

# What Black Lives Matter Means to Me by Erica Ugbo

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is more than just a movement to me. It's an experience that I've had to operate my whole life. I remember when I was younger, I had such a passion for school. I remember how I would complete countless math problems the teacher didn't assign just for fun, I remember going to the library and reading three books a week, I remember being bullied for "acting white," and I remember being called "an oreo". Back then I didn't know what it meant to "act white". I didn't understand what was so bad about being at the top of my class yet being black *at the same time*. To this day I feel unapologetic about being black and educated, while rejecting those societal norms. If my experience can inspire at least one person to feel remorseless about themselves, then it's worth fighting for. Fighting against prejudiced beliefs and a corrupted justice system isn't new for black people, it's a norm, an involuntary lifestyle, and it shouldn't have to be. The BLM movement is my microphone to signify how I deserve to be treated, and I deserve to have the same opportunities and be treated like any other race, equally. It shouldn't take being suffocated under a police officer's knee for me to attest to the fact that my life matters. It shouldn't take being shot walking home from school for people to finally understand my oppression. It shouldn't take being wrongly arrested for people to know my name, because my life matters enough that I should be able to make a worthwhile name for myself. This movement exists because, after centuries of exploitation, this goal even now has not yet been achieved.

The phrase "black lives matter" isn't insinuating that other lives don't matter. Everyone has the right to live and the right to pursue their own happiness. When people talk about the denotation of Black Lives Matter, they're really trying to embody that **black lives matter too**. The Black Lives Matter movement is also significant because I believe the world needs to be

exposed to history and how it's affecting the world we inhabit today. The oppression and abuse of black people all over the world has been diluted. It's been shoved into one month, and one small chapter of a history book. No other group in America still to this day bears the hardships that slavery and discrimination has caused. It's intricately woven into our laws, the way we police, and one of the biggest reasons for the set back of African American progress and excessive wealth disparities.

This movement can either break us or make us as a country. People trying to assign a negative connotation to the movement due to the mistakes and extremities of a small group of individuals, as well as misrepresentation from the media, can easily not only discredit the hard work of all involved, but repel others from seeing the truth. The truth is that there's a group of people who want to highlight the gruesome reality of the history that has shaped this country to the point where many can see no wrong. There's evidence and statistics that can attest to the fact that society's view on black people has shown correlation to stereotypes that result in the slaughter of black people. Officials in office, who hold power all over our country, holding bias like this are the reason people don't see the need to help and understand black communities. They are then met with violence and ignorance resulting in civil unrest because black lives don't seem to be respected as we've seen time and time again. Imagine human beings' slain, yet those doing the murder are treated the same way as someone with excessive speeding tickets. Then living in a world where people try to justify these wrongdoings with nothing other than their internalized and irrational fear of black people and change. If BLM can inspire more people to break these societal norms, learn from their history, defend their communities, and above all learn understanding and tolerance, a breakthrough can occur where we can all live unapologetically and safely in this country.