreading the religion and the English language among black people, another way to erase their origins and culture. Thus at the

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<sup>26</sup> Palmer, Vol. 4, 1575.

<sup>27</sup> David Pilgrim, “Nigger and Caricature” (*Ferris State University*, Sept. 2001. Web. 20 Oct. 2016). <https://ferris.edu/news/jimcrow/caricature/>

<sup>28</sup> Palmer, Vol. 4, 1575.

<sup>29</sup> Kevin Aldridge, Richelle Thompson and Earnest Winston, “The Evolving N-Word” (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 5 Aug. 2001. Web. 20 Oct. 2016). [http://www.enquirer.com/editions/2001/08/05/loc\\_1the\\_n-word.html](http://www.enquirer.com/editions/2001/08/05/loc_1the_n-word.html)



abolition of slavery, the former slaves often changed their names (first and last) in order to not only break from the past and sever any link to their former masters, but also to reclaim their identity, their self, and to honor their heroes by taking last names such as Washington, Jefferson, etc.<sup>30</sup> While at the time of the Civil War, American names were most commonly used by black people, African names came back into fashion around the 1920s and well into the 1960s, as they represented racial pride and an affirmation of their identity.<sup>31</sup> However, since the 1960s, there has been a general tendency in the United States to look for original names for children, and for African Americans this tendency often led to names which sound African, yet do not necessarily exist or are not spelt the same way.<sup>32</sup> This change shows a desire to maintain a racial pride, a reaffirmation of their origins and heritage, while claiming their identity as American citizens, as the designation “African American” does.

At the end of the Civil Rights Movement, the black population obtained a true legal citizenship and some argue, a proper place in the American society. Others, however, claim that there is still a long way to go to reach a post-racial society.

## 2 A Post-Racial America?

### **The victories of the Civil Rights Movement**

At the end of the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement had changed American society. One of the major victories of the Civil Rights Movement was the end of disenfranchisement of the black population (through threat, violence or the impossibility to register on the lists due to various tests and conditions, such as the poll tax, which ended in 1964 through the Twenty-fourth Amendment). Though other stratagems were put into place to prevent the black voting population from having too much impact on elections, such as gerrymandering or simply not respecting the law, their impact ended up being minor. This led to the elections of black people into public offices and thus to a better representation of the community in the state and Federal governments, and as far as the election and re-election of the first black president in 2008 and 2012.

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<sup>30</sup> “Identity and Roots” (*Port Cities Bristol*, nd. Web. 3 June 2017). <http://www.discoveringbristol.org.uk/slavery/after-slavery/wider-world/african-diaspora/identity-and-roots/>; Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 189; Paul Lovejoy, ed., *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (London: Continuum, 2009), 13.

<sup>31</sup> Palmer, Vol. 4, 1572-1574.

<sup>32</sup> Laura Wattenberg, “The Names You Choose Mean more Today than ever Before” (*Baby Name Wizard*, 28 Oct. 2010. Web. 3 June 2017). <http://www.babynamewizard.com/archives/2010/10/the-names-you-choose-mean-more-today-than-ever-before>

The forced desegregation of the South was another central victory. The unanimous Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was one of the first stepping stones, though the decision to allow a gradual desegregation instead of an immediate one slowed down the integration of black students into former white schools and universities, and a lot of violent incidents occurred.<sup>33</sup> Some of them had to be escorted by the police or even the military, there were harassment, physical assaults, bomb threats, etc., and the Justice system often failed to punish people and schools which defied desegregation.<sup>34</sup> However, many cities in border states knew very little opposition and/or violence, and by 1973, ninety percent of southern black youth attended desegregated schools, in great part thanks to the 1964 Civil Rights Act.<sup>35</sup>

Earlier on in history, the military, which had also been segregated in the North and the South, was the first to be desegregated, via the Executive order of President Truman in 1948, in the aftermath of the Second World War.<sup>36</sup> To underline these victories and their consequences on today's society, the American government published a book underlining the struggle of the Civil Rights Movement and its results.<sup>37</sup> The editor used specific examples linking the atrocities of the past to the breakthroughs of the present, such as "Forty-two years after her friend Denise McNair was murdered by racist vigilantes, Condoleezza Rice took office as the nation's Secretary of state," or "John R. Lewis, for example, was one of the Freedom Riders beaten bloody by the Montgomery mob in 1961. Today he represents Georgia's Fifth District in the U.S. House of Representatives."<sup>38</sup> The editor gives statistics using a positive point of view, such as "Black secondary school graduation rates have nearly tripled since 1966, and the rate of poverty has been nearly halved in that time" and concludes on Obama's election and the "broad and deep consensus that the shameful histories of slavery, segregation, and disadvantage must be relegated to the past."<sup>39</sup> This depiction, while, of course, based on facts, presents a very positive and optimistic point of view of the situation. Some may argue that the poverty rate was very high at the time, and even once halved, is still way higher for the black population than for the white population, or that there is no data to support the claims of the said consensus, etc. Even when the editor sheds light on present

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<sup>33</sup> Michael J. Klarman, *Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 82-86.

<sup>34</sup> Klarman, 92-96.

<sup>35</sup> Klarman, 124.

<sup>36</sup> "Executive Order 9981: Desegregation of the Armed Forces (1948)" (*Our Documents*, nd. Web.10 Jan. 2017). <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=84>

<sup>37</sup> Michael Jay Friedman, ed., *Free at Last: The U.S. Civil Rights Movement* (U.S. Department of State, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Friedman, 66.

<sup>39</sup> Friedman, 67.

issues, he only focuses on controversial questions, with parameters which go further than racism into political orientations as to the extent of the role of the government in meddling in segregation that happens de facto and not de jure. In other words, in nearly sixty years there have been major advances towards racial equality, and the place of African American citizens in society has greatly improved. Nevertheless, what this book does not truly evoke – which is not surprising given that the American government is the publisher – are the deep systemic and social inequalities the black community has to face in the twenty-first century, which the next section of this thesis deals with.

### **Persistence of Racial Inequalities**

Racial inequalities and racism take numerous forms in today's American society. This section will focus on some of the major ones, namely on the achievement gap, school resegregation, employment, mass incarceration, poverty, and physical violence.<sup>40</sup>

There has always been a gap in the education of white students and black students. Whereas as mentioned before, the graduation rate has nearly tripled since 1966, the education gap, while lessened, remains. Dr. Elaine Witty and her brother Dr. Rod Paige –former Secretary of Education in the Bush administration – are the authors of *The Black-White Achievement Gap: Why Closing it Is the Greatest Civil Rights Issue of our Time*, in which they argue that even though, as many eagerly claim, this gap found its origin in the era of slavery, and persisted throughout segregation, the fact that it has not disappeared today is not simply and only due to the “educational history coupled with continued racial discrimination,” even though it is one of its foundations.<sup>41</sup> According to them, the gap is in great part due to the lack of investment of African American leaders in the education of the youth, as they do not make it a priority on their agenda.<sup>42</sup> Other theories exist: beyond the straightforward (and heavily criticized) theories of the inherent incapacity of African Americans in general, Mamie and Kenneth Clark argued in the 1940s that this gap was due in part to black people's self-hatred, which prevented them from believing in their own academic capacities, a theory claimed as plausible again as late as 2006.<sup>43</sup> Indeed Claude Steele's stereotype threat theory demonstrates that if someone belongs to a group which is diagnosed as less capable in certain

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<sup>40</sup> Of course, there are also the issues of difference in salaries, in property value, in bank loans, and in social interactions among others.

<sup>41</sup> Rod Paige and Elaine Witty, *The Black-White Achievement Gap: Why Closing It Is the Greatest Civil Rights Issue of Our Time* (New York: American Management Association, 2010), 92.

<sup>42</sup> Paige, 96-98.

<sup>43</sup>Noel S. Anderson and Haroon Kharem, ed., *Education as Freedom: African-American Educational Thought and Activism* (New York: Lexington Books, 2009), 96, 100.

areas, then the individual will underperform. Thus, as stereotypically diagnosed as low achieving in standardized tests, African Americans would score less than they should, or being conscious of the stereotype and of the prejudice it can provoke in their assessors, they expect to be graded accordingly, no matter their actual results, a phenomenon which itself adds stress that can be another reason for underperforming.<sup>44</sup> Various other theories exist, and their number underlines that it is complex to determine the main factor or even the combination of factors leading to this achievement gap. Especially since in some schools, there is no obvious gap and many African American students achieve academic excellence.<sup>45</sup> In the end, most theories reach the same conclusion: the gap can be closed, though the method to close it is still problematic, as the exact sources remain uncertain. This achievement gap can be seen in the following table:

Table 1: Educational Attainment by Race of People between 25 and 29 Years Old.

	Year	African American	White	Total
<b>High School diploma or more</b>	1995	86.7	92.7	86.9
	2000	86.8	94	88.1
	2005	87	92.8	86.2
	2010	89.6	94.5	88.8
	2016	91.1	95.2	91.7
<b>Associate's degree or higher</b>	1995	22.5	38.3	33
	2000	26	43.7	37.7
	2005	26.5	43.9	37.3
	2010	29.4	48.9	41.1
	2016	31.7	54.3	46.1
<b>Bachelor's degree or higher</b>	1995	15.4	28.8	24.7
	2000	17.8	34	29.1
	2005	17.6	34.5	28.8
	2010	19.4	38.6	31.7
	2016	22.7	42.9	36.1
<b>Master's degree or higher</b>	1995	1.8	5.3	4.5
	2000	3.7	5.8	5.4
	2005	2.6	7.5	6.3
	2010	4.7	7.7	6.8
	2016	5.2	10.5	9.2

The total rate includes the entire population.

Source: "Percentage of Persons 25 to 29 Years Old with Selected Levels of Educational Attainment, by Race/Ethnicity and Sex: Selected Years, 1920 through 2016" (National Center for Education Statistics, nd. Web. 15 May 2017). <[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_104.20.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_104.20.asp)>

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, 97-101.

<sup>45</sup> Paige, 96.

This table shows that in the last twenty years, white people in their mid-twenties have continuously had a higher education than the national average, sometimes at a really higher rate, while the black youth has continuously been below the average rate, except in graduating High School since 2005. While the gap between the rate of African American graduates and white graduates is slowly growing smaller, the gap in higher education rates is expanding.

Beyond the achievement gap (or arguably one factor of it), many schools are resegregated in the South, this time not de jure but de facto, while other northern schools were never actually forcibly desegregated. In the book that he participated in and edited, Dr. Noel Anderson presents his findings for this renewed segregation: since the 1960s the emergence of a black middle class also meant black families moving to the suburbs, but as there is a tendency for the poor community (often made of black people and Hispanics) to reside in the same areas of cities, so did the black community. This is often also a result of the past segregation, which is then reflected in the demographics of the schools.<sup>46</sup> Another factor of this segregation is private schools: during the second half of the 1990s, fewer than 10% of the students of public schools in major cities such as Atlanta, New Orleans or Washington, DC were white.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the legacy of segregation and today's economic factors are central to this "hypersegregation" of minorities (and not just the black community) and the white population.<sup>48</sup>

However, while Anderson presents racism as a minor reason, James Patterson evokes incidents in the 1990s at universities where black students were given more access to previously whites only classes, and as a result a number of white parents sent their children to different universities.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, there are, for instance in New York – which was declared in 2009 the city with the most segregated schools –, segregated kindergarten schools, where white parents do not send their children to their zoned schools, but often to others where there is a majority of white students. And yet, while racism can be a factor, wealth and strategic decisions are seen as the reasons of this segregation: some schools have success rates below twenty percent in the reading and math state exams while others are over seventy percent.<sup>50</sup> These high success schools have a great majority of white students, and all with

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<sup>46</sup> Anderson, 163-164.

<sup>47</sup> Anderson, 165.

<sup>48</sup> Anderson, 187.

<sup>49</sup> James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education, a Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 191-192.

<sup>50</sup> Kate Taylor, "Family by Family, How School Segregation still Happens" (*The New York Times*, 28 Apr. 2017. Web. 02 May 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/28/nyregion/school-segregation-nyc-district-3.html>;

wealthy or middle-class parents, while more than eighty percent of the students of the lower success schools are black or Hispanic, and low-income.<sup>51</sup> It was the case in April 2017, as it was in the 1980s, and most likely as it was before that. And while some schools, which sometimes struggle to get a library, opened classes with special programs for the gifted to attract white/wealthier parents, some argued that these children were more favored than the others in order for the school to become attractive and thus perpetuated the disadvantage that low-income children faced. On the contrary, the other schools benefit from the wealth of the parents and can raise up to six figures amount of money for the school. And for the schools and zones which force parents to respect the geographical delimitations, which coincide with the socioeconomic delimitations of the city, segregation is presented as a problem that cannot be directly addressed, as the mayor of New York City shared in an interview in 2017: “We cannot change the basic reality of housing in New York City.”<sup>52</sup> Segregation continues further on and does not stop at the eighth grade, when students can theoretically apply anywhere in the city, but strict admission requirements enforced by the best schools favor the middle-class and wealthy children, mostly white and Asian, while black and Hispanic students remain once more together in schools with less budget, and a lower graduation rate.<sup>53</sup>

So while the skin color of the children is not really a factor as to which school they attend nor the only reason as to why schools are segregated, the race of their parents, grandparents and ancestors is: the black population (as well as the Hispanics) had traditionally less means than the white and thus their economic status as well as de facto segregation grouped poor minorities in the same residential areas. However, the delimitation into zones for school repartition was not made strictly by chance and these communities remained separated, in a manner that greatly influenced the budget of the schools and the success of their students. So even though to address this issue there are talks of moving the lines of these zones, white parents strongly oppose them, as they do not wish to send their children to a school where the success rate is lower, no matter the race of the other students. And though New York City is the most flagrant example, racially and socioeconomically segregated schools exist all over

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John Kucsera and Gary Orfield, *New York State's Extreme School Segregation: Inequality, Inaction and a Damaged Future* (Los Angeles: The Civil Rights Project, 2014), vi.

<sup>51</sup> Kate Taylor, “Manhattan Rezoning Fight Involves a School Called ‘Persistently Dangerous’” (*The New York Times*, 27 Oct. 2015. Web. 02 May 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/28/nyregion/manhattan-rezoning-fight-involves-a-school-called-persistently-dangerous.html>

<sup>52</sup> Kate Taylor, “De Blasio, Expanding an Education Program, Dismisses Past Approches” (*The New York Times*, 11 May 2017. Web. 15 May 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/11/nyregion/de-blasio-expanding-community-schools-initiative.html>

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth A. Harris and Ford Fessenden, “The Broken Promises of Choice in New York City Schools” (*The New York Times*, 5 May 2017. Web. 5 May 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/05/nyregion/school-choice-new-york-city-high-school-admissions.html>

the country. These segregated schools are the first step into society that children experience, and the black children who attend those low success schools start in life with a disadvantage. This disadvantage can mean not or barely graduating from high school, which often means getting a minimum wage job or unemployment.

Employment – or lack thereof – is another area where there are great racial disparities, as shows the table below.

Table 2: Unemployment Rates by Race

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2016
African American	14.8	14.3	15.1	11.4	10.4	7.6	10	16	8.4
White	7.8	6.3	6.2	4.8	4.9	3.5	4.4	8.7	4.3
Total	8.5	7.1	7.2	5.6	5.6	4	5.1	9.6	4.9

Sources: “Unemployment Rates by Race and Ethnicity, 2010” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 5 Oct. 2011. Web. 15 May 2017). <[https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2011/ted\\_20111005\\_data.htm](https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2011/ted_20111005_data.htm)>; “Unemployment Rate and Employment–Population Ratio by Major Race and Ethnicity Groups, 2016 Annual Averages” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 13 Jan. 2017. Web. 15 May 2017). <<https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2017/unemployment-rate-and-employment-population-ratio-vary-by-race-and-ethnicity.htm>>; “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, nd. Web. 15 May 2017). <[https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNU04000000?years\\_option=all\\_years&periods\\_option=specific\\_periods&periods=Annual+Data](https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNU04000000?years_option=all_years&periods_option=specific_periods&periods=Annual+Data)>

Since 1975 (and most likely before too, but data is more complex to retrieve), the rate of unemployed white people has always been below the national average, and often well below it, while on the contrary, the rate of unemployed black people has always been way higher than the average, often near twice as much. There are a number of possible factors to explain this discrepancy, some rather classic linked to the individuals themselves – such as previous job experience, skills and qualifications, presenting well and giving a good job interview, etc. – and others more challenging such as having a criminal record, or plain racism. While it is often complex to establish with certainty the main factor or factors which led to a white person being hired over an African American applicant, a study to establish more precisely the importance of race, gender and criminality held by employers has been published by the Arizona State University.<sup>54</sup> In their own words, the authors presented their research as such:

We included two separate experiments and an employer survey in our research. The first involved the submission of more than 6,000 online applications for entry-level jobs. The second experiment sent individuals (auditors) to apply for 60 jobs in-person. This allows us to compare the results of two different methods of job applications. The third research method

<sup>54</sup> Scott H. Decker, Cassia Spohn, and Natalie R. Ortiz, *Criminal Stigma, Race, Gender, and Employment: an Expanded Assessment of the Consequences of Imprisonment for Employment* (Phoenix: Arizona State University, 2010).

was a survey conducted among 49 employers, all of whom were included in the second experiment. For each of the first two experiments, we had six different pairs of job applicants, comprised of black men, black women, Hispanic men, Hispanic women, white men and white women. One member of each pair had a prison record included on their résumé. In every other respect, the résumés were identical. Race/ethnicity was cued through the use of first and last names on the résumés sent to employers.<sup>55</sup>

After their experiments, the researchers concluded that with a similar criminal background, “[Black men’s] odds of getting a callback for an interview or offered a job are 125 percent smaller than white male ex-prisoners,” and black men without a record only have a slightly better chance of getting a job than white men with a record.<sup>56</sup> As will be seen further on, a higher percentage of African American men have a criminal record than white men. However, this last finding is in slight contradiction with another research, led by Devah Pager in 2006: her experiment, conducted similarly, found that black men without a criminal record had 14% chances to get a callback, against 17% for a white man with a record; she thus concludes that “being black in America today is just about the same as having a felony conviction in terms of one’s chances of finding a job”.<sup>57</sup> This discrepancy between the two studies can be due to several factors, such as the fact that time had passed, and others which were underlined by Decker and his co-authors in the possible flaws of their work, such as the state’s unemployment rate which was higher than usual during their experiment, the few responses they got back which prevented them from having more data to analyze, and the fact that Arizona depends on seasonal work which favors some part of the population and not others.<sup>58</sup> Concerning women, while women without a record had more positive results, the gap with the applications of women with a record was minimum compared to the men; however, similarly to Pager’s results, white women with a record still have more chances to get a job than black women without a record.<sup>59</sup> To conclude, even though many variables may influence these experiments, the unemployment rates and the similarity of their results do indicate that an innocent black person has almost as much chance of getting hired for an entry-level job as a white felon, which underlines the stereotype that plagues black people on the employment market of blacks being criminals or at least as untrustworthy and inadequate to work as criminals. This stereotype finds its origin in the legacy of racism, but also in the present mass incarceration of African Americans.

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<sup>55</sup> Decker, 1.

<sup>56</sup> Decker, 48-50.

<sup>57</sup> D. Pager, *Marked: Race, Crime and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 90-91.

<sup>58</sup> Decker, 71.

<sup>59</sup> Decker, 36-37.



As shows the table below, since 1980, the total population in the correctional system (thus including people on parole or probation) has more than tripled, and the number of people incarcerated has almost quadrupled.

Table 3: Number of People in the Adult Correctional System per Year.

	<b>Total Number in the Correctional System</b>	<b>Number of People Incarcerated</b>
<b>1980</b>	1,845,100	503,600
<b>1985</b>	2,891,800	744,200
<b>1990</b>	4,350,300	1,148,700
<b>1995</b>	5,382,100	1,585,600
<b>2000</b>	6,467,800	1,945,400
<b>2005</b>	7,055,600	2,200,400
<b>2010</b>	7,089,000	2,279,100
<b>2015</b>	6,741,400	2,173,800

Counts were rounded to the nearest 100.  
 Source: “Corrections Statistical Analysis Tool – Prisoners” (*Bureau of Justice Statistics*, nd. Web. 10 Aug. 2017). <<https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=nps>>

Apart from issues such as prisons being overcrowded, the importance of such numbers for this thesis lies in the proportion of African Americans in the said correctional system.

Table 4: “Sentenced Prisoners under the Jurisdiction of State or Federal Correctional Authorities.”

	<b>African American</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2005</b>	572,400	497,600	1,462,900
<b>2010</b>	592,000	519,600	1,552,700
<b>2015</b>	523,000	499,400	1,476,800

Counts were rounded to the nearest 100.  
 Source: E. Ann Carson and Elizabeth Anderson, *Prisoners in 2015* (New York: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016), 6.

Table X shows that the number of African Americans sentenced and incarcerated is higher than that of white people, and has been for many years. In terms of proportions, during these years black people in prison and jails represented about 40% of the incarcerated population, while white people represented about 39%, even though African Americans only represented 13% of the total population, and white people 64%.<sup>60</sup> This over-representation of the black

<sup>60</sup> Peter Wagner and Bernadette Rabuy, “Racial and Ethnic disparities in Prisons and Jails” (*Prison Policy Initiative*, 2016. Web. 18 May 2017). [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/pie2016\\_race.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/pie2016_race.html)

population in jail has been qualified by many as “the New Jim Crow” since they view it as a new way of segregating black men and the white population.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, some researchers, such as Michelle Alexander, argue that some sentences are discriminatory, especially in certain areas such as drugs, giving the example of Georgia’s policy of “two strikes and you’re out,” which led to many black men condemned to life sentences after only two drug offenses; black men thus represented 98.4% of the people with life sentences in 1995.<sup>62</sup>

Besides the fact that a conviction makes it more complex for black people to get a job, another element resembles Jim Crow laws: disenfranchisement. Indeed, in 2016 about 6.1 million people – or 2.5% of the voting population – could not exercise their right to vote because they had been convicted of a crime, and among them were an estimated 2.2 million African Americans.<sup>63</sup> This number means that one in thirteen African American adults could not vote during the 2016 presidential elections. Alongside the right to vote, a conviction, like Jim Crow laws, prevents a citizen from being part of a jury, and socially stigmatizes him/her in a way that makes it more complicated to find housing.<sup>64</sup> Though the parallel with Jim Crow laws has its limitations, this comparison aims to underline not only the higher rate of arrests of black people compared to white people, but also the dire consequences that they have on their citizenship and rehabilitation in society at the end of their sentence (which supposedly marks the end of the debt they owed society) as well as on the rest of the black community whose public image is often associated to felons or possible felons, as will be analyzed further on.

A recent legal attempt at disenfranchisement was overruled by the Supreme Court, as the North Carolina Republican Party pretexting voter fraud tried to revoke certain forms of identification to get access to voting, means of identification used mostly by African Americans.<sup>65</sup> Without admitting the possible racist agenda of the Republicans, the Supreme Court did not allow the restriction to be implemented.

Poverty is another element of American society where racial disparities are deep.

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<sup>61</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012); Keith O. Lawrence, ed., *Race, Crime, and Punishment. Breaking the Connection in America* (Washington: The Aspen Institute, 2011).

<sup>62</sup> Alexander, 67.

<sup>63</sup> Katie Rose Quandt, “One in Thirteen African American Adults Prohibited from Voting in the United States” (*Moyers and Company*, 24 Mar. 2015. Web. 18 May 2017). <http://billmoyers.com/2015/03/24/felon-disenfranchisement/>

<sup>64</sup> Alexander, 92, 96.

<sup>65</sup> Adam Liptak and Michael Wines, “Strict North Carolina Voter ID Law Thwarted after Supreme Court Rejects Case” (*The New York Times*, 15 May 2017. Web. 15 May 2017). [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/15/us/politics/voter-id-laws-supreme-court-north-carolina.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/15/us/politics/voter-id-laws-supreme-court-north-carolina.html?_r=0)

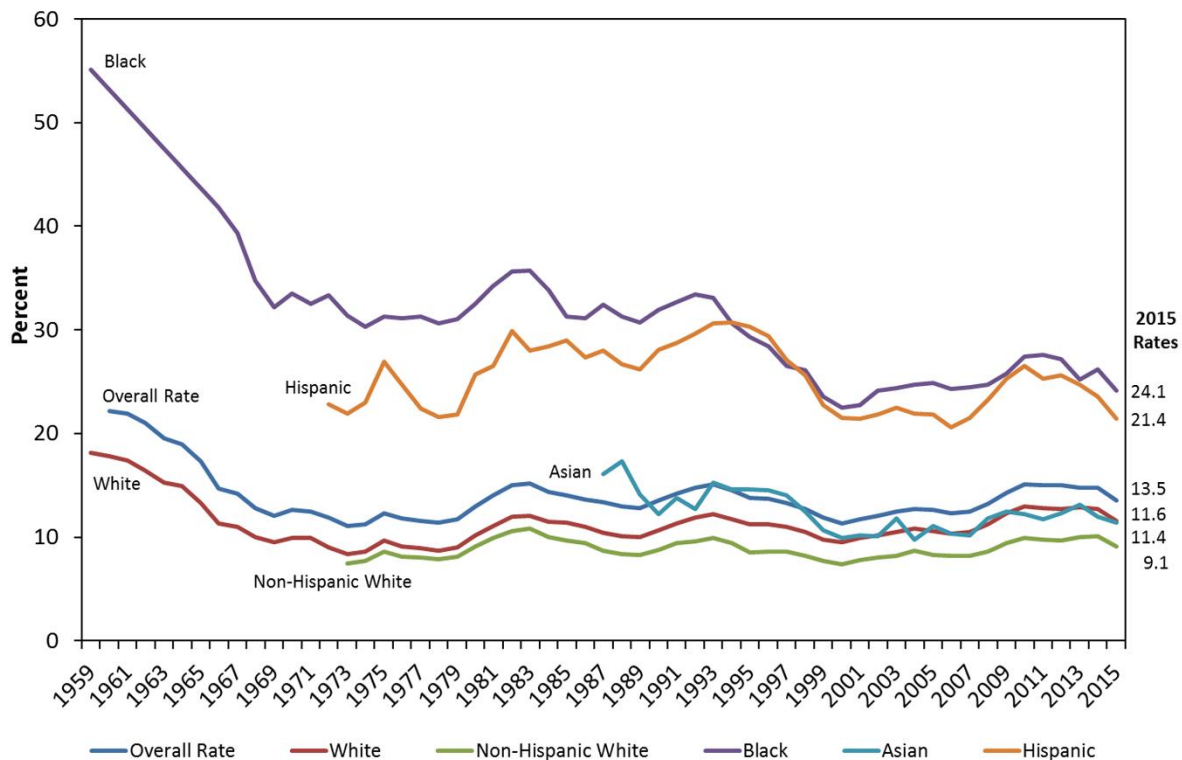


Figure 1: “U.S. poverty rates vary significantly by race and ethnicity: 1961–2015,” nd, < <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/faqs/faq3.htm>>

As this figure shows, the rate of black people below the federal poverty level has always been significantly higher than that of white people, even though it tends to diminish. As analyzed before, a few of the many reasons for this gap are the difficulty to get a job and mass incarceration of black people, and all those three elements combined can create a vicious circle difficult to get out of.

Furthermore, racist hatred still plagues the United States. While the last recorded lynching was in 1981 when Klansmen beat up and slit the throat of the nineteen-year-old Michael Donald, hate crimes are still recorded nowadays.<sup>66</sup> White supremacists are still recruiting, as proves the campaign that took place on 110 college campuses in the 2016-2017 school year, and the rallies that have been organized to protest against the removal of monuments of the Confederacy and historical figures in favor of slavery in the South, which caused violent confrontations, for instance in Charlottesville, Va., where a white woman in favor of the removal was killed by a white nationalist as he drove into the crowd.<sup>67</sup> Black men

<sup>66</sup> “Donald v. United Klans of America” (*Southern Poverty Law Center*, nd. Web. 10 May 2017).

<https://www.splcenter.org/seeking-justice/case-docket/donald-v-united-klans-america>

<sup>67</sup> “White Supremacists on Campus: Unprecedented Recruitment Efforts Underway” (*Anti-Defamation League*, 6 Mar. 2017. Web. 3 July 2017).

<https://www.adl.org/blog/white-supremacists-on-campus-unprecedented-recruitment-efforts-underway>

Richard Fausset and Alan Feuer, “Far-Right Groups Surge into National View in Charlottesville” (*The New York Times*, 12 Aug. 2017. Web. 12 Aug. 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/far-right-groups-blaze-into->

are still targeted and killed only because of their race.<sup>68</sup> To be more precise, out of the 4,216 victims of hate crimes recorded in 2015, 52.2% were black.<sup>69</sup> On June 17, 2015, a young white man opened fire in a black church in Charleston, S.C., and killed nine people.<sup>70</sup> These are only a few examples of hate crimes committed these last few years, underlining the fact that racist violence is still an important issue in today's American society, and that some mentalities have not changed significantly since the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement era, even though "colorblindness" is a popular notion, and a "post-racial" American society was thought to be within reach.

The term "post-racial" was first used in the media in 1971 in a *New York Times* article entitled "The Compact Set up for 'Post-Racial' South," which was about a policy board created to ensure a socioeconomically productive growth of the southern states after segregation.<sup>71</sup> This term defines something that does no longer take into consideration the race of individuals. With the election of Barack Obama, many people hoped that American society had in fact become post-racial, or colorblind.<sup>72</sup> "Racial colorblindness" is used when defining not seeing skin color, as in not seeing races and is a term often linked to "post-racial," as it would implicate that a colorblind person living in a post-racial society would not be racist. While the intention is to go beyond racist prejudice and toward equal treatment of all people, this notion has been heavily criticized as being another hindrance to solve the issue of racial inequalities, as it is perceived as advantaging white people. For instance, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, author of *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, labeled the term "colorblind racism," which he defines

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[national-view-in-charlottesville.html?ribbon-ad-idx=3&rref=us&module=Banner&version=context&region=Header&action=click&contentCollection=U.S.&pgt=article](http://national-view-in-charlottesville.html?ribbon-ad-idx=3&rref=us&module=Banner&version=context&region=Header&action=click&contentCollection=U.S.&pgt=article)

<sup>68</sup> Joe Vazquez, "One of Three Suspects Arrested in El Sobrante Hate Crime and Fatal Shooting" (*CBS SF Bay Area*, 22 Nov. 2016. Web. 22 Nov. 2016). <http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2016/11/22/1-arrest-2-sought-in-el-sobrante-fatal-shooting-hate-crime/>; "Cops: NYC Stabbing Suspect Said Killing 'Was Practice' for Times Square Attack on Black Men" (*CBS News*, 24 Mar. 2017. Web. 24 Mar. 2017). <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/cops-nyc-stabbing-suspect-james-jackson-killing-was-practice-for-times-square-attack-on-black-men/>

<sup>69</sup> "Victims" (2015 *Hate Crime Statistics*, nd. Web. 10 May 2017). [https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2015/topic-pages/victims\\_final](https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2015/topic-pages/victims_final)

<sup>70</sup> Karen Workman and Andrea Kannapell, "The Charleston Shooting: What Happened" (*The New York Times*, 18 June 2015. Web. 10 May 2017). [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/18/us/the-charleston-shooting-what-happened.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/18/us/the-charleston-shooting-what-happened.html?_r=0)

<sup>71</sup> James T. Wooten, "The Compact Set Up for 'Post-Racial' South" (*The New York Times*, 5 Oct. 1971. Web. 10 May 2017). <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?res=9905E6D91338EF34BC4D53DFB667838A669EDE>

<sup>72</sup> Daniel Schorr, "A New, 'Post-Racial' Political Era in America" (*NPR*, 28 Jan. 2008. Web. 10 May 2017). <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18489466>; Michael C. Dawson and Lawrence D. Bobo, "One Year Later and the Myth of a Post-Racial Society" (*Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, Vol. 6, 2009) 247–249.

as white people refusing to see the racial component of the disparities the white population and minorities and, consequently blaming these disparities on other factors:

This ideology, which acquired cohesiveness and dominance in the late 1960s, explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics. [...] Whites rationalize minorities' contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks' imputed cultural limitations.<sup>73</sup>

The issue he underlines by comparing Jim Crow Laws to colorblind racism is also the fact that the latter is more covert: where signs made the ideology of the owner of an establishment and its patrons clear to all, Bonilla-Silva writes of a “‘smiling face’ discrimination,” with people politely saying that the job they are offering has been taken, that all tables of a restaurant are already reserved, that houses are no longer available in certain neighborhoods, or even do not advertise accommodations or jobs openly in order to reserve them for the right (white) seeker.<sup>74</sup> All these covert methods make it more complex to identify racism and repress it, and maintain the status quo without attracting attention. Moreover, Michael K. Brown underlines the issue of making colorblind policies while hoping that equal law for all would suffice to make everyone equal in society, whereas anti-discrimination laws have proved to be insufficient to ensure equal treatments to minorities. He argues that color-conscious policy is now necessary to counterbalance white-privilege – even though during the Civil Rights Movement era colorblindness was essential to make policies advance – but that they are not enough today: “Racial equality requires social and political changes that go beyond superficially equal access or treatment.”<sup>75</sup> Mentalities and race relations need to change in order to get beyond racial prejudice.

However, the optimism about the United States being a post-racial society has quickly subsided. Indeed, different polls made these last few years highlight that the American population does believe that racism is anchored in their society.

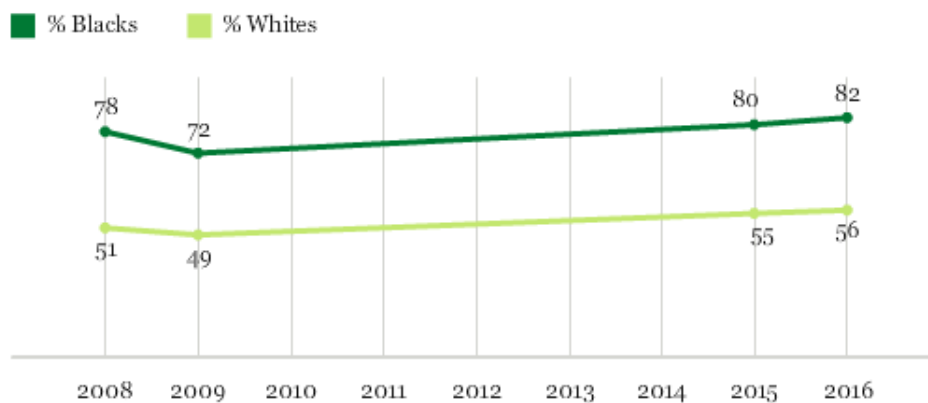
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<sup>73</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 2.

