

## The Black Lives Matter Movement: Past, Present, and Future

October 20, 2015: a University of Missouri graduate student goes on hunger strike protesting racial slurs on campus; the football team refuses to play until the president of the university resigns. November 13, 2015: Yale University students protest over culturally appropriating Halloween costumes. November 11, 2015: Claremont McKenna students hunger strike. November 18, 2015: a Princeton University sit-in. Across the country, the Black Lives Matter movement and a number of other social justice groups have brought racial discrimination to the forefront of society's attention. The movement, like any that pushes for major change, has not been without backlash, whether in the form of physical violence against protesters or, more symbolically, in the anonymous act of placing tape over the portraits of black Harvard Law School professors. I support the Black Lives Matter movement and all they have done to bring attention to police brutality and other forms of racial injustice. But I believe it is time for a shift in goals. Society has been saturated with discussion of the deaths of innocent black citizens – it is now time to solve the problem through legislation. The best, most thorough way to fix the underlying societal problem that has caused these deaths is to make far-reaching changes to housing and education – a transformation that must originate with the government.

The tumultuous decade of the 1960s was the last time protests of this magnitude burst out over racial issues. We remember this era for Martin Luther King Jr., whose nonviolent protests to end segregation make for heroic stories that are told in every middle school in America. It is of little surprise, then, that the legislative acts that turned desegregation into law have been somewhat

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overshadowed – *Brown vs. the Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were the measures that firmly laid the Jim Crow “separate but equal” statutes in the dust. My reason for mentioning these is to emphasize that grassroots movements like Black Lives Matter have their best chance of becoming successful by working through the current established system of law. Many people are now passionate about racial justice, and nearly everyone is at the very least aware of the cause – it is time to turn social pressure into real results, time to lobby Congress and bring cases to the Supreme Court to effect the movement’s ultimate goals.

This plan of action begs the question of what, in fact, the legislative and regulatory goals of the movement should be. I believe that they should focus on the root of the problem – the underlying, often subconscious racism in our society. Some ideas that have been suggested concentrate too narrowly on the police themselves, such as the often-repeated idea of putting cameras on law enforcement. Measures like this one would help to convict police officers who make racist attacks, and it would perhaps prevent a portion of these attacks by keeping the police more attentive, but I do not believe that these deaths would stop occurring. Instead, the focus should be on educating our nation’s youth, putting them in an environment where different races are acknowledged but treated as equally as, say, different academic interests. How can such a major shift in societal mindset be accomplished? I suggest a combination of teaching a respect for different races – which is already being done, to some degree, in classes like US History – and, more importantly, putting students in an actual diverse environment from a young age. The largest obstacle to solving America’s race problem is the segregation of black and white

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communities, often a result of historical happenstance and socioeconomic background. For example, cheap inner-city housing is inhabited by those of a lower socioeconomic background, often giving rise to a predominately black community. Conversely, suburban areas like Westport usually have higher costs of living, and the result is a largely white population. Government-mandated cheaper housing units in wealthier neighborhoods would add diversity to schools, and if instituted on a wide scale, could do much to eradicate racist undertones from the thoughts of the next generation.

As for the protests on college campuses themselves, I support the intent, as well as the execution – for the most part. The spread of awareness of racial issues is unquestionably a positive idea, as is the elimination of racist practices and microaggressions, often unintentional, from people’s behavior. The aspect with which I do take issue, however, is the environment that makes it difficult to speak conservative opinions on these campuses without the hushing cries that label the speech as offensive. When a college only invites speakers espousing liberal views, it can be alienating to those with other opinions. It is not the approach an institution of education should take – rather, it should promote real discussion, inviting speakers to campus whose opinions may be unpopular with much of the student body. Helping students understand each others’ opinions should be a cornerstone of any college’s goals – and besides, understanding how others think is the most effective way to change their minds. The Black Lives Matter movement is an important voice, one that has not been heard nearly enough until only recently, but it should not be so loud as to drown out others.

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Black Lives Matter has done much to combat racial injustice. While the movement does have a tendency to quiet conflicting opinions, its spread of awareness and passion for the cause of racial justice far outstrip its relatively minor defects. The next step in the effort is to effect far-reaching change through the established governmental process, by lobbying Congress or passing cases up to the Supreme Court. Laws that serve to desegregate housing and teach respect for all races through our education system would do much to solve the racial tensions in our society. The events that have occurred reflect poorly on our country, and they require major changes to correct them. The people are prepared – now is the time to combat racism head-on.