

The Black Lives Matter Movement



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Research Question:

How has Black Lives Matter Affected
Positive Social change on Behalf of
Black People?

February 26, 2012: Trayvon Martin's Killing

On February 26, 2012, 17 year old Trayvon Martin was shot and killed while leaving a convenience store in Sanford, Florida. He was shot by George Zimmerman, a 28 year old man, who had been working as a volunteer neighborhood watch. George Zimmerman was patrolling the neighborhood at the time. Zimmerman claimed that he shot Martin out of self defense, despite the teen being unarmed. Martin had been visiting his father from Miami, Florida when he was seen by Zimmerman who “called the non-emergency line of the Sanford police to report that Martin looked suspicious then ignored a police dispatcher’s advice not to follow the young man.” ([History.com](http://www.history.com)).



Picture of Trayvon Martin

Trayvon Martin's Killing Continued

There were no witnesses to the shooting, but when George Zimmerman was found, he appeared to have sustained multiple injuries. Among those were a bloody nose and a number of cuts on the back of his head. Trayvon Martin's death drew nationwide attention, which led to mostly local protests being held in Martin's name. Zimmerman was charged with second degree murder, to which he pled not guilty, and his trial began in June 2013. The trial received massive public attention. The text from [History.com](https://www.history.com) "Prosecutors also tried to poke holes in Zimmerman's self-defense claim by pointing to inconsistencies in his statements to the police." The trial ended with the jury finding Zimmerman not guilty and saw him acquitted of all charges. While this was heartbreaking for the black community, it was not surprising. Decisions to acquitted police officers of charges was not uncommon, especially when they are being charged by a black person. This decision lead to massive public outrage and is seen as the event that lead to BLM's founding.

Jul 13, 2013: Black Lives Matter is Created

Black Lives Matter or BLM was founded in 2013 by 3 women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi. It started as a internet hashtag called #BlackLivesMatter . It was founded after Trayvon Martin's murder at the hands of neighborhood police volunteer, George Zimmerman. The group's goal was to bring awareness to the oppression that the black community faces. This oppression takes the form of both police brutality, and systemic racism. BLM also wants to highlight groups within the black community, such as black women, and black queer and trans people. With every police killing of an unarmed black person, BLMs influence and numbers grew. One of these killings was Michael (or Mike) Brown, a unarmed black 18 year old who was shot by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. Mike was walking on the street with his friend Dorian Johnson when they were stopped by Darren Wilson in his police SUV, who told them to get on the sidewalk.



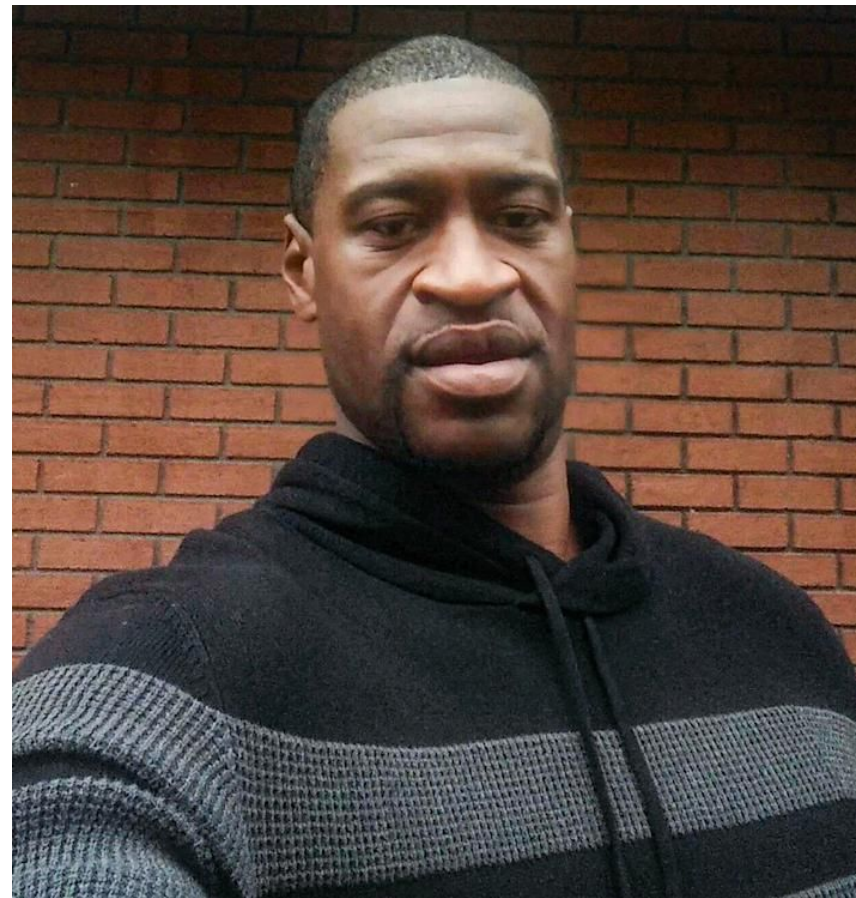
One of the many racial justice protests held in Trayvon Martin's name.