<sup>74</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>75</sup> Michael K. Brown, et al. *Whitewashing Race: the Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 4, 58.

Perceptions That Racism Against Blacks Is Widespread in U.S., by Race



GALLUP

Figure 2: Jeffrey M. Jones, “Perceptions that Racism against Blacks Is Widespread in U.S., by Race” (Gallup, 17 Aug. 2016. Web. 2 Aug. 2017). <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/194657/six-americans-say-racism-against-blacks-widespread.aspx>>

Though there is a disparity between the perceptions of blacks and whites, their evolution is nevertheless quite similar as they both dropped in 2009 (though not as much for white people), and then progressively rose in the following years. It is noteworthy that the perceptions of both communities dropped, especially for blacks, the year Barack Obama took office; however in 2016, by the end of his presidency, both blacks and whites thought racism was more widespread than before his presidency. One theory is that people thought optimistically that having a black president either was the symbol of a change in mentalities or would provoke a change, but as they did not perceive the said-change, especially during the events at Ferguson, Mo, and afterwards, many people were disappointed by his lack of involvement in the matter and in handling racial inequalities in general, and grew pessimistic about the evolution of racism. The poll below illustrates the current situation:

Table 5: “How Serious of a Problem do You Think Racism is Nationally?”

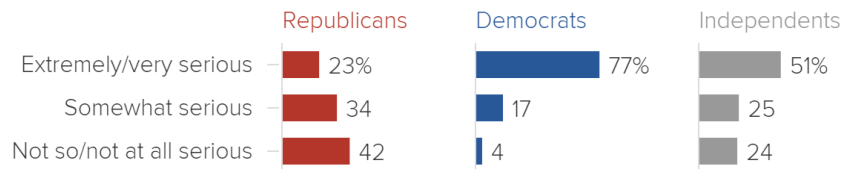
	White	Black
Very serious	31	68
Somewhat serious	43	20
Not very serious	16	5
Not at all serious	6	6

Source: “National Perception of Racism” (*The Huffington Post*, 17 July 2015. Web. 2 Aug. 2017) <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/white-people-racism-poll\\_us\\_55a91a4fe4b0c5f0322d17f2](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/white-people-racism-poll_us_55a91a4fe4b0c5f0322d17f2)>

This poll indicates that 74% of white Americans and 88% of African Americans believe that racism is a serious issue in the country. Yet these numbers have to be considered cautiously, as they do not necessarily mean that 74% of white Americans believe that racism against

minorities is a serious problem (beyond the issue of people lying during polls as they do not want to seem racist), since they may well see themselves as victims of anti-white racism as well; a more specific question may lead to different numbers. The two polls below give further detail about the perception of racism in American society.

### How serious is racial discrimination against blacks?



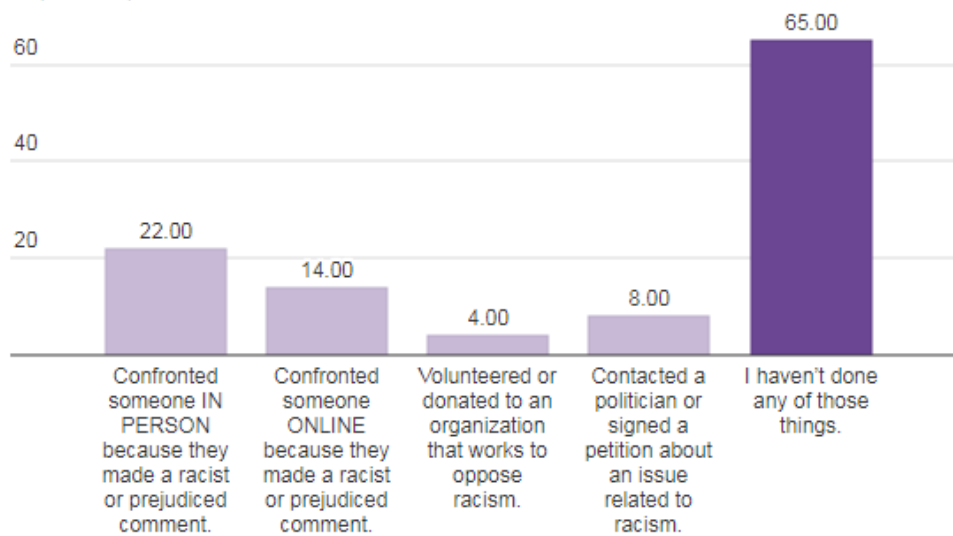
NBC News|SurveyMonkey Weekly Election Tracking Poll among registered voters

Figure 3: Hannah Hartig, John Lapinski and Stephanie Psyllos, “How Serious is Racial Discrimination against Blacks?” (NBC News, 12 Aug. 2016. Web. 2 Aug. 2017).

<<http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/majority-americans-think-racial-discrimination-serious-problem-poll-n607381>>

### Actions Taken Against Racism

Which of the following, if any, have you done in the last year? Select all that apply. (Among white respondents)



Created with [Datawrapper](#)  
[Get the data](#)

Source: [HuffPost/YouGov](#),  
THE HUFFINGTON POST

Figure 4: Janie Velencia, “Actions Taken Against Racism” (The Huffington Post, 17 July 2015. Web. 2 Aug. 2017) <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/white-people-racism-poll\\_us\\_55a91a4fe4b0c5f0322d17f2](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/white-people-racism-poll_us_55a91a4fe4b0c5f0322d17f2)>

These numbers could be interpreted as a great number of white people not daring, caring or wanting to condemn racism when they witness it, but then again, 56% of the white respondents did not believe that there were racism issues in their community, and 25% who did think there were did not think they could personally do anything to change the situation. Thus, as the journalist who interpreted the polls underlined, and the last three figures could

confirm: “if you can’t see racism, you can’t do anything to change it.”<sup>76</sup> Indeed, another issue added to colorblind racism is blindness to racism, conscious or not. And while diverse organizations launch campaigns to raise awareness about racism, conscious denial of racial inequalities is more complex (if at all possible) to eradicate.

So even though there have been real improvements in the civil rights of black people in banishing some race-conscious laws, which allowed a colorblind access to voting and schools in the south thanks to the Civil Rights Movement, some of these improvements were short-lived. For instance, the hypersegregation of schools around the country, and many other racial inequalities remain the main components in daily life, such as applying for accommodation, a job, a loan, one’s relationship with the justice system, or interactions among citizens.

For African Americans, racial discrimination often took the form of violence throughout history, such as lynching and rapes, going as far as legal murders during slavery. Yet, if the Constitution now supposedly grants blacks the same protection under the law as whites, since the Civil Right Movement the police has never actually stopped using excessive force disproportionately.

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<sup>76</sup> Janie Velencia, “Actions Taken Against Racism” (*The Huffington Post*, 17 July 2015. Web. 2 Aug. 2017). <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/white-people-racism-poll\\_us\\_55a91a4fe4b0c5f0322d17f2](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/white-people-racism-poll_us_55a91a4fe4b0c5f0322d17f2)>



## **II Police Brutality**

### **1 The Police in the United States**

Before going into details about police brutality, it is important to have a closer look at what being a police officer in the United States is like nowadays. In order to become a police officer or be sworn in a sheriff's department, there are a few requirements:

- Be 18 or 21 depending on departments.
- Be an American citizen or be eligible.
- Have at least a high school diploma or GED (though more and more departments ask for college credits).
- Have no felony conviction.
- No misdemeanor conviction for domestic violence; some misdemeanor convictions are tolerated by some departments.
- Pass various tests: depending on departments, there can be a written, oral, physical, polygraph, psychological and/or medical exam, a background check, a drug screen, a personal integrity questionnaire, etc.<sup>77</sup>

The duties of a police officer are not set nationally, but can be set as state laws or as Police Department policies. Here is an example of those duties, as set by the state of Missouri:

- Preserve the public peace.
- Prevent crime and arrest offenders.
- Protect the rights of persons and property.
- Guard the public health.
- Preserve order at every public election, and at all streets, alleys, highways, waters, and other places.
- Prevent and remove nuisances on all streets, alleys, highways, waters, and other places.
- Provide a proper police force at fires for the protection of firemen and property.
- Protect transients at public wharves, airports, and railway and bus stations.
- See that all laws relating to elections and to the observance of Sunday, and relating to pawnbrokers, intemperance, lotteries, policies, vagrants, disorderly persons, and the public health are enforced.
- Suppress gambling and bawdyhouses, and every other manner and kind of disorder and offense against law and public health.
- Enforce all laws and ordinances which have been passed or may be subsequently passed.<sup>78</sup>

It is astonishingly complex to get the number of sworn officers. Data collectable from the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Justice Statistics do not go further than the year 2008.

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<sup>77</sup> John Douglas, *John Douglas's Guide to Landing a Career in Law Enforcement* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 71-109; "How to Become a Police Officer: a Quick Guide" (*How to Become a Police Officer*, nd. Web. 20 Jan. 2016). <https://www.how-to-become-a-police-officer.com/#requirements>

<sup>78</sup> Michael J. Palmiotto and Alison McKenney Brown, *Police Officer Exams* (New York: McGraw Hill's, 2008), 12.

Table 6: Full-Time State and Local Law Enforcement Employees.

	<b>Sworn officers</b>	<b>Total number of US citizens</b>
1992	608,022	257,908,206
1996	663,535	269,483,224
2000	708,022	282,895,741
2004	731,903	293,530,886
2008	765,246	304,473,143

Sources: Brian A. Reaves, “Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies, 2008” (*Bureau of Justice Statistics*, 2011. Web. 25 Jan. 2017). <<https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cs1lea08.pdf>>; “U.S. Population” (*Worldometers*, nd. Web. 25 Jan. 2017). <<http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/us-population/>>

Data collection issues aside, this table shows that in the eight-year span data for the 1990s, there have been more recruitment – with about a hundred thousand new sworn officers – than in the 2000s with about 57,000. While the advancements in technology could justify a lesser need of manpower (for the transmission and treatment of information, communication, evidence processing, and dozens of other tasks that humans had to do before computers and the internet), this slower increase in recruitment is not a voluntary decision of Police Departments, and is not simply due to budget shortage. For instance, as of December 2016, the Los Angeles Police Department was in need of a hundred recruits, and Philadelphia 350.<sup>79</sup> One factor behind this lack of recruits is the higher need of recruits to replace the baby boom police officers, as they started to retire in the early 2000s; some mayors tried to convince officers near retirement to stay through bonuses, as they could not afford paying for the retirement pensions of all of them right away.<sup>80</sup> Alongside the retirees, punctual resignations may create a need: many reasons may motivate this decision such as a better job offer in another Department, a lack of incentive, work-related stress, etc.<sup>81</sup> Another factor is the better state of the economy and the dangerousness of the job: as unemployment fell from 9.6 in 2010 to 4.9 in 2016, people were less inclined to get or keep a dangerous job such as police officer, but turn to safer options.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, though budget shortage is not the only factor, it is one of them: while Police Departments may have the resources to hire and train new recruits, the salaries and benefits allocated may not motivate potential candidates, or people who do want a career in law enforcement may choose another, more competitive Police Department.<sup>83</sup> Besides, the hiring requirements have become higher with time, with more and more Police Departments demanding college credits, or have simply become harder to meet, such as not

<sup>79</sup> “Police Departments struggle to Recruit Enough Officers” (*The Economist*, 5 Jan. 2017. Web. 5 Jan. 2017). <https://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21713898-stronger-economy-partly-blame-police-departments-struggle-recruit-enough>

<sup>80</sup> Douglas, 5-6.

<sup>81</sup> Douglas, 13.

<sup>82</sup> “Police Departments struggle to Recruit Enough Officers”; See Table 2: Unemployment Rate by Race.

<sup>83</sup> Douglas, 8.

having misdemeanors convictions linked to drug use or alcohol (especially since the number of arrests for misdemeanors has increased).<sup>84</sup> Many other reasons can justify this lack of manpower, such as the changing generational preferences (as the new generation does not perceive the police and/or careers the same way as the previous generation), the complexity of the hiring process (multiple exams), the increase in tasks and responsibilities (i.e. community policing, more patrols since 9/11), etc.<sup>85</sup>

On top of lacking police officers, Police Departments have to face another issue: lacking minorities. Women and minorities are the less represented populations in the police force.

Table 7: Rate of Minority Police Officers.

	<b>Rate of Minorities in US population</b>	<b>Rate of minority police officers</b>	<b>Women police officers</b>
1987	-	14.6%	7.6%
1990	19.3%	17%	8.1%
1993	-	19.1%	8.8%
1997	-	21.5%	10%
2000	30.9	22.6%	10.6%
2003	32.1	23.6%	11.3%

Source: Matthew J. Hickman and Brian A. Reaves, “Female and Minority Local Police Officers, 1987 and 2003” (*Bureau of Justice Statistics*, 2006. Web. 11 May 2017). <<https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=1979>>; Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States” (*US Census Bureau*, Feb. 2005. Web. 11 May 2017). <<https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/twps0076.pdf>>; “Population Profile of the United States: Dynamic Version” (*US Census Bureau*, 2004. Web. 11 May 2017). <<https://www.census.gov/population/pop-profile/dynamic/profiledynamic.pdf>>

However, according to a guide written to help people become police officers, minorities and women have been demanded recruits since the 1970s as: “law enforcement agencies have begun to recognize the importance of ensuring that the police force they hire resembles the public it polices.”<sup>86</sup> Indeed, mostly due to the discrimination those two groups face in the force – during the recruitment process as well as once they are a part of the police force – they only represent a minor part of police officers.<sup>87</sup> Though a discrepancy can be seen between the percentage of minorities in the general population and in the police force, a bigger

<sup>84</sup> Kristen Lemma, “Forty-Five Years of Arrests: New York City 1970-2015” (*Research @ Pratt SI*, 4 Oct. 2016. Web. 20 Apr. 2017). <http://research.prattsils.org/blog/coursework/information-visualization/new-york-state-arrests-1970-2015/>

<sup>85</sup> Douglas, 27-28.

<sup>86</sup> Palmiotto, 12.

<sup>87</sup> Kenneth Bolton Jr and Joe R. Feagin, *Black in Blue: African-American Police Officers and Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 162-164.

discrepancy can be observed in certain cities where the majority of the population is black, and the majority of police officers are white: racial tensions can rise between the two.<sup>88</sup>

Beyond a reduced efficiency (longer response times, slower administrative tasks, etc.), understaffed Police Departments can lead to over issues. Indeed, in order to compensate for the lack of manpower, it is common practice for police officers to work overtime, which means working for sixty hours a week instead of forty.<sup>89</sup> The consequences of working so many hours, especially regularly, can be dire: overtime tires the mind and the body, causing reduced concentration and reflexes (in a job where split-second decisions have to be made) which can ultimately lead to someone getting injured or shot (including the officer). Overtime and bigger workloads also cause (more) stress, and in the long run, motivate officers to retire early or quit, leading the Police Department to be further understaffed.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, more police officers do not necessarily mean less crime, as has often been theorized.<sup>91</sup> A research from the University of Cincinnati in 2016 presents an alternative to this theory, and after conducting “a systematic review of 62 studies and 229 findings of police force size and crime, from 1971 through 2013,” the authors concluded that having more officers does not significantly reduce crime, but that applying certain policing strategies does.<sup>92</sup>

Being a police officer nowadays is thus complex, especially in understaffed Departments, and due to the increase in responsibilities thrust upon them. Yet, some officers “come in expecting to chase people and do shoot-ups” which can easily lead to police brutality, especially since some officers never fire their service weapon in their entire career.<sup>93</sup> While trigger-happy officers do not represent the majority of police forces, police brutality is an important issue in today’s society.

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<sup>88</sup> Lynn Neary, “Black and Blue: Police and Minorities” (*NPR*, 23 July 2009. Web. 21 Apr. 2017). <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106928434>

<sup>89</sup> Mikaela Cannizzo, “Lack of Police Officers Delays Response Times, Forces more Overtime Shifts” (*The Daily Texan*, 26 Jan. 2016. Web. 20 Apr. 2017). <http://www.dailytexanonline.com/2016/01/29/lack-of-police-officers-delays-response-times-forces-more-overtime-shifts>

<sup>90</sup> Idem; Carole Carlson, “Five more Cops Quit Understaffed Gary Police Department” (*The Chicago Tribune*, 9 July 2015. Web. 16 Aug. 2017). <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-ptb-gary-police-quit-st-0710-20150709-story.html>; Bryan J. Vila, “Impact of Long Hours on Police Officers and the Communities They Serve” (*American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, Vol. 49 Nov. 2006), 978-979.

<sup>91</sup> YongJei Lee, John E. Eck and Nicholas Corsaro, “Conclusions from the History of Research into the Effects of Police Force Size on Crime—1968 through 2013: a Historical Systematic Review” (*Journal of Experimental Criminology*, Vol.12, Issue 3, Sept. 2016), 433-435.

<sup>92</sup> Lee, 431, 446.

<sup>93</sup> Miller, 163.

## **Police Brutality**

For university Professor Leonard Moore, police brutality includes: “police homicides; unlawful arrests; assaults; threatening and abusive language; the use of racial slurs; sexual exploitation; the beating of prisoners in police custody; racial profiling; police complicity in drug-dealing, prostitution, burglaries, protection schemes, and gun-smuggling.”<sup>94</sup> However, police work necessitates the use of force, which is not inherently police brutality. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (ICAP), an organization that works closely with the government to establish policies, published in 1957 a code of conduct for police officers:

### **Use of Force**

A police officer will never employ unnecessary force or violence and will use only such force in the discharge of duty as is reasonable in all circumstances. The use of force should be used only with the greatest restraint and only after discussion, negotiation and persuasion have been found to be inappropriate or ineffective. While the use of force is occasionally unavoidable, every police officer will refrain from unnecessary infliction of pain or suffering and will never engage in cruel, degrading or inhumane treatment of any person.<sup>95</sup>

In 2003, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) sponsored a report on citizen complaints about police use of force which stated that:

During 2002 large State and local law enforcement agencies, representing 5% of agencies and 59% of officers, received a total of 26,556 citizen complaints about police use of force. This corresponds to an overall rate of 6.6 force complaints per 100 full-time sworn officers.<sup>96</sup>

Of those complaints, only 8% resulted in disciplinary actions. However, these numbers have to be taken into account with caution, as complaints are not processed the same way in every agency – some having dedicated boards accessible to citizens and not others – but also because they only reflect official complaints while some people may not dare file one as they may fear repercussions or not being taken seriously. Moreover, at the time only 53% of these municipal Police Departments required that investigations be conducted semi-externally, meaning “outside the chain of command where the accused officer is assigned” but still in the same department.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, some of these complaints may not be legitimate as the person filing the complaint may do so only as a grievance. The report also insists on the distinction between “use of excessive force” and “excessive use of force”: the first phrase is used for single incidents when too much force was applied, while the second is used when force is applied in (too) numerous incidents. Another BJS report estimates that excessive use

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<sup>94</sup>Leonard N. Moore, *Black Rage in New Orleans: Police Brutality and African-American Activism* (Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 1-2.

<sup>95</sup> Douglas, 54-55.

<sup>96</sup> Matthew Hickman, “Citizen Complaints about Police Use of Force” (*Bureau of Justice Statistics*, 26 June 2006, 1. Web. 17 July 2016).

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070808080406/http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/ccpuf.htm>

<sup>97</sup> Hickman, 6.

of force is a symptom of “weak policies on use of force; weak enforcement of policies; inadequate training, supervision, or equipment; or potentially violent police officers,” and in such cases, disciplinary measures are not sufficient if several officers are concerned, but a review of the training process and internal policies are.<sup>98</sup>

One of the most extreme forms that use of force or police brutality can take is police killing. There have been 991 deaths by police in 2015 and 961 in 2016, though a great number of them are not cases of police brutality.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, in a country where it is legal for private citizens to bear a weapon (though there are restrictions depending on state laws), police officers are legally allowed to use deadly use of force in specific cases:

1. Defend themselves or a third person from the use or imminent use of deadly physical force or
2. Make an arrest or prevent the escape from custody of a person whom they reasonably believe has committed or attempted to commit a felony involving the infliction or threatened infliction of serious physical injury and, where feasible, they have given warning of their intent to use deadly physical force.<sup>100</sup>

In 1985 in *Tennessee v. Garner*, the Supreme Court ruled that a police officer cannot use deadly force to make an arrest or to stop a fleeing suspect, unless the suspect is an immediate threat to the public or the officer; in 1989 in *Graham v. Connor*, the Supreme Court ruled that officers using deadly force must be judged according to the circumstances of the situation with “objective reasonableness.”<sup>101</sup> In other words, the Supreme Court ruled that each case of deadly force had to be examined individually, and that the circumstances would dictate whether its use was justified or not. Indeed, as the decision to use deadly force often has to be made in a split-second, cases when an officer shot and killed a suspect who was holding or reaching for an object which could be mistaken as a gun (but was not a gun) and/or had a history of violence were judged as justified by the bureau of internal affairs or courts.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, the high possibility of a suspect being armed is due to the right to bear weapons, and police officers may have to take that decision at any moment when responding to a 911 call or stopping someone for a traffic violation.

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<sup>98</sup> Tom McEwen, “National Data Collection on Police Use of Force” (*Bureau of Justice Statistics*, 1996. Web. 17 July 2016), 55. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ndcopuof.pdf>

<sup>99</sup> “2015 Police Shooting Database” (*The Washington Post*, nd. Web. 22 Nov. 2016). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings/>; “2016 Police Shooting Database” (*The Washington Post*, nd. Web. 22 Nov. 2016). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings-2016>

<sup>100</sup> George Coppolo, “Use of Deadly Force by Law Enforcement Officers” (*Connecticut General Assembly*, 2008. Web. 11 May 2017). <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2008/rpt/2008-R-0074.htm>

<sup>101</sup> Idem; Associated Press, “When are Police Justified in Using Deadly Force” (*Los Angeles Times*, 13 July 2016. Web. 11 May 2017). <<http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-police-deadly-force-20160711-snap-story.html>>; *Tennessee v. Garner*, 471 U.S. 1 (1985); *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989).

<sup>102</sup> Idem.

However, there are cases which turn into police brutality. In 2013, Sergeant Jason Blackwelder was convicted for the manslaughter of Russel Rios, a suspect who had allegedly stolen from a store.<sup>103</sup> Dr. Philip Stinson conducted a research published in 2016, indicating that between the years 2005 and 2011, 5,545 police officers were arrested for committing a crime, and that the majority of those crimes were committed because the officers got the opportunity because of their occupation and the low supervision it provides, even though more than half of these police officers were off-duty at the time of the crime.<sup>104</sup> Among these five thousand arrested officers, 2,586 were arrested for a violent crime; more than half lost their jobs as a consequence, and 39.5% were convicted for the crime.<sup>105</sup> The following table summarizes the results:

Table 8: “Most Serious Offenses Charged in Violence-related Police Crime Arrest Cases, 2005-2011.”

<b>Crime</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Assault	870	26.4
Aggravated Assault	570	17.1
Forcible Fondling	352	10.6
Forcible rape	355	9.7
Intimidation	200	6
Murder/ Non-negligent manslaughter	104	3.1
Forcible sodomy	94	2.8
Robbery	92	2.8
Civil Rights violation	61	1.8
Weapons law violation	57	1.7
Disorderly conduct	55	1.7
Negligent manslaughter	43	1.3
Burglary/ Breaking and entering	38	1.1
Official misconduct/oppression	38	1.1
Arson	32	1
Driving under the influence	32	1

<sup>103</sup> Taylor Kate Brown, “The Cases Where US Police have Faced Killing Charges” (*BBC*, 8 Apr. 2015. Web. 12 May 2017). <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-30339943>

<sup>104</sup> Philip Stinson, John Liederbach, Steven Lab and Steven Brewer, Jr., “Police Integrity Lost: a Study of Law Enforcement Officers Arrested” (*National Institute of Justice Office*, Jan. 2016. Web. 20 Feb. 2017, 189-191). <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249850.pdf>

<sup>105</sup> Stinson, Liederbach, 150-153.

Other violent crimes such as kidnapping, obstruction of justice, false statements, bribery, narcotic violation, and seventeen others, all individually accounted for less than 1%.

Source: Philip Stinson, John Liederbach, Steven Lab and Steven Brewer, Jr. “Police Integrity Lost: a Study of Law Enforcement Officers Arrested” (*National Institute of Justice Office*, Jan. 2016. Web. 20 Feb. 2017, p. 321). <<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249850.pdf>>

As a variety of research and databases were launched these last few years – such as Dr. Stinson’s, the *Washington Post*’s, *The Guardian*’s, and *Fatal Encounter* – the non-existence of an official, national database has been underlined in the media, and even the FBI database is greatly lacking in accuracy, as it recorded fewer than 460 police shootings, when other databases counted more than 900 cases.<sup>106</sup> This lack of record hinders any attempt to see a potential pattern of police brutality in specific Police Departments or cities, and makes it more complex to look for the possibility of a national systemic issue as every incident remains isolated, which in turns prevents any counter-measures from being taken (different training, firing problematic officers or chains of command, different policies, more supervision, etc.). But Police Departments are not the only ones preventing systemic change; for police brutality to be so persistent, it needs the complicity of other institutions, such as the justice system: “courts tend to portray incidents of police brutality as anecdotal, fragmented, and isolated rather than as part of a systemic, institutional pattern.”<sup>107</sup> Indeed, in her research, Susan Bandes underlines that except in cases where the abundance of evidence and public indignation cannot allow for a non-indictment, very few police officers are charged in courts; and even when they are, often only one officer takes the fall even though other officers and superiors have participated or at least were aware of the situation and helped cover him/her.<sup>108</sup> This solidarity is called the blue wall (or code) of silence: “an unwritten code in many departments which prohibits disclosing perjury or other misconduct by fellow officers, or even testifying truthfully if the facts would implicate the conduct of a fellow officer”, a code

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<sup>106</sup> Radley Balko, “Why Are There no Good Data on Police Use of Force?” (*The Huffington Post*, 11 Dec. 2012. Web. 4 Jan. 2017) [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/radley-balko/why-is-there-no-good-data\\_b\\_2278013.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/radley-balko/why-is-there-no-good-data_b_2278013.html); Wesley Lowery, “Aren’t more White People than Black People Killed by Police? Yes, but No” (*The Washington Post*, 11 July 2016. Web. 20 Oct. 2016). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/amhtml/news/post-nation/wp/2016/07/11/arent-more-white-people-than-black-people-killed-by-police-yes-but-no/>; Mark Tran, “FBI Chief: ‘Unacceptable’ that Guardian has Better Data on Police Violence” (*The Guardian*, 8 Oct. 2015. Web 17 July 2016). <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/oct/08/fbi-chief-says-ridiculous-guardian-washington-post-better-information-police-shootings>; “The Counted” (*The Guardian*, nd. Web. 22 Nov. 2016). <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database>>; “2015 Police Shooting Database” (*The Washington Post*, 22 Nov. 2016). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings/>; “2016 Police Shooting Database” (*The Washington Post*, 22 Nov. 2016). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings-2016/>; *Fatal Encounters* website (22 Nov. 2016). <http://data.fatalecounters.org/>; Stinson, Liederbach.

<sup>107</sup> Susan Bandes, “Patterns of Injustice: Police Brutality in the Courts” (*Buffalo Law Review*. Vol.47 No. 3, 1999), 1275.

<sup>108</sup> Bandes, 1281-1288.



even characterized as a “normative injunction.”<sup>109</sup> Bandes concludes that the core of (unpunished) police brutality implicitly comes from society, more specifically “that part of society that has political and economic power” that wants to protect the status quo:

Such brutality is often implicitly approved by majority residents of stratified, segregated societies who value law and order, who want the boundaries between black and white neighborhoods policed and who will put up with the infliction of a substantial amount of brutality on others as long as it is not made impossible to ignore.<sup>110</sup>

This implicit approval can be seen in the enforcement of laws: under the 1994 Crime Control Act, the attorney general must publish an annual report of data on police use of force (deadly and non-deadly); however, Police Departments are under no obligation to actually provide all the data necessary for the report, and while Congress could compel them to, budgetary reasons are given as to why it does not.<sup>111</sup>

To conclude, since the 2000’s Police Departments have had more and more federal funding through Homeland Security (ever since 9/11) to create Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams, but also narcotics task forces and other tactical task forces, to buy tactical gear, heavy weaponry, military weaponry and vehicles, even though a lack of manpower worsened.<sup>112</sup> Yet, Police Departments are barely monitored on a national level (as proves the lack of data on the number of police officers and on police shootings) which, with the blue code, ensures the protection of officers exacting police brutality. Besides, even when such incidents were to be prosecuted, the systematic refusal of the government to recognize a systemic pattern of police brutality prevents any measures from being taken to deter it, and worse, encourages it, as only a small number of officers end up indicted.

### **The Danger of Being a Police Officer.**

One justification given for police shootings, justified or not, is the dangerous character of the job. Indeed, the criminal opportunity theory, stating that the occupation of a person increases the probability of being a victim, and the fact that any person encountered may be armed, indicate that police officer is a dangerous occupation.<sup>113</sup> Yet, the numbers do not tell the same story: “despite the occasional tragedy, a police officer is no more at risk of a fatal injury while on the job than is an electrician or a construction supervisor. A construction

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<sup>109</sup> Gabriel J. Chin, “The ‘Blue Wall of Silence’ as Evidence of Bias and Motive to Lie” (*University of Pittsburgh Law Review*, Vol. 59, 1998), 237; Andrew Millie and Dilip K. Das, eds., *Contemporary Issues in Law Enforcement and Policing* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2008), 45.

<sup>110</sup> Bandes, 1340.

<sup>111</sup> Balko, “No Good Data...”

<sup>112</sup> Radley Balko. *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America’s Police Forces*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2013), np.

<sup>113</sup> Robert J. Kaminski, *The Murder of Police Officers* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2004), 8-11.

worker is two and a half times, and a taxi driver four times, more likely to be killed while on the job than a police officer.”<sup>114</sup> However, the reasons are not the same. If in 2007, 38% of fatal occupational injuries of construction workers were falls, 9% were due to falling objects, and only 2% were homicides, the events causing the deaths of police officers are quite different, even with death by gunfire put aside.

Table 9: Occupational Deaths of Police Officers.

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015
Gunfire	112	104	60	50	55	59	41
Accidental gunfire	7	5	5	3	7	2	2
Assault	10	1	5	3	-	6	3
Stabbed	5	8	5	2	2	-	-
Aircraft accident	5	9	12	7	2	2	3
Duty-related illness	1	1	3	1	4	1	2
Heart attack	11	15	10	8	20	19	18
Bomb	2	-	1	-	1	-	6
Vehicle crash	37	26	27	48	28	48	31
Vehicle pursuit	15	6	8	5	5	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>141</b>

Source: *Officer Down Memorial Page Website* (nd. Web. 26 Jan. 2017).  
<https://www.odmp.org/search/year?year=2015>

The table shows that police deaths have been decreasing since 1970, and that proportionally to the estimated number of police officers, the rates of deaths are rather low, and decreasing too –though, once more, it is hard to determine with precision since no official number has been registered for the police officers in the past few years. Moreover, while gunfire remains the main cause of death for police officers, other elements enter into consideration, such as vehicle crashes, which in 2015, 2010 and 2000 are almost as numerous as shootings.

Besides, it would seem that the higher education demanded in certain Departments (college credits and not just a high school diploma) and a larger number of foot patrols do not reduce the risk of officers being killed in duty.<sup>115</sup> However, according to Robert J. Kaminski, an efficient way to reduce danger for police officers, is to decrease “levels of poverty,

<sup>114</sup> Jerome G. Miller, *Search and Destroy: African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 163.

<sup>115</sup> Kaminski, 148.

economic inequality, family disintegration, and racial segregation rather than through improvements in police performance.”<sup>116</sup>

So in the end, even if other occupations such as construction worker may proportionally cause more deaths annually, the causes of deaths are mainly accidental or due to human error; thus being a police officer is a dangerous occupation in a different way, since the first cause of death is by intentional gunfire, which can happen at any moment, even though the number of deaths has been decreasing over the years. So while police officer is a dangerous occupation and presents challenges especially in understaffed departments, police brutality remains a central systemic problem that needs to be addressed by the government, and not treated as anecdotal incidents.

## 2 Police Brutality against Black People

Police brutality is more frequent against the poor and minorities. The black community, which is one of the poorest, has historically been subjected to violence in general and to police brutality, especially during slavery and segregation, but also afterwards.<sup>117</sup> In the 1960s, as black people organized marches and protests, police brutality became an automatic response: “in many ways white police officers institutionalized an informal culture of police brutality toward African Americans and they emerged as the protectors of white privilege and the opponents of black progress.” This “us versus them mentality” of the time, beyond the racial aspect, also includes a deep belief that black people are not as civilized as white people, that they have different, lower sets of morals and thus are less likely to uphold the law.

Moreover, at the time, police officers saw their duty as the protection of the white population only – which implied protecting them from black people – and did not see black people as needing protection, from either white people or each other – they were not a real part of society and though they had to obey the law when it concerns white people, they had to handle their crimes internally.<sup>118</sup> After WWII this was especially visible in places where the black community had been very small and started to grow: numerous police districts did not treat these newcomers as part of their community. Police officers have testified that it was common practice in their precincts to brutalize innocent black people, by creating or planting

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<sup>116</sup> Kaminski, 147.

<sup>117</sup> Fredrick C. Harris, “The Next Civil Rights Movement?” (*Dissent Magazine*, Summer 2015. Web. 20 Oct. 2016). <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/black-lives-matter-new-civil-rights-movement-fredrick-harris>

<sup>118</sup> Moore, 1, 3.

fake evidence on them or their vehicles.<sup>119</sup> Even when Police Departments started recruiting black men in relation to affirmative action programs, working conditions were made extremely difficult because of racial harassment and discrimination.<sup>120</sup> It was common practice for superior officers to turn a blind eye to these practices or participate, leaving little to no recourse to black officers, especially since they were also discriminated against for promotions and thus had no black superior officer to support them. Moreover, black police officers were often encouraged to be violent towards other African Americans to be accepted by fellow officers and superiors: by becoming or in order to become a cop as they defined it, black officers had to “lose” or deny their skin color and their ties to the black community.<sup>121</sup>

Even today, black people are considered as probable criminals because of their skin color. For instance, a “stop-and-frisk” policy that had been implemented in 1964 by the mayor of New York City was only judged by the court as in violation of the Constitution in 2013 in *Floyd, et al. v. City of New York*, since this policy targeted minorities and particularly African Americans.<sup>122</sup> The number of stop-and-frisks recorded decreased considerably, from almost 533,000 in 2012 to approximately 45,000 in 2014. Yet, on average between 2002 and 2016, more than half of the people stopped were black, and about 30% were Hispanics, even after 2013, showing that this policy was and remains minority oriented.<sup>123</sup> In the first-half of 2016, 71% of people stopped and frisked by the Chicago Police were black, a disproportional percentage since only a third of the city’s population is African American.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, once stopped by the police, African Americans are “twelve times as likely as Whites to experience the use of force” (touching, hand-cuffing, shoving against the ground or other, gun pointing, etc.) at the hand of the New York City Police, and 53% more likely in the rest of the country.<sup>125</sup> Besides, almost 90% of the people stopped were innocent. However, police

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<sup>119</sup> Idem.

