

love not HATE

Uhuru editor-in-chief explores the
Black Lives Matter movement

WORDS BY SIERRA ALLEN

Since childhood, a staple lesson learned is to trust the police as they are obliged to protect and serve the community. We learn to call the police during frightful situations, but most importantly, to lean on them as they shield us from danger. However, for many black individuals, those feelings that once created a blanket of security soon disappear as we learn to face the real world.

For me, that security blanket vanished after Trayvon Martin, an unarmed, 17-year-old black boy, was shot and killed while shortcutting through a gated community on his way home. Like many before him, his death was accompanied with injustice as his killer, George Zimmerman, was acquitted at trial. Although many of these situations happened prior to Martin, this particular incident initiated the Black Lives Matter movement that stands today. I do not write this to inflict anger, but to impose understanding instead, of the importance of the Black Lives Matter movement.

As an 18-year-old black girl fresh out of a diverse high school, I tuned to the State of Florida v. George Zimmerman trial as if Trayvon Martin were my own little brother. He began to feel like a part of me, because in a way, he was. We shared the same skin color and cultural background, but the biggest factor was mentally seeing my biological brother within him. Just like Martin, my brother is a tall, young, black boy who poses as a

threat to certain people. I heard the imploring cry of someone who looked like my brother and could've been my brother on the 911 call. I felt the guilt of his mother not being able to protect her son, but from an older sibling's perspective instead. As the oldest daughter of a Navy SEAL, I was always taught to defend my siblings, and the thought of my brother's lifeless body flashing across the news screens like Martin's gave me goosebumps. This was such a huge weight on my heart, and no matter how much I tried to shake the connection off, it just wouldn't fade.

With the facts and scenario explained, along with the audio of the 911 call, I just knew that Zimmerman would be indicted. When I expressed my confidence to an older coworker who was also black, he laughed an exhausted laugh and replied, "Don't get your hopes up young lady. That man will go free."

Confused and caught off guard, I thought to myself, "Where is your hope?" But shortly after hearing the verdict of "not guilty," my heart sank as I rose out of my seat, dumbfounded, speechless and now, just like my coworker, hopeless.

Just like that, I woke up and realized that the world I once knew was no longer the same, and the certainty I had for the judicial system disappeared. I wiped a tear from my face and gathered myself, not knowing that this single tear would be the first of many more and I'd soon laugh the same exhausted laugh to keep from crying.

“This was such a **huge weight** on my heart and no matter how much I tried to shake the connection off, it just wouldn’t fade.”

—Sierra Allen

Soon after the trial, Black Lives Matter was created as “a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society,” according to the founders, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi and Alicia Garza. The victimized grew tired of being victims and the evolution of this movement is a direct reflection of that growth. Black Lives Matter aims for a world where black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise, but acknowledged and treated equally. It aims to rebuild and rebirth the black communities from within, while also challenging the system.

According to a study conducted by The Guardian, “Despite making up only 2 percent of the total US population [in 2015], African-American males between the ages of 15 and 35 comprised more than 15 percent of all deaths logged this year by an ongoing investigation into the use of deadly force by police. Their rate of police-involved deaths was five times higher than for white men of the same age.”

The same study also shows that out of 1,134 deaths at the hands of law enforcement, young black men were nine times more likely than other Americans to be killed by the police.

Declared by the Black Lives Matter official website page, “When we say Black Lives Matter, we are broadening the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state. We are talking about the ways in which black lives are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity.”

Even though Black Lives Matter is a rallying cry for liberation, there has been a lot of backlash from non-supporters. Rooted in apparent racism, the Ku Klux Klan is described as a “white Patriotic Christian organization,” but the Black Lives Matter movement is mislabeled as a hate

group. Although there is no correlation of the two organizations, it’s important to compare the systematic unfairness of their descriptions, which also misleads the perception of the public. This perception is then translated into the “angry black people” stereotype, when in actuality, Black Lives Matter is a reaction to the lack of basic human rights the black community has.

As stated above, it’s important to compare the systematic unfairness of both the Ku Klux Klan and Black Lives Matter. It’s also important to compare the unfairness between black and white individuals by law enforcement as well.

In 2015, Dylann Roof, the mass murderer involved in the Charleston, South Carolina, church shooting, killed nine innocent black parishioners as they stood and prayed near the end of Bible study. As police arrived, Roof was calmly arrested and taken to Burger King before his arrival at the police station, two luxuries a black man wouldn’t be awarded. As a black man, this wouldn’t even be an option, considering he’d have to be alive to even have that option.

In 2016, Philando Castile was shot to death seven times in front of his girlfriend and four-year-old daughter after reaching for his ID. Not only was he reaching for his ID, he was also reaching for his gun permit and explaining that he was armed, which is a tactic the black community learns early in life. Castile took all of the precautions of warning the police officer of his licensed weapon because he knew he’d become a threat but was still shot to death. The fact that he knew he had to quickly explain himself is the fear the black community feels when questioned by the police, even if there’s no wrongdoing.

Although Roof was sentenced to death and Castile’s murderer was charged with three felonies, this is just one of many examples of systematic racism in law enforcement. No, Roof was not a

police officer himself, but privilege is still expressed through his arrest. And even though his goal was to “start a race war,” as stated in his confession according to the New York Daily News, he was only painted as a troubled kid, which is another prime example of privilege a black man wouldn’t be able to hold.

Black Lives Matter is more than the focal point of the validity of black life within the system, but it’s about the validity of black life and equal privilege as a whole. It all coincides.

Black Lives Matter is a reminder and protest that people of color deserve and demand equal protection, human rights and life, just like everyone else. In fact, “just because the movement aims to end police violence against black lives does not mean it encourages violence against police by black people. Black Lives Matter has never, ever insinuated that other lives don’t,” Lilly Workneh, The Huffington Posts’ Black Voices senior editor, says. So when people type or chant Black Lives Matter, it is not a slogan that is meant to take away from the importance of other lives, but it is a reminder and declaration of the importance of ours just as well.

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