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# The evolution of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States from its creation to nowadays

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► **To cite this version:**

Apolline Lagarde. The evolution of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States from its creation to nowadays. Humanities and Social Sciences. 2020. dumas-03113315

**HAL Id: dumas-03113315**

**<https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-03113315>**

Submitted on 18 Jan 2021

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**UNIVERSITÉ  
CAEN  
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Université de Caen, Normandie  
UFR Langues Vivantes Étrangères  
Master Études Culturelles

**MÉMOIRE MASTER 2 ÉTUDES CULTURELLES**

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**The Evolution of the Black Lives Matter  
Movement in the United States from its  
Creation to Nowadays**

Mémoire sous la direction de  
Monsieur Taoufik Djebali

Année Universitaire 2019/2020

*À mes parents.*

# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PART ONE : PERSISTING RACIAL INEQUALITIES</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>I. Structural Racism</b>	<b>9</b>
1. Different views on structural racism and what holds Black people back	9
2. Economic situation of the Black community	12
3. Educational disparities	17
4. Access to jobs and (un)employment rates	28
5. Access to quality housing	32
6. Health disparities	36
<b>II. The Justice System and Federal System and their Impact on The Black Community</b>	<b>41</b>
1. The distrust of the Black population towards law enforcement	41
2. The "War on Drugs" and its impact on Black people	44
3. Mass incarceration	47
4. Black deaths by law enforcement	50
<b>III. A Feeling of Disappointment from the Black Community towards Black People in Position of Power</b>	<b>56</b>
1. The hope that Barack Obama represented	56
A. Candidate Obama: A hope for racial equality	56
B. Obama and racial equality	59
C. Obama's reactions to police killings	63
2. Black elite in position of power	65
A. A Black elite standing in the White elite's path	65
B. Black policemen involved in killings of African Americans	67
<b>PART TWO: THE RISE OF THE MOVEMENT UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF BARACK OBAMA</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>I. The Spark that Put the Movement on Fire</b>	<b>70</b>
1. Beginning of protests after the death of Trayvon Martin	70
2. Different protests but no main organization	73
3. The indictment of Zimmerman and the creation of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter	75
<b>II. The "Full-Blown Emergence" of the Movement in Ferguson</b>	<b>79</b>

1. Ferguson (2014): the catalyst of a national protest after the death of Michael Brown	79
2. Police response to protests in Ferguson	82
3. Massive protests in Baltimore: focus on a wider issue	86
<b>III. A New Kind of Social Movement that Seems to Reflect Nowadays Society</b>	<b>91</b>
1. The use of new technologies to build a movement	91
2. The place of youth in building protests	93
3. A "mosaic of activism" created through multiple forms	96
<b>PART THREE: AN APPARENT DECLINE OF PROTESTS SINCE THE ELECTION OF DONALD TRUMP</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>I. Issues Encountered by the Movement</b>	<b>102</b>
1. The media coverage of Ferguson uprising and its impact on the movement	102
2. The "All Lives Matter" : the backlash	106
3. The lack of leadership as the main internal issue in the movement	109
<b>II. Difficulties to Protest in the Trump Era</b>	<b>113</b>
1. A feeling of hate during the presidential campaign	113
2. The consequences of protesting on Black activists	116
3. A return to a fight for the more basic rights since the election of Donald Trump	120
<b>III. Mixed Opinions About the Achievement of The Movement and its Future</b>	<b>124</b>
1. A difficult shift from protests to politics	124
2. An ongoing fight with new forms of activism	127
3. Achievements of the movement	131
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>144</b>

## List of Charts and Tables

<b>Charts</b>	
"Persons in Poverty by Race/ Ethnicity, 1974-2011"	p.15
"Median Net Worth of Households, 1984 to 2011"	p.16
"Percent of Children Under 18 Living in Poverty, 2013"	p.19
"Percent of Students in All Private Elementary and Secondary Schools in The United States, 2015"	p.23
"Percent of Students in All Public Elementary and Secondary Schools in The United States, 2015"	p.23
"Percent of Employed People in the United States, 2012 Annual Averages"	p.28
"Percent of Unemployment Rates, 2000-2012 Annual Average"	p.31
"Percent of Contact Initiated With The Police, 2015"	p.43
"Number of Sentenced Prisoners in The U.S., 2005-2015"	p.47
"Percent of Sentenced Prisoners Under State Jurisdiction, 2008"	p.48
"Percent of Sentenced Prisoners Under The jurisdiction of State Correctional Authority, 2014"	p.59
"Percent of White Prisoners Under The Jurisdiction of State Correctional Authority, From 2004-2014"	p.60
"Percent of Black prisoners Under The Jurisdiction of State Correctional Authority, From 2004-2014"	p.60
<b>Table</b>	
"Number and Percent of Children Under Age 18 Living in Poverty"	p.19