<sup>120</sup> Bolton, v.

<sup>121</sup> Moore, 3.

<sup>122</sup> Arthur H. Garrison, “NYPD Stop and Frisk, Perceptions of Criminals, Race and the Meaning of Terry v Ohio: A Content Analysis of Floyd, et al. v City of New York” (*Rutgers Race and the Law Review*, vol.15, 2014), 65; *Floyd, et al. v. City of New York*, 959 F. Supp. 2d 540 (2013).

<sup>123</sup> “Stop-and-Frisk Data” (*New York Civil Liberties Union*, nd. Web. 20 Feb. 2017). <https://www.nyclu.org/en/stop-and-frisk-data>

<sup>124</sup> Jeremy Gerner and Dan Hinkel, “New Report Shows Chicago Police Street Stops down, Minorities still Stopped more” (*The Chicago Tribune*, 24 Mar. 2017. Web. 24 Mar. 2017). <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-chicago-police-stop-and-frisk-report-met-20170324-story.html>

<sup>125</sup> “During Stops that do not Result in an Arrest, Blacks Are more than Twelve Times as Likely as Whites to Experience the Use of Force during Stop and Frisks by New York City Police” (*Prison Policy Initiative*, nd. Web. 24 Mar. 2017). [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/nyc\\_police\\_use\\_of\\_force\\_without\\_arrest\\_2010\\_rates.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/nyc_police_use_of_force_without_arrest_2010_rates.html); Roland G. Fryer, Jr., “An Empirical of Racial Differences on Police Use of Force” (*National Bureau of Economic Research*, July 2016. Web. 24 Mar. 2017). <http://www.nber.org/papers/w22399.pdf>

brutality goes far beyond racial profiling resulting in arrests. Police killing black people also knows disproportional rates, as the following table shows:

Table 10: Fatal Police Shootings in 2015 and 2016.

	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Fatal police shootings	991	963
Fatal police shootings of black people	258	233
Unarmed people killed	94	48
Unarmed black people killed	38	17
Minors killed	18	16
Black minors killed	5	6

The “unarmed” designation implies that the victim posed no apparent threat with a vehicle, a toy weapon, or any other object.

Sources: “2015 Police Shooting Database”; “2016 Police Shooting Database.”

This table shows that 25% of people killed by the police are black, even though they only represent 13% of the general population, and about a third of unarmed people killed are black. Though a number of those shootings cannot be classified as “police brutality” because the shootings were justified, these numbers underline that there is an issue in the police’s perception of black people. Indeed, a research determined that “when factoring in threat level, black Americans who are fatally shot by police are no more likely to be posing an imminent lethal threat to the officers at the moment they are killed than white Americans fatally shot by police.”<sup>126</sup> Yet, they are shot and killed at a higher rate. In addition, according to the NAACP, between 1999 and 2014, 76 unarmed African Americans were killed while in police custody.<sup>127</sup> However, there are no such exhaustive records (official or not) for non-lethal aggression, sexual assaults, racial slurs, threats, etc., that the black population endures by police officers, and thus it is not possible to get a clear picture of the extent of non-fatal police brutality that African Americans face every year. Besides, an investigation on racial bias led by a governor-ordered task force revealed that in 2010, “9 of the 10 officers killed in friendly fire encounters in the United States since 1982 were black or Latino” and the report concluded that racial bias had an impact in “shoot/don’t shoot” situations.<sup>128</sup> Only a few studies argue

<sup>126</sup> Lowery.

<sup>127</sup> Rich Juzwiak and Aleksander Chan, “Unarmed People of Color Killed by Police, 1999-2014” (*Gawker*, 8 Dec. 2014. Web. 20 Oct. 2016). <http://gawker.com/unarmed-people-of-color-killed-by-police-1999-2014-1666672349>

<sup>128</sup> Al Baker, “Bias Seen in ‘Police-on-Police’ Shootings” (*The New York Times*, 27 May 2010. Web. 20 Oct. 2016). <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/27/nyregion/27shoot.html>

that racial bias plays no role in police shootings.<sup>129</sup> University of Missouri-St Louis Professor David Klinger interviewed about 100 officers, and concluded that there was “evidence of increased wariness about using deadly force against black suspects for fear of how it would be perceived and the associated consequences”; answers which mean that officers do not wish to appear as racist when they shoot a black person. Also, simulations have been set up with police officers having to shoot at targets of black or white people depending on whether they were armed; the longer hesitation before firing at black targets was interpreted as officers being less likely to shoot at black people, but could also be interpreted as the extra-time necessary for the officers to be certain that the black target was armed to avoid shooting unarmed black targets and being perceived as racist.<sup>130</sup>

### **Racist Police Brutality Unpunished**

A major reason why racist police brutality is still such an issue in the twenty-first century is virtual immunity. Until fairly recently, police brutality against black people was seldom found in the mass media, except in the black press, which led to a certain unawareness (desired or not) of the rest of the population, and almost an invisibility cloak for abusive police officers.<sup>131</sup> This virtual impunity (virtual because a few officers are tried and found guilty) is a legacy from the past: between 1889 and 1918, 3,224 lynchings were recorded, and no one was prosecuted. It shows that violence towards black people - or white “sympathizers” – was not considered as a real issue by law enforcement nor the Justice Department.<sup>132</sup> During the Civil Rights Movement, in the south, civilian lynching was replaced by police brutality, still with total impunity.<sup>133</sup>

The local police department, with the support of politicians, segregationists, district attorneys, and judges, carried out extralegal violence against African Americans, realizing that black Southerners had no visible means of redress.<sup>134</sup>

A flagrant example of racist police brutality going unpunished in the late twentieth century is the case of Rodney King, a black taxi driver who, in 1991, was beaten up after a car chase by four police officers (three white and one Hispanic) while more than a dozen others

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<sup>129</sup> Joseph Cesario, “Are Black Americans Killed by Police more than We Would Expect?” (*Social Cognition Laboratory*, 2016. Web. 13 Aug. 2017). <https://www.cesariolab.com/race-bias-in-shooting>; Roland G. Fryer, Jr., “An Empirical Analysis of Racial Differences in Police Use of Force” (*The National Bureau of Economic Research*, 2016. Web. 24 Mar. 2017). <http://www.nber.org/papers/w22399.pdf>.

<sup>130</sup> Tom Jackman, “This Study Found Race matters in Police Shootings, but the Results may Surprise You” (*The Washington Post*, 27 Apr. 2016. Web. 12 Aug. 2017). [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/true-crime/wp/2016/04/27/this-study-found-race-matters-in-police-shootings-but-the-results-may-surprise-you/?utm\\_term=.2d7ca8524c21](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/true-crime/wp/2016/04/27/this-study-found-race-matters-in-police-shootings-but-the-results-may-surprise-you/?utm_term=.2d7ca8524c21)

<sup>131</sup> Moore, 2.

<sup>132</sup> Miller, 53.

<sup>133</sup> Moore, 2.

<sup>134</sup> Idem.

watched. As a result of this assault, King suffered broken bones and permanent brain damage. Even though a man living nearby recorded the scene from his balcony and sent the footage to a TV station, which was then broadcast nationally and internationally, the four officers charged were found not guilty of excessive use of force, and no sanction was taken against the officers who stood by and watched.<sup>135</sup> Still nowadays, only a few cases are tried, and fewer lead to a conviction. This lack of repercussions can be due to several factors.

First, the incident has to be known: the blue code/wall of silence can prevent such instances from being investigated, especially when the whole precinct shares – or is forced to share- the same ideology. Also, when internal affairs or a district attorney are required to investigate, the lack of evidence resulting from this unwritten code often forces them to dismiss the case. Indeed, according to a research done by Philip Stinson, between 2005 and April 2017, only eighty officers were arrested for murder or manslaughter after a fatal shooting; out of these eighty, twenty-eight have been convicted, thirty-one have not, and twenty-one are still pending.<sup>136</sup> Though he does not give the number of cases involving black people, given that the rate of police killings is higher for blacks, it is a safe assumption that out of these eighty cases, a significant number involves the death of a black person. The number of officers arrested is extremely low for a twelve-year span, given that Stinson estimates that about a thousand people are killed by the police every year (though not all by police shooting); thus, fewer than 1% of police shootings each year are deemed possibly unjustified and are brought to justice, which is an extremely low percentage for human error or malice. Besides, out of the twenty-eight officers who were charged with murder or manslaughter, thirteen pleaded guilty and did not go to trial, which means that of the forty-six cases that did go to trial, more than two thirds were found not guilty, were acquitted, or their case was dismissed.<sup>137</sup> This lack of punishment is often in part due to the positive image police officers have in society. They are often seen as stressed-out officers who made a one-time-only mistake doing their best to do their life-threatening job, which is to protect citizens from (black) criminals. Indeed, according to Dr. Stinson, juries tend to “give every possible benefit of the doubt” to on-duty officers, except when it comes to corruption and other non-

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<sup>135</sup> Karen Grigsby Bates, “When LA Erupted in Anger: a Look back at the Rodney King Riots” (*NPR*, 26 Apr. 2017. Web. 27 Apr. 2017).

<http://www.npr.org/2017/04/26/524744989/when-la-erupted-in-anger-a-look-back-at-the-rodney-king-riots>

<sup>136</sup> Philip Stinson, “Police Shootings Data: What We Know and What We don’t Know” (*Criminal Justice Faculty Publications*, vol.78, 2017. Web. 27 Apr. 2017), 29-30.

[http://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1077&context=crim\\_just\\_pub](http://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1077&context=crim_just_pub)

<sup>137</sup> Stinson, 31.

violent crimes.<sup>138</sup> Almost half of the cases that did not lead to a conviction lead to an acquittal by a jury, and almost a fifth by bench trial; 30% were dismissed either by the judge or the prosecutor.<sup>139</sup> Besides Bandes's conclusion that the white political and economic elite desires the status quo to remain, she also theorizes that if courts do not condemn police officers more often and investigations are not systematic, it is in part due to the fact that acknowledging the problem as systemic and not just as "a few rotten apples in the basket" would lead to a general public distrust in law enforcements, and to pressures for the government to reform an entire system rapidly, reforms which would lead to many low and high-ranking officers being fired, a desperate and pricey campaign to recruit and train their replacements, etc.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, Stinson underlines the sentences: two convictions for official misconduct, twenty-one convictions for a degree of manslaughter (four voluntary, six involuntary, eleven manslaughter) and five for murder, of which four were overturned on appeal. Murder and manslaughter convictions are different in the sentences they imply: as manslaughter is deemed a less grave homicide, the sentences are lesser than for murder.<sup>141</sup> Thus, almost 75% of convictions are for manslaughter and 18% for murder, statistics which are in opposition with the national tendency, as citizens are in majority convicted for murder, while only a fifth are for manslaughter.<sup>142</sup> Thus, the officers' actions are considered as a gross negligence, or extreme work-related stress, and not as an intent to cause harm.

However, Stinson's conclusions that juries are rather lenient with police officers may not be the only reasons as to why so many jury trials end with a not guilty verdict. On May 19, 2017, Betty Shelby was found not guilty of manslaughter after shooting and killing Terence Crutcher on September 16, 2016. She went back to work five days after her acquittal, after an unpaid leave during the trial. However, the jury of this last case willed to explain their verdict in court by reading a letter. As the judge denied the request, the jury foreman who had written it decided to deliver it to the media, while remaining anonymous.<sup>143</sup> In this four-page letter, the foreman gives general insight into the jurors' conclusions, on the various elements of the case. They all agreed that the window of Crutcher's car was open, and that he was disobeying

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<sup>138</sup> Taylor Kate Brown.

<sup>139</sup> Stinson, 34.

<sup>140</sup> Bandes, 1287-1288.

<sup>141</sup> "What Is the Difference between Murder and Manslaughter?" (*The Economist*, 2 July 2013. Web. 26 Oct. 2016). <https://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2013/07/economist-explains>

<sup>142</sup> "Homicide" (*Office for National Statistics*, 9 Feb. 2017. Web. 20 Mar. 2017).

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/compendium/focusonviolentcrimeandsexualoffences/yearendingmarch2016/homicide>

<sup>143</sup> For more details on the case, see Annex 6 "Terence Crutcher"; "Jury Deliberation, Betty Shelby Manslaughter trial Media Release" (*Court in and for Tulsa County, State of Oklahoma*, 19 May 2017).



a direct order not to get close to his vehicle. They agreed that at the “exact moment” Crutcher reached inside the vehicle, theoretically possibly for a weapon, the officer’s training was to fire first. At this point, they knew they had to find her not guilty:

The State, in this case, had the burden to prove guilt to each element of the respective charges, beyond a reasonable doubt. Some elements are extremely specific, which makes it more challenging for the prosecution to cross that barrier of “beyond a reasonable doubt”. In this case, after extensive deliberation, we the Jury, in accordance with the instructions provided by the Court and through examination of all evidence presented, could not overcome guilt beyond a reasonable doubt and consequently delivered a “not guilty” verdict.<sup>144</sup>

However, they challenged many other points of the case. They believed that officer Shelby could have – and should have – prevented the situation to reach the point where she had to discharge her weapon, by using for instance a non-lethal method such as a Taser gun. They also believed that the argument of acting in the “Heat of Passion,” meaning that “intense emotion had to dominate the person’s thought process at the very instant the act of the homicide was committed” was not valid in her case, and that she acted mostly according to her training. This last element, her training, is at the core of the jurors’ blame: they recognize that they are unaware of every detail of an officer’s training, but they believe that it should include the use of non-lethal means to stop a suspect before it is too late. They thus encouraged the Tulsa Police Department to review the case attentively and question her judgment and ability as a police officer. They also underline the discrepancies of treatment between the way a standard citizen and a police officer are treated after they caused the death of another person, and recommend that a police officer not be allowed to review any video evidence before their interview, and that this interview should happen as soon as possible, just like for a private citizen. This letter underlined the limitations of trial by jury, as the instructions on reaching a guilty verdict may rely on finding every aspects of multiple and specific elements of the case incriminating, which, in good faith may reveal challenging, and thus lead to a non-guilty verdict even though the jury agreed on guilt on all accounts but one minor element. This can be seen as another systemic issue that protects police officers.

Police brutality is thus a societal issue long established and that particularly affects African Americans. Though the right to bear arms makes every situation potentially life-threatening for police officers, it does not justify the higher rate at which black people are killed, nor the fact that the justice system often fails to indict them or find them guilty. Even if the African American community has had to face police brutality for a very long time, the

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<sup>144</sup> “Jury Deliberation, Betty Shelby Manslaughter trial Media Release,” 4.

death of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014, sparked a national movement of indignation and protest.

### **III Ferguson, Missouri**

This section will analyze how and why Ferguson, Mo, became the epicenter of protests against police brutality, and how the events that occurred starting August 9, 2014, impacted American society. The peculiar character of Michael Brown's death is that there is nothing peculiar about it. Unarmed black people have died at the hands of white police officers before Michael Brown, who was not famous in any way, lived in a small city, and whose death was not even recorded by a body camera or a passerby. However, his death sparked a national and even international wide indignation.<sup>145</sup>

#### **1 Michael Brown's Death**

Michael Brown was an eighteen year-old African American man living in Ferguson, Mo. The events that preceded Brown's death are still uncertain because of contradictory testimonies, but what is certain is that on August 9, 2014, Officer Darren Wilson stopped Michael Brown in the street for jaywalking, and after a heated conversation and an altercation, shot and killed him.

#### **The Protests**

Unfortunately, black people being shot and killed by the police is a reality of life that the residents of Ferguson, composed in majority of black people, are well aware of.<sup>146</sup> However, some elements sparked the outrage of the population that day: first, witnesses were certain that the black teenager had his hands up and was unarmed – and thus not an immediate threat – when the white police officer fired his weapon multiple times, and second the fact that the body remained in the middle of the street for four hours and was not even covered was interpreted by the people at the scene as disrespectful, at best. Indeed, Ferguson Democratic committee woman Patricia Bynes added: “it also sent the message from law enforcement that ‘we can do this to you any day, any time, in broad daylight, and there’s nothing you can do about it.’” Indeed, no reason was given by the department of police as to why the body remained for so long in the street, since it had been underlined many times that this was not customary, and was even highly unusual.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> For a detailed timeline of the events, see Annex 5.

<sup>146</sup> “Ferguson City, Missouri Statistics and Demographics” (*Area Connect*, nd. Web. 26 Oct. 2016). <http://ferguson.areconnect.com/statistics.htm>

<sup>147</sup> Julie Bosman, and Joseph Goldstein, “Timeline for a Body: Four Hours in the Middle of a Ferguson Street” (*New York Times*, 23 Aug. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/24/us/michael-brown-a-bodys-timeline-4-hours-on-a-ferguson-street.html>

Yet, for the inhabitants of Ferguson, police racial bias was common: a year after Michael Brown's death, the Department of Justice (DOJ) released a report on Ferguson Police Department (FPD) stating that it had fallen into "a pattern of unconstitutional policing," especially against the African American community. Indeed, the DOJ found that it was common practice for city officials to pressure the Police Department into fining the inhabitants to increase municipal revenues, even though it resulted in a distrust of the black population as they were treated "less as constituents to be protected than as potential offenders and sources of revenue."<sup>148</sup> The DOJ also detected "a pattern of stops without reasonable suspicion and arrests without probable cause in violation of the Fourth Amendment; infringement on free expression, as well as retaliation for protected expression, in violation of the First Amendment; and excessive force in violation of the Fourth Amendment."<sup>149</sup> The municipal court too acted disproportionately, giving harsher sentences than necessary for minor violations, adding fees every time the payment of a fine was late (which in numerous cases led to people having to pay several times the amount of the initial fine), sometimes even giving jail time for people who failed to appear in court. As a result, many people have lost their jobs or are in a difficult financial situation, and do not trust either the police or the municipal court to work in the best interest of Ferguson's residents.<sup>150</sup> Racial bias was also clearly established, in a Police Department with only 8% of African American officers: "from 2012 to 2014 [...] African Americans account for 85% of vehicle stops, 90% of citations, and 93% of arrests made by FPD officers, despite comprising only 67% of Ferguson's population"; "nearly 90% of documented force used by FPD officers was used against African Americans. In every canine bite incident for which racial information is available, the person bitten was African American."<sup>151</sup> This report helps depict the context at the time of Brown's death: tense race relations between the Ferguson police and the African American community, and long-built anger and resentment that sparked such a quick organization of protest.

And so, a candle vigil was set up near the scene of the shooting in the evening, and protesters were met by officers in riot gear with rifles and dogs; violence ensued, and thirty people were arrested.<sup>152</sup> The following nights, the protests, the police confrontations and the

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<sup>148</sup> "Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department" (*Department of Justice Civil Rights Division*, 4 Mar. 2015), 2.

<sup>149</sup> "Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department" 2-3.

<sup>150</sup> "Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department" 2-4.

<sup>151</sup> "Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department" 4-5.

<sup>152</sup> Sabrina Siddiqui, Simon McCormack, "Here's a Timeline of the Events in Ferguson since Michael Brown's Death" (*The Huffington Post*, 25 Nov. 2014. Web. 1 Oct. 2016).

arrests continued. Moreover, as the police still refused to disclose the identity of the officer involved in Brown's death, the hacker collective Anonymous intervened in what they called "Operation Ferguson": after threatening FPD, Anonymous hacked and shut down the city's web servers; a few days later a Twitter account linked to the collective released a name, but the latter was not Darren Wilson's, the actual officer involved. Twitter banned the account and other Anonymous accounts confirmed that the name given was wrong. However, this stunt may have encouraged the FPD to release the real name the following day, alongside a video of Brown's alleged robbery.<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, protests intensified to the point that Missouri Governor declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew.<sup>154</sup> But as the curfew was not respected, the governor decided to send the National Guard to assist Ferguson police.<sup>155</sup> Indeed, people from other cities had been coming to protest alongside Ferguson inhabitants, and protesters were counted in multiple thousands; the governor thought it wise to show strength, hoping that it would help calm the situation down and bring back peace. The media and protesters described Ferguson as a war zone, with twenty-three thousand officers deployed in riot gear with shields, helicopters, tear gas regularly used to disperse protesters, looting, fires...<sup>156</sup>

But soon, these protests took even more extraordinary proportions as the entire nation became involved (for one side or the other) in the case: more activists from the entire country came to protest, new community and activist leaders emerged, and the Black Lives Matter movement arose. Moreover the little Missouri city caught international attention: as foreign mainstream news media started to spread the story of Michael Brown's death but also of the protests violently met by the police forces, support to the protesters came from all around the

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<[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/25/ferguson-timeline\\_n\\_6220166.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/25/ferguson-timeline_n_6220166.html)>; Julie Bosman and Emma G. Fitzsimmons, "Grief and Protests Follow Shooting of a Teenager" (*The New York Times*, 10 Aug. 2014. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/11/us/police-say-mike-brown-was-killed-after-struggle-for-gun.html>

<sup>153</sup> Marquaysa Battle, "People Think Ferguson Protestors are Being Killed, Here's a Look at What's Going on" (*Elite Daily*, 10 May 2017. Web. 13 May 2017). <http://elitedaily.com/life/culture/ferguson-protestors-killed-edward-crawford-michael-brown/1895155/>; Jon Swaine, Rory Carroll, and Amanda Holpuch, "Ferguson Police Release Name of Officer Who Shot Michael Brown" (*The Guardian*, 15 Aug. 2014. 1 Oct. 2016). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/15/ferguson-police-darren-wilson-michael-brown-shooting>

<sup>154</sup> "Michael Brown's Shooting and its Immediate Aftermath in Ferguson" (*The New York Times*, 25 Aug. 2014. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). <[https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/12/us/13police-shooting-of-black-teenager-michael-brown.html?\\_r=0#/#time348\\_10366](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/12/us/13police-shooting-of-black-teenager-michael-brown.html?_r=0#/#time348_10366)>; Siddiqui; Julie Bosman, and Joseph Goldstein, "Timeline for a Body: Four Hours in the Middle of a Ferguson Street" (*The New York Times*, 23 Aug. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/11/us/police-say-mike-brown-was-killed-after-struggle-for-gun.html>

<sup>155</sup> Idem.

<sup>156</sup> Tom McKay, "Days after Michael Brown's Death, Ferguson Looks Like a War Zone" (*Mic*, 12 Aug. 2014. Web. 20 Oct. 2016). <https://mic.com/articles/95998/days-after-michael-brown-s-death-ferguson-looks-like-a-war-zone#fjxLqa7EM>; Paul Lewis and Jon Swaine, "Ferguson Ablaze after Michael Brown Verdict: 'This Is a War Zone Now'" (*The Guardian*, 25 Nov. 2014. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/nov/25/-sp-ferguson-ablaze-michael-brown-verdict-war-zone>

world: many people from various countries tweeted their support often with the hashtag #[name of city or country]StandsWithFerguson, including Palestinians who even gave advice on how to deal with tear gas; some people even traveled to Ferguson to join the protests, among them Tibetan monks, a delegation of Amnesty International, and members of the Clergy.<sup>157</sup>

As a grand jury began its investigation into the case and Darren Wilson on August 20, the calm came back during protests and the next day the governor withdrew the National Guards. But after Brown's funeral on August 25, protests continued throughout September and October, with more protesters arrested. In mid-November, as the grand jury was getting ready to make its decision, the governor called the National Guards back and reinstated the state of emergency; on November 24, the grand jury decided not to indict Darren Wilson, and more protests ensued: since Michael Brown's death, another police officer had not been indicted for killing John Crawford III, a black man who was holding an air-rifle; another black man, Vonderrit Myers Jr., had been fatally shot by a police officer in St Louis (in this case the victim was armed and had fired his gun at the officer); Akai Gurley had been killed in an accidental shot from a rookie police officer; and twelve year-old Tamir Rice had been killed by an officer for holding a toy gun.<sup>158</sup> Besides, the grand jury decision was also imminent on Eric Garner's case. All those elements led to high tensions and anger, which expressed themselves during protests organized in ninety major cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and Boston, but also abroad.<sup>159</sup> Against the wishes of the Brown family, violence

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<sup>157</sup> Zach Goldhammer, "The Whole World Is Watching Ferguson" (*The Atlantic*, 20 Aug. 2014. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/the-whole-word-is-watching-ferguson/378729/>; Valerie Schremp Hahn, "Clergy Join Peaceful but Noisy Protest in Ferguson" (*Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*, 30 Sept. 2014. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). [http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/clergy-join-peaceful-but-noisy-protest-in-ferguson/article\\_8795f7ec-bb0f-5741-a9cf-b1b4c3b65f28.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/clergy-join-peaceful-but-noisy-protest-in-ferguson/article_8795f7ec-bb0f-5741-a9cf-b1b4c3b65f28.html)

<sup>158</sup> Mark Berman, "No Indictment after Police Shoot and Kill Man at an Ohio Wal-Mart; Justice Department Launches Investigation" (*The Washington Post*, 24 Spt. 2014. Web. 21 Oct. 2016). [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2014/09/24/no-indictments-after-police-shoot-and-kill-man-at-an-ohio-wal-mart-justice-dept-launches-investigation/?utm\\_term=.b7b9769a74cb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2014/09/24/no-indictments-after-police-shoot-and-kill-man-at-an-ohio-wal-mart-justice-dept-launches-investigation/?utm_term=.b7b9769a74cb); Robert Patrick, "Lawyer Identifies St Louis Officer Who Killed VonDerrit Myers Jr." (*Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*, 20 Nov. 2014. Web. 26 Jan. 2017). [http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/lawyer-identifies-st-louis-officer-who-killed-vonderrit-myers-jr/article\\_47600cab-5fdb-53d4-bb11-9ced3090263a.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/lawyer-identifies-st-louis-officer-who-killed-vonderrit-myers-jr/article_47600cab-5fdb-53d4-bb11-9ced3090263a.html); Ryan Sit, Rocco Parascandola and Larry McShane, "Panicked NYPD Rookie Fatally Shoots Unarmed Man in Brooklyn" (*New York Daily News*, 22 Nov. 2014. Web. 20 Oct. 2016). <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/brooklyn/nypd-officer-guns-man-28-brooklyn-housing-project-article-1.2018724>; "Video Shows Cleveland Cop Shoot Twelve-Year-Old Tamir Rice within Seconds" (*NBC News*, 26 Nov. 2014. Web. 26 Jan. 2017). <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/video-shows-cleveland-cop-shoot-12-year-old-tamir-rice-n256656>

<sup>159</sup> David McCormack, "Protests Break out across Ninety Cities as Thousands March in Anger" (*Daily Mail*, 25 Nov. 2014. Web. 25 Oct. 2016). <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2848203/Protesters-gather-90-cities-U-S-grand-jury-decides-Officer-Darren-Wilson-won-t-charged-death-Michael-Brown.html>; Ben Quinn, "Ferguson: Protest at US Embassy in London over Killing of Michael Brown" (*The Guardian*, 26 Nov. 2014. Web. 25 Oct. 2016). <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/nov/26/london-protests-against-michael-brown-killing-in-united-states>

erupted once more in many cities, and did again on December 4, as Officer Pantaleo who killed Eric Garner was not indicted either.<sup>160</sup> Many protests disrupted cities, with the occupation of malls and highways (including on black Friday), the occupation of restaurants, and marchers stopping traffic.<sup>161</sup> As other cases of police officers killing black men kept happening, protests persisted, especially under the organization of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Alongside the protests, people found other ways to demonstrate their support to Michael Brown's family: fundraisers collected approximately \$700,000, eleven rappers contributed to a song entitled "Don't Shoot" whose benefits have been going to the Michael Brown Memorial Fund, and the Wisconsin Hope Lab and the Boys and Girls of Dane County set up a scholarship for Brown's three siblings.<sup>162</sup> However, Officer Wilson also received support from part of the population through protests and with fundraisers nearing one million dollars, raised in part by the KKK.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, if tens of thousands of people protested to denounce police brutality against the black community, others protested in support of the police: the controversy about Michael Brown's behavior prior to his shooting divided the population, and while some think that there is a systemic issue about the rate of black people killed by the police, others wanted to show support to the police and blamed primarily the

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<sup>160</sup> Moni Basu, Holly Yan and Dana Ford, "Fires, Chaos Erupt in Ferguson after Grand Jury doesn't Indict in Michael Brown Case" (*CNN*, 25 Nov. 2014. Web. 19 Feb. 2017). <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/24/justice/ferguson-grand-jury/index.html>; Oliver Laughland, Jessica Glenza and Paul Lewis, "'We Can't Breathe': Eric Garner's last Words Become Protesters' Rallying Cry" (*The Guardian*, 4 Dec. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/dec/04/we-cant-breathe-eric-garner-protesters-chant-last-words>

<sup>161</sup> Lilly Workneh, "#BlackoutBlackFriday: a National Call to Boycott Black Friday for Ferguson and Beyond" (*The Huffington Post*, 9 Dec. 2014. 20 Feb. 2017). [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/28/blackout-black-friday\\_n\\_6237108.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/28/blackout-black-friday_n_6237108.html); Scott Shafer, "'Black Brunch' Organizers Put Protest on the Menu" (*KQED*, 10 Dec. 2014. Web. 21 Feb. 2017). <https://www.kqed.org/news/2014/12/10/black-brunch-organizers-put-protest-on-the-menu/>; Eduardo Munoz, "Marchers Stop Traffic in New York to Protest Death at Hands of Police" (*Newsweek*, 5 Dec. 2014. Web. 21 Feb. 2017). <http://www.newsweek.com/marchers-stop-traffic-new-york-protest-death-hands-police-289399>; Randy Furst, "Mall of America Drops Lawsuit against Black Lives Matter Activists" (*Star Tribune*, 1 Mar. 2016. Web. 23 June 2017). <http://www.startribune.com/mall-of-america-drops-lawsuit-against-black-lives-matter-activists/370684301/>

<sup>162</sup> Jim Suhr, "Donors Give nearly \$700K after Michael Brown Shooting" (*CBS Saint Louis*, 27 Aug. 2014. Web. 17 Jan. 2017). <http://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2014/08/27/donors-give-nearly-700k-after-michael-brown-shooting/>; Nick Sanchez, "Michael Brown Fund, Wilson Donations near \$1M; Rappers Release Song" (*Newsmax*, 28 Aug. 2014. Web. 17 Jan. 2017). <http://www.newsmax.com/TheWire/michael-brown-fund-darren-wilson-ferguson/2014/08/28/id/591424/>

<sup>163</sup> Daniel Bates, "Exclusive: Darren Wilson's 'One Million Dollar' Warchest Revealed by Woman Organizing Support for Officer – and Who Says: 'Michael Brown Made a Bad Choice that Day'" (*The Daily Mail*, 28 Nov. 2014. Web. 16 Sept. 2016). <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2851213/Darren-Wilson-receive-1-million-funding-supporters-woman-organizing-officer-s-friends-group-says-Michael-Brown-bad-choice-day.html>; Julia Talanova, "Support Grows for Darren Wilson, Officer Who Shot Ferguson Teen Michael Brown" (*CNN*, 8 Sept. 2014. Web. 16 Sept. 2016). <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/19/us/ferguson-darren-wilson-support/index.html>; Jolie Lee, "KKK Raising Money for Ferguson Police Officer" (*USA Today*, 19 Aug. 2014. Web. 22 Oct. 2016). <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2014/08/19/ku-klux-klan-ferguson-police-michael-brown/14275115/>

protesters for the violence in the protests, and among them, some were white supremacists and had no issues with Brown’s death. The Pew Research Center published a report on the reactions to the FPD shooting, to compare the differences in perceptions of communities.<sup>164</sup> Here are the findings:

Table 11: “Stark Racial Divisions in Reactions to Ferguson Police Shooting.”

	Black people agreeing	White people agreeing	Total agreeing
Michael Brown’s death raises important issues about race	80%	37%	44%
In relation to Michael Brown’s death, “race is getting more attention than it deserves”	18%	47%	40%
Police response to Ferguson shooting has gone too far	65%	33%	40%
Police response to Ferguson shooting has been about right	20%	32%	28%
Great/fair amount of confidence in shooting investigation	18%	52%	45%
Not much/no confidence at all in shooting investigation	76%	33%	41%

For each topic, the remaining percentage to get to 100% are people who did not know how to answer. Source: “Stark Racial Divisions in Reactions to Ferguson Police Shooting” (*Pew Research Center*, 18 Aug. 2014. Web. 22 Oct. 2016). <<http://www.people-press.org/2014/08/18/stark-racial-divisions-in-reactions-to-ferguson-police-shooting/>>

The differences in point of view are striking. Black people in great majority consider that race was a factor in the incident and the way it was handled, and thus they have little confidence that Officer Wilson will be indicted for the shooting. On the other hand, white people are quite divided on the matter, and while half of them still have confidence in the investigation, and about half think that race was not a factor in Brown’s death, the police response left a third of the white population confused about its legitimacy. These numbers reflect an important issue: as Susan Bandes argues, as almost half of the white population does not consider that the high rate of police killings of black people is an issue, and does not see that the justice system rarely indicts officers for police brutality, and as the white population is so divided on the question of police use of force against protesters of police brutality, then, there is little chance that a change in police race relations and police indictments will occur thanks and through the population. The change, however, could come from the government: the report from the DOJ that established the issues of racial bias and of greed in the FPD and

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<sup>164</sup> “Stark Racial Divisions in Reactions to Ferguson Police Shooting” (*Pew Research Center*, 18 Aug. 2014. Web. 22 Oct. 2016). <http://www.people-press.org/2014/08/18/stark-racial-divisions-in-reactions-to-ferguson-police-shooting/>



municipal court, also included the necessary changes the city had to implement. Thus, a settlement was worked out with the municipality to reform policies and practices instead of litigation.<sup>165</sup> The city has agreed, among other changes, to restrict and enhance supervision of the use of force (especially during stop-and-frisks) of FPD and to create a crisis intervention team, which will intervene on cases with people with mental health issues or under the influence of alcohol or drugs; to organize conversations between officers and citizens (especially with people who distrust FPD the most), and between the municipality and citizens; to reform the municipal code, and thus, reduce the instances in which people are fined (such as for “failure to appear”) or jailed for failure to pay fines; to “provide clear policy” on unlawful discrimination to FPD and municipal employees, and make sure that they are respected.<sup>166</sup> If properly implemented, this agreement could make Ferguson a safer and fairer city for its residents. Nevertheless, there are numerous other cities (if not the majority) which would need such a thorough review from the DOJ, followed by an agreement to solve (or at least reduce) similar issues; but since it took the DOJ seven months to make this report, a lack of resources and budgetary limitations prevent such a project from being implemented, and DOJ reports will remain an extraordinary measure.