BLMs Creation Continued

Officer Wilson then drove his car in front of Mike Brown and Dorian Johnson to stop them from moving forward. Wilson and Brown then had a verbal altercation through the window of the car, during which Wilson fired two gunshots leading to Brown and Johnson running away. Wilson exited his car and pursued them on foot, leading to him eventually fatally shooting Michael Brown six times. The killing of Brown came with massive public outrage. BLM quickly took action, organizing many protests in Mike Brown's name. As a result of this, they saw their numbers and support grow. [Aclu.org](https://www.aclu.org) states BLM is not a movement focused on civil rights, it's a movement that focuses on "fighting for a fundamental reordering of society wherein Black lives are free from systematic dehumanization." Today BLM is recognized globally, and people all around the world attempt to carry out its mission. Many different organizations and charities make up parts of the movement. An example is the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, a legal organization that fights for racial justice. Another example is the Loveland Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides help to people of color with mental health struggles, specifically women and girls of color. These organizations and charities have helped BLM span its influence to marginalized groups within the black community. The organizations and charities also have helped the black community and their struggles to be acknowledged. The progress that BLM has made over the years would not have been possible without the help of these organizations and charities. BLM's size and influence has grown massively as time has gone by. A internet hashtag has turned into a movement made up of many organizations, that has the influence to make massive changes to society.

May 25, 2020: George Floyd's Killing

On May 25, 2020, In Minneapolis, Minnesota, George Floyd, a 46 year old black man, was killed by police officer Derek Chauvin . A video of the killing went viral on social media and caused massive public outrage. The video portrays the incident as it happened. The incident began after three officers, Derek Chauvin, Thomas Lane, and J. Alexander Kueng, responded to a 911 call, stating that George Floyd had paid for cigarettes with counterfeit money. [New York Times](#) states, "In the footage, Mr. Lane, one of the officers, taps his flashlight on the window and asks Mr. Floyd to show his hands. After being asked several times, Mr. Floyd eventually opens the car door, while apologizing." "When Floyd opens the door the officer "draws his gun, points it at Mr. Floyd and says, 'Put your [expletive] hands up right now.'" He then pulls Floyd out of the car, while never explaining the reason he stopped Floyd.



Picture of George Floyd

George Floyd's Killing Continued

The officers pushed Floyd into the backseat of the police car, despite his claims that he was claustrophobic. As a result of this, Floyd “pushes himself out the other side of the vehicle, saying he is going to lie on the ground.” ([New York Times](#)). The officers proceed to pin Floyd facedown with “Mr. Chauvin kneeling on his neck, Mr. Kueng kneeling on his upper legs and holding his wrist, and Mr. Lane holding Mr. Floyd’s legs.” Despite saying that he could not breathe, George Floyd was kept in that position for over nine minutes, during which Officer (now former) Kueng checked George Floyd’s pulse, telling the other officers that he could not feel it. Despite that, the officers held Floyd in a position that restricted his breathing until medical assistance arrived. By then it was too late, Floyd had already died due to a lack of oxygen.



One of the protests in Pennsylvania held after George Floyd's killing.

The Social and Political Effects of George Floyd's Death

The video came with nationwide shock and outrage, police brutality had been going on for years and people were aware of it. Floyd's death however, was too much for the public to handle. The dehumanizing way in which Floyd was treated was appalling to many. Protests erupted all around the nation, this led "to a nationwide racial justice movement not seen since the civil rights protests of the 1960s." The Black Lives Matter movement quickly became the main force behind the protests. This time of protests saw BLM gain not only national recognition, but also recognition on an international scale, with BLM protests happening in countries all over the world. These protests came at a heavy cost for some as the protesters often clashed with the police, which led to dangerous encounters that left people injured. The protesters were subject to being tear gassed, arrested, and in some cases, being violently assaulted by the police. The Black Lives Matter movement was put under political scrutiny. A movement that was aimed to ensure black lives were valued and stop the many forms of racism present in American society, turned into a political one that caused divides among the public. While there was political conflict surrounding the movement, BLM was able to accomplish what it set out to do. In April, Derek Chauvin was convicted of second degree murder, third degree murder, and manslaughter, he was later sentenced to 22 ½ years in prison. Derek Chauvin being convicted of the crimes that he committed showed that BLM had made progress, police were finally being held accountable. The social change that BLM has made so far has come at a very slow pace, but the progress they have made has been massive. However BLM's political changes, are quite minimal when compared to the social changes they have made, but as the movement grows so will its political influence, the first sign of its growing political influence presented itself as the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020

February 24, 2021: The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020

The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020 was passed by the House of Representatives on May 25, 2020, the bill was blocked by the Senate. The bill was designed to put an end to unjust policing practices. According to [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov), in addition to other things the bill does the following :

- “lowers the criminal intent standard—from willful to knowing or reckless—to convict a law enforcement officer for misconduct in a federal prosecution,”
- “limits qualified immunity as a defense to liability in a private civil action against a law enforcement officer,”
- “And grants administrative subpoena power to the Department of Justice (DOJ) in pattern-or-practice investigations.”

The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act also aimed to stop racial profiling from police officers. The bill was passed in response to George Floyd's death at the hands of police, and the bill was named after Floyd.

What The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020 Meant

The George Floyd Justice in Policing act was more impactful in a social way than a legislative way. The bill being passed by the House of Representatives gave many black people hope that their struggle was finally being noticed at a high level of government . The bill even being introduced was seen by many as evidence of BLMs growing political influence. While the bill being introduced showed BLM's progress, the bill being blocked by the Senate showed that there was a large amount of work for the movement in the future.



Karen Bass, the main sponsor of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, making a speech in support of the bill.

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