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The True Impact of Black Lives Matter

Devin Iorio

America has a history of a constantly growing and changing society. This society has continued to evolve since the founding of the nation as a result of unremitting action taken by those who wish to change aspects of it. The Black Lives Matter movement, which began in 2013, is a prime example of this action being taken in present day. This movement exists as a response to the systematic inequality that plagues the American law enforcement system. While there has been some public concern as to the true effect of the Black Lives Matter movement, these worries are largely misguided. The true purpose of the movement is not to incite violence, but rather to raise a dialogue and offer a united voice on an issue that has persisted for far too long.

The Black Lives Matter movement has worked over the past several years to raise public awareness of the issue regarding American law enforcement's perceivably discriminatory relationship with African Americans. Through their many public protests and marches, the group has become a household name and largely synonymous with the present day black struggle for equality. The group has come to offer a strong and unified voice to individuals whose opinions are too often lost under the voice of their oppressors. This accumulation and unity of people serves to legitimize and strengthen the movement as a whole. The events of today showcase many stark similarities with those of the 1960's African American civil rights movement. During this time, the Montgomery Bus Boycott and its forerunners demonstrated the viability of organizing a local mass movement to challenge segregation in the Deep South¹. The united force of the civil rights activists during this time parallel the nature of members of Black Lives Matter who work and protest in masses in order to propel conversation around the "state-sanctioned violence"² towards African Americans throughout the country. In the present day, there are many influential members of Black Lives Matter who find themselves in the public eye and use their position to promote the principles and message of the group. One such individual is professional football player Colin Kaepernick. Kaepernick, who formerly played for the San Francisco 49ers, began the now very popular protest of kneeling during the National Anthem in order to protest against police brutality and injustice in the American law enforcement system. This act by Kaepernick spurred both his fellow players and the American people as a whole. In the opening weeks of the 2017 NFL football season the trend grew as almost every team in the National Football League had players participating in some form of protest³. The NFL's massive audience of Americans who tune in to watch these football games each week has resulted in the message of the Black Lives Matter group has ultimately been relayed to millions of individuals across the country. Through the use of these large group movements and united protests, the Black Lives Matter is able to facilitate their message to the American people, accomplishing their purpose as a group.

¹ Kenneth T. Andrews and Kraig Beyerlein and Tuneka Tucker Farnum. "The Legitimacy of Protest: Explaining White Southerners' Attitudes Toward the Civil Rights Movement." *Social Forces* 94, no. 3 (2016): 1021-1044. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed October 19, 2017).

² "Herstory", *Black Lives Matter*, n.d. 2017, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/herstory/>, Accessed October 19, 2017.

³ News, CBS. "NFL players continue national anthem protests." CBS News. October 15, 2017. Accessed October 19, 2017. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/nfl-players-continue-national-anthem-protests/>.

One of the greatest criticisms of the Black Lives Matter movement is that the organization actually worsens relations between African Americans and police and incites violence in minority neighborhoods; this claim is simply incorrect. African American relations with police officers have been poor for many years throughout American history. The Black Lives Matter organization has simply been broadcasting the injustice on a greater and more public scale. To find evidence of this historically deplorable relationship with police, one can merely look to the American 1980s. Black artists of the decade, such as NWA, created aggressive politically charged music in response to the militaristic, broken window policing of the era that ran rampant in minority neighborhoods. In its time NWA was also condemned by the FBI for its potential to incite violence and further damage relations between African Americans and law enforcement⁴. It has become commonplace that throughout American history those in a position of power have painted the oppressed as inciting violence any time they called for change. This concept can again be seen when looking at the response to the work of civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. In the case of the Nobel Peace Prize winner, the FBI also became involved to quell the “uprising”. During his life, King received a letter from the FBI urging him to end his insightful messages which threatened the order of society⁵. This again shows the repeated practice of the oppressors dispelling any call for change in society by the oppressed as overly confrontational. In all, it is evident that the issue of race relations has already been highly prevalent in America for years, and that the Black Lives Matter movement is working to again confront this issue.

In the years since its creation, the Black Lives Matter organization has had many notable impacts that have worked to better society. By drawing attention and raising public concern, Black Lives Matter has undoubtedly changed the dynamic of modern society regarding embedded racism. While it is impossible to truly and effectively quantify how many discriminatory acts have been prevented by Black Lives Matter, the true value of Black Lives Matter lies in the voice and attention that it lends to an issue that has existed for far too long. The group has unquestionably been effective in this endeavor. The organization has been the topic of conversation on virtually all media outlets over the past three years, as well as gained attention from powerful government leaders such as former President Obama who frequently invited representatives of the group to the White House in 2016⁶. Black Lives Matter allows for more people to become aware of the issue at hand and take part in working to solve the issue by no longer tolerating the unjust aspects of everyday culture. In addition to this, there are many measurable societal advancements and achievements made by the Black Lives Matter movement. One such achievement came with the filling and winning of a lawsuit against Baton Rouge

⁴ Hochman, Steve. "Compton Rappers Versus the Letter of the Law: FBI Claims Song by N.W.A.

Advocates Violence on Police." Los Angeles Times. October 05, 1989. Accessed October 19, 2017. http://articles.latimes.com/1989-10-05/entertainment/ca-1046_1_law-enforcement.

⁵ Gage, Beverly. "What an Uncensored Letter to M.L.K. Reveals." The New York Times. November 11, 2014. Accessed October 19, 2017.

https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/16/magazine/what-an-uncensored-letter-to-mlk-reveals.html?_r=1.

⁶ Collier Meyerson, "5 milestone accomplishments from the year in Black Lives Matter." Splinter.

December 21, 2016. Accessed October 19, 2017. <https://splinternews.com/5-milestone-accomplishments-from-the-year-in-black-live-1793864356>

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Police in response to the shooting of Alton Sterling. Ninety- two Black Lives Matter members won \$100,000 as a result of the “aggressive and unconstitutional tactics” used by the police⁷. This victory for Black Lives Matter demonstrates the effectiveness of the organization to fight for justice and create societal change. Through the examination of cases like this and the ability of the organization to draw public attention, it can be seen that Black Lives Matter is actively working to peacefully improve the lives of African Americans in America.

When looking at the Black Lives Matter organization it is important to remember that all effective protests and movements strive to make the oppressors of society uncomfortable in order to draw attention and create change. Black Lives Matter has used this ideology to spread their message of displeasure with law enforcement across the country. Despite accusations of being overly confrontational, the group has been able to cultivate a dialogue throughout the country and offer a unified voice to call out against the racial inequality which plagues American law enforcement to this day.

⁷Collier Meyerson, "5 milestone accomplishments from the year in Black Lives Matter."

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