However, this case would not have reached such an international scale, and would not have led to a reform of the policies implemented in Ferguson without the social medium Twitter.

### **The Twitter Impact**

A St. Louis reporter working for the local TV *KSDK* was one of the first persons to tweet about Michael Brown’s death, and included photos of the population gathering around the scene a few hours after the shooting.<sup>167</sup>

One of the central Tweepers that day was Antonio French, a local black politician who was at the scene and live tweeted many pictures and accounts of the protest and of the altercations with the police. A few other people were central to spreading the news of the shooting on Twitter.<sup>168</sup> This network was at the core of the protests: Twitter served as the first means of communication after the incident and was thus instrumental in organizing a protest which took such a scale that the mainstream news media could not ignore it.

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<sup>165</sup> “Negotiated Ferguson Consent Decree” (United States District Court Eastern District of Missouri, 26 Jan. 2016. Web. 20 Aug. 2017), 3. <http://www.fergusoncity.com/DocumentCenter/View/1920>

<sup>166</sup> “Negotiated Ferguson Consent Decree.”

<sup>167</sup> Freelon, Deen, Charlton D. McIlwain and Meredith D. Clark, *Beyond the Hashtags*. (Washington: Center for Media and Social Impact, 2016), 42.

<sup>168</sup> Freelon, 43.

Twitter is also the birth place of the BLM movement, which started after the non-indictment of George Zimmerman, who had killed Trayvon Martin in 2012. With this new occurrence of a black unarmed teenager killed – and by the police this time – #BLM quickly became the rallying cry of the movement on Twitter and in the streets of Ferguson. Besides, it enabled people from all over the world to express their support to Michael Brown’s family and the on-site protesters, via #Ferguson, #BLM, #HandsUpDontShoot, and #MikeBrown. And as these hashtags became trendy, they gave even more visibility to the protests.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, the capacity to share short videos instantly enabled to show the officers in riot gear, the tear gas and its effect on people, protesters (and journalists) beaten and arrested by officers, etc., which probably greatly influenced the indecision of the white population as to the soundness of the excessive use of force demonstrated, seen in table 11.

A question, though, could be raised: why did Michael Brown’s death go viral and not Eric Garner’s, nor that of any other black man killed by the police? In comparison, Eric Garner’s death, which happened on July 17, 2014, and had raised a lot of indignation too, was tweeted 226,675 times by 128,831 unique users between the day of his death and the day of Brown’s death a month and a half later, while Brown’s death was tweeted 12,589,097 times by 1,734,541 unique users in less than a month after his death.<sup>170</sup> Their close time proximity could be one factor as to why Brown’s death had such an impact on the black community and the media, since Garner’s death video showing the officer putting him in a chokehold and Garner’s repetitive plea “I can’t breathe” was seen by many activists and people from the black community as a way to see if justice would be rendered. So this new case of police killing of a black teenager sparked another, bigger wave of indignation, especially since at first some witness accounts claimed that Brown had his hands up when he was shot. It is arguable that the protests linked to Brown’s death would have been even wider if the non-indictment of Pantaleo (the officer who did the chokehold on Garner) had happened before Brown’s death. Moreover, Garner’s story was never in the “front page” (figuratively for online news outlets, and literally for newspapers) and was mentioned mostly in local news.<sup>171</sup> Yet, a specific Tweet about his death was retweeted 36,000 times (during the period mentioned before) by the Young Black Twitter community, while many members usually did not tweet about such serious matters.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Freelon, 16.

<sup>170</sup> Freelon, 37, 42.

<sup>171</sup> Freelon, 41.

<sup>172</sup> Freelon, 39-40.



Figure 5: Tweet, 20 Jul. 2014 <<https://twitter.com/iKeepItTooReal/status/490898084658819073>>

Another particularity of this tweet, was its lack of protest: it did not ask for justice, it did not link Garner’s death to any racial issue, it did not specify that Garner was unarmed and pleaded for air, nor that he had children; nor did it mention any reason why the NYPD intervened. It simply stated that the NYPD killed him by choking him. Thus, at first there was little opposition to the protests after Brown’s death (which was centered on the alleged theft, the phrase “hands up don’t shoot” – sentence he apparently never said –, and the altercation with Officer Wilson), given that this story remained out of the mainstream media, and was mainly spread between black people and sympathizers during the first few days.<sup>173</sup> In a way, Eric Garner’s story, and the social media’s response to it, paved the way for the reaction to Brown’s death.

On the other hand, if Wilson’s non-indictment was celebrated by some people, Pantaleo’s was more controversial because of the video footage, since more people agreed that Garner was in fact a victim of police brutality – because of the illegal chokehold but also because the officers did nothing when Garner repeatedly said that he could not breathe – and thus people felt that justice had not been rendered.<sup>174</sup>

It is also interesting to note that another black man had been killed by a police officer before Michael Brown, and after Garner, on August 5, 2014: John Crawford III. However, his death was less controversial than Garner’s and Brown’s. Indeed, Crawford had picked up an air rifle in a store while shopping, and, according to an eye-witness, “was waving it around”. The eye-witness called 911, and the dispatcher informed the two officers dispatched that the

<sup>173</sup> Freelon, 41.

<sup>174</sup> Freelon, 61.

suspect was armed. The surveillance video showed Crawford holding and swinging his air rifle, canon towards the floor, before being shot. While many people argued that he was not an actual threat and may not have been given the time to cooperate by the officers before he got shot (the officer who fired said that Crawford was saying something that he could not hear because he was discharging his weapon), this case could not be truly considered as “an unarmed black man killed by the police,” because of the dispatcher’s mention of a weapon and the air rifle. Even though Brown’s case also raised questions given that contradictory testimonies claim that he had his hands up, and others that he was reaching for the officer’s weapon, Brown actually did not carry a weapon, and was stopped by Wilson for a minor disturbance, which is often the case for black people in Ferguson. While Crawford’s death did not receive a lot of media attention nor protest at first, it did after Brown’s and after the officer was not indicted either, in order to underline what activists considered as police killing black people with impunity.<sup>175</sup>

Finally, the main difference between these deaths and Brown’s was the community’s reaction. The context in which the event happened – meaning in a small city where the majority of the population is black and is subjected to racial inequalities in treatment from the municipality and the police – motivated a fast reaction of the black residents who organized a vigil and a protest on the same day of the incident. Their swift actions as well as numerous Tweets gave visibility to the case in the news, while indignation for Eric Garner’s death had remained mostly on social media until these protests.

Officer Wilson fatally shooting Michael Brown in a small city plagued by racial bias and police brutality thus paved the way for nationwide protests and international attention. Yet, these protests did not stop with this particular case; on the contrary, Michael Brown’s death gave national visibility to other black men killed by the police. His death marked the beginning of a new wave of protests.

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<sup>175</sup> Jon Swaine, “Ohio Walmart Video Reveals Moments before Officer Killed John Crawford” (*The Guardian*, 25 Sept. 2014. Web. 20 Oct. 2016). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/24/surveillance-video-walmart-shooting-john-crawford-police>; Thomas Gnau, “Officer: ‘I Fired Two Shots Center-Mass at (John Crawford III)’” (*The Dayton Daily News*, 14 Oct. 2014. Web. 20 Oct. 2016). <http://www.daytondailynews.com/news/local/officer-fired-two-shots-center-mass-john-crawford-iii/gGiZUov76z5xScodw157nl/>; Sarah Jaffe, “Exclusive: John Crawford Supporters to Protest at Walmart Today” (*Salon*, 3 Oct. 2014. Web. 20 Oct. 2016). [http://www.salon.com/2014/10/03/exclusive\\_john\\_crawford\\_supporters\\_to\\_protest\\_at\\_walmart\\_today/](http://www.salon.com/2014/10/03/exclusive_john_crawford_supporters_to_protest_at_walmart_today/)

## 2 After Ferguson

Michael Brown’s death is not the only case of racist police brutality that led to protests since the Civil Rights Movement. For instance, in Los Angeles in 1992, the police beating of Rodney King and the non-indictment for excessive use of force of the four officers involved – despite the video evidence and King’s serious injuries – sparked five days of riots which cost one billion dollars in property damages, and led to fifty deaths (ten at the hands of LAPD and the National Guards), over two thousand people injured and the arrest of approximately six thousand people for disorderly conduct, arson or looting.<sup>176</sup> In 1993, two of the four officers went to prison for more than two years for violating King’s civil rights after a civil trial, and the two remaining officers were fired from LAPD; the other officers who allowed for the beating to happen suffered no repercussion. Apart for these two convictions and a settlement for Rodney King, these riots did not lead to any lasting positive consequence concerning police brutality or racial bias in police forces. In Michael Brown’s case, however, there is a “before” and an “after Ferguson” in the way the population responds to police brutality, even three years later.

*The Washington Post* and the *Guardian* each created a database to keep track of police killings; *The Washington Post*’s focuses on shootings, while the *Guardian*’s keeps records of any death linked to the police. The following tables display numbers for the years 2015 and 2016.

Table 12: People Killed by the Police in 2015.

	<i>The Washington Post</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>
Total of people killed	--	1146
Total of black people killed	--	307
Total of people fatally shot	995	1017
Black people fatally shot	259	261
Black people under 18 years old*	5	5
Black people with signs of mental illness*	39	--
Black people with a toy weapon*	6	--
unarmed black people *	38	79
Black people who died in custody	--	19

<sup>176</sup> Karen Grigsby Bates, “When LA Erupted in Anger: a Look back at the Rodney King Riots” (*NPR*, 26 Apr. 2017. Web. 27 Apr. 2017).  
<http://www.npr.org/2017/04/26/524744989/when-la-erupted-in-anger-a-look-back-at-the-rodney-king-riots>

\* The *Washington Post* categories only include people who have been shot by the police, while the *Guardian* categories include all deaths the police are responsible for.

The discrepancy between the numbers of unarmed black people killed comes not only from the fact that the *Guardian* also includes people who died from another cause than a gunshot, but also because it does not differentiate with toy weapons.

Sources: “2015 Police Shooting Database” (*The Washington Post*, nd. Web. 22 Nov. 2016). <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings/>>; “The Counted” (*The Guardian*, nd. Web. 22 Nov. 2016). <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database>>

Table 13: People Killed by the Police in 2016.

	<i>The Washington Post</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>
Total of people killed	--	1093
Total of black people killed	--	266
Total of people fatally shot	963	1011
Black people fatally shot	233	249
Black people under 18 years old*	6	6
Black people with signs of mental illness*	34	--
Black people with a toy weapon*	13	--
unarmed black people *	17	42
Black people who died in custody	--	10
Body camera	37	--

Sources: “2016 Police Shooting Database” (*The Washington Post*, nd. Web. 22 Nov. 2016) <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings-2016/>>; “The Counted” (*The Guardian*, nd. Web. 22 Nov. 2016) <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database>>

**N.B.:** As of August 2017, the *Washington Post* had recorded 646 fatal shootings, 138 black people, including 24 with a recognized mental illness, 8 under eighteen years old, eight unarmed and five with a toy weapon.<sup>177</sup> The *Guardian* had not published any number as of August 2017.

The slight discrepancy between the numbers collected by both news outlets is negligible, especially since their sources are the news media, and not official reports from the police. It is thus possible that some deaths elude the news, and the actual number of police killings, may be higher. The numbers for the years 2015 and 2016 show a slight decrease in the number of people killed, especially of unarmed black people, which may result from a higher caution from police officers, given the attention such cases may get. According to the

<sup>177</sup> “2017 Police Shooting Database” (*The Washington Post*, nd. Web. 16 Mar. 2017). <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings-2017/>>

data collected by *The Washington Post*, the number of black people shot recorded by a body camera is rather low with only thirty-seven instances, which indicates that body cameras are still not commonly used and/or that their presence is not often disclosed by the police. Out of all these deaths, it is difficult to determine whether they were “justified” (according to police criteria) or could be the result of possibly biased police brutality. However, not every black man killed by police has become high-profile with protests ensuing, only a few ignited nationwide protests, especially in cases when the victim was unarmed and video footage was available.<sup>178</sup>

Police use of deadly force can be justified depending on the situation, but sometimes, evidence and witness accounts make it questionable. From 2014 to August 2017, there have been more than two dozen cases of African Americans killed by the police with questionable circumstances; these cases have provoked anger and restlessness, materialized in numerous protests. These cases became high-profile for several reasons: the fact that the majority were unarmed or were not seen as particularly dangerous to the officers, the young age of some victims, the video evidence, the mental status of the victims, but also the consequences for the officers involved in the deaths. Indeed, out of twenty-four deaths, one led to disciplinary actions, two trials are pending, two cases led to convictions for manslaughter, and one led to a plea deal; in other words, nineteen cases led to no sanctions, either by non-indictment, no charges, charges dropped, mistrial, or acquittal.<sup>179</sup> Some cases, however, may be more controversial, when the victims had a weapon on them (even if they were not holding it at the time of death), when they had already been arrested, or when contradictory witness accounts and a lack of evidence prevent from finding the truth. The following table presents the names of the high-profile victims of police shootings, the dates of their deaths, the names of the officers involved, whether there was video evidence of the time of death, and finally the legal consequences of the deaths, such as a criminal charge or a settlement for the families of the victims.

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<sup>178</sup> Mercy Benzaquen, Damien Cave, and Rochelle Oliver, “The Raw Videos that Have Sparked Outrage over Police Treatment of Blacks” (*The New York Times*, 19 Aug. 2017. Web. 19 Aug. 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/19/us/police-videos-race.html>

<sup>179</sup> As mentioned with more details in the second part, second subpart.

Table 14: High-Profile Police Killings.

<b>Victim</b>	<b>Date of death</b>	<b>Officer involved</b>	<b>Video</b>	<b>Charges/ consequences</b>
<b>Eric Garner</b>	17 July 2014	Daniel Pantaleo	Yes	Not indicted – placed on desk duty - \$5.9 million settlement
<b>John Crawford III</b>	5 Aug. 2014	Two anonymous officers	Yes	Not indicted
<b>Michael Brown</b>	9 Aug. 2014	Darren Wilson	No	Not indicted – resigned
<b>Ezell Ford</b>	11 Aug. 2014	Sharlton Wampler, Antonio Villegas	No	Not indicted – confidential disciplinary actions taken - \$1.5 million settlement
<b>Kajieme Powell</b>	19 Aug. 2014	Two anonymous officers	Yes	Not indicted
<b>Laquan McDonald</b>	20 Oct. 2014	Jason Van Dyke	Yes	Awaiting trial – three other officers charged with conspiracy for trying to cover up for Van Dyke
<b>Akai Gurley</b>	20 Nov. 2014	Peter Liang	No	Convicted for manslaughter and official misconduct
<b>Tamir Rice</b>	22 Nov. 2014	Timothy Loehmann	No	Not indicted – fired - Civil lawsuit settled
<b>Jerame Reid</b>	30 Dec. 2014	Braheme Days Roger Worley	Yes	Not indicted
<b>Natasha McKenna</b>	8 Feb. 2015	Anonymous	Yes	No charges
<b>Tony Robinson</b>	6 Mar. 2015	Matthew Kenny	No	Not indicted
<b>Freddie Gray</b>	19 Apr. 2015	Six officers	Yes	Three acquittals, one mistrial and three charges dropped - \$6.4 million settlement
<b>Eric Harris</b>	2 Apr. 2015	Robert Bates	Yes	Convicted for second-degree manslaughter (four years)
<b>Walter Scott</b>	4 April 2015	Michael Slager	Yes	Mistrial then plea deal: guilty plea for use of excessive force to avoid other additional charges
<b>Brendon Glenn</b>	5 May 2015	Clifford Proctor	Yes	No charges yet - \$4 million settlement to the family
<b>Sandra Bland</b>	13 July 2015	Brian Encinia, County Sheriff and jail staff	Yes	County Sheriff and jail staff not indicted - Encinia not charged with false statements under the condition that he quits - \$1.9 million settlement
<b>Samuel Dubose</b>	19 July 2015	Raymond Tensing	Yes	Two mistrials for hung jury - fired
<b>Jeremy McDole</b>	23 Sept. 2015	Four officers	No	No charges – \$1.5 million settlement
<b>Jamar Clark</b>	15 Nov. 2015	Mark Ringgenberg Dustin Schwarze	No	No charges
<b>Alton Sterling</b>	5 July 2016	Blane Salamoni Howie Lake II	Yes	No charges
<b>Philando Castile</b>	6 July 2016	Jeronimo Yanez	Yes	Acquittal of manslaughter and reckless discharge of a firearm.



<b>Terence Crutcher</b>	16 Sept. 2016	Betty Shelby	Yes	Acquittal of first-degree manslaughter - resigned
<b>Keith Scott</b>	20 sept. 2016	Brentley Vinson	No	No charges
<b>Jordan Edwards</b>	29 Apr. 2017	Roy Oliver	No	Charged with murder, awaiting trial - fired

The victims have been selected as their cases led to major protests and a lot of media attention.

Sources: see Annex 6.

Protests often became more frequent and with a higher attendance after no legal action was pursued or juries failed to convict officers; protesters felt that justice had failed the victims and their families, and that police officers could and would keep killing black people (even unarmed and before video cameras) in total impunity. Besides, some of the officers not indicted have a history of complaints of police brutality against them. Such is the case of Daniel Pantaleo, who has been accused of planting evidence, and twice of degrading searches of genitalia (and once in public view), or of Roy Oliver, who is also being charged for pointing his gun at a woman who had struck the back of his truck two weeks before he killed Jordan Edwards, and had to attend anger management sessions after the district attorney filed a complaint.<sup>180</sup> This lack of repercussions is seen by many as the confirmation that there is a systemic issue with the way police brutality is handled.<sup>181</sup> However, the latest high-profile cases, starting with Freddie Gray's, may have been the objects of more thorough consideration: in the majority of cases before, officers were not even indicted for their actions, while after, even if no charges were brought or the officer got acquitted, at least the possibility of a court trial was open as grand juries indicted every officer. This change may well be the result of the protests for justice, which could have altered the perception of the members of the grand juries. Indeed, the number of officers arrested for police brutality in 2015 more than doubled from the preceding year, and in 2016 although the number had decreased, it was still higher than any given year since 2005.<sup>182</sup>

Another example of racist police brutality is Charles Kinsey's case: though he did not die from his gunshot wound, his story is a perfect example of what protesters are angry about. On July 18, 2016, Officer Jonathan Aledda answered a 911 call about a man who wanted to shoot himself. However as he arrived at the scene, Charles Kinsey, a black therapist, was

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<sup>180</sup> Kevin McCoy, "Choke-hold Cop Sued in Prior Misconduct Cases" (*USA Today*, 4 Dec. 2014. Web. 20 June 2017). <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/12/04/choke-hold-cop-pantaleo-sued/19899461/>; Manny Fernandez and Serge F. Kovalski, "New Charges for Ex-Officer in Texas Accused of Murdering Black Teenager" (*The New York Times*, 23 June 2017. Web. 23 June 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/23/us/roy-oliver-balch-springs-police-jordan-edwards-killing.html?mcubz=3>

<sup>181</sup> Steven W. Thrasher, "Police Hunt and Kill Black People Like Philando Castile. There's no Justice" (*The Guardian*, 19 June 2017. Web. 20 June 2017).

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/19/philando-castile-police-violence-black-americans>

<sup>182</sup> Stinson, 29.

taking care of his autistic patient Arnaldo Rios, who had run away from the institution. As the officer pointed his assault rifle towards them, Kinsey lay down on the ground with his arms in the air, with his patient sitting on the ground next to him. Kinsey explained the situation, saying that the object in Rios's hands was a toy truck. A video taken by a bystander confirms the situation. Nevertheless, Aledda fired his weapon three times, hitting Kinsey in the leg. Kinsey was left handcuffed and bleeding in the street for about twenty minutes without medical assistance from the police. The Chief of police confirmed that Aledda knew before firing that the patient was unarmed, and yet was aiming for him.<sup>183</sup> BLM organized rallies, demanding that the officer be fired.<sup>184</sup> It took a year for the officer to be arrested for attempted manslaughter and negligence, but there is no guarantee that the jury will find him guilty.<sup>185</sup> While Kinsey repeatedly expressed how lucky he felt to be alive, the problem remained the same: an unarmed black man was shot by the police, and treated as a criminal afterwards, even though he was the victim. However, similarly to more and more Police Departments, the Chief of police decided to improve officer training, especially in handling crisis situations.<sup>186</sup> Unfortunately, such measures are only taken as a result of a shooting, to soothe the population, rather than preemptively to avoid such situations. Moreover, it is uncertain whether these reforms will be “embraced in the police subculture” or only temporarily implemented until the population's focus is required on some other issue. Previous similar reforms indeed often failed to persist.<sup>187</sup> In addition, the creation of reforms implies a systemic issue, yet it is never fully addressed by the police, and no reform of the justice system which rarely convicts has been considered yet.

The “after Ferguson” period is not only characterized by the news visibility conferred to these cases, but also by the protests they provoke. Though a number of protests turned violent (with people injured or even killed, riots, looting and property destruction), many did not. For instance, the demonstrations for Alton Sterling and Philando Castile held July 8,

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<sup>183</sup> Nick Wing, “The most Disturbing Part about The Charles Kinsey Police Shooting” (*The Huffington Post*, 3 Jan. 2017. Web. 20 Feb. 2017).

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/charles-kinsey-shooting\\_us\\_57911026e4b0bddd4d39718](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/charles-kinsey-shooting_us_57911026e4b0bddd4d39718)

<sup>184</sup> Emily Cochrane, “Protesters Stage Peaceful Sit-In at North Miami Police Headquarters” (*The Miami Herald*, 25 July 2016. Web. 20 Feb. 2017). <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/north-miami/article91815577.html>

<sup>185</sup> Bill Chappell, “North Miami Officer is Arrested over Shooting of Therapist during Standoff” (*NPR*, 12 Apr. 2017. Web. 18 Aug. 2017). <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/04/12/523612815/north-miami-officer-is-arrested-over-shooting-of-therapist-during-standoff>

<sup>186</sup> Jessica Lipscomb, “Six Months after Charles Kinsey Shooting, North Miami Police will Get Training Review” (*Miami New Times*, 11 Jan. 2017. Web. 18 Aug. 2017). <http://www.miaminewtimes.com/news/six-months-after-charles-kinsey-shooting-north-miami-police-will-get-training-review-9053814>

<sup>187</sup> Ronald Weitzer, “American Policing Under Fire: Misconduct and Reform” (*Social Science and Modern Society*, vol. 52, no. 5, Sept. 2015), 478.

2016, remained peaceful as thousands of people protested in Little Rock, Phoenix, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, Denver, Atlanta, Chicago, Baltimore, Boston, Detroit, New York City, and other major cities, despite the high tension with the police after the killing of five police officers by a sniper during a protest the day before, and the numerous arrests for disorderly conduct.<sup>188</sup> Indeed, the victims' families and the protest leaders generally asked for non-violence to avoid arrests and injuries, but also in order to be heard: more legitimacy is given to orderly protests, especially when the issue is brutality. However, in more controversial cases, public opinion can be more divided by the protests, and counter-protests may take place. For instance demonstrations were held in support of Officer Wilson and Peter Liang, but also more generally in support of all police officers.<sup>189</sup>

Some people have claimed that a "Ferguson effect" emerged from the protests of August 2014: as the police were seen as a force trying to silence oppressors by some, and as inefficient by others, officers were "under siege" and either unable or afraid to do their jobs. As a result, the rise in the crime rates of several cities, including Saint Louis, in the following months was blamed on the protests.<sup>190</sup> However, various studies suggest that the confrontation with the police has nothing to do with crime rates: a report from the *Sentencing Project* compared the homicide, property crime and violent crime rates of the years 2013 and 2014, and overall concludes "with reasonable certainty" that there was no correlation.<sup>191</sup> However, in Chicago, uncertainty over the legitimacy of the use of deadly force during the police encounter that caused the death of Laquan McDonald resulted in the requirement for Chicago police officers to "fill out a detailed form for every street stop"; this requirement caused a drastic decrease of street stops, from almost sixty thousand stops in October 2015 to below ten thousand as soon as it was implemented, and during the following months.<sup>192</sup> Eight thousand officers answered a survey that revealed that 86% thought that "high-profile

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<sup>188</sup> F. Brinley Bruton, Daniella Silva, and Jon Schuppe, "More than a Hundred Arrested at Baton Rouge, Rochester Black Lives Matter Protests" (*NBC News*, 9 July 2016. Web. 18 Aug. 2017). <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/blacklivesmatter-protest-rochester-police-arrest-74-demonstration-n606416>

<sup>189</sup> Jon Swaine, "Ferguson Police Officer Was 'Doing his Job', say Supporters" (*The Guardian*, 18 Aug. 2014. Web. 17 Jan. 2017). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/18/ferguson-supporters-police-killed-teenager-protest>; Chris Fuchs, "Thousands Rally after Conviction of Ex-Cop Peter Liang in Death of Akai Gurley" (*NBC News*, 20 Feb. 2016. Web. 15 Mar. 2017). <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/thousands-rally-after-conviction-ex-cop-peter-liang-death-akai-n522546>; Louis Sahagun, "Blue Lives Matter, Police and Supporters Say at Hollywood Rally" (*The Los Angeles Times*, 27 Sept. 2015. Web. 21 Feb. 2017). <http://ktla.com/2015/09/27/police-supporters-hold-blue-lives-matter-rally-in-hollywood/>

<sup>190</sup> Ashley Gold, "Why Has the Murder Rate in Some US Cities suddenly Spiked?" (*BBC News*, 5 June 2015. Web. 17 Jan. 2017). <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-32995911>

<sup>191</sup> Richard Rosenfeld, "Was There a 'Ferguson Effect' on Crime in St. Louis?" (*The Sentencing Project*, 2015. Web. 26 Sept. 2016), 1-4. <http://sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Ferguson-Effect.pdf>

<sup>192</sup> Shaila Dewan, "Deconstructing the 'Ferguson Effect'" (*The New York Times*, 29 Mar. 2017. Web. 29 Mar. 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/us/politics/ferguson-effect.html?mcubz=3>

incidents between police and blacks made their job harder,” that the majority believed that deaths of black people were “isolated incidents” only and that “officers who consistently do a poor job are held accountable”; the survey also showed that 92% of white officers believed that blacks and whites had equal rights and that the country did not need to make further changes, against 29% of black officers, and 92% of officers believed that protests are due to “a long-standing bias against the police.”<sup>193</sup> Thus, a “Ferguson effect” is perceived as real for police officers, even though they believe that distrust in the police did not appear with the protests at Ferguson, but was already anchored in society, especially since the majority feels that police brutality is addressed and punished.

Another recorded effect of high-profile police killings is the temporary decline of 911 calls from the black community, as their trust in the police is shaken: a study conducted by the *New York Times* focused on this effect, and concluded:

Our findings confirm what the people of Ferguson, Mo., Baltimore and other cities have been saying all along: that police violence rips apart the social contract between the criminal justice system and the citizenry, suppressing one of the most basic forms of civic engagement, calling 911 for help.<sup>194</sup>

Thus, even if protests quite probably did not stir more crimes, it is possible that the media visibility they conferred to police killings has had consequences, such as an increased (temporary) distrust in the police, and a stricter supervision of police officers, which can frustrate them. On the other hand, President Trump’s positions about police brutality and reforming policies seem to go in the opposite direction, as his administration scheduled to reinstitute a program that had been limited by Obama, in which military surplus equipment was given to Police Departments.<sup>195</sup>

Thus, since the protests held at Ferguson in 2014, questionable police killings of black people have been under the scrutiny of the population, and as protests have denounced perceived failures of the justice system, Police Departments at fault have changed their training and use of force policy, one after the other. Damaging effects have been attributed to the negative publicity given to the police, and though some of these effects are debatable, they cannot be blamed on the protests, as some were, but should lead to a national reform of law

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<sup>193</sup> Rich Morin, Kim Parker, Renee Stepler, and Andrew Mercer, “Behind the Badge” (*Pew Research Center*, 11 Jan. 2017. Web. 12 Jan. 2017). <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/01/11/behind-the-badge/>

<sup>194</sup> Matthew Desmond and Andrew V. Papachristos, “Why Don’t You Call the Cops?” (*The New York Times*, 30 Sept. 2016. Web. 17 Jan. 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/01/opinion/why-dont-you-just-call-the-cops.html>

<sup>195</sup> Adam Goldman, “Trump Fully Restore Military Surplus Transfers to Police” (*The New York Times*, 27 Aug. 2017. Web. 27 Aug. 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/27/us/politics/trump-military-equipment-police.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fus&r=0>

enforcement policy, in order to make all members of the population safe under the protection of the police. However, beyond the impact of protest, an “after Ferguson” era would not have existed without the considerable role the news and entertainment media have played in the way the population perceives police brutality.

### 3 Change in Media Coverage

The perception that the general population has of police officers does not rely mainly on the news media; on the contrary, an important part of their personal appreciation results from face-to face interaction with the police, and from the experiences of family, friends, and neighbors. This is especially true for African Americans, whose distrust is often based on real-life experiences of people they know and have a similar socioeconomic situation, rather than on the mainstream news.<sup>196</sup> However, the events that took place at Ferguson changed the way the news handle police killings of African Americans, their way of representing the police. Thus the news increased awareness about black people being killed by the police, which influenced people’s opinion of the police more than usual.

#### **News Coverage**

The various outlets covered the events rather differently, changing the narrative. Many have set up a timeline of the events, yet many contradictions or discrepancies can be found on those various websites. For instance, the description of what happened on August 9, 2014, the day Michael Brown was shot to death, varied according to various criteria. Events were often presented in a fashion that influenced the reader, from a police officer shooting and killing a teenager without justification, to a police officer acting in his line of duty.

Some news outlets focused on portraying Brown as the utter innocent victim. They emphasized his youth by giving his age, calling him a “teenager” or “teenage boy,” mentioning that he had recently graduated from high school. They also only mentioned information that would paint Brown as a *good* person: some said that he was on his way to visit his grandmother, others that he was on his way home, and insisted on the fact that he graduated high school and planned to go to college, mentioned the nickname “the gentle giant,” etc., and did not mention that he had allegedly been caught on camera stealing, and

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<sup>196</sup>Steven Chermak, Edmund McGarnell and Jeff Gruenewald, “Media Coverage of Police Misconduct and Attitudes toward Police” (*Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, Vol. 29 No.2, 2006, 265); Weitzer, 476.

that many witnesses agreed on the fact that there was an altercation between Brown and Wilson. Others on the contrary, mentioned that the police officer assaulted Brown prior to the shooting; some emphasized Brown's and Wilson's skin colors. They also only mentioned the witness reports that claimed that Brown had his hands in the air, and ignored the contradictory ones. Finally, many included the fact that the body remained out on the street for four hours before being driven to a morgue (*CBS Saint Louis, Ebony, The Telegraph, The Wall Street Journal, Yahoo News, and CBS News with The Associated Press*).<sup>197</sup>

Other outlets tried and stayed as objective as the press can be, and stated the events matter-of-factly, underlining the many uncertainties that remained about the events because of contradictory witness statements, and later used the evidence, such as the autopsy report. They also mentioned that, according to the police at the time, Brown had allegedly stolen a box of cigarillos in a convenience store moments earlier. In this category, some do not make any correlation between the alleged theft and the shooting, emphasizing that even if Wilson claimed to have recognized Brown from the description given, he did not confront him about that in the first place (implying that the police officer may not actually have recognized him) (*Newsweek, Huffington Post, NPR, BBC*), others imply that Wilson did recognize him afterwards (*USA Today, The Washington Post*).<sup>198</sup> A few presented the story from the point of view of Brown's friend and witnesses whose testimonies were similar, as well as the point of view of the police officer (through hearsay) and the police station, leaving the readers

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<sup>197</sup> "Timeline: the Death of Michael brown and unrest in Ferguson" (*CBS St. Louis*, 12 Aug. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2014/08/12/timeline-the-death-of-michael-brown-and-unrest-in-ferguson/>; Katina Parker, "Ferguson Forward: a Timeline." (*Ebony*, 12 Feb. 2015. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://www.ebony.com/news-views/ferguson-forward-a-timeline-504#axzz4OfDMkL5I>; Raf Sanchez, "Ferguson: Timeline of Events since Michael Brown's Death." (*Telegraph*, 10 Aug. 2015. Web. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/11242108/Ferguson-timeline-of-events-since-Michael-Browns-death.html>; "Ferguson Timeline: What's Happened so Far" (*Wall Street Journal*, 18 Aug. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2014/08/18/ferguson-timeline-whats-happened-so-far/>; "Timeline of US Protests over Police Killings of Black Suspects" (*Yahoo*, 28 Apr. 2015. Web. 22 Feb. 2017). <https://www.yahoo.com/news/timeline-us-protests-over-police-killings-black-suspects-151146646.html>; Associated Press, "Timeline: Police Shooting Death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri" (*CBS News*, 23 Nov. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/timeline-police-shooting-death-of-michael-brown-in-ferguson-missouri/>

<sup>198</sup> Reuters, "Michael Brown Shooting, Ferguson Fallout: a Fallout" (*Newsweek*, 24 Nov. 2012. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://europe.newsweek.com/michael-brown-shooting-ferguson-fallout-timeline-286756?rm=eu>; Siddiqui; Scott Neuman, "Ferguson Timeline: Grief, Anger and Tension" (*NPR*, 24 Nov. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/11/24/364103735/ferguson-timeline-grief-anger-and-tension>; "Michael Brown Shooting: Timeline of Events in Ferguson" (*BBC*, 15 Aug. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-28797288>; Colby Itkowitz, "Timeline of Events in Ferguson, Mo" (*The Washington Post*, 16 Aug. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/timeline-of-events-in-ferguson-mo/2014/08/16/02f37e8c-2580-11e4-86ca-6f03cbd15c1a\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/timeline-of-events-in-ferguson-mo/2014/08/16/02f37e8c-2580-11e4-86ca-6f03cbd15c1a_story.html); Emily Brown, "Timeline: Michael Brown Shooting in Ferguson, Mo" (*USA Today*, 14 Aug. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/08/14/michael-brown-ferguson-missouri-timeline/14051827/>

relatively free to make up their own minds (*CNN, Mashable*).<sup>199</sup> Some media remained almost neutral, by summarizing the event in a very few lines, such as “a police officer shoots and kills an unarmed 18-year-old in Ferguson, Mo,” focusing on the act in itself which is almost the only certainty there is. However, while this can be seen as neutrality (for instance by using various testimonies even if they contradict their narrative, and by not mentioning the witnesses’ races), the fact that no reason is given for this encounter may also give the impression that Wilson fired without cause and excludes any possibility that he had justification for discharging his weapon (*PBS, ABC News*).<sup>200</sup> Other media insisted on the altercation between Wilson and Brown prior to the shooting (*NBC News*).<sup>201</sup>

The number of mainstream news outlets reporting Michael Brown’s death is most likely due to the protests that followed it, which may also explain the fact that the articles relating his death are predominantly supporting him. Some more nuanced depictions, such as those underlining that he allegedly robbed a store mere moments earlier, lessen the legitimacy of the protests, and paint Michael Brown as a criminal, even though the theft had nothing to do with the officer’s initial reaction. In such cases, it is plausible that the outlets adapted to their readers, and presented a narrative that they would want to read and follow. But if news outlets can influence the narrative, the police can also influence the news: “most typically, it is officials who focus attention on the behavior of suspects rather than on that of officers, asserting that officers were obliged to use force to accomplish legitimate crime-control and order-maintenance goals.”<sup>202</sup> Indeed, as the Chief of police had no choice but to name Darren Wilson, he also released the video of the alleged robbery, which tarnished the public image of the “gentle giant,” possibly in the hope of giving more credibility to the officer’s version that Brown had assaulted him, and thus of minimizing the blame on the police. Though the release of this footage did not impede the protests, it probably intensified the support of part of the population for Darren Wilson and the police in general.

