

BLM Paper by Matthew Hughes

The Black Lives Matter Movement began in 2013 by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi. It was founded after the murder of a black teenager named Trayvon Martin in February of 2012 by then neighborhood watchmen George Zimmerman. Sadly Zimmerman was later acquitted of his death in the ensuing trial which to me is a sheer travesty of justice for a family to lose their son especially so young and the killer to then walk free. The movement was created primarily to raise awareness of incidents of police brutality and civil rights injustices in particular ones linked to race or racial biases that seem to still be prevalent even today. That however is only the start to the tragedy, as after that in 2014 an 18 year old black man named Michael Brown was also killed by a police officer, there is however debate as to whether he was robbing a convenience store at the time and if when he was directed to he actually held his hands up as the officer had instructed him to do upon first seeing him after robbing the store. Regardless though no one should have to die in such a manner and no ones family should have to go through that level of pain upon losing a loved one, especially as even if he was doing something wrong at the time he was 18 and many, many 18 year olds do foolish, impulsive, or flat-out dangerous things and don't lose their lives as a result. This incident however would push the movement onwards even farther however as after Brown's death there were many protests both peaceful and non in Ferguson where Brown had been killed, some linked to Black Lives Matter and others linked to just every day outraged citizens that many more deaths that are wrongful are of black men and women.

It was becoming very apparent that much of the deaths going on were also caused by law enforcement encounters going very wrong, or in many of the cases potentially all an over use of force in order to get a suspect to stand down or surrender. This is especially true in the case of Trayvon Martin, as well as someone else I have not discussed yet, a much more recent incident the death of George Floyd as well as the death of Breonna Taylor. These two deaths struck me the most since Trayvon Martins as they were both very preventable and even more unnecessary. The death of Breonna Taylor on March 13th of 2020 in Louisville KY was absolutely sickening to me as not only were the police officers involved in question not even in uniform, but also because Brett Hankison was indicted by a grand jury in September of that year for wanton endangerment of Breonna's neighbors who's apartment was hit when he fired without a clear line of sight into the sliding glass patio door and window of Ms. Taylor's apartment. This alone suggests that Hankison had little regard for the lives of others in general not just based on race, creed, or culture alone making him someone at least in my eyes that would not be a good police officer, one who is enlisted to protect and serve as they say. Breonna was an EMT and served the public in a key role and likely saved several if not more lives before having hers taken in such a heinous manner, by 3 officers who executed a poorly planned raid and forced entry into her apartment with a search warrant they had procured not even for her but for someone living in the same unit.

Two other officers Jonathan Mattingly and Myles Cosgrove were also charged as they were with Hankison and helped in the poorly executed raid that led to Taylor's death, however they were merely reassigned to administrative duties. The fact that most disturbs me however upon reviewing this particular case is that Breonna was struck six times in a matter of a few seconds of the 3 officers entering her apartment simply because she was standing in the hallway with the man the officers believed they were looking for in connection to the drug ring that he was reportedly involved in. That alone suggests a severe lack of restraint and training which is a dismal failure of a system that is supposed to keep ALL citizens safe and if making an arrest or issuing a warrant doing so in the correct manner to avoid fatalities and even injuries when possible. This lack of training and correct procedure when arresting someone, executing a warrant and so on would continue with the tragic death of George Floyd later that same year. George Floyd was an unarmed black man who was believed to have bought cigarettes with a counterfeit 20\$ bill after a convenience store worker called police. Little did he realize that this call would have a ripple effect that would impact a families life forever. Around seventeen minutes after the first squad car arrived on the scene Floyd would be rendered unconscious as one of the officers involved thought it would be a great idea to kneel on his neck.

This was allegedly because Floyd was resisting arrest and whether he was or not there is absolutely no excuse for such appalling and overly forceful behavior that leaves a man dead who in no way deserved to be, least of all in such a ghastly manner. As 3 officers stood around and watched, 2 even blocking onlookers from seeing what was happening the fourth officer currently on the scene Derek Chauvin continuously applied pressure to George Floyd's neck, this would shortly after lead to his death. What makes this even more tragic is that Floyd had been engaged for 3 years from 2017-2020 until his death on May 25th of 2020, I have pondered many times would some if not all of these have ended differently if the people who were believed to have perpetrated these actions been white, or if the officers in question had more training in order to better handle certain situations? I believe that training could have been and needs to be improved for officers for scenarios like these, in particular when to use force versus when to not, but it also becomes a question of screening possible officers better before they are even able to obtain a gun or a badge for hints of racial biases, and not even just for black men or women, but any and all minorities. That is imperative in particular not making snap judgments and being the type in some case and in some not so metaphorically to shoot first and ask questions later, the system needs to change the way it does things if tragedies like these are lessened or hopefully entirely eliminated, so no families have to suffer the ways these did.

This movement has also affected me as I have several friends who are black and well I wonder if any scenarios even close to these ever happened to them versus if they happened to anyone from any other race or culture I know would it end badly and would I ever see them again? The lack of training and proper police work done in these situations is deeply disturbing and I perennially have wondered for some time now if officers are properly trained in the way of handling all cultures and races equally and if biases are screened for in a proper way before an officer is legally able to begin their job. We as a society can do better and do believe that if Black Lives Matter continues the momentum its started over the last years since Trayvon Martins death then it can likely make a big difference and perhaps even stamp out a good deal of the racism that still exists at least in some areas such as some of the men and women in law enforcement. Racism is pointless to begin with as in every race, creed, and color, there are good and bad people in all walks of life but no one not a single solitary soul should ever have to lose their life in the way that the men and women described in the essay did, through sloppy

handling of delicate situations. Hopefully in the future that can be lessened to a very great extent if not entirely eliminated.