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<sup>199</sup> Rachel Clarke and Christopher Lett, “What Happened when Michael Brown Met Officer Darren Wilson” (*CNN*, 11 Nov. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2014/08/us/ferguson-brown-timeline/>; Amanda Wills, “Waiting for the Grand Jury: the Ferguson Case Laid Out” (*Mashable*, 24 Nov. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://mashable.com/2014/11/17/ferguson-grand-jury-michael-brown/#jDNP67qZakqh>

<sup>200</sup> Charles Pulliam-Moore and Margaret Myers, “Timeline of Events in Ferguson” (*PBS*, 20 Aug. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/timeline-events-ferguson/>; Susanna, Kim, “What’s Happened in Ferguson since Michael Brown’s Death: a Timeline” (*ABC News*, 17 Nov. 2014. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://abcnews.go.com/US/happened-ferguson-missouri-michael-browns-death-timeline/story?id=26974512>

<sup>201</sup> Elisa Fieldstadt, “Teen Killed by Missouri Officer after ‘Physical Confrontation’: Police” (*NBC News*, 10 Aug. 2014. Web. 20 Oct. 2016). <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/michael-brown-shooting/teen-killed-missouri-officer-after-physical-confrontation-police-n177206>

<sup>202</sup> Lawrence, 37.

Other people tried to manipulate the narrative: Jason Pollock filmed a documentary entitled “Stranger Fruit” which deals with Brown’s death. Pollock released to the press a longer, edited version of the footage of the store that Brown allegedly robbed, and presents an alternative theory: Michael Brown did not steal cigarillos, but had traded them earlier for what could be drugs.<sup>203</sup> This alternative raised a lot of issues, one of them being that the police deliberately edited the video (and others being: why would the police be in possession of such an incriminating video for the store employees in the first place? Why would they report a theft after a drug deal?). However, the store owner’s attorney organized a press conference, showing some parts of the footage which had been edited out, showing that there had been no trade. While the attorney’s way of scripting the events and basically dubbing the dialogues can be seen as manipulating the narrative too, the scenario proposed seems more logical, even if there seemed to be more happening than the attorney let transpire.<sup>204</sup> However unwise staging this narrative was, the circulation of the documentary’s version around the news had consequences: another demonstration rose in front of the store, violence ensued, and a boycott was started when the store’s attorney held the press conference.<sup>205</sup>

All in all, the news coverage of the events was intense, and, at the same time, fueled and was fueled by the protests. However, this coverage is far from typical for police killings. Before August 2014, episodic instances of questionable police killings against black people made the mainstream news. Usually, the vast majority of these killings was only discussed in black news media. Indeed, in cases of controversial police use of force “the vast majority of incidents that receive any coverage at all disappear quickly from the news pages and are successfully contained by official communication strategies.”<sup>206</sup> Moreover, whenever they did make the news, individualized cases got a better visibility than the ones underlining a systemic issue, and mostly the police version was taken into account.<sup>207</sup> Journalists were more inclined to quote or rely on a legitimate source – the police official report – than witnesses who contradict each other or may be biased against the police, or victims who could be criminals, trying to victimize themselves, or looking for retaliation.<sup>208</sup> Besides, as journalists

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<sup>203</sup> Mitch Smith, “New Ferguson Video Adds Wrinkle to Michael Brown Case” (*The New York Times*, 11 Mar. 2017. Web. 11 Mar. 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/11/us/michael-brown-ferguson-police-shooting-video.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&r=3>

<sup>204</sup> Fox 10 Phoenix, “Just Released: Unedited Surveillance Videos of Michael Brown at Ferguson Convenience Store” (*Youtube*, 13 Mar. 2017. Web. 13 Mar. 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEBWuULMdNw>

<sup>205</sup> Jon Schuppe, “Ferguson Security Video Renews Anger over Michael Brown’s Death” (*NBC News*, 13 Mar. 2017. Web. 13 Mar. 2017). <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/michael-brown-shooting/ferguson-security-video-renews-anger-over-michael-brown-s-death-n732721>

<sup>206</sup> Lawrence, 34.

<sup>207</sup> Lawrence, 43, 46.

<sup>208</sup> Lawrence, 52, 55.



are often given a particular section, antagonizing police officials may reveal counterproductive for getting exclusivity in later events, and thus may discourage journalists in pursuing leads that contradict the police version. However, the media coverage of Ferguson changed how police brutality was depicted in the news.

### **After Ferguson**

Since Brown's death, or rather since the Ferguson protests, news media have reported numerous police killings of black people, especially as some became high-profile because of demonstrations. The extensive coverage in the mainstream news outlets caused the public's trust in the police to decline, as Researcher Regina Lawrence underlines: "news media help to create and sustain the legitimacy of police, but they also sometimes subject police to critical scrutiny that erodes police legitimacy."<sup>209</sup> And indeed, in 2015 a poll stated that only 52% of the population had "a great deal/quite a lot of confidence" in the police, confidence which had not been that low since 1993, right after the Rodney King riots. However, these numbers are not drastically low, as the highest peak reached in that timespan was 64% in 2004; more generally, the answers to this poll oscillated between 54% and 59%.<sup>210</sup>

Even if some studies found in the past that news consumption about specific instances of police brutality did not alter people's vision of the police in general – only of the officer accused of misconduct, even if a jury fails to indict him/her – it is no longer the case.<sup>211</sup> Indeed, in a short period of time, many instances of questionable police killings of black people became high profile: at least twenty-three in a little over two years provoked massive protests and news attention. The news, as well as the protesters getting organized as the BLM movement, presented these individual cases as one systemic problem, and thus even in cities where there had been no recent case of police brutality mediatized, trust in police decreased. However, this raises another issue: if in the past police brutality was presented as rare incidents, it is now depicted as a pervasive national problem, and though it can be an issue in *any* Police Department, it is not an issue in *every* Police Department. Thus while systemic issues have to be addressed, the news should manage the information in a more balanced way, to avoid misplaced anger and wariness.

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<sup>209</sup> Regina Lawrence, *The Politics of Force: Media and the Construction of Police Brutality* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2000), 31.

<sup>210</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, "In US, Confidence in Police Lowest in Twenty-Two Years" (*Gallup*, 19 June 2015. Web. 14 Mar. 2017). <http://www.gallup.com/poll/183704/confidence-police-lowest-years.aspx>

<sup>211</sup> Chermak, 272.

While a popular hypothesis is that the news influence the protests, in the particular case of Ferguson, it may only be half right. Lawrence theorizes that the news “manage” what will be perceived as a societal problem: “as they construct the news, journalists give some voices, claims, and symbols wide exposure by admitting them to center stage”.<sup>212</sup> Yet, it is not quite the case with these protests: Twitter and other social media are at the origin of the Ferguson protests and of the rise of the BLM movement; the specific sociological conditions in Ferguson allowed for the population to take control, and to decide for themselves what constitutes a problem; the news only followed the population’s wishes. However the protests would probably not have reached international attention, and probably not have touched (positively or negatively) the entire nation without the publicity. The protests would have been less supported, and maybe eventually forgotten, but as news outlets shared the stories and the videos of unarmed black people getting killed, the impact of their involvement is undeniable.<sup>213</sup> In addition, the circulation of these videos is another central aspect of the “after Ferguson” effect.

Though Brown’s death was not recorded, many other police killings were. Whether it was by the police – with a body camera or a dashboard camera – or by civilians with their cellphones, videos have become useful tools for activists to support a claim of police brutality. Without video evidence, Eric Garner’s death or Walter Scott’s would have probably been unheard of. The scandals around the officers’ contradictory accounts made these cases protest-worthy but also newsworthy, especially for Scott’s death since there was only one witness, whose credibility would have been seen as inferior to an officer’s. In spite of the surprisingly little impact that video evidence had in court trials, these videos and their circulation on the mainstream news have become a weapon for activists and victims’ families, since they force the part of the population usually not confronted to police brutality to look at the problem, and get outraged when the justice system fails to indict and convict.

Another change lies in the people interviewed in cases of police killings: whenever there are some, it is common to have witnesses give the account of their experience of the killing to the news, and/or to have the family of the victim give a positive portrayal of their lost one, instead of just having summaries of the police report or press conference. These accounts somewhat individualize the story. However, during and after Ferguson, a category of people generally less often interviewed was heard: “activists seeking police reform, residents

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<sup>212</sup> Lawrence, 4.

<sup>213</sup> Elliott C. McLaughlin, “We’re not Seeing more Police Shootings, Just more News Coverage” (*CNN*, 21 Apr. 2015. Web. 26 Jan. 2017). <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/20/us/police-brutality-video-social-media-attitudes/index.html>

and leaders of minority and inner-city communities, and some academic experts” who present particular instances of excessive police use of force as a pattern of police brutality.<sup>214</sup> Indeed, these people underline that isolated cases are in fact not isolated, and that the officer involved is not the only one to blame, but his superiors, his training, the lack of supervision and repercussions are to blame as well, thus establishing that the problem is deeper than just one officer who went too far or lost control.

Similarly to Ferguson, other protests appeared in foreign news outlets.<sup>215</sup> While some argue that whether the world is watching or not does not matter as much as whether the United States is, such worldwide visibility could pressure the American government into handling police brutality, on top of the protests. However this does not seem very likely to happen under the Trump administration, as the President is clearly not in favor of the protests: he blamed BLM protesters when some of them got hurt and one killed at a white supremacist rally, and pardoned a former Sheriff who was on trial for illegal detention of immigrants based on racial profiling.<sup>216</sup> Indeed, many of the President’s controversial statements have been relayed by mainstream news outlets, where he clearly encouraged rough treatments of immigrant criminals.<sup>217</sup> This kind of statement, by being widely spread by the news, may fuel the anti-police brutality protests, and simultaneously make interactions more tensed between the police and African Americans, as their own President publicly encourages police brutality.

Furthermore, the way the news portrays victims has also been revised. #IfTheyGunnedMeDown contested the photos outlets used to present black victims, which in some cases portrayed the victim as a criminal. This hashtag was spread by Twitter users alongside two photos of themselves, one that made them look like criminals or violent, and one that showed them smiling, that made them look mild, sometimes representing one of their accomplishments (graduation, receiving a medal, with their family, etc.), with a caption

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<sup>214</sup> Lawrence, 39-41.

<sup>215</sup> Morgan Winsor, “Black Lives Matter Protests Go Global, from Ireland to South Africa” (*ABC News*, 13 July 2016. Web. 21 Oct. 2016). <http://abcnews.go.com/International/black-lives-matter-protests-global-ireland-south-africa/story?id=40546549>

<sup>216</sup> Thandisizwe Chimurenga, “News Station Blames White Supremacist Stabbing on Black Lives Matter, not on White Supremacy” (*Daily KOS*, 18 Aug. 2016. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <https://www.dailykos.com/story/2016/8/18/1561357/-News-station-blames-white-supremacist-stabbing-on-Black-Lives-Matter-NOT-on-white-supremacy>; Adam Liptak, “Why Trump’s Pardon of Arpaio Follows Law, yet Challenges It” (*The New York Times*, 26 Aug. 2017. Web. 26 Aug. 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/26/us/politics/trump-pardon-joe-arpaio-constitution.html?ref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fpolitics>

<sup>217</sup> Maggie Haberman and Liz Robbins, “Trump, on Long Island, Vows an End to Gang Violence” (*The New York Times*, 28 July 2017. Web. 28 July 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/28/us/politics/trump-immigration-gang-violence-long-island.html?mcubz=1>

reading “if they gunned me down, which one would they choose?”<sup>218</sup> This way of denouncing the way the news can manipulate the narrative influenced the later portrayals of victims, as outlets chose more neutral photographs. Or more precisely, the way the news portrays victims has been *mostly* revised. Among other instances, on August 18, 2016, the news channel King 5 Seattle broadcast a report on a stabbing with the misleading title “‘Black Lives Matter’ may have led to stabbing.” In reality, the victim was part of the BLM movement and was allegedly stabbed by a white supremacist. The title thus put the blame on the movement and not on the alleged culprit.<sup>219</sup>

Last but not least, the *Washington Post* and the *Guardian* databases of people killed by the police in 2015 and 2016 marked a desire to hold the police responsible for the killings, and underlined that the fact that the authorities do not keep a thorough, national record is unacceptable, especially since it prevents them from detecting patterns in Police Departments and thus from enforcing a change in their policies. These databases are quite detailed with a convenient search engine allowing anyone to retrieve data related to these deaths (identity of the victim, age, ethnicity, cause of death, whether or not the victim was armed, a brief summary of the events, location, status of the investigation, Police Department concerned and articles from other news outlets). This also allows people to contact the outlets if they have more information or find an error. The *Washington Post* keeps recording police shootings for the year 2017, but as a pay-wall has been put up on the website, this database is less accessible than it used to be. However, the *Guardian* will discontinue the database and will not create a 2017 list, judging that since the BOJ and the FBI “have committed to reforming how they track officer-involved deaths,” its work was done, even if the new database may be less accessible and less convenient to retrieve data from, and may not be as thorough as the *Guardian*’s.<sup>220</sup>

### **Television Representation**

While there are numerous American TV shows centered on law enforcement conveying a positive image of the institution, these last years, several famous shows tackled the issue of racist police brutality

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<sup>218</sup> Nick Wing, “When the Media Treats White Suspects and Killers Better than Black Victims” (*The Huffington Post*, 14 Aug. 2014. Web. 19 Oct. 2016). [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/14/media-black-victims\\_n\\_5673291.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/14/media-black-victims_n_5673291.html)

<sup>219</sup> Drew Mikkelsen, “Police Say Olympia Stabbing Was Racially Motivated” (*King 5*, 17 Aug. 2016. Web. 16 Jan. 2017). <http://www.king5.com/news/crime/black-lives-matter-may-have-prompted-stabbing/301011901>

<sup>220</sup> The Counted Team, “A Note to our Readers” (Facebook, 24 Jan. 2017. Web. 22 Aug. 2017). <https://www.facebook.com/notes/the-counted/a-note-to-our-readers/765675203580600/>

The fourteenth episode of the drama show *Scandal*'s fourth season, aired on March 5, 2015, was entitled "The Lawn Chair," and recreates a situation similar to Michael Brown's story: a black teenager is killed by a white police officer, and a quick response follows from the black community, with extensive media coverage. However, in this case, the grieving father is sitting on a lawn chair placed near the dead body to guard it with a rifle: the officer claims that the teenager threatened him with a knife, and the father does not believe it. This situation echoes the controversy over Brown's alleged attempt to take Officer Wilson's weapon. The TV show, however, brings a resolution by giving proof that the teenager was innocent, which denounces police brutality and corruption (a knife was planted by the police). Creator Shonda Rhimes tweeted at the end of the episode that, after a hard debate, they opted for a hopeful ending, for what should be, instead of imitating real life.<sup>221</sup>

The sitcom *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* put aside its usual comic lightness by airing on May 2, 2017, the episode "Moo Moo," which deals with a black police officer wearing a hoodie looking for his daughter's favorite blanket when he is stopped for no reason by a white police officer who acts immediately as if he was threatening, and quickly treats him as a suspicious person. The episode focuses on the difference of treatment by law enforcement between black and white people, on the lack of repercussions when an officer uses racial profiling, on the established solidarity between officers which prevents any internal denunciation, as well as on the issue of explaining to black children racially motivated police profiling, abuse of power and brutality. The sitcom, based on the life of a police district, skillfully tackles the systemic nature of the issue, while underlining that it does not concern every police officer.

The first season of *Marvel's Luke Cage*, which premiered on September 30, 2016, also deals with the issue, with a twist of irony: the unarmed (and innocent) black man shot at by the police has an unbreakable skin. The story takes place in Harlem, an African American historic neighborhood, famous for the "Harlem Renaissance" which happened in the 1920s, when African American social, cultural and artistic revolutions took place. The character Luke Cage unwillingly becomes a super hero in the eyes of his community, while being seen as a dangerous criminal by the mainstream media and law enforcement. His hole-riddled hoodie becomes a symbol for the black community, of police brutality but also of hope as a bullet-proof man walks their streets.

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<sup>221</sup> Lauren Duca, "'Scandal' Takes on Institutionalized Racism and Police Brutality in Ferguson-Inspired Episode" (*Huffington Post*, 6 Mar. 2015. Web. 25 Apr. 2017).  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/05/scandal-ferguson\\_n\\_6813246.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/05/scandal-ferguson_n_6813246.html)

*Dear White People*, a comedy drama series based on the same-name movie, deals with institutionalized racism as lived by black students at a prestigious University. In the fifth episode of the first season, a fight is about to happen during a party when the campus security officers interrupt it, and hold at gun point a black student who refused to show his ID. In the following episodes, the black community, deeply shocked by the incident, protests and demands that the officer be fired and that campus security officers not be allowed to carry lethal weapons on duty. The accent is put on the student held at gunpoint, and his traumatism as he realized he could have died that night, even though he was not a danger to the officer, as other black men did before him. The show also tackles the lack of response of the university administration.

Finally, *South Park*, the satirical animated show, also dealt with the issue the way they always do, with deep irony and criticism. Indeed, during the twentieth season of the show, one of the main characters, Eric Cartman, wears a black t-shirt with the white inscription “Token’s life matters” (Token being a black child in Eric’s school) in reference to the BLM merchandizing; the strange element of this picture being the fact that Cartman has been established as a self-centered, racist child. Besides, another episode deals with the controversy of Colin Kaepernick sitting or kneeling, when, before playing the national anthem, the speaker announces that people may stand, sit or kneel to honor America, leaving Kaepernick with no way to protest, probably a way for the authors’ opinion that this way of protesting, as well as all the criticism, were pointless and useless.

In the final analysis, Michael Brown’s death was not the first case of police shooting that sparked protests: Rodney King’s beating in 1992 provoked massive protests and riots. However, these riots, as destructive as they were, lasted five days and led to no lasting change. By contrast, the numerous protests, at Ferguson and nationwide, pressured many Police Departments to take significant measures to curb racial bias in the practice of law enforcement, gave visibility to black victims of other police shootings in the mainstream media, and launched the BLM movement, a new type of Civil Rights Movement. The next part of this research will focus on this movement – its creation, its impact, as well as the criticism it faces.

## **IV Black Lives Matter: A New Wave of Protests**

Though the struggle for racial equality never really stopped and some Civil Rights organizations – such as the NAACP – are still active even a century later, a decade after the end of legal segregation, this struggle became a lesser priority for the general population. However, the events at Ferguson, the response from the local and federal government, and the reactions of the population and the media, led to a revival of Civil Rights movements, in the form of Black Lives Matter. This movement, which started through social media before becoming a famous organization, embodies a renewed desire for equality and the end of racism. Yet, other movements rose in opposition, fragmenting the population once more on the question of racism, with slogans such as “All Lives Matter,” “White Lives Matter,” and “Blue Lives Matter.”

### **1 The “Black Lives Matter” Movement: A New Version of the Civil Rights Movement**

As established in the previous pages, police brutality was not a new issue that the black American community had to face. The novelty laid in the new wave of protest which rose to denounce it, taking its roots in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. From it, rose a movement called “Black Lives Matter.”

This movement started in 2013, when George Zimmerman, a member of a neighborhood watch, was acquitted for killing a year earlier an unarmed black teenager named Trayvon Martin, and Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors, two African American activists, tweeted “#BlackLivesMatter” in protest.<sup>222</sup> Though the Tweet spread and remained used even a year after its creation - for instance it was used 398 times on Twitter in July 2014 - it really became a trend after Michael Brown’s death in August of that year, when it was used more than fifty thousand times, and even more in the following months every time an unarmed black man was killed by a police officer.<sup>223</sup> It is, however, essential to note that the phrase “Black Lives Matter” has rapidly been seen as more than just a slogan or a hashtag, or the organization that will be detailed further on; it is commonly used to also describe the ideology behind it, which rallies a lot of African Americans as well as people from other ethnic groups (and even other countries), who do not necessarily participate or even completely agree with the actions undertaken by the eponymous organization. The phrase BLM has become a symbol of

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<sup>222</sup> See Annex 1 for more details on the founders of BLM and the movement itself.

<sup>223</sup> “About” section (*Black Lives Matter* website. 25 Sept. 2016). <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>

opposition to anti-black racism. Opal Tometi, one of the founders of the organization, declared:

Today, on International Human Rights Day, we recognize the current struggle is not merely for reforms of policing, anymore [sic] than the Montgomery Bus Boycott was simply about a seat on the bus. It is about the full recognition of our rights as citizens; and it is a battle for full civil, social, legal, political, economic and cultural rights as enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>224</sup>

Beyond the hashtag, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi founded a chapter-based organization, which did not start, nor ended, as a way to protest police brutality: to them, it is a way to raise awareness of the racism deeply rooted in American society, which can result in the death of unarmed black people, and a way to enforce an acknowledgement, and eventually, social change. This movement also differs from usual movements in the way that it is decentralized: even though these three women created the phrase, it is not limited to designating the actions they undertake.<sup>225</sup> Though the BLM movement also deals with the mistreatment of the black LGBTQ community, with social inequalities and other issues, this thesis focuses specifically on its involvement regarding police brutality.

As Khadijah White underlines, the BLM movement is a movement in the broad sense of the word, not just an organization: people hold signs with BLM written on them as a message, but it does not mean that they are actually part of the organization. By contrast, in the 1960s, anyone who would hold a sign reading “NAACP” or “Black Panther,” would show an affiliation to their actions.<sup>226</sup> One of the founders even prefers to describe BLM as a network, to underline the central place of communication through the internet, the decentralization of the leadership, and the long-term aspect of their cause: unlike the Civil Rights Movement, the founders of BLM are not focusing on specific legal issues with clear demands that can be met through constitutional amendments and laws, but want to address deeply rooted racism.<sup>227</sup> They are also advocating for any black person, and not just the ones without a criminal record: mass incarceration is an important topic to BLM too, and, for instance, the fact that Michael Brown allegedly stole from a convenience store a few moments before his death has no relevance to them: “for these activists, victims did not have to be perfect in order to be worthy of solidarity.”<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Opal Tometi and Gerald Lenoir, “Black Lives Matter is not a Civil Rights Movement” (*Time*, 10 Dec. 2015. Web. 26 Sept. 2016). <http://time.com/4144655/international-human-rights-day-black-lives-matter/>

<sup>225</sup> “About” section (*Black Lives Matter* website. 25 Sept. 2016). <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>; Freelon, 9; Jessica Guynn, “Meet the Woman who Coined #BlackLivesMatter” (*USA Today*, 4 March 2015. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). <http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2015/03/04/alicia-garza-black-lives-matter/24341593/>

<sup>226</sup> White, 87.

<sup>227</sup> White, 88.

<sup>228</sup> White, 89.



## **#BlackLivesMatter**

Between June 1, 2014, and May 31, 2015, #BlackLivesMatter was tweeted 4,312,599 times.<sup>229</sup> At the beginning of this timespan there were a lot of other hashtags being spread (#IfTheyGunnedMeDown, #Justice4All, #HandsUpDontShoot, etc.), and #BLM was only one among them, not yet the rallying slogan it would become. Similarly to its creation, it really became famous and heavily retweeted (and not just by activists) when a grand jury failed to indict Officer Wilson for Brown’s death on November 24, with 103,319 tweets; and it was spread even more when Officer Pantaleo was not indicted either for Eric Garner’s death on December 3. #BLM was the way for activists, journalists, celebrities and the general population to deplore what they perceived as a lack of justice when a police officer kills an unarmed black person and faces no consequences. It quickly spread beyond Twitter with signs during protests, t-shirts and hoodies (whose visibility during the protests helped make it even more popular), with other social media such as Facebook and Snapchat, and, for the rest of the world, with people from other countries showing their support through the hashtag.<sup>230</sup> Among the many general hashtags –hashtags that do not focus on one individual but are a slogan linked to an issue – which were tweeted during protests against police brutality, #BLM was the only one to focus specifically on race, on black people, while others could apply to any minority, or just about anyone (i.e. “hands up don’t shoot”).<sup>231</sup>

As shown in Figure 6, #BLM became truly used after the non-indictments of officers Wilson and Pantaleo, but the movement had already become more influential in the social media. Among tweets about police brutality against black people, BLM’s were the most spread from the beginning of September 2014 on.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Freelon, 21.

<sup>230</sup> Freelon, 33.

<sup>231</sup> Freelon, 34.

<sup>232</sup> More details on these groups and this data in the fourth subpart.

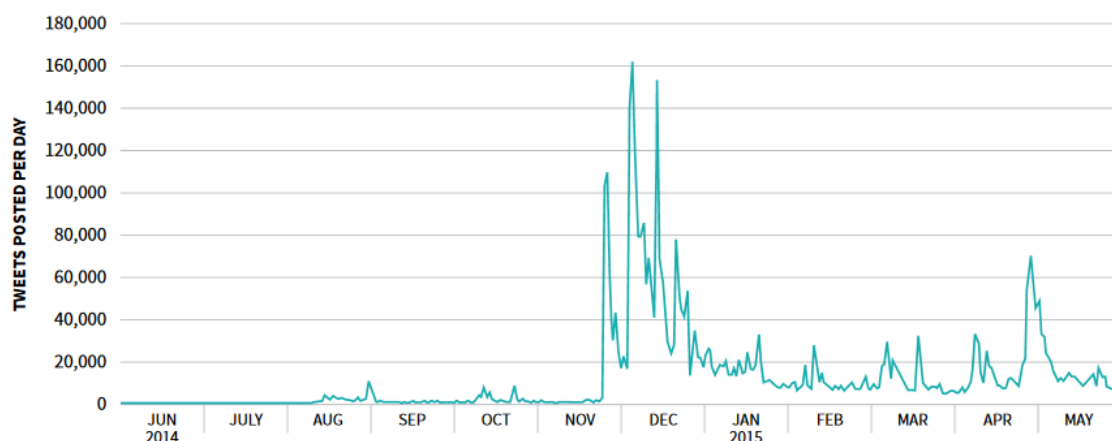


Figure 6: “Tweets Containing #BlackLivesMatter over Time,” Freelon, p. 33.

Other social movements have used the internet to spread their message and influence, such as the Zapatistas since 1994 (against the Mexican government), the Battle in Seattle of 1999 (anti-globalization protest), the Arab Spring of 2010-2012 (against authoritarian governments), the anti-SOPA/PIPA movement of 2011-2012 (bills which allegedly reduce freedom on the internet), 15M/Indignados (anti-austerity movement) and the Occupy movement (against social and economic inequality) since 2011.<sup>233</sup> BLM most likely took its inspiration from them. However the difference between these movements and BLM is the fact that police brutality is somewhat a more concrete and visual issue, with clearly identified (though sometimes arguable) victims, with mourning friends and families questioning the morality of a governmental institution. Besides, the message carried by BLM is clear - “stop killing us” - and seems to be very attainable in theory (through reforms of police training, enforcing more legal consequences, stricter recruiting, etc.), while social inequality or poverty have a less visible enemy to blame and battle (“stop poverty” or “stop inequalities” would require major reforms in national and international politics and economy). BLM’s target is very clear and defined as far as police brutality is concerned, even though it still is the result of deeply rooted racism and years of systemic depiction of the black man as a dangerous criminal, which will not disappear overnight with a protest from the collective mind. The visibility and impact of protests are also due to the fact that they happen in the United States, the most powerful country in the world, which claims to value freedom, equality and Human

<sup>233</sup> Freelon, 82; “EZLN Communiques” (*Struggle*, nd. Web. 25 Feb. 2017). <http://www.struggle.ws/mexico/ezlnco.html>; Lynsi Burton, “WTO Riots in Seattle: Fifteen Years Ago” (*Seattle Pi*, 29 Nov. 2014. Web. 25 Feb. 2017). <http://www.seattlepi.com/local/article/WTO-riots-in-Seattle-15-years-ago-5915088.php>; Joseph Micallef, “The Arab Spring: Six Years Later” (*Huffington Post*, nd. Web. 25 Feb. 2017). [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-v-micallef/the-arab-spring-six-years\\_b\\_14461896.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-v-micallef/the-arab-spring-six-years_b_14461896.html); Sarah Rainsford, “Spain’s ‘Indignants’ Lead International Protest Day” (*BBC News*, 15 Oct. 2011. Web. 25 Feb. 2017). <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-15315270>

Rights, which aims to be an example for the rest of the world, and whose language is the most widespread.

**The Civil Rights Movement and Black Lives Matter**

The following table underlines the similarities, but also the differences, between the Civil Rights Movement and the BLM movement, in order to show the evolution in protesting anti-black racism in the United States in the last sixty years.

Table 15: Similarities and Differences between the Civil Rights Movement and the BLM movement.

<b>Civil Rights Movement</b>	<b>Black Lives Matter</b>
Wide skepticism from the white part of the population as to the legitimacy and usefulness of protest, low approval rates.	
Desire for peaceful protests (MLK renown for it) which can (and have) turn violent with police confrontations	
Methods of protest: sit-ins, marches, and others linked to the issue protested (Civil Rights Movement: Freedom Rides about transportation segregation; BLM: die-ins about police killings)	
Support from black and white celebrities, politicians, athletes and community leaders.	
Centered on black, cisgender, heterosexual men	Centered on black people as human beings: inclusive of the LGBTQ community, and also puts black women under the spotlight.
A few males leading the movement (who then became targets), such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.	Many leaders, many of them female, not centralizing decision-making to one or two people (such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which was one of the few following this model at the time)
Centered on specific civil rights for African Americans, such as desegregation, no housing and work discrimination and the right to vote.	Centers on addressing the systemic and social racism in the U.S., in particular racial police brutality.
Time consuming organization with the necessity of hundreds of volunteers to spread awareness of a march or a protest, through the distribution of letters, pamphlets, phone calls, etc.	Instantaneous communication to thousands or hundred thousands of people nationwide through the internet, thanks to a few people via email, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.
Difficulty getting the mainstream media and the general population aware of what is happening – black people being kept from voting through various means (intimidation, registration, etc.), violent assaults during peaceful protests.	Easy use of technology (smartphones, internet) to spread images through social media but also through mainstream media to pressure the local and national governments.

Sources: Toni Akindele, “Here are the Stats: Black Lives Matter v. Civil Rights Movement” (*Essence*, 12 Oct. 2016. Web. 2 Apr. 2017). <http://www.essence.com/culture/black-lives-matter-civil-rights-movement>; Harris, “The Next Civil Rights Movement?”; “Gallup Poll” (*Civil Rights Movement Veterans*, May 1961. Web. 2 Apr. 2017).

[http://www.crmvet.org/docs/60s\\_crm\\_public-opinion.pdf](http://www.crmvet.org/docs/60s_crm_public-opinion.pdf); Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Gretchen Livingston, “How Americans View the Black Lives Matter Movement” (*Pew Research*, 8 July 2016. Web. 2 Apr. 2017). <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/08/how-americans-view-the-black-lives-matter-movement/>; Paul Rosenberg, “Think Black Lives Matter is ‘Divisive’? The Civil Rights Movement Split the U.S. Far more” (*Salon*, 20 July 2016. Web. 2 Apr. 2017). [http://www.salon.com/2016/07/20/think\\_black\\_lives\\_matter\\_is\\_divisive\\_the\\_civil\\_rights\\_movement\\_split\\_the\\_u\\_s\\_far\\_more/](http://www.salon.com/2016/07/20/think_black_lives_matter_is_divisive_the_civil_rights_movement_split_the_u_s_far_more/)

BLM has been seen by many as the continuation of the Civil Rights Movement. Yet, even though both movements share common characteristics, many criteria separate them, making BLM more of a new movement than just another episode of the anti-racist struggle, by being wider, reaching further, demanding more (social as well as political change) and planning to never end the list of demands until equality is reached, even if it takes decades.<sup>234</sup> Besides, the election of Barack Obama led many people to believe in changes in American society and governmental policies.

### **President Barack Obama**

As the Obamas moved into the White House in 2009, many (mostly white) Americans and foreigners thought that systemic racial issues were a thing of the past in the United States. However, as racial police brutality came under the spotlight by mid-2014, the reactions and actions of the first black president of the United States came under close scrutiny.

In a general way, President Obama expressed his support many times to the victims, to the families, but also to the BLM movement. During a Chicago town hall meeting in July 2016, he explained the stakes of the movement and the issues raised:

I know that there’s some who have criticized even the phrase ‘Black Lives Matter’ as if the notion is as if other lives don’t matter. We get ‘All Lives Matter’ or ‘Blue Lives Matter.’ I understand the point they’re trying to make. I think it’s also important for us to understand that the phrase ‘Black Lives Matter’ simply refers to the notion that there’s a specific vulnerability for African-Americans that needs to be addressed. It’s not meant to suggest that other lives don’t matter. It’s to suggest that other folks aren’t experiencing this particular vulnerability and so we shouldn’t get too caught up somehow in this notion that people who are asking for fair treatment are somehow automatically anti-police or trying to only look out for black lives as opposed to others. I think we have to be careful about playing that game because, obviously, that’s not what is intended.<sup>235</sup>

The president publicly supported celebrities who were denouncing police brutality against African Americans, such as basketballer LeBron James who wore a T-shirt with the slogan “I can’t breathe” written on it:

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<sup>234</sup> “Herstory” section (*Black Lives Matter* website, nd. Web. 2 Apr. 2017). <http://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>

<sup>235</sup> Soraya Nadia McDonald, “President Obama Clarifies his Definition of ‘Black Lives Matter’” (*The Undeclared*, 14 July 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). <https://theundefeated.com/features/president-obamas-clarifies-his-definition-of-black-lives-matter/>

LeBron is an example of a young man who has, in his own way and in a respectful way, tried to say, 'I'm part of this society, too' and focus attention. I'd like to see more athletes do that, not just around this issue, but around a range of issues.<sup>236</sup>

He also talked about the racial bias present in governmental institutions, including law enforcement, at the memorial service for the five Dallas police officers killed by a sniper during a BLM protest in July 2016, aiming to avoid retaliation against the black community.<sup>237</sup>

However, while supporting BLM and underlining that there was a systemic issue to work on, Barack Obama also showed support to police officers on many occasions and condemned violence and retaliation towards them, underlining that it had negative results on the message and the movement: "Whenever those of us who are concerned about failures of the criminal justice system attack police, you are doing a disservice to the cause."<sup>238</sup> He added that "the vast majority of police officers are doing a really good job and are trying to protect people".<sup>239</sup> On a different occasion, he gave his opinion on looting and public damages which happened in Ferguson during protests, saying he had "no sympathy at all for destroying your own communities."<sup>240</sup>

His public support to the cause caused heavy criticism on all sides. There have been claims by the National Association of Police Organizations and other groups that President Obama was "facilitating a 'war on cops'", and that his government refused to prosecute "cop killers." He was also criticized when refusing to recognize BLM as a terrorist organization after the petition filed by "We the People" in January 2017.<sup>241</sup> Every time, President Obama replied by stating that he does not condone any violence or retaliation towards police officers

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<sup>236</sup> Sandra Sobieraj Westfall, "President Obama: more Sports Stars should Speak out on Social Issues" (*People*, 18 Dec. 2014. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). <http://people.com/celebrity/president-obama-more-sports-stars-should-speak-out-on-social-issues/>

<sup>237</sup> Dave Boyer, "Obama Defends Black Lives Matter Protests at Police Memorial in Dallas" (*Washington Times*, 12 July 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/jul/12/obama-defends-black-lives-matter-protests-police-m/>

<sup>238</sup> Ayesha Rascoe and Angus Berwick, "Obama Says Attacks on Police Hurt Black Lives Matter Cause" (*Reuters*, 10 July 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-police-obama-police-idUSKCN0ZQ0MB>

<sup>239</sup> Gregory Korte, "Obama Calls for Mutual Respect from Black Lives Matter and Police" (*USA Today*, 11 July 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2016/07/10/obama-calls-mutual-respect-black-lives-matter-and-police/86917082/>

<sup>240</sup> Eric Brander, "Obama: 'No Sympathy' for Violence in Ferguson" (*CNN*, 26 Nov. 2014. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/25/politics/obama-holder-ferguson/index.html>

<sup>241</sup> P.R. Lockhart, "Police Groups Blame Obama, Black Lives Matter for 'War on Cops'" (*Mother Jones*, 8 July 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/07/police-groups-criticize-obama-black-lives-matter/>

Feliks Garcia, "President Barack Obama Rejects Petition to Designate Black Lives Matter as a Terrorist Organisation" (*Independent*, 18 July 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/black-lives-matter-barack-obama-rejects-petition-terrorist-organisation-we-the-people-a7143536.html>

and supports the BLM movement in raising awareness to this “specific vulnerability for African-Americans”.<sup>242</sup> Timing was sometimes crucial to Obama’s critics, as some of his public speeches came shortly before an attack on police officers, which fuelled discontent.<sup>243</sup>

A black Dallas police officer also added to the controversy by filing a lawsuit against BLM and President Obama – as well as Reverend Al Sharpton, Louis Farrakhan (Nation of Islam leader), Hilary Clinton, and activist George Soros – for inciting violence among the black community, by emphasizing that “they are under attack.”<sup>244</sup> On yet another level, criticism rose against President Obama from parts of the black community who consider that he did not do enough for the cause. For instance, some argue that it was regrettable that nothing really changed for the black community under his presidency and that it was one of the reasons why the need for a BLM movement emerged, and will surely remain strong under the Trump administration.<sup>245</sup> Others argue that Obama did very little outside of speeches, which he mostly used to ease the black population.<sup>246</sup> BLM cofounder Alicia Garza deplores that he mainly focused on the violence experienced by black men and did not focus on black women as well.<sup>247</sup>

As every politician, President Obama did not manage to get a unanimous support, either from the police and its supporters, or from the BLM movement and the black community. Even if he advocated for both sides, recognizing the issue of police brutality against black people and condemning violent retaliation towards law enforcement, for some he did too much by publicly supporting the BLM movement which they deemed was anti-police and/or anti-white, and for others he did not use his position as head of the government enough to ensure a long-overdue systemic change. Pleasing such a heterogeneous population is complicated at best, especially on such a historically sensitive issue, and for many the fact that

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<sup>242</sup> Idem.

<sup>243</sup> Idem.

<sup>244</sup> “Dallas Cop Files Lawsuit against Black Lives Matter, Obama” (*Fox News*, 18 Sept. 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2016/09/18/dallas-cop-files-lawsuit-against-black-lives-matter-obama.html>  
**N.B.:** there is no follow up on the lawsuit in the media yet.

<sup>245</sup> Danielle Fuentes Morgan, “Obama and Black Lives Matter: an Epilogue” (*Al Jazeera*, 27 Jan. 2017. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/01/obama-black-lives-matter-epilogue-170126073428660.html>

<sup>246</sup> Patrisse Cullors, “Obama Says Black Lives Matter. But He doesn’t Ensure They do” (*The Guardian*, 16 July 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/16/obama-black-lives-matter-doesnt-ensure-they-do>; Michael Denzel Smith, “How President Obama Failed Black Lives Matter” (*The Washington Post*, 21 July 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/07/21/how-president-obama-failed-black-lives-matter/?utm\\_term=.43b217448620](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/07/21/how-president-obama-failed-black-lives-matter/?utm_term=.43b217448620)

<sup>247</sup> Alicia Garza, “Black Lives Matter Co-Founder: Obama Overlooked Black Women” (*Black Lives Matter*, nd. Web. 28 Apr. 2017). <http://blacklivesmatter.com/black-lives-matter-co-founder-obama-overlooked-black-women/>

Obama somewhat remained on both sides and did not achieve any forceful change tainted his legacy as first black president of the United States.

### **Other forms of Protest**

Though BLM is probably the best-known way of protesting police brutality against black people these last few years, it is not the only one. Other ways of protesting have been put in place. Many hashtags have become slogans used on signs during protests, but also used on t-shirts, hoodies and other types of merchandizing (phone cases, stickers, tote bags, etc.). Some merchandize sellers donate their profits to organizations or associations linked to the BLM movement, or which help the black community in some way.<sup>248</sup> By wearing such clothes, people bring offline awareness to the issue and publicly show their support to the cause. There is also merchandizing created to support the ALM, and BlueLM movements

Celebrities – actors, singers, artists, community leaders, athletes, etc. – have always been instrumental in advertising causes, movements and charities in and through the mainstream media, and to the general population. Police brutality against African Americans is no exception. Many black celebrities have used their notoriety to sensitize people about this issue; among others, black NBA athletes LeBron James, Carmelo Anthony, Chris Paul and Dwayne Wade used the annual ESPY Awards show, which recognizes sports achievements, to address a message of peace and a plea to end racist police brutality to the viewers.<sup>249</sup> American football player Colin Kaepernick decided to sit or kneel during anthems, as he was “not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color”; he was joined by many other football players and athletes.<sup>250</sup> In the popular arts, singer Beyoncé Knowles featured the mothers of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and Eric Garner, holding photographs of their sons in a film set to launch her album *Lemonade*; posted a message on her official website addressing the issue of unpunished racist police brutality; and her performance during the Half-time of the launch of the Super Bowl in 2016

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<sup>248</sup> “About” section (*Merch For the Movement* website. Web. 25 Feb. 2017).

<https://www.merchforthemovement.org/pages/about-us>

<sup>249</sup> Breaking Sports, “ESPYS 2016 – LeBron James, Carmelo, CP3 and Wade’s Powerful Message” (*Youtube*, 13 July 2016. Video. Web. 23 Apr. 2017). [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDf\\_uzHF5n4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDf_uzHF5n4); Melissa Chan, “Read LeBron James and Carmelo Anthony’s Powerful Speech on Race at the ESPY Awards” (*Time*, 14 July 2016. Web. 23 Apr. 2017), <http://time.com/4406289/lebron-james-carmelo-anthony-espy-awards-transcript/>

<sup>250</sup> Steve Wyche, “Colin Kaepernick Explains Why He Sat during National Anthem” (*NFL*, 28 Aug. 2016. Web. 23 Apr. 2017). <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000691077/article/colin-kaepernick-explains-protest-of-national-anthem>; Mark Sandritter, “A Timeline of Colin Kaepernick’s National Anthem Protest and the Athletes who Joined Him” (*SB Nation* 6 Nov. 2016. Web. 23 Apr. 2017). <http://www.sbnation.com/2016/9/11/12869726/colin-kaepernick-national-anthem-protest-seahawks-brandon-marshall-nfl>

was widely perceived as a homage to the Black Panthers, BLM and other iconic figures of the Civil Rights Movement or black culture.<sup>251</sup> Many other celebrities have shown their support to the movement through tweets, public statements and speeches, songs, roles they accept on TV or cinema, etc., such as actor Jesse Williams who played in *Selma* and the documentary *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter Movement* which he also produced. Other actors such as Kerry Washington or Rashida Jones were also very vocal on the subject, singer Kendrick Lamar's song "Alright" was presented as the new black national anthem and sung during protests, KXNG Crooked dedicated a song to Eric Garner entitled "I Can't Breathe," and many others like singer Katy Perry tweeted about the issue (and who is the person with the most Twitter followers in the world).<sup>252</sup>

In addition, various websites have been launched regarding the issue at hand, focusing on the victims and their families, police brutality, police accountability, reforming the police, protesting, or raising awareness. For instance Campaign Zero aims to stop police brutality through reforming the police; it works as a database of police brutality, issues reports and proposes solutions.<sup>253</sup> There was also Rise Up October, a three-day mobilization which took place between October 22 and 24, 2015, which aimed at protesting police brutality.<sup>254</sup> The Say Her Name movement is not entirely separated from BLM, but was considered important as it focuses on black women victims of police brutality, including queer black women, and not just black men who tend to be more often the center of the focus.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> "Beyoncé Gay Marriage: Bey Shows Support for Gay Marriage" (*Vibe*, 28 March 2013. Web. 8 June 2017). <http://www.vibe.com/2013/03/beyonce-gay-marriage-bey-shows-support-gay-marriage/>; Beyoncé website (9 June 2016). <http://www.beyonce.com>; Ariana Bacle, "Michael Brown's Mother Talks Beyoncé's 'Lemonade': 'They Wanted me to Look Regal'" (*EW*, 11 May 2016. Web. 8 June 2017). <http://ew.com/article/2016/05/11/michael-brown-mother-lemonade-beyonce/>; "Beyoncé's Super Bowl Performance: Why Was It so Significant?" (*BBC*, 8 Feb. 2016. Web. 20 Feb. 2017). <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-35520636>

<sup>252</sup> Aisha Harris, "Has Kendrick Lamar Recorded the New Black National Anthem?" (*Slate*, 3 Aug. 2015. Web. 8 June 2017).

[http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2015/08/black\\_lives\\_matter\\_protesters\\_chant\\_kendrick\\_lamar\\_s\\_alright\\_what\\_makes.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2015/08/black_lives_matter_protesters_chant_kendrick_lamar_s_alright_what_makes.html)  
<http://www.mtv.com/news/2017734/kxng-crooked-tupac-eric-garner-i-cant-breathe/>; Rob Markman, "KXNG Crooked Channels Tupac on his Eric Garner Dedication 'I can't Breathe'" (*MTV*, 5 Dec. 2014. Web. 8 June 2017). [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/jesse-williams-stay-woke-documentary-black-lives-matter-us\\_5739516ee4b077d4d6f3688a](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/jesse-williams-stay-woke-documentary-black-lives-matter-us_5739516ee4b077d4d6f3688a); Rachael Davis, "Ten Non-Black Celebrities who have Spoken out in Support of Black Lives Matter" (*Essence*, 12 July 2016. Web. 8 June 2017). <http://www.essence.com/life/non-black-celebrities-who-support-black-lives-matter#972866>; Freelon, 24.

<sup>253</sup> *Join Campaign Zero* website (30 Mar. 2017). <https://www.joincampaignzero.org/>

<sup>254</sup> Nadeen Shaker, "This Injustice has Taken Genocidal Proportions: Why Cornel West and Carl Dix are Rising up against Police Brutality" (*Salon*, 21 Oct. 2015. Web. 30 Mar. 2017). [http://www.salon.com/2015/10/21/this\\_injustice\\_has\\_taken\\_genocidal\\_proportions\\_why\\_cornel\\_west\\_and\\_carl\\_dix\\_are\\_rising\\_up\\_against\\_police\\_brutality/](http://www.salon.com/2015/10/21/this_injustice_has_taken_genocidal_proportions_why_cornel_west_and_carl_dix_are_rising_up_against_police_brutality/)

<sup>255</sup> "Say her Name" (*The African American Policy Forum*, nd. Web. 30 Mar. 2017). <http://www.aapf.org/sayhername/>



## Criticism

With the protests at Ferguson and the rise of BLM, criticism rose too, from people who disagreed with, for instance, the notion of black people being more likely to be victims of police brutality, with every death protested being presented as a result of police brutality and not just an officer doing his/her job and/or protecting his/her life, with the methods used (riots, looting, protests, etc.). One of the arguments the most frequently used by anti-BLM supporters is the fact that a great majority of murders of black Americans are committed by black Americans, thus questioning the validity of their protest since police killings are only relatively few in comparison. Besides, activists have been called liars by the opposition when multiple witnesses claimed that Michael Brown never said “hands up, don’t shoot” which had become a slogan denouncing police brutality.<sup>256</sup> Moreover, as seen before, a Harvard study stating that non-whites were not more likely to get shot by police officers than whites has been quoted in several mainstream news media.<sup>257</sup> BLM is considered by some as an anti-white movement, and even a terrorist group.<sup>258</sup> The movement has also been accused of anti-Semitism, taking a stand against Israel: some groups part of BLM accuse Israel of apartheid and genocide on the Palestinian people.<sup>259</sup>

In addition, individuals and organizations filed various lawsuits against BLM and other black community leaders, such as Sgt. Demetrick Pennie, from the Dallas Police Department, filed a suit against BLM and others for inciting violence against police officers, after a sniper shot and killed five Dallas officers on July 7, 2016.<sup>260</sup> A lawsuit was also filed in December 2015 by Mall of America for protesting on private property, but was voluntarily dropped by

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<sup>256</sup> Kelly Riddell, “The Lies of Black Lives Matter” (*The Washington Times*, 18 July 2016. Web. 3 Apr. 2017).

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/jul/18/lies-black-lives-matter/>

<sup>257</sup> Valerie Richardson, “No Racial Bias in Police Shootings, Study by Harvard Professor Shows” (*The Washington Times*, 11 July 2016. Web. 3 Apr. 2017).

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/jul/11/no-racial-bias-police-shootings-study-harvard-prof/>

<sup>258</sup> Naomi Lim, “Rudy Giuliani: Black Lives Matter ‘Inherently Racist’” (*CNN*, 11 July 2016. Web. 3 Apr. 2017).

<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/11/politics/rudy-giuliani-black-lives-matter-inherently-racist/>; Walaa Chahine, “Labeling Black Lives Matter as a Terrorist Organization is not Only Unjust, It’s Dangerous” (*The Huffington Post*, 15 July 2016. Web. 3 Apr. 2017). [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/walaa-chahine/labeling-blm-as-a-terrori\\_b\\_10931812.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/walaa-chahine/labeling-blm-as-a-terrori_b_10931812.html)

<sup>259</sup> Alan M. Dershowitz, “Black Lives Matter Must Rescind Anti-Israel Declaration” (*The Boston Globe*, 12 Aug. 2016. Web. 3 Apr. 2017). <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/columns/2016/08/12/black-lives-matter-must-rescind-anti-israel-declaration/EHDYV3gNLwrTTwfp0JA8QN/story.html>

<sup>260</sup> Jessica Chasmar, “Dallas Police Officer Sues Black Lives Matter, Obama for Stoking ‘Race War’” (*The Washington Times*, 19 Sept. 2016. Web. 22 June 2017).

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/sep/19/demetrick-pennie-dallas-police-officer-sues-black-/>

“Dallas Cop Files Lawsuit against Black Lives Matter, Obama” (*Fox News*, 18 Sept. 2016. Web. 23 June 2017).

<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2016/09/18/dallas-cop-files-lawsuit-against-black-lives-matter-obama.html>

the mall, as they judged that the message had been transmitted since no more protests were due to take place there.<sup>261</sup>

However, those lawsuits, criticisms and skepticism were just the first wave; a strong opposition rose through a few movements, using a similar phrasing: All Lives Matter, White Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter.

## 2 Other Lives Matter

Several movements have emerged in response to the BLM movement, claiming in a general way that “other lives matter.” While there have been people (private citizens, politician and celebrities) who have publicly expressed their opposition to certain race sensitive issues and events, such as the protests at Ferguson, Mo, it never took the proportion of the ALM, WLM, and BlueLM movements since the end of the Civil Rights era (except for the KKK). So with this new Civil Rights Movement, came a similarly shaped response. Many American citizens felt that BLM either exaggerated the issue, had no right to protest against the police, claimed that black lives mattered more than police officer lives or others, and/or incited violence towards law enforcement and white people. From these thoughts emerged a few related movements which gained the public’s attention (ALM, WLM, BlueLM), but also a multitude of others which have no link to the racial issue, but used the slogan “X Lives Matter” to promote their cause.

### **All Lives Matter**

A popular movement created in response to BLM is All Lives Matter, which appeared on social media soon after #BLM became trendy. In theory, this slogan does not dismiss the value of black lives, but insists on the fact that not just black lives matter, underlining that police lives matter as well, and that every human life should matter equally. However, the ambiguity lies in the fact that this slogan is often used to criticize BLM, and many argue that while all lives should matter equally, the issue of unpunished police brutality affects the black community more particularly than others. Thus repressing the BLM movement with the slogan ALM means silencing this issue again, and helping the status quo by attracting the

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<sup>261</sup> Randy Furst, “Mall of America Drops Lawsuit against Black Lives Matter Activists” (*Star Tribune*, 1 Mar. 2016. Web. 23 June 2017).  
<http://www.startribune.com/mall-of-america-drops-lawsuit-against-black-lives-matter-activists/370684301/>

population’s attention on another matter.<sup>262</sup> A cartoonist used a house on fire as an analogy to explain the issue BLM activists have with the ALM movement.

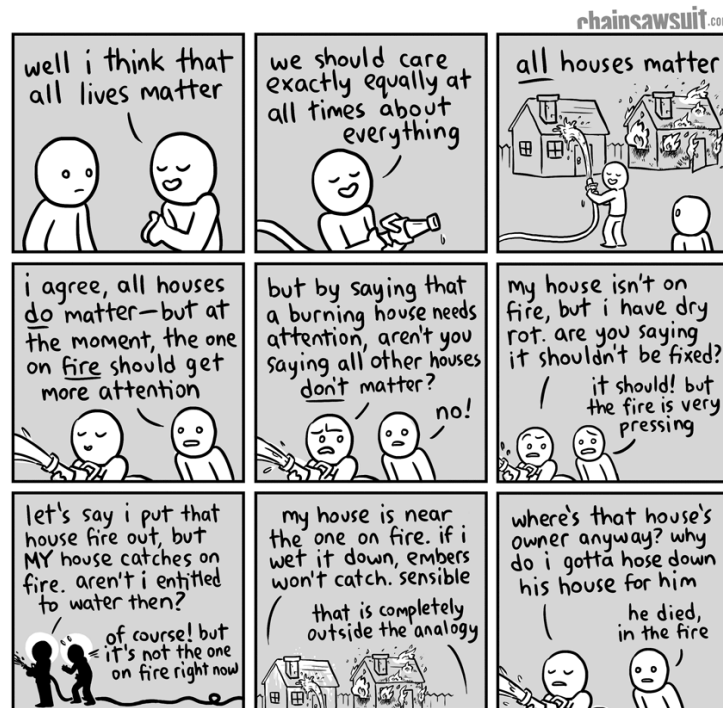


Figure 7: “All Houses Matter” by Kris Straub <<http://chainsawsuit.com/comic/archive/2016/07/07/all-houses-matter-the-extended-cut/>>

While some claim that only white people agree with ALM, social media and the news have shown that it was not the case.<sup>263</sup>

A number of black people as well as people from other minorities do agree with the ALM slogan for diverse reasons. And that is maybe the most complex aspect of the ALM movement: its heterogeneity. Depending on people’s origins or ideologies, all ALM followers cannot be defined the same way, but belong to a spectrum of ideologies. These followers are:

- People who agree with BLM but also use ALM to be all-inclusive.
- People who understand and agree with the message, but fear the social repercussions of using or supporting #BLM: they, or the people around them, believe that #BLM is too strong a statement, or/and that it would lessen their support to other communities and police officers who have not used brutality. #ALM is a safe alternative in order to

<sup>262</sup> David Theo Goldberg, “Why ‘Black Lives Matter’ Because All Lives don’t Matter in America” (*The Huffington Post*, 25 Sept. 2016. Web. 1 Oct. 2016).

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-theo-goldberg/why-black-lives-matter\\_b\\_8191424.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-theo-goldberg/why-black-lives-matter_b_8191424.html)

<sup>263</sup> Jesse Damiani, “Every Time You Say ‘All Lives Matter’ You are Being an Accidental Racist” (*The Huffington Post*, 15 July 2016. Web. 3 Apr. 2017).

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jesse-damiani/every-time-you-say-all-li\\_1\\_b\\_11004780.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jesse-damiani/every-time-you-say-all-li_1_b_11004780.html)

show support to any victim, black ones included, without having to justify themselves or face anger from other people (except from some #BLM supporters).

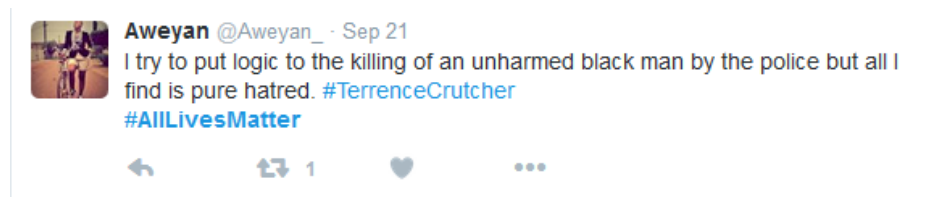


Figure 8: Tweet, 21 Sept. 2016 <[https://twitter.com/Aweyan\\_/status/778650492100571136](https://twitter.com/Aweyan_/status/778650492100571136)>

- People who understand the BLM movement, but disagree with the actions taken by the BLM organization.



Figure 9: Tweet, 30 Apr. 2017 <[https://twitter.com/Bull3tpr00f\\_/status/858784378834604032](https://twitter.com/Bull3tpr00f_/status/858784378834604032)>

- People who dislike the focus of the movement: they do not like the emphasis placed on black people; and want to put it on everyone, underlining that no skin color is more important than another. They use the hashtag to support unarmed black people who suffer from police brutality too, and believe that they are more including, and preaching for equality.
- People who use the slogan to promote other causes, not linked to police brutality, such as pro-life movements, feminist movements, etc.
- People who interpret the message differently: they believe that BLM advocates that black lives matter more than other lives or police lives specifically.
- People who do not believe that there is a racial issue: they do not believe that black people are particularly victims of police brutality, and/or believe that the force used by officers is justified or justifiable.



Figure 10: Tweet, 18 June 2017. <[https://twitter.com/w\\_terrence/status/876215333278937088](https://twitter.com/w_terrence/status/876215333278937088)>

- People who disagree with the message: racist people who identify with ALM rather than WLM in order not to be called racists, or may not fully realize their prejudice against black people.



Figure 11: Tweet, 1 May 2017 <<https://twitter.com/StrawLivesMattr/status/858984198387912705>>

Another particularity of ALM is the fact that it only remains an ideological movement, and no organization or association has been (successfully) created. There have been several demonstrations with people wearing signs or t-shirts reading “All Lives Matter,” but they often took place alongside BLM protests.<sup>264</sup> There is no clear leadership(s), no real action undertaken, contrarily to BLM, WLM and BlueLM. This is either due to the heterogeneity of the supporters or due to a lack of commitment on their behalf or simply due to the vagueness and lack of an actual purpose of the slogan. For all these reasons, this movement remained mostly on social media and did not find a place in the real world like the others.

### White Lives Matter

White Lives Matter is a drastically different response than ALM, since it only focuses on one part of the population, instead of trying to be all-inclusive. While some supporters of the

<sup>264</sup> Brendan Gauthier, “Watch: ‘We’re all Brothers and Sisters’: Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter Activist Hug It out in Dallas” (*Salon*, 12 July 2016. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). [http://www.salon.com/2016/07/12/watch\\_were\\_all\\_brothers\\_and\\_sisters\\_black\\_lives\\_matter\\_and\\_all\\_lives\\_matter\\_activists\\_hug\\_it\\_out\\_in\\_dallas/](http://www.salon.com/2016/07/12/watch_were_all_brothers_and_sisters_black_lives_matter_and_all_lives_matter_activists_hug_it_out_in_dallas/)

movement believe that the BLM movement preaches violence against white people and especially white police officers, some go as far for some as talking about a “white genocide” (not only due to actual killings but also to miscegenation and immigration of people of color spreading their culture in the United States), and others openly affirm their white supremacist ideology.<sup>265</sup> Consequently, the group has been judged as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.<sup>266</sup>



Figure 12: Tweet, 20 June 2017. <<https://twitter.com/wginfonetorg/status/877235941336862721>>

A website has been created under this name and focuses on issues such as what they call the white genocide, Zionism, “Islamation,” miscegenation, etc.<sup>267</sup> Though the website’s creators do not want to be associated with white supremacists, their discourse shows many similarities with supremacist ideology, such as the fear of the erasure of European descent genes, and, at best, distrust in other races or non-Christian religions. Thus, it is understandable that this movement should be so controversial, and that people should express more discreetly their belief in or allegiance to it.

### **Blue Lives Matter**

Blue Lives Matter is yet an entirely different response to BLM, because the question of race is often (though not always) secondary or even non-existent for some of its followers. They mainly focus on the violence and the life-threatening situations that police officers (and

<sup>265</sup> See Annex 3 for more details.

<sup>266</sup> “White Lives Matter” (*Southern Poverty Law Center*, nd. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/white-lives-matter>

<sup>267</sup> See Annex 3 for more details.

sometimes firefighters) have to face while on duty, often including all races and not just white officers. Somehow, this group does not directly criticize BLM the way ALM or WLM can, but aims to offer another narrative, another issue to focus on, partly in order to curb the criticism law enforcement officers have been under since the protests at Ferguson and the BLM movement came under the spotlight.



Figure 13: Tweet, 2 July 2017 <<https://twitter.com/MichaelHBlank/status/881483409670975488>>

Other followers, however, focus on the legitimacy of police shootings and put the blame more easily on the suspects rather than on the officers.

There is also a group of BlueLM followers who do heavily criticize BLM, for the violence that has erupted in protests, for the deaths of police officers as retaliation for police brutality, and for depicting police officers as racist and violent in a general way. For instance, County Sheriff David Clarke Jr., who is a black man, has compared BLM to the KKK, and to terrorist groups.<sup>268</sup>

The biggest organization linked to this movement is Blue Lives Matter New York City, which focuses on helping injured police officers and their families, as well as families of officers killed on duty.<sup>269</sup> Other than the name resemblance, this organization does not show any opposition to the BLM movement per se, but focuses on showing that law enforcement

<sup>268</sup> Tom Kertscher, “Pro-Sheriff David Clarke Group Says Clarke Called Black Lives Matter Hate Group, Terrorist Movement” (*Politifact*, 17 Apr. 2017. Web. 2 May 2017).

<http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/statements/2017/apr/17/sheriff-david-clarke-us-senate/pro-sheriff-david-clarke-group-says-clarke-called-/>; Janell Ross, “Blue Lives Matter and Other Extreme Positions Delivered by Black Speakers at the RNC” (*The Washington Post*, 19 July 2016. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/07/19/blue-lives-matter-and-other-extreme-positions-delivered-by-black-speakers-at-the-rnc/>

<sup>269</sup> See annex 4 for more details.

officers are victims of violence and killings as well, and honors “good” officers, who never abused their badge.

A media company was also launched with a website named after the slogan by active and retired police officers to raise awareness of the dangers of the job and to increase public support. Unlike the organization, the website is clearly against BLM: “the media catered to movements such as Black Lives Matter, whose goal was the vilification of law enforcement. Criminals who rioted and victimized innocent citizens were further given legitimacy by the media as “protesters.”<sup>270</sup> The articles on the website insist that the death of Michael Brown was justified, and thus that the BLM movement is not. The website also allows for donations and membership and has a merchandizing store; the money collected is used to finance equipment for law enforcement officers and support to the families of officers killed in action.<sup>271</sup>

## **X Lives Matter**

With the visibility that BLM phrasing gained on social media and the news, many causes used a similar phrasing for promotion. For instance, pro-life groups (including religious groups) have used the slogan “Babies’ Lives Matter” or “Unborn Lives Matter” on many occasions to condemn the right of abortion.<sup>272</sup>

Latino activists use “Brown Lives Matter” to raise awareness of racist police brutality as well as other issues this community is more vulnerable to, such as deportation, legal immigration restrictions, etc.<sup>273</sup>

Similarly, “Muslim Lives Matter” has also been used, especially to underline the difference between terrorist extremists and Muslim people, who do not want to be associated with the former and denounce acts of violence and hatred towards their community.<sup>274</sup> “Native Lives Matter” in Canada denounces police brutality as well as many murders towards this community.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> “About Us” section (*Blue Lives Matter*, nd. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). <https://bluelivesmatter.blue/organization/>

<sup>271</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>272</sup> Steven Ertelt, “Black Pastor Slams Abortion: ‘You Can’t say Black Lives Matter When Black Baby Lives Don’t Matter’” (*Life News*, 23 Aug. 2016. Web. 3 Oct. 2016). <http://www.lifenews.com/2016/08/23/black-pastor-slams-abortion-you-cant-say-black-lives-matter-when-black-baby-lives-dont-matter/>

<sup>273</sup> Hector Luis Alamo, “Brown Lives (Now) Matter” (*Latino Rebels*, 6 Oct. 2015. Web. 3 Oct. 2016). <http://www.latinorebels.com/2015/10/06/brown-lives-now-matter/>; David A. Love, “Brown Lives Matter, Muslim Lives Matter” (*The Huffington Post*, 27 April 2015. Web. 3 Oct. 2016). [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-a-love/brown-lives-matter-muslim\\_b\\_6757280.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-a-love/brown-lives-matter-muslim_b_6757280.html)

<sup>274</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>275</sup> “Native Lives Matter” page (*Facebook*. Web. 3 Oct. 2016). [https://www.facebook.com/pg/nativelivesmatter1/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/nativelivesmatter1/about/?ref=page_internal)



“Women’s Lives Matter” denounces many things: gender inequality (work and social discrimination), police brutality (and especially sexual assaults), domestic violence, sexual harassment and assault, etc., depending on various groups using the slogan.<sup>276</sup>

“Old Lives Matter” has been used to raise awareness about seniors who were being evicted from their accommodations.<sup>277</sup>

Many other communities or groups have used the phrase such as the LGBTQ community, religious communities, other racial minorities, to defend the handicapped, the poor, illegal immigrants, prisoners, recovering addicts (and the discrimination they face) etc.

Other movements not related to race or human life use the phrase as well, such as “Animals’ Lives Matter” and other movements specific to one animal, to promote veganism or the protection of endangered species.<sup>278</sup>

If many causes use this phrase, a profusion of other XLM slogans were created, not in response to BLM or to racist police brutality, nor to promote a cause, but in a derisive way. Thus, one may encounter memes, Facebook pages, or Twitter hashtags about how beard lives matter, orange lives matter (about people who tend to turn orange-ish when tanned, like President Trump), man bun lives matter, annoying lives matter, Mario’s lives matter (the video game heroic plumber), Kenny’s lives matter (the *South Park* character who used to die in every episode), etc.

The spread of the use of the phrase XLM is quite understandable, as it is easy to remember, to abbreviate and it holds a powerful meaning. However, the fact that so many different groups used it lessened the initial effect produced: the phrase was created in order to underline that even though this statement should be evident, it is not the case; yet the fact that it is used for anything and everything has made it a mainstream slogan with lesser impact, since the issue of unarmed black people being killed ends up on the same level as black cats being less adopted than other cats because of superstitions.

Though protests and the BLM movement have been said to have divided the American population, it is quite visible that the opposition itself is deeply divided too. Even within a movement, heterogeneous groups can be found with varying ideologies and course of actions,

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<sup>276</sup> Louise Harrison, “Women’s Lives Matter” (*Left Unity*, 9 Sept. 2016. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). <http://leftunity.org/womens-lives-matter/>; “Herstory” section (*Black Lives Matter* website. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). <http://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>; Phyllis Zagano, “Women’s Lives Matter” (*National Catholic Reporter*, 10 Aug. 2015. Web. 1 Oct. 2016). <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/just-catholic/womens-lives-matter>

<sup>277</sup> Steve Lopez, “‘Old Lives Matter,’ Say Seniors Fighting Eviction” (*Press Reader*, 8 Jan. 2017. Web. 25 Feb. 2017). <https://www.pressreader.com/usa/los-angeles-times/20170108/281728384200774>

<sup>278</sup> Melanie Arter, “Humane Society Official: Animal Lives Matter” (*CNS News*, 1 Sept. 2016. Web. 25 Feb. 2017). <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/melanie-hunter/humane-society-official-animal-lives-matter>

which reveals the complexity of addressing the issue in today's American society, with its multiple populations, cultures, and histories.

### 3 The Impact of Social Media

BLM and its opposing movements all started through social media, as people wanted to express their opinion on the deaths of black people killed by the police. Of course, the potential of social media has been valued and witnessed before August 2014. However, the impact of social media did not take the same form before Ferguson. In the book *The Dragonfly Effect*, published in 2010, the authors describe the four elements through which social media drive social change, using the analogy of the four wings of the dragonfly, which allows this “benign creature” to “propel itself in any direction – with tremendous speed and force”.<sup>279</sup> According to them, these four essential elements are:

- “Focus”: “identify a single concrete and measurable goal.”
- “Grab the attention” by being original, visible to be differentiated from the other causes or movements.
- “Engage” by provoking deep empathy through an authentic and personal story.
- “Take action” by enabling others to work with you, and in a way, for you, by giving people easy goals to achieve first, the tools to succeed, and the desire to recruit others.<sup>280</sup>

Though the authors give many examples in which this analogy is accurate, it cannot quite be applied to the BLM movement. For starters, the families of the victims are not the ones who made their deaths so well known on social media, but a network of people from the black community did. Then, the “focus” part is less measurable and concrete in the case of BLM than in the cases analyzed in the book: in the book, the authors give the example of a young man seeking a bone marrow transplant to cure his leukemia; while the number of compatible donors was one in twenty thousand, it still was measurable, and his goal would be reached once he would find a single compatible donor.<sup>281</sup> Police brutality, however, is more complex to measure and identify, because apart from the ostensible wounds and deaths, other forms of brutality are not obvious, such as racial profiling, racist slurs, some sexual assaults, etc.

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<sup>279</sup> Jennifer Aaker, Andy Smith, and Carlye Adler, *The Dragonfly Effect: Quick, Effective, and Powerful ways to Use Social Media to Drive Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 17.

<sup>280</sup> Aaker, 38-39.

<sup>281</sup> Aaker, 30-32.

Besides, even for deaths at the hands of a police officer, it can be complex to determine whether they resulted from police training, human error or police brutality, as the low rate of indictments and their contestation by the public show. Thus, the process necessary to reach the end of police brutality is more complex and the result is not as definitive as finding a compatible bone marrow. The “grab the attention” part is, however, still essential: as will be detailed later, the BLM movement became quite visible on social media, the names of the victims became trends, and original hashtags such as #BLM or #IfTheyGunnedMeDown appeared. This visibility was rather quickly transferred to mainstream media thanks to the protests. The “engage” part is also different: though the victims have no personal relations to the leaders of the BLM movement nor to some influential people on social media who helped spread their story, their stories are personal to them, as members of the black community, as minorities, or simply as human beings, which is what many people on social media tried to emphasize, while the authors assume that people need to be moved and/or shocked in order to care about a cause that does not concern them. Finally, the “take action” part remains somewhat similar: while families asked people for help (signing petitions, creating organizations, etc.) people often acted on their own, by organizing vigils and protests often without leaders (especially in Ferguson and in the beginning), and by selling merchandizing, etc.

So the social movement that started from the social media does not conform to what was expected and efficient before 2014, except for people working together, which underlines once more its uniqueness in this day and age.

Thus, in order to assess the role of social media in the growth of the movement, this section will focus on Facebook and Twitter: researching Facebook pages and groups will help determine the reach of BLM and its opposing movements on the online American population, before analyzing the use of hashtags on Twitter during the protests at Ferguson and afterward. Facebook and Twitter are two of the most used social media in the world and in the United States. Both opened for the public in 2006, are used worldwide, and allow people to communicate. The following analysis will focus on both, and will present their importance in the issue at hand. Facebook is the most often visited social network, which makes it an obvious choice; however, even if Twitter is only ninth, it was a relevant social medium to analyze: the ones ranking above it are either private ways of communication (Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, WeChat, QQ), social media not popular in the U.S. (Chinese QZone), networks used mostly by a very young population (Tumblr), or media that do not allow for an

actual verbal communication (Instagram). Besides, as will be seen later on, Twitter played a special and central role during the protests in Ferguson.

The following table compares the online use of Facebook and Twitter.

Table 16: Use of Facebook and Twitter.

	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Twitter</b>
Number of accounts created	More than 2 billion	1.3 billion
American internet users registered in 2017	79%	24%
Monthly active users in the world in 2017	1,940 million	328 million
Average number of “friends” or “followers” by person in 2016	338	208
Average time spent per visit	20 minutes	-
Tweets/status updates per day in 2016	55 million	500 million
World’s leaders (or governments) registered	87%	83%

Sources: “The Top 20 Valuable Facebook Statistics – Updated May 2017” (*Zephoria*, 8 May 2017. Web. 1 June 2017). <<https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/>>; “Top 10 Twitter Statistics – May 2017” (*Zephoria*, nd. Web. 1 June 2017). <<https://zephoria.com/twitter-statistics-top-ten/>>; Dave Chaffrey, “Global Social Media Research Summary 2017” (*Smart Insights*, 27 April 2017. Web. 1 June 2017). <<http://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>>; Alex York, “47 Social Media Statistics to Bookmark for 2017” (*Sprout Social*, 27 Feb. 2017. Web. 1 June 2017). <<https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-statistics/>>; Kit Smith, “Marketing: 47 Facebook Statistics for 2016” (*Brandwatch*, 12 May 2016. Web. 1 June 2017). <<https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/47-facebook-statistics-2016/>>; Kit Smith, “44 Twitter Statistics for 2016” (*Brandwatch*, 17 May 2016. Web. 1 June 2017). <<https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/44-twitter-stats-2016/>>; “World Leaders on Facebook 2016” (*Twiplomacy*, 18 Jan. 2016. Web. 1 June 2017). <<http://twiplomacy.com/blog/world-leaders-on-facebook-2016/>>.

Numbers have to be considered with caution: at least 81 million Facebook profiles have been catalogued as fake, one person may have several Twitter or Facebook accounts, many companies have a Facebook or a Twitter account, and only about 550 million people on the website or application have ever sent a Tweet (against 1.3 billion registered).<sup>282</sup> These numbers show that a comparison between the two social networks would be disproportionate, besides the fact that they have very different types of usage. Twitter is more individual oriented (one may follow a person without reciprocity) and aims for short statements, right to the point, possibly accompanied by photos, gifs, videos or website links and retweets of other users; it also focuses on the immediacy of an event, through “live tweeting” a situation, which often leads to multiple tweets in a short time span. On the other hand, Facebook is more

<sup>282</sup> Idem.

community oriented (the term “friend” implies reciprocity, and family and personal relationships can be indicated): it offers basically the same possibilities as Twitter, but also allows long statements, private and group conversations, creation of public or private events, etc. For these reasons, they will be analyzed separately and never really compared.

It is important to keep in mind that all the numbers and statistics given about those two social media are worldwide, and do not concern only the United States, except when stated otherwise. Thus, if two million people like a page or tweet a hashtag, it is impossible to know how many of them are American, though it is likely that if the page or tweet is directly related to the US, mostly Americans would react to it.

## **Facebook**

The following results are the fruit of a search made on Facebook on May 17, 2017, using specific key words. The results were counted one by one, since Facebook’s search engine does not offer relevant filters (exact keywords, relevance, date, popularity, etc.), nor indications (number of results found, percentage of keywords used in the result, etc.). These results include pages or groups containing the exact keywords, and their variations (with syntax or grammatical errors, no spaces between the words and extra words), but do not include the pages or groups opposed to the movement (with words such as “anti,” “against,” etc.). Some pages or groups had duplicates (same name, same founder) with one or two members, and others had no members (not even the founder), so none of these were included in the results; conflicting groups and pages – such as “Black Lives Matter, All Lives Matter” which mixes the two movement – were rejected, when the search was made for BLM, but included for ALM. The *Modern Language Association* norms will not be respected for the name of the groups and pages described below, nor will grammatical or spelling corrections be made, in order to show how they can be perceived from the outside. A detail dataset was made for the Facebook pages, but not for the groups: the number of groups exceeding greatly the number of pages, classifying each one depending on their title and number of members would have been tenuous for one person and within the time available for this research. Some information may also be lacking regarding groups, due to Facebook’s policies of hiding the content of closed groups.

The interest of comparing pages and groups lies in the difference of involvement they demand: Facebook pages usually have one or a few administrators who take care of its content, which they choose freely; people who like the page have its content displayed on their wall and comment it if they choose to, or even contact the administrators to propose

content. But their involvement is minor, especially when pages are the official page of a real organization (for example the official Facebook page of the BLM organization, or official chapters). The administrators also need to maintain the page by adding posts regularly to have visibility on people's walls. Besides, pages require promotion to be known and easily found, especially since the search engine does not allow to filter pages by relevance, date of creation or popularity; however they do appear on Google searches.

On the other hand, Facebook groups offer their members an easy way to communicate, an easy way to be found by other members (groups appear on profiles' sidebars while pages need to be searched – even though they appear first once liked) and while also having few administrators, offer to their members the possibility to add content as well. Groups also allow to add other members (depending on the settings chosen by the administrators), which may be the whole point of the group: having people participating, creating an online community with common interests, with relatively minor involvement from administrators. As Facebook itself describes groups:

Facebook Groups are the place for small group communication and for people to share their common interests and express their opinion. Groups allow people to come together around a common cause, issue or activity to organize, express objectives, discuss issues, post photos, and share related content.<sup>283</sup>

Yet this may also discourage people from joining, since the point is to offer a certain commitment. Groups also provide a certain privacy: closed groups prevent non-members from seeing the content, and membership can be revoked any time, which is particularly useful for administrators who want to prevent someone from adding posts which are in opposition with the ideology shared by the group.

These last points are essential for the popularity of a page or a group: while anyone can check out the content of a page before liking it, this is not possible for closed groups, which means that people may ask to join after the recommendation of another member, or simply based on the name of the group and its self-description in the “about” section; even if this privacy is still limited – since Facebook friends can see which groups one belongs to – they still offer a certain secrecy as to what people post or like in these groups (whose names can sometimes be misleading, purposefully or not). It is also important to keep in mind that there are also secret groups on Facebook, which are not accessible except by member invitation, and thus do not appear in searches nor on users' profiles. The total number of Facebook pages

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<sup>283</sup> Matt Hicks, “Facebook Tips: What’s the Difference between a Facebook Page and Group?” (*Facebook*, 24 Feb. 2010. Web. 1 June 2017). <https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook/facebook-tips-whats-the-difference-between-a-facebook-page-and-group/324706977130/>

in May 2017 was 78,200,000.<sup>284</sup> The pages and groups will be classified according to the following table, which categorizes the frequency of their use; these categories will help determine the relevancy of a page or a group, almost three years after the first appearance of BLM during the protests at Ferguson.

Table 17: Online Activity of Facebook Pages and Groups, According to the Frequency of Posts.

<b>Daily active</b>	On average at least one post every day since January 2017
<b>Very active</b>	Several posts a week
<b>Active</b>	At least a dozen posts a month
<b>Not very active</b>	A few posts a month
<b>Barely active</b>	A few posts a trimester
<b>Inactive</b>	No new posts in at least the last two months

The key words used for the following research are: “Black Lives Matter,” “Black Life Matters,” “BlackLivesMatter,” “BlackLifeMatters”; “White Lives Matter,” “White Life Matters,” “WhiteLivesMatter,” “WhiteLifeMatters”; “All Lives Matter,” “AllLivesMatter”; “Blue Lives Matter,” “BlueLivesMatter,” “Cop Lives Matter,” “CopLivesMatter.”

### Black Lives Matter

#### *Facebook pages.*

The page with the highest number of “likes” is the official page of the BLM organization with 271,499.<sup>285</sup> It is very active, mostly posts about the actions of the organization, their depiction in the press, and issues related to police brutality and racial inequality in American society.

The second most popular page is “Black Lives Matter Minneapolis” with 56,800 likes.<sup>286</sup> It is the official Facebook page of the BLM chapter, but it is not very active anymore; it deals mostly with the actions of the chapter.

The third most popular page is “Black Lives Matter – Toronto,” once more the official Facebook page of the BLM chapter, with 33,517 likes.<sup>287</sup> It is not very active, and deals mostly with racial issues and police brutality, and the actions undertaken by the chapter.

<sup>284</sup> “Facebook Company Statistics” (*Statistics Brain*, 9 May 2017. Web. 1 June 2017).

<http://www.statisticbrain.com/facebook-statistics/>

<sup>285</sup> “Black Lives Matter” page (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/pg/BlackLivesMatter/posts/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/BlackLivesMatter/posts/?ref=page_internal)

<sup>286</sup> “Black Lives Matter Minneapolis” page (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/blacklivesmatterminneapolis/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/blacklivesmatterminneapolis/?ref=br_rs)

The difference between the number of pages containing only “Black Lives Matter” in their title (plus sometimes the name of a city, region, state, etc.) and the number of pages based in variations, and the fact that the three most popular pages belong to the first category, proves that the slogan bears a strong significance for Facebook users. Indeed, it comes from a hashtag widely used on Twitter (as will be seen later) and is heavily associated with the official organization and the anti-police brutality protests. The total number of pages compared to the number of pages with less than a hundred likes shows that there has been a certain desire for people to get involved by creating their own pages instead of just liking an existing one, but their content or the multitude of pages available prevented them from being more popular.

Table 18: Number of Facebook Pages with “Black Lives Matter” in their Title.

“Black Lives Matter” (+ place) <sup>288</sup>		Variation of “Black Lives Matter” <sup>289</sup>	
467		227	
Total 694			
More than 1000 likes	106	Highest number of likes	271,499
[500-999] likes	66		
[100-499] likes	167		
Less than 100 likes	355	Lowest number of likes	0

#### *Facebook groups.*

There are 765 groups using in their title “Black Lives Matter” and variations. The group with the highest number of members is “Black Lives Matter” with 18,064 members.<sup>290</sup> It is a public, active group, and most posts are from members and not the group administrators. They post news related to black people, the movement, and political issues linked to black people.

The second-largest group is “Black Lives Matter: Chicago” with 10,643 members.<sup>291</sup> It is linked to the Chicago chapter of the BLM organization, is a public group and is daily active.

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<sup>287</sup> “Black Lives Matter - Toronto” page (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/blacklivesmatterTO/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/blacklivesmatterTO/?ref=br_rs)

<sup>288</sup> The name of places may also be included, such a city, a region, or a State.

<sup>289</sup> Variations include: “BLM”, “Black Life Matter”, “#Blacklivesmatter” “#BLM,” “Black lives do matter,” “Black life does matter,” and other words added not in contradiction (e.g. “I say Black Lives Matter”), misspells, and grammatical mistakes.

<sup>290</sup> “Black Lives Matter” group (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/blacklives/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/blacklives/?ref=br_rs)

<sup>291</sup> “Black Lives Matter: Chicago” group (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/BlackLivesMatterChicago/>



Most posts are from the many administrators (nineteen), dealing with police brutality against black people, as well as black people's education, incarceration, and political issues.

The third-largest group is "Black Lives Matter: Los Angeles" with 10,512 members.<sup>292</sup> It is a closed group and does not appear to be linked to the official Los Angeles BLM chapter.

The number of users interested in one particular group is significantly lower than of users interested in pages. Even though there are slightly more groups than there are pages, as mentioned before, this higher interest in pages could be because users are more passive than for groups, and little is required of them.

The fact that for both pages and groups, the top three are still daily or weekly active shows that the interest held for the movement was not just ephemeral, and was not just a one wave tsunami which got a lot of attention at one precise moment and then went back to quietness. Almost three years after the death of Michael Brown and the initial wave which started the movement, it is still present and active on Facebook, the most used social medium.

### White Lives Matter

#### *Facebook pages.*

The three most popular pages are all named "White Lives Matter." The first one has 13,814 likes.<sup>293</sup> It is not very active, and is specific about not being a hate group in its "about" section. It was created July 24, 2016. Posts are mostly in favor of Donald Trump and against Hilary Clinton, in favor of police officers (in reaction to BLM protests), and the page promotes WLM t-shirts. It presents itself as the "officialWLM" but has no explicit ties to any actual organization.

The second one has 5,490, and was created in 2014; it was active until September 2016.<sup>294</sup> There are mostly political posts in favor of Donald Trump (especially during the presidential campaign), posts against BLM, news about black criminals, BLM protests gone violent, etc.

The third one has 3,795 likes, and is not very active.<sup>295</sup> The administrator focuses on the notion of "white genocide", supports Donald Trump, is specific on not wanting to have a

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<sup>292</sup> "Black Lives Matter: Los Angeles" group (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/blacklivesmatterla/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/blacklivesmatterla/?ref=br_rs)

<sup>293</sup> "White Lives Matter" page (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

<https://www.facebook.com/OfficialWhiteLivesMatter/>

<sup>294</sup> "White Lives Matter" page (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/White-Lives-Matter-1530416620562173/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/White-Lives-Matter-1530416620562173/?ref=br_rs)

<sup>295</sup> "White Lives Matter" page (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/whitelivesdomatter/posts/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/whitelivesdomatter/posts/?ref=page_internal)

racist page, and posts from time to time about Martin Luther King, Jr. and other famous black Civil Rights activists or famous black people.

The WLM movement has very few pages, and the great majority of them have less than five hundred likes, which shows the lack of popularity of the movement. Some of the 37 variations of “WLM” underline even more the controversial aspect of this movement. For instance, a page entitled “White Lives Matter More” has openly racist posts, and has 365 likes.<sup>296</sup> These variations underline the controversial aspect of this movement, why it is associated with racism, and thus why the movement is not very popular, as people generally do not want to be publicly seen as racists, no matter their personal opinions.

Table 19: Number of Facebook Pages with “White Lives Matter” in their Title.

“White Lives Matter” (+ place)		Variation of “White Lives Matter” <sup>297</sup>	
80		37	
Total 117			
More than 1000 likes	6	Highest number of likes	13,814
[500-999] likes	8		
[100-499] likes	31		
Less than 100 likes	72	Lowest number of likes	0

*Facebook groups.*

There are 542 groups dedicated to WLM. The largest group is “ALL WHITE LIVES MATTER!” with 3,337 members; it is a closed group, explicitly selective of its members.<sup>298</sup> The second-largest group is “White Lives Matter,” has 820 members and is also a closed group.<sup>299</sup> The third-largest group is “White Lives Matter – Suid Afrika,” with 258 members.<sup>300</sup> It is specific to South Africa, and is closed too.

About half of WLM groups are closed groups, including the three most popular ones, while in other “X Lives Matter” movements, the majority are open: this can mean that privacy

<sup>296</sup> “White Lives Matter more” page (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017). <https://www.facebook.com/White-Lives-Matter-More-1268744866492090/>

<sup>297</sup> Variations include: “WLM,” “White Life Matter,” “#Whitelivesmatter,” “#WLM,” “White lives do matter,” “White life does matter,” and other words added not in contradiction (e.g. “Only White Lives Matter”), misspells, and grammatical mistakes.

<sup>298</sup> “All White Lives Matter” group (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017). [https://www.facebook.com/groups/856372451165099/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/856372451165099/?ref=br_rs)

<sup>299</sup> “White Lives Matter” group (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017). [https://www.facebook.com/groups/153408211733664/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/153408211733664/?ref=br_rs)

<sup>300</sup> “White Lives Matter – Suid Afrika” group (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017). [https://www.facebook.com/groups/1028397183970665/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1028397183970665/?ref=br_rs)

is valued by WLM group members, or it can be due to the sensitive nature of their posts, especially with the controversial nature of this movement and the criticism it faces.

### All Lives Matter

ALM pages and groups raised a particular issue: many ALM groups do not deal with issues such as police brutality, or racism, but many concern abortion, animal lives, suicide, the death penalty, the right to own a weapon, religion, etc. While a selection could be made for the Facebook pages, it was not as simple for the groups, since many of them are closed groups and the exact issue the members want to focus on is not always transparent in the title.

### *Facebook pages.*

The first most popular page with 13,047 likes is “All\_Lives\_Matter,” linked to an organization in Aurora, Illinois.<sup>301</sup> The administrator is daily active, and often posts pieces of news or information, and asks people to comment on them. Some posts are against BLM, but many focus on societal problems and the daily news.

In second position is “All Lives Matter” with 12,072 likes.<sup>302</sup> It focuses a lot on police officers (the profile picture is a police badge and the cover picture shows three police officers, including one black). Posts concern various media (songs, news, videos, etc.) in support of BlueLM, and some against BLM. It has been inactive since January 24, and there were only a few posts a month in the end. It was created on December 14, 2014.

In third position is the page “All Lives Matter Movement” with 8,203 likes.<sup>303</sup> It is not very active anymore, and contains many posts against BLM, against racism, as well as many posts unrelated to any “X Lives Matter” movement.

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<sup>301</sup> “All Lives Matter” page (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/WeAllAboutThisLife/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/WeAllAboutThisLife/?ref=br_rs)

<sup>302</sup> “All Lives Matter” page (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/alllivesmatterous/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/alllivesmatterous/?ref=br_rs)

<sup>303</sup> “All Lives Matter Movement” page (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/whaleyalllivesmatter/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/whaleyalllivesmatter/?ref=br_rs)

Table 20: Number of Facebook Pages with “All Lives Matter” in their Title.

“All Lives Matter” (+ place)		Variations of “All Lives Matter” <sup>304</sup>	
14		4	
Total 18			
More than 1000 likes	14	Highest number of likes	13,047
[500-999] likes	2		
[100-499] likes	0		
Less than 100 likes	2	Lowest number of likes	0

### *Facebook groups*

There are 636 groups dedicated to ALM. The group with the highest number of members has 5,704, and is entitled “cops lives matter. ALL LIVES MATTER,” but seems to mostly deal with issues related to BlueLM (profile and cover pictures showing officers) It is a closed group.<sup>305</sup>

The second largest has 2,107 members and is called “ALM: the patriots of the second amendment”.<sup>306</sup> It is a public, daily active group. Posts are often pro-Trump and anti-Obama, focus on the Bundy ranch case, the right to own a weapon, and news. The group administrator is the main poster, but other members participate as well.

The third largest, with 580 members, is named “ALL LIFE MATTERS!” and deals mostly with police brutality (not restricted to black people), abuse of power, and religion.<sup>307</sup> . It is a public, daily active group, created on March 18, 2016, and is clearly anti-BLM. Posts are prominently from the group administrator.

The low number of ALM pages is really surprising, especially compared to the relatively high number of groups. Just as there are no ALM organization, the movement seems not to have inspired Facebook users to create (and thus invest their time in) an ALM page.

Groups, however, seem more popular (not so much in terms of members but in terms of creation), but they are not necessarily groups in opposition to BLM: many of these groups state that they are not against BLM, or even have “black lives matter” in their title or their

<sup>304</sup> Variations include: “ALM,” “All Life Matter,” “#Alllivesmatter,” “#ALM,” “All lives do matter,” and other words added not in contradiction (e.g. “Black, Blue, White Lives Matter”), misspells, and grammatical mistakes.

<sup>305</sup> “Cop Lives Matter too. All Lives Matter” group (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/1090674117613217/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1090674117613217/?ref=br_rs)

<sup>306</sup> “All Lives Matter: the Patriots of the Second Amendment” group (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/1668671103392729/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1668671103392729/?ref=br_rs)

<sup>307</sup> “All Life Matters!” group (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1706508239588190/>

“about” section, but, most importantly, some of these groups do not focus on the issues raised by BLM, but focus on completely different issues, as underlined earlier about this movement.

Blue Lives Matter

For this movement, two distinct denominations have been included in the search, “Blue Lives Matter” and “Cop Lives Matter,” since they designate the same ideological movement.

*Facebook Pages.*

The first most popular page has 1,561,280 likes and is the organization (see the first BlueLM organization detailed in the annex) which also sells merchandizing.<sup>308</sup> It is daily active, deals mostly with violence towards police officers (a lot of news, support to hurt officers or to officers’ families) and was created in 2014.

The second, with 319,657 likes, is “all cop lives matter,” was created on October 28, 2014, and also sells merchandizing.<sup>309</sup> It is daily active, deals mostly with cop-related humor, or with support to police officers. It posts very little news information.

The third, with 111,760 likes, is “blue lives matter Law.”<sup>310</sup> Created 15 July 2016, it is daily active and mostly posts about injured or killed in action police officers, but also K9 units, and messages of support.

There are very few pages dedicated to BlueLM, but they are quite popular. It is possible that pages were not created due to the official one being in place and being deemed as sufficient.

Table 21: Number of Facebook Pages with “Blue/Cop Lives Matter” in their Title.

“Blue/Cop Lives Matter” (+ place)		Variation of “Blue/Cop Lives Matter” <sup>311</sup>	
49		14	
Total 63			
More than 1000 likes	14	Highest number of likes	1,561,280
[500-999] likes	3		
[100-499] likes	25		
Less than 100 likes	21	Lowest number of likes	11

<sup>308</sup> “Blue Lives Matter” page (Facebook. Web. 17 May 2017).

<sup>309</sup> “All Cop Lives Matter” page (Facebook. Web. 17 May 2017).

<sup>310</sup> “Blue Lives Matter Law” page (Facebook. Web. 17 May 2017).

<sup>311</sup> Variations include: “Blue/Cop Life Matter,” “#Blue/Coplivesmatter,” “Blue/Cop lives do matter,” and other words added not in contradiction (e.g. “Firefighters for BlueLivesMatter”), misspells, and grammatical mistakes.

### *Facebook Groups*

There are 348 groups under the name “Blue Lives Matter” or “Cop Lives Matter” and variations.

Number one is “#BlueLivesMatter,” with 9,915 members.<sup>312</sup> It is a public group. It posts mostly in support of police officers (videos, testimonies, news about officers being injured in the line of duty, or saving someone’s life, being kind to a citizen, arresting criminals, etc.). It is daily active, mostly thanks to group administrators.

Number two is “Blue Lives Matter Colorado” with 6,449 members, and is also a public group.<sup>313</sup> Daily active with many daily posts, it posts about police officers, firefighters, paramedics, soldiers, etc., often about one member of these professions being injured or killed in action. Many of the posts are from group administrators.

Number three is “BLUE LIVES MATTER” with 6,292 members.<sup>314</sup> It is a closed group.

Though there are considerably more groups than pages, they are considerably less popular than the pages. Opposition to the BLM movement may have sparked a desire to support police officers among Facebook users, but it seems that only the administrators (so the people who undertook to create the page) are truly invested in posting regularly. This could mean that while people may more easily support a page in favor of law enforcement, they are not committed quite enough to create pages or participate in groups.

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<sup>312</sup> “#BlueLivesMatter” group (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/SupportLEOs/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/SupportLEOs/?ref=br_rs)

<sup>313</sup> “Blue Lives Matter Colorado” group (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/889845397716200/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/889845397716200/?ref=br_rs)

<sup>314</sup> “Blue Lives Matter” group (*Facebook*. Web. 17 May 2017).

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/1739980706284717/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1739980706284717/?ref=br_rs)

Comparison

Now that the number of pages and groups have been scrutinized and interpreted individually, it is possible to compare the presence of the movements with each other.

Table 22: Comparison between Pages and Groups of the Various Movements.

		First most popular	Second most popular	Third most popular	Total pages or groups
Pages	BLM	271,499 Very active	56,800 Not very active	33,517 Not very active	<b>694</b>
	WLM	13,814 Not Very active	5,490 Inactive	3,795 Not very active	<b>117</b>
	ALM	13,047 Daily active	12,072 Inactive	8,203 Not very active	<b>18</b>
	BlueLM	1,561,280 Daily active	319,657 Daily active	111,760 Daily active	<b>63</b>
<b>Total</b>					<b>892</b>
Groups	BLM	18,064 Active	10,643 Daily active	10,512 -	<b>765</b>
	WLM	3,337 -	820 -	258 -	<b>542</b>
	ALM	5,704 -	2,107 Daily active	580 Daily active	<b>636</b>
	BlueLM	9,915 Daily active	6,449 Daily active	6,292 -	<b>348</b>
<b>Total</b>					<b>2291</b>

This table helps uncover many different tendencies. First of all, it shows that depending on groups or pages, tendencies change. For instance, BLM has more dedicated pages and groups, but is only second in the highest number of likes for an individual page, behind BlueLM. This can have different interpretations: BLM may have sparked a wave of eagerness which resulted in many people joining groups to communicate among supporters, while BlueLM supporters all focused on the low number of pages created. Thus, many theories can emerge from these results, and it can be hard to verify their plausibility. The following lines focus on the most plausible ones.

When considering the top three of pages and groups for each of the four movements studied, WLM pages appear as the least popular. Except for the obvious explanation that it is because fewer Facebook users would want to be associated with the movement (either because they do not support it or because they do not want to advertise that they do), this low popularity can also be due to the high number of pages and groups created, which could have dispersed the supporters. As for the few ALM pages, their number most likely shows that

there are not many supporters interested in these pages (either because there are not a lot of supporters to begin with, a theory possibly corroborated by the popularity of the top groups, or because the content is not “like” worthy).

Indeed, far behind BlueLM and BLM, ALM pages are not very popular (either in number of likes or in number of dedicated pages). While there are many groups, the most popular are not very much so, despite their daily posts. It is plausible that Facebook users are not interested, or have lost interest over time, in this movement, which is the only one not affiliated with any actual association or organization, and has remained mostly a slogan of protest.

This shows that while there is an opposition to BLM, the WLM movement is a minor player, and that the great majority of white American users do not agree with this movement. Similarly, the low popularity on Facebook of the ALM movement, which alone can rival with the other movements through the number of groups created (and many of them are not even created to be in complete opposition to BLM), underline the fact that Facebook users do not feel like it is a necessary movement.

BlueLM pages are extremely popular in comparison with the others, and even the second most popular page is more so than the most popular BLM page. One empirical reason for this popularity is the frequency of posts: BlueLM pages post at least one post a day, and they often post more, which gives them a greater visibility than a few posts a month (corresponding to “not very active”). Another factor is the fact that the most popular page is also linked to a non-profit association which financially helps injured police officers and families of officers killed in action. But there is also the question of race relationships with the police: as established earlier, black communities tend to fear and/or distrust the police, especially when they live in certain areas, but the white part of the population has another vision of the police and more generally trust that their job is to protect them. Thus, since white people are more numerous than black people, it is not surprising that the number of BlueLM supporters should be higher (which also emphasizes that only a small minority of the white community sides with WLM).

In terms of opposition to BLM, BlueLM is by far the most popular movement on Facebook. This shows that many people focus on the topic raised by BLM, i.e. police brutality against black people, rather than on the question of race, and share the misconception that the initial message of BLM is “black lives matter more,” rather than “black lives matter too.” However, if more users like BlueLM Facebook pages than BLM, the BLM community is far more involved in groups.



## Twitter

Despite Facebook's reach and popularity, another social medium is at the core of the protest against racism: Twitter. Indeed, it is with Twitter that the BLM movement started, and it was also the main means of communication which helped organize protests, and was central, for instance, in the events of Ferguson in April 2014.

#BLM has been included by *Yes Magazine* as one of the "Twelve Hashtags that Changed the World in 2014," alongside #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, which is also linked to police brutality and will be detailed later.<sup>315</sup> The American Dialect Society elected the hashtag their word of the year 2014, even though there was some controversy over the fact that "black lives matter" is a clause, not only a noun phrase, which they justified that way:

While *#blacklivesmatter* may not fit the traditional definition of a word, it demonstrates how powerfully a hashtag can convey a succinct social message. [...] Language scholars are paying attention to the innovative linguistic force of hashtags, and *#blacklivesmatter* was certainly a forceful example of this in 2014.<sup>316</sup>

The following data comes from a report written by Deen Freelon, Charlton D. McIlwain and Meredith D. Clark, all assistant or associate professors in various universities, and is entitled *Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #BlackLivesMatter, and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice*.<sup>317</sup> Their goal was to research the influence of online activity and activism on social movements. They studied how Twitter helped shape the BLM movement and social protest. To do so, they purchased directly from Twitter 40,815,975 public tweets that included one of 45 key words or key phrases or key hashtags related to police brutality against black people in the period. These key words are the names of the twenty victims (including their nickname and as a hashtag), #Ferguson, and #BLM.

The authors used the names of twenty unarmed black people who died at the hand of the police in one year, from June 2014 to June 2015: Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Walter Scott, Tamir Rice, John Crawford, Tony Robinson, Eric Harris, Ezell Ford, Akai Gurley, Kajieme Powell, Victor White, Jordan Baker, Tanisha Anderson, Jerame Reid, Yvette Smith, Phillip White, Dante Parker, McKenzie Cochran and Tyree Woodson. The authors underline some of the flaws of their work: the sources they used to collect these names (The NAACP Legal Defense Fund's Twitter account and a *Buzzfeed* article) only included two women, and did not mention Natasha McKenna, Aura Rosser or any other in that year, even though their deaths did spark conversations on Twitter. Another flaw that they did not

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<sup>315</sup> Lindsey Weedston, "Twelve Hashtags That Changed the World in 2014" (*Yes Magazine*, 9 Dec. 2014. Web. 27 May 2017). <http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/12-hashtags-that-changed-the-world-in-2014>

<sup>316</sup> "2014 Word of the Year is '#BlackLivesMatter'" (*American Dialect Society*, 9 Jan. 2015. Web. 27 May 2017). <http://www.americandialect.org/2014-word-of-the-year-is-blacklivesmatter>

<sup>317</sup> Freelon.

mention, is the fact that their data does not include every relevant hashtag: while #BlackLivesMatter is the official-spelt hashtag of the movement, #BLM is also widely used (since shorter and thus faster to type, one central characteristic of Twitter). Besides, it is also common to see variations, or misspelled or grammatically incorrect hashtags, such as #BlackLifeMatter or #BlackLifeMatters, etc. Those variations should have been included in the purchase in order to reduce discrepancies between the numbers they use and the actual number of people tweeting about the movement. It may also be regretted that they did not add as key words “hands up don’t shoot” and other slogans/hashtags created according to the circumstances of a dead person on their list.

However, it is understandable that they would not include “police brutality” in their key words, since it could have concerned any country, any victim and not just black people, any type of brutality (extortion, sexual assault, etc.), and not just police killing.

Once all of these flaws are taken into account, this report is still very valuable, since it is the only one (as I write) to propose such a specific analysis on Twitter, hashtags and police brutality against black people.

Between June 1, 2014, and May 31, 2015, #BlackLivesMatter was tweeted more than four million times, and #Ferguson more than twenty-one million times. This report highlights that all of the victims of police brutality mentioned before did not get the same Twitter attention: Michael Brown’s name (or as a hashtag) is the most popular and has been tweeted over nine million times, but except for Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Walter Scott, and Tamir Rice, all of the other names used in the study have below one million tweets, going as low as almost two thousand for Tyree Woodson (who allegedly shot himself while in police custody).<sup>318</sup> This important difference between the numbers underlines the fact that not every death linked to police brutality or negligence sparked the same reaction online, and that many factors can contribute to or prevent viral reactions: the time of the year and other events happening at the same time (“bigger” news may overshadow a death), the online popularity and network of the Twitter users, the circumstances of the death, etc.

That said, the day the grand jury decided not to indict Officer Wilson and the eight following days witnessed 8,528,144 tweets on the matter (with 3,420,934 on the day of the decision), from 1,966,447 unique users, and #Ferguson was predominant (to say the least) in

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<sup>318</sup> Freelon, 21-23; Kai Reed, “Police: Man Shoots Himself inside Baltimore Police Station” (*WBALTV*, 7 Aug 2014. Web. 27 May 2017). <http://www.wbaltv.com/article/police-man-shoots-himself-inside-baltimore-police-station/7088551>

these tweets, since it appeared in more than six million of them. The second most used hashtag was #MikeBrown, and the third #BLM, both under 500,000 tweets each.

At the end of this nine-day period, a six-day one began, with the non-indictment of Daniel Pantaleo. This time, there were 4,475,174 tweets from 1,106,020 unique users (so more tweets from fewer users). #EricGarner was the most tweeted hashtag at nearly 2 million tweets, second was #BLM with around 750,000 tweets, and #Ferguson came third with slightly less.<sup>319</sup>

Table 23: Comparison of Tweets and Unique Users in Relation to Officers’ Non-Indictments.

	<b>Tweets</b>	<b>Unique users</b>
Officer Wilson’s non-indictment average per day (Nov. 24 – Dec.2, 2014)	947,571	218,494
Officer Palanteo’s non-indictment average per day (Dec. 3 – Dec 10,2014)	559,397	138,253

Source: Freelon, 55, 59.

Afterwards, while the number of unique users remains almost the same with 1,056,438 between December 11, 2014, and April 3, 2015, the number of tweets decreases drastically with 5,388,906 in the four-month period (which means an average of 336,807 tweets per week).<sup>320</sup> However, in this period, #BLM was the most used hashtag and took even a bigger lead on #Ferguson, with almost two million tweets against around 1.6 million for the latter.<sup>321</sup> This can be interpreted as the heat of these specific deaths being a bit dialed down while the notion of a systemic racial issue in Police Departments was highlighted.

From April 4 to April 18, 2015, a period which starts with the killing of Walter Scott by a white police officer, 468,160 users tweeted 1,421,304 times about related police brutality. The most used hashtag was the name of the victim, with more than 700,000 tweets, followed by #BLM (over 200,000 tweets), and third is #EricHarris, the name of another unarmed black man killed by a police officer on April 2, 2015 (with about 150,000 tweets). Thanks to the video footage that shows clearly that Scott was not a danger for the police officer, many people who are traditionally supportive of law enforcement, such as people identifying themselves as conservatives, tweeted in support of the victim and blamed the officer.

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<sup>319</sup> The statistics of this report only take into accounts tweets within the authors’ purchase; thus phrases such as “the most tweeted hashtag” only refer to these tweets, and not to the entire Twitter social medium.

<sup>320</sup> Freelon, 55, 59.

<sup>321</sup> Freelon, 65.



Figure 14: Tweet, 8 Apr. 2015 <<https://twitter.com/benshapiro/status/585661431359614976>>

Last but not least, the last period under study in the report was April 19 (with the death of Freddy Gray) to May 31, 2015, with 3,949,473 tweets from 897,397 unique users. Once more, the name of the victim turned into a hashtag is the most tweeted one (with around 1.6 million tweets), followed by #BLM (with a little over 750,000 tweets), and third is #Baltimore (a little under 500,000), which is the city where the killing happened (mirroring #Ferguson). Conservatives this time were more in the opposition, condemning the violence of the protests.



Figure 15: Tweet, 28 Apr. 2015 <<https://twitter.com/MiltonWolfMD/status/592832172228239360>>

The report concludes on the fact that “the Twitter discussion remained Black-led”, and that while videos and photos of a death and/or of violent protests do help attract non-activists, it is not always enough.<sup>322</sup> It also presents the community of Young Black Twitter as overall less political than the BLM community, noting that their tweets had more to do with

<sup>322</sup> Freelon, 76.

“memorialization (e.g. ‘RIP Mike Brown’) and dark humor” than a call to provoke social change.<sup>323</sup> Indeed, the authors of the report interpret the disparity between the two communities, and especially the fact that they are not mostly one and the same, as: “here are substantial populations of Black youth that are simply not being reached by BLM’s messages, at least on Twitter.”<sup>324</sup>

Unfortunately, while this report offered many interesting pieces of information, there are no such reports concerning the other “X Lives Matter” movements, and no comparison can be made, since Twitter’s search engine does not give information such as the number of times a hashtag has been tweeted publicly (again, the authors of the report had to pay to be given access to this information), nor does it allow a search similar to the one done for Facebook in this research.

Besides users’ support to BLM, Twitter itself also showed support on July 8, 2016, by adding an emoji that systematically appears after #BlackLivesMatter, which is composed of three clenched fists with varying brown shades.<sup>325</sup> This emoji was created for #BHM (Black History Month). A staff Twitter account explained:



Figure 16: Tweet, 8 July 2016 <<https://twitter.com/Blackbirds/status/751481152192393216>>

However, criticism arose as people argued that this emoji was implemented a day after the Dallas shooting, where five police officers were shot down by a sniper during an anti-police brutality peaceful protest, and because the positive connotation it gives the hashtag would make it more difficult to criticize the movement.<sup>326</sup>

If #BLM has become an emblem of the movement, other hashtags were also invented, in general in reaction to the circumstances of a particular death or event linked to it (which

<sup>323</sup> Freelon, 77; **N.B.:** Young Black Twitter will be detailed further on.

<sup>324</sup> Idem.

<sup>325</sup> “Twitter’s Black Lives matter Emoji Surfaces on Social Media” (ABC7, 10 July 2016. Web. 27 May 2017). <http://abc7.com/society/twitters-black-lives-matter-emoji-surfaces-on-social-media/1421219/>

<sup>326</sup> Robert Shimshock, “Twitter Rewards Black Lives Matter with Official Emoji less than a Day after Dallas” (Breitbart, 9 July 2016. Web. 30 Mar. 2017). <http://www.breitbart.com/tech/2016/07/09/twitter-rewards-black-lives-matter/>; Manny Fernandez, “Five Dallas Officers were Killed as Payback, Police Chief Says” (The New York Times, 8 July 2016. Web. 30 Mar. 2017). [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/09/us/dallas-police-shooting.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/09/us/dallas-police-shooting.html?_r=0)

explains why they were less popular than #BLM which regroups every death of a black person by a police officer). Here is a list of the various hashtags linked to #BLM and/or denouncing police brutality against black people, and their origins.

#### #IfTheyGunnedMeDown

Started by criminal defense lawyer C.J. Lawrence, after seeing the shared photo of Michael Brown, it focuses on the news portrayal of black people being killed, especially by police officers, showing some specific portraits of the victims, for example with a certain clothing style or pose like “gangsta” pose, that some people feel is a way to depict the victim as a plausible criminal and lessen the notion of “innocence.”<sup>327</sup> The users of this hashtag thus underline what they see as an attempt at manipulating the image of the victim by posting two photos, one which could be seen as violent or not upholding the law, and one more conventional, with a smile.<sup>328</sup>

#### #IcantBreathe

This sentence is made of the final words of Eric Garner, a 43 year-old African American who died on July 17, 2014, during a police officer’s chokehold. This death sparked protests a few days after it happened, and again once a grand jury did not indict the police officer. The chokehold in itself is under debate – as the officer claims he was trying to do another maneuver – as well as the fact that no police officer present tried to reanimate Garner after he lost consciousness on the sidewalk, waiting for the ambulance to arrive.<sup>329</sup>

#### #HandsUpDontShoot

This hashtag was created in the wake of Michael Brown’s death in August 2014, to underline the fact that, according to some eye-witnesses (and not to others), he had his hands up when the police officer shot him. Many protest signs wore these words and put their hands up during protests, and many people posted pictures of themselves hands up with the hashtag on Twitter, but also on Facebook and Instagram.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> “#BBCTrending: The Two Faces of Michael Brown” (*BBC*, 11 Aug. 2014. Web. 30 Mar. 2017).

<http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-28742301>

<sup>328</sup> Weedston.

<sup>329</sup> Al Baker, J. David Goodman and Benjamin Mueller, “Beyond the Chokehold: the Path to Eric Garner’s Death” (*The New York Times*, 13 June 2015. Web. 30 Mar. 2017).

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/14/nyregion/eric-garner-police-chokehold-staten-island.html?smid=pl-share>

<sup>330</sup> Lauren O’Neil, “‘Hands up Don’t Shoot’ Gesture Spreads Online in Support of Ferguson Protesters” (*CBC*, 14 Aug. 2014. Web. 30 Mar. 2017). <http://www.cbc.ca/newsblogs/yourcommunity/2014/08/hands-up-dont-shoot-gesture-spreads-online-in-support-of-ferguson-protesters.html>

A website [handsupdontshoot.com](http://handsupdontshoot.com) was also created in August, following the spread of the hashtag, whose goal is “to counter false narratives spread by law enforcement, the establishment, ‘movement leaders’ and the media.”<sup>331</sup>

### #IfIDieInPoliceCustody

This hashtag was created after Sandra Bland, a 28 year-old black woman, died in police custody July 13, 2015. The circumstances of her arrest have caused a debate: the dashboard camera of the police officers recorded the entire meeting. Though Bland did change lines without signaling it (which is the initial cause of her being pulled over), many people argue that the police officer had no cause to arrest her in the first place, since a ticket (which he had written) should have been enough, and his insistence of her putting down her cigarette was unnecessary. The officer then tried to physically force her out of her vehicle when she refused to do so, then pointed a Taser at her to force her cooperation. While she did resist arrest, the controversy lies on the use of force from the police officer, and the charge of “assaulting an officer.” Moreover, after three days in detention, she was found dead, hanging in her cell, which was ruled as a suicide, but the skeptic family asked for another independent autopsy.<sup>332</sup> In the end, her family’s lawsuit for wrongful death was settled for 1.9 million dollars.<sup>333</sup> This hashtag was used by people to raise awareness about this story, as well as to tell relatives and friends what they would like to say in case this happened, and many of these were used to insist on the fact that they would not commit suicide and that they should question everything the police say.<sup>334</sup>

### #SayHerName

This hashtag was created by the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) in May 2015 in a report they issued to raise awareness of police brutality against black women in particular, claiming that in the media – including BLM – the focus is too much put on black men and that sexual assaults, killings of black women, especially disabled and from the LGBT community

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<sup>331</sup> “About” page (*Hands up Don’t Shoot* website, nd. Web. 30 Mar. 2017). <http://handsupdontshoot.com/about/>

<sup>332</sup> K.K. Rebecca Lai, Haeyoun Park and Wilson Andrews, “Assessing the Legality of Sandra Bland’s Arrest” (*The New York Times*, 22 July 2015. Web. 30 Mar. 2017).

[https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/07/20/us/sandra-bland-arrest-death-videos-maps.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/07/20/us/sandra-bland-arrest-death-videos-maps.html?_r=0)

<sup>333</sup> Jason Silverstein, “Sandra Bland Family Agrees to \$1.9 million Wrongful Death Settlement” (*Daily News*, 15 Sept. 2016. Web. 30 Mar. 2017). <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/sandra-bland-family-settles-wrongful-death-suit-1-9-million-article-1.2793156>

<sup>334</sup> Weedston.

are forgotten. The updated version of the report includes Sandra Bland (mentioned earlier in the #IfIDieInPoliceCustody section).<sup>335</sup>

### #NoJusticeNoPeace

Little to no information as to when this hashtag was created is available online (there is not even a Wikipedia page about it), but the hashtag is still currently used on Twitter. However, due to its general notion, it is also used in matters not related to black people or to police brutality.<sup>337</sup>

Most of these hashtags originated from Black Twitter, and all of them spread through this particular Twitter network.

### Black Twitter

The phrase “Black Twitter” designates a diverse community, composed mainly of black Americans, as heterogeneous this group can be – in terms of class, education, gender identification, sexual and political orientation, etc. – but also of black people from other countries as well as non-black people (though they are a minority).<sup>338</sup> Black Twitter is only a part of the black community using Twitter, blacks being the predominant group on Twitter.

Table 24: Twitter Users by Race.

	2014
White users on Twitter	21%
Black users on Twitter	27%
Hispanic	25%

Source: Maeve Duggan, Nicole B. Ellison, Cliff Lampe, Amanda Lenhart and Mary Madden, “Demographics of Key Social Networking Platforms” (*Pew Research Center*, 9 Jan. 2015. Web. 2 Apr. 2017). <<http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/demographics-of-key-social-networking-platforms-2/>>

This table shows that the black community is proportionately more present on Twitter than the white, which shows an evolution in access to the internet. As often with new technology, the cost was high at first: to get access to the internet at its beginning, a computer was mandatory, as well as a subscription to an internet provider, under the condition that the area lived in was serviced (usually the wealthy areas were serviced first). Thus, the black

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<sup>335</sup> Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Andrea J. Ritchie, Rachel Anspach, Rachel Gilmer and Luke Harris, *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women* (New York: African American Policy Forum and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, 2015).

<sup>337</sup> “#NoJusticeNoPeace” search results (*Twitter*, 28 Aug. 2017. Web. 30 Mar. 2017). <https://twitter.com/hashtag/nojusticenopeace?lang=en>

<sup>338</sup> Donovan X. Ramsey, “The Truth about Black Twitter” (*The Atlantic*, 10 Apr. 2015. Web. 30 Mar. 2017). <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/04/the-truth-about-black-twitter/390120/>



population, who traditionally has a lesser income, got an equal access later, partly thanks to yet newer technologies which soon cost less than an office computer, such as laptops, smartphones and more recently tablets.

Table 25: American Internet User Rate by Race.

	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2016
White	53%	63%	72%	79%	84%	88%
Black	38%	50%	59%	69%	77%	85%

Source: “Internet/Broadband Fact Sheet” (*Pew Research Center*, 12 Jan. 2017. Web. 2 Apr. 2017). <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/>

This table shows that more than half of white Americans had access to the internet as early as the year 2000, whereas only slightly more than a third of the black population had, and that the gap has greatly decreased with time, even if it still exists.

Table 26: Smartphone-Based Internet Dependency Rate by Race among American Adults.

	2013	2015	2016
White	6%	10%	9%
Black	10%	19%	15%

Source: “Internet/Broadband Fact Sheet” (*Pew Research Center*, 12 Jan. 2017. Web. 2 Apr. 2017). <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/>

The increase and then decrease of the dependency of black people on smartphone can be explained first by the market being flooded by smartphones between 2013 and 2015, with cheaper and cheaper models as well as phone subscriptions including 3G and 4G, and with the market being later flooded with tablets, and free Wi-Fi in many public places, such as restaurants, cafés, libraries, stores, even in the street in some cities. These numbers may also indicate that white Americans do not depend as much on smartphones because they already own a computer and/or a laptop and/or tablet, and most likely have an internet connection at home.<sup>339</sup>

One central aspect of Black Twitter’s importance in this thesis, is the identification process with the victims of police brutality. Many members tweet about the fact that they could have been Mike Brown, or Sandra Bland, or that one of their loved ones could have been.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Jeff Guo, “What People don’t Get about ‘Black Twitter’” (*The Washington Post*, 22 Oct. 2015. Web. 2 Apr. 2017). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/10/22/why-it-can-be-offensive-to-use-the-term-black-twitter/>

<sup>340</sup> Freelon, 35.

One of the first records of this community dates back to 2009, from *The Awl* article entitled “What were Black People Talking about on Twitter Last Night?” A white journalist explains his obsession with the way black people use Twitter, which he was able to witness through the trending topics, which other social media did not give access to at the time. He also underlines the difference between black and white users, saying that black users were active twenty-four hours a day, while white users mostly tweeted during the day, which explained why black user trends were not only more visible in the evening, but surpassed the whites’.<sup>341</sup> A year later, a *Slate* article mentioned this community again: “How Black People Use Twitter” focuses on the fact that the black American Twitter community was at the origin of a hashtag trend #WordsThatLeadToTrouble, created by a South African woman.<sup>342</sup> The journalist proposed an answer to this phenomenon:

Black people—specifically, young black people—do seem to use Twitter differently from everyone else on the service. They form tighter clusters on the network—they follow one another more readily, they retweet each other more often, and more of their posts are @-replies—posts directed at other users. It’s this behavior, intentional or not, that gives black people—and in particular, black teenagers—the means to dominate the conversation on Twitter.

This particular community functions as a network, and the fact that an estimated quarter of users are African American (though it is difficult to measure since users do not have to indicate their ethnicity) explains the speed at which hashtags become trendy and news travel among them.<sup>343</sup>

This category designated as “Young Black Twitter” has its own specificities:

The communities we observe here are “young” in that they deal in topics and communication styles that appeal to Black youth: hip-hop music, culturally relevant jokes, fashion, sex and relationship advice, and Black celebrities. Like most young people, they rarely discuss politics or current affairs, but make exceptions when the news affects them directly.<sup>344</sup>

However, more than mere fun-oriented hashtags (of which there are plenty), Black Twitter made activism trendy. One of the first times was in 2013, when Paula Deen, a TV cook and owner of restaurants, was accused of being racist towards her black employees and of using the N- word; Black Twitter was credited with making her lose her show and several of her business connections, by going viral on Twitter, but also by contacting the network and said-

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<sup>341</sup> Choire Sicha, “What were Black People Talking about on Twitter Last Night?” (*The Awl*, 11 Nov. 2009. Web. 2 Apr. 2017). <https://theawl.com/what-were-black-people-talking-about-on-twitter-last-night-4408ca0ba3d6>

<sup>342</sup> Farhad Manjoo, “How Black People Use Twitter” (*Slate*, 10 Aug. 2010. Web. 2 Apr. 2017).

[http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2010/08/how\\_black\\_people\\_use\\_twitter.single.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2010/08/how_black_people_use_twitter.single.html)

<sup>343</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>344</sup> Freelon, 25.

connections to threaten them of boycott if they kept doing business with her.<sup>345</sup> That same year, Black Twitter was said to be the reason why one of the jurors on George Zimmerman's trial could not get a book-deal for the story.<sup>346</sup> In September 2014, Black Twitter was credited with forcing the *New York Times* to apologize: journalist Alessandra Stanley wrote an article about TV producer Shonda Rhimes, and described one of her star actresses, Viola Davis, as "less classically beautiful."<sup>347</sup> That very day and the three following ones, the outrage fused on Black Twitter, from comments to black women posting pictures of themselves to fight this cultural oppression of establishing white women as beauty standards, making black women inherently less or not beautiful.<sup>348</sup> This outrage reached mainstream media, forcing the *New York Times* editorial staff to publish an apology, even though they also published the explanation of the journalist, who was actually criticizing TV beauty standards and was not literal (a method she often uses in her writing).<sup>349</sup>

But this was not the first time that the *New York Times* had responded to Black Twitter: it published an article directly inspired by and dealing with #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, bringing the focus on media depiction of black victims. The number of tweets using the hashtag made it trendy, and caught the attention of the mainstream news outlet.<sup>350</sup>

In January 2015, #OscarsSoWhite started to trend on Black Twitter, then Twitter, in reaction to the lack of black nominees in the main acting categories. Some celebrities decided in reaction to boycott the event, others talked about it during their monologue, and the Academy reacted by promising to double the number of minority nominees by 2020.<sup>351</sup>

Nevertheless, even though mainstream media can sometimes be influenced by Black Twitter, their depiction of the online (and offline) community is often criticized. Members of the community or researchers deplore the fact that it is often presented as a homogenous

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<sup>345</sup> Feminista Jones, "Is Twitter the Underground Railroad of Activism?" (*Salon*, 17 July 2013. Web. 29 March 2017). [http://www.salon.com/2013/07/17/how\\_twitter\\_fuels\\_black\\_activism/](http://www.salon.com/2013/07/17/how_twitter_fuels_black_activism/); Shani O. Hilton, "The Secret Power of Black Twitter" (*Buzzfeed News*, 17 July 2013. Web. 29 March 2017).

[https://www.buzzfeed.com/shani/the-secret-power-of-black-twitter?utm\\_term=.vko98NwPJ#.eJAvVwK7](https://www.buzzfeed.com/shani/the-secret-power-of-black-twitter?utm_term=.vko98NwPJ#.eJAvVwK7)

<sup>346</sup> Jones, Twitter Underground Railroad.

<sup>347</sup> Alessandra Stanley, "Wrought in Rhimes's Image" (*The New York Times*, 18 Sept. 2014. Web. 29 March 2017). [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/arts/television/viola-davis-plays-shonda-rhimes-latest-tough-heroine.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/arts/television/viola-davis-plays-shonda-rhimes-latest-tough-heroine.html?_r=1)

<sup>348</sup> Derrick Clifton, "Twenty-Six Best Tweets in Response to Critic who Called Viola Davis 'Less Classically Beautiful'" (*Mic*, 29 Sept. 2014. Web. 29 March 2017). <https://mic.com/articles/99992/26-best-tweets-in-response-to-critic-who-called-viola-davis-less-classically-beautiful#.YC9K14vZN>

<sup>349</sup> Margaret Sullivan, "An Article on Shonda Rhimes Rightly Causes a Furor" (*The New York Times*, 22 Sept. 2014. Web. 29 March 2017). [https://publiceditor.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/22/an-article-on-shonda-rhimes-rightly-causes-a-furor/?\\_php=true&\\_type=blogs&\\_r=0;\\_ramsey](https://publiceditor.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/22/an-article-on-shonda-rhimes-rightly-causes-a-furor/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0;_ramsey).

<sup>350</sup> Tanzina Vega, "Shooting Spurs Hashtag Effort on Stereotypes" (*The New York Times*, 12 Aug. 2014. Web. 29 March 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/13/us/if-they-gunned-me-down-protest-on-twitter.html>

<sup>351</sup> Jenna Wortham, "Black Tweets Matter" (*The Smithsonian Magazine*, Sept. 2016. Web. 22 March 2017). <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/black-tweets-matter-180960117/?no-ist>

group, representative of the entire black online and offline community. They deplore among other things the lack of commitment to actually interview the people who started a trend and this somewhat invasion of their privacy, since even if Tweets are notoriously public, many conversations happening on Black Twitter were not meant to be publicized in the media, but were simply conversations between people sharing their points of view, experiences and emotions. Since no authorization was required for mainstream media to use their tweets as examples, they can also be taken out of context and misunderstood.<sup>352</sup>

On the other hand, Black Twitter has also been criticized. For instance, for some people, “Black Twitter is just Twitter” and this differentiation is not always welcome, because it can be seen as a way of segregating the black community for some, or giving too much importance to this community for others.<sup>353</sup> There has been also criticism coming from within Black Twitter against other members, for example when homophobic and transphobic slurs spread about the rapper Tyga who reportedly shared nude pictures and text messages with a transgender woman.<sup>354</sup>

To conclude on the impact of social media, some people argue that all those tweets, hashtags, Facebook pages and groups are mostly (or arguably) useless and do not really help change the situation they denounce. Journalist Malcolm Gladwell, for instance, argues in 2010 that what people see as online activism is not real activism, but little demanding participation: he takes as a reference point the “Greensboro Four,” the four black students who sat in a white area in a diner in February 1960 to protest segregation and the wave of protests that ensued, and argues that social media cannot trigger such events of “high-risk activism.” They lack the organization and leadership of such activism, and thus only give the illusion of nationwide (or worldwide) impact through Facebook likes and retweets, while little action is taken.<sup>355</sup>

Journalist Muriel Macdonald agrees on some aspects, especially concerning Twitter and the proliferation of some hashtags. She uses “‘Hashtag Activism’ – as a phrase reserved for ineffective, vaguely narcissistic Twitter do-gooding.” To illustrate her point, she argues that some hashtags such as #BringBackOurGirls (about the three hundred schoolgirls abducted in Nigeria) or #JeSuisCharlie (about the terrorist attack against the French satirical newspaper in January 2015), which were tweeted more than three million times in less than 24 hours, did

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<sup>352</sup> Ramsey; Meredith D. Clark, *To Tweet our own Cause* (Chapel Hill: ProQuest, 2014. 6); Guo.

<sup>353</sup> Idem.

<sup>354</sup> Dexter Thomas, “When ‘Black Twitter’ sounds like ‘White Twitter’” (15 July 2015. Web. 22 March 2017). <http://www.latimes.com/business/technology/la-black-twitter-20150715-story.html>

<sup>355</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, “Small Change: Why the Revolution will not be Tweeted” (*The New Yorker*, 4 Oct. 2010. Web. 22 March 2017). <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell>

not do anything to help the situation but were spread because they “make us feel better,” and spread awareness of the event. She also writes about hashtags which “make us think,” even though they do not spark actual marches, etc.: “they’ve become an important part of how we communicate ideas, and may even influence how we think” which can provoke social change as well. She presents the example of #ALM when used to support #BLM and the fact that many people think that the ALM hashtag diminishes the message of #BLM and thus should not be used.

However, she also partly disagrees with Gladwell and similar critics, and puts forward hashtags which triggered actual massive action, such as #BLM and #HandsUpDontShoot, #UmbrellaRevolution in China – which helped organize and symbolized protests against the Chinese government – or #PeoplesClimate – whose march was the biggest climate march in history with about 400,000 people, but also 630,000 social media posts.<sup>356</sup>

So even though social media do not always spark *active* activism, such as marches, fundraisers, etc., thanks to every hashtag or Facebook page created, they sometimes do, and also help people communicate about issues of today’s society, raise awareness of certain facts nationwide or worldwide, and advertise solidarity. Journalism professor Jelani Cobb even compared the role of social media for civil rights movements today to the role of the television in the 1960s.<sup>357</sup> Awareness is indeed the first step to taking actions and social change.

### **Facebook, Twitter, and the News**

Beyond what Facebook or Twitter users choose to like or participate in, another important factor in the impact of social media is the news the users get through them.

In 2016, 76% of Facebook users and 42% of Twitter users checked these social media daily.<sup>358</sup> While in 2012 49% of people saw news on social media, in 2016 this number rose to 62%.

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<sup>356</sup> Muriel Macdonald, “Hashtag Activism: The Revolution will be Tweeted” (*Tint Up*, 16 Jan. 2015. Web. 22 March 2017). <https://www.tintup.com/blog/hashtag-activism-revolution-tweeted/>

<sup>357</sup> Wortham.

<sup>358</sup> “Social Media Fact Sheet” (*Pew Research Center*, 12 Jan. 2017. Web. 22 March 2017). <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/>

Table 27: “Social Media News Use” in 2016.

	Use site	Get news on site
<b>Facebook</b>	67	44
<b>Youtube</b>	48	10
<b>Twitter</b>	16	9
<b>Instagram</b>	19	4
<b>LinkedIn</b>	20	4
<b>Reddit</b>	4	2
<b>Snapchat</b>	10	2
<b>Tumblr</b>	4	1
<b>Vine</b>	2	0

Source: Survey, Jeffrey Gottfried and Elisa Shearer, “News Use across Social Media Platforms 2016” (Pew Research Center, 26 May 2016. Web. 22 March 2017).

<http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/>

This table shows that 44% of American adults get news on Facebook, against only 9% on Twitter in 2016 (against 30% on Facebook and 8% on Twitter in 2013). Of those people, 38% actually seek the news on Facebook, and 54% on Twitter. This means that about 17% of American adults seek their news on Facebook, and 27% see news on Facebook.

The importance of this information lies in the content of the news. Because even if mainstream news outlets such as the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, etc., have millions of people worldwide reading them on Facebook, there are also a lot of alternative news outlets, which may provide strongly biased information, or may use unreliable sources that people may not take the time to verify and thus consider as accurate news. However, TV remains the main source of news for the general American population.<sup>359</sup>

The social media Facebook and Twitter thus played important yet different roles in the protest of racist police brutality. Twitter allowed for black people to rapidly share information and organize themselves through their large network, but also to make the protests and the movement that ensued visible to the white community and the mainstream media. Through Twitter, black people managed to make their voices heard online and raise issues such as the representation of black victims in the news. As for Facebook, it allowed people to express their support to the various XLM movements, by creating and participating in pages and/or groups. The social network also provided information such as to the commitment of these

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<sup>359</sup> Idem.

supporters, showing that BlueLM was more popular as long as users did not have to participate, or that BLM had prompted the creation of many different pages and groups – decentralization which probably lessened their individual impact.

The protest movement that rose after the death of Michael Brown in August 2014 is unique, despite being the heir of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Indeed, this movement focuses on systemic racism, but is decentralized and acts under the name of the organization BLM, even though the different chapters do not answer to a unique leader or group of leaders. Born from the social network Twitter, BLM caught national then international attention as people from all over the world manifested their support online by using specific hashtags or by attending protests. However, the opposition also rapidly rose, as movements emerged under the names ALM, WLM and BlueLM, each with their specific criticism about BLM; while organizations have also been created for WLM and BlueLM, all three movements are generally less visible during protests and on social media. Yet, BlueLM and sometimes officers under investigation for the death of a black person do receive a lot of support from the American population, as police brutality is still not seen as systemic but as happening in isolated occurrences.

## **Conclusion**

African Americans have had to fight to get a proper citizenship in American society. Until late in the twentieth century, institutionalized racism under the forms of slavery and segregation prevented their access to equal treatment in every aspect of society (freedom, education, vote, employment, justice, access to public places, etc.) and often led to violent clashes with the white population, which could end up in death. However, even after the Civil War ended slavery, and the Civil Rights Movement ended segregation and legal racial discrimination, African Americans were still confronted to socioeconomic inequalities, and other ways to disfranchise them. Indeed, after the gains of the 1960s, mass incarceration led to a growing number of black men being forbidden to vote; schools were resegregated; poverty and unemployment came to touch in majority the black community; even though the gap between black and white high school graduates is closing today, the gap in higher education is still huge; and many studies confirm that while some claim to be in the era of colorblindness, racial prejudice is still a consequential issue in the American society.

One example of racial inequalities, and the core of this thesis, is police brutality, which can take many forms, from intimidation to unjustified deadly use of force. While this extreme abuse of authority targets every ethnicity, black people have been and still are disproportionately victims of police killings, and as the justice system and the government refuse to recognize that the issue is systemic and not just occurrences of isolated incidents, no national and lasting reforms of officer training and of policies are to be expected. Only a few Police Departments which have known publicized incidents – and for some have been under federal investigation – have implemented a few reforms. Besides, the Trump administration does not seem to consider racist police brutality as an issue that needs to be addressed.

Thus, in a context of tensions between the black community and the predominantly white Ferguson Police Department, the fatal shooting of Michael Brown immediately sparked local protests, which quickly became nationwide. Mainstream news outlets alongside the major social medium Twitter extensively covered the demonstrations, and participated in making this death internationally known and the embodiment of racist police brutality in the United States. Yet the protests were not reduced to this particular death, and as other black victims died under the responsibility of white police officers, the media craze and the marches continued. The news media, that many scholars established as managing which issues would become the focus of the general population, found themselves being influenced by the



emerging movement of protestation in real life and online. This emerging movement came to be known as Black Lives Matter.

While recent, this movement is the heir of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement in many aspects, such as the means used (marches, occupation of places, etc.), and the desire for peaceful protest which sometimes can turn violent through altercations with the police. However, other elements make BLM innovative, such as including the entire black community (for instance the black LGBTQ community), and the decentralization of leadership. Nonetheless, BLM has been heavily criticized and movements have risen in opposition. These movements are innovative too; ALM, WLM, and BlueLM, by imitating BLM phrasing, lessen its impact, whereas during the Civil Rights Movement, the Ku Klux Klan was the only nationally organized movement on the opposite side. ALM includes a spectrum of followers, from people who also agree with the BLM movement to people who believe that BLM has no legitimacy. This movement remains mostly an online opposition. WLM and BlueLM have their own organizations, but with very different goals: WLM shares similar concerns with white supremacist groups, and BlueLM focuses on solidarity toward law enforcement officers and their families. Besides playing an important role in these movements as well as spreading the news to the connected part of the population, social media help get a clearer idea of their extent. While people are more inclined to show their support to BLM by creating their own group or page, BlueLM has a page with by far the highest number of likes, showing that more people are inclined to show their support to the actual police organizations, as long as they do not have to be too active in the process. This underlines that the population is not invested in the same way depending on which movement it supports. The lack of information on Twitter prevented from reaching similar conclusions, but the studies conducted allowed to take a closer look at the importance this social medium had on spreading information and awareness of police killings, especially since in the United States, more black people use Twitter than white people. Thus, Twitter allowed the spark of indignation to ignite into fiery protests.

While a new Civil Rights Movement rose under the first black president, the current administration does not seem inclined to act in preventing or deterring police brutality, nor to address racism issues. Indeed, on many occasions President Trump has expressed his approval of violence – for instance with the use of torture against prisoners at Guantanamo, which he wants to keep open – and his support to police brutality, which he literally encouraged in a speech to officers in Brentwood, N.Y., and symbolically condoned when he pardoned a Sheriff who had violated the Constitution and his oath to serve and protect. Moreover,

Trump's desire to implement an immigration ban, his support to white supremacists during the protest turned violent in Charlottesville, and other controversial statements he made do not suggest that improving race relations and reducing racial inequalities are on his presidential agenda. Thus, an important new wave of Civil Rights movements could emerge alongside BLM, other organizations and other community leaders, to denounce other forms of inequalities and racism that the Trump administration encourages or protects, as suggest, among other instances, the feminist protests at the Women's March of January 2017 during Trump's inauguration, and other demonstrations against the immigration ban and the ban on sanctuary cities that took place since Trump took office almost nine months ago.

The BLM movement has widened its scope, for instance when chapters organized counter-protests in Charlottesville, as white nationalists protested against the removal of the statues of Confederate heroes, and when they prepared an exhibition on black history. While there is no certainty that the movement will persist, the feeling of necessity – especially under this administration – may ensure its durability. As long as no efficient reform is implemented to reduce the number of black people killed by the police, as long as the justice system is perceived as failing because of non-indictments of officers involved, and if BLM keeps expanding the range of its activities, while maintaining visibility in the social and news media, the movement could ensure a lasting support from the black community and sympathizers, and provoke considerable change in American society, as the Civil Rights Movement did.

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