# INTRODUCTION

Police brutality against the Black community is an issue deeply rooted in American society and if its denunciation in public mainstream is occasional, it remains a phenomenon that affects Black people in their every day life. What has been denounced by the Black Lives Matter movement is that police violence against the Black community in the United States is not only the result of a simple, yet disastrous pattern of racist White police officers killing Black people. Police violence actually engraves itself in a system of structural racism that has been deeply affecting the Black community for years and that results in persisting racial disparities in education, health, housing and employment between Black and White people. According to the movement, police brutality is in fact the visible consequence of a system of structural racism that leads to the constant harassment of poor Black communities by law enforcement. The fight of the Black Lives Matter movement therefore engraves itself in a long standing struggle for racial equality started years ago by the Civil Rights movement. The rise of massive protests of the Black Lives Matter movement in Ferguson in 2014 after the killing of an 18 year old African American by law enforcement, recalls the events of 1992 in Los Angeles. That year the widespread of the video of a Black man, Rodney King, being beaten by police officers of the Los Angeles Police Department had led to what is now known as the 1992 Los Angeles riots. If the use of excessive force by police officers was not uncommon at the time and is still not today, the difference then with other cases of police violence was that for once a footage of the beating of Rodney King had been made and widely spread. Those events resonate with the more recent denunciations of police brutality mainly due to the use of social media which now enable people to denounce those acts of police violence. Yet, if the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement engraves itself in a much older fight for racial equality, its evolution raises new questions. In fact, the movement rose during the presidency of the first ever

Black president, Barack Obama, a candidate who had brought many hopes of building a "post-racial" society. Even more surprising, massive protests of the movement started declining in 2016 when the openly racist candidate, Donald Trump, rose in the political sphere.

Several studies have been made on the Black Lives Matter movement, many books have been written by activists or founders of the movement. That list of books includes: *When They Call you a Terrorist* written by Patrisse Khan-Cullors<sup>1</sup>, *They Can't Kill Us All* by Wesley Lowery<sup>2</sup>, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor<sup>3</sup> or *Making All Black Lives Matter* written by Barbara Ransby.<sup>4</sup> All those works mainly recall the major events that brought the movement to life. They give details about the protests in Ferguson and Baltimore, recall the feelings of protesters during the demonstrations and give a precise analysis of the lives of several Black men and women who have been impacted by police brutality and structural racism in their daily lives. The book written by Patrisse Khan-Cullors recalls the rise of the movement and highlights different levels of racism in the United States by tackling the theme of structural racism. Other works on the Black Lives Matter movement have been done to compare it with the Civil Rights movement that came before it: among them a journal article written by Dewey Mc Clayton entitled "Black Lives Matter: A Comparative Analysis of two Social Movements in the United States" published in 2018 or "Black Lives Matter: The Movement's Relevance and Comparison to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement" written by Stacy Jenkins-Robinson in 2017. Finally, articles focusing on the place of women in building the Black Lives Matter movement have been written, for example, one by Marcia Chatelain entitled: "Women and Black Lives Matter" published in 2015. Thus, several works have been published on the Black Lives Matter movement. The aim of this thesis is to understand how the evolution of the movement reflects the society in which it was built. Therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> Khan-Cullors, Patrisse, *When They Call You a Terrorist: a Black Lives Matter Memoir*, Canongate Books Ltd, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Lowery, Wesley, *They Can't Kill Us All*, Little, Brown and Company, November 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ransby, Barbara, *Making All Black Lives Matter*, University of California Press, 2018.



this work aims at analyzing the political and social context that has brought the movement to life, studying its rise and the role that social media played in its creation and finally understanding what context brought the movement to decline from 2016 to the beginning of 2020.

The study of the evolution of the Black Lives Matter movement from its very beginning to nowadays raises many questions about the state of racial equality in the United States. It makes one wonder about what led to so much distrust of the Black community towards law enforcement and whether the racism of certain police officers is the only cause of police violence towards Black people. The denunciation of structural racism that is thought by Black activists to have led to the eruption of the movement also leads to question the context in which it erupted. Thus, what are the feelings of most African Americans on the question of racial equality in the United States? And are those feelings in accordance with the state of racial equality in the country? It also leads to question the link between structural racism and the ongoing police violence towards Black people: How has the "War On Drugs", started by President Nixon, led to the mass incarceration of Black people in the United States since 1971? And what consequences has the mass incarceration of Black people had on the Black community? The rise of the movement under the presidency of Barack Obama also rises questions about his achievements as president of the United States. How did Black people feel about Obama and why did the movement expand under his presidency? Above all, it makes one reconsider the idea that the United States is a post-racial society. Thus, did the election of Barack Obama show that having a Black president would not be sufficient to end racial disparities? The killings of Black people by law enforcement is a long standing issue in the United States, and every year a disproportionate number of Black people are killed by police officers. Therefore, what was the spark that put the movement on fire? And what role did social media play in the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement? In addition, several aspects of the Black Lives Matter movement have led to think that the movement created a new way of organizing. To what extent does the

Black Lives Matter movement represent a new kind of social movement? Finally since 2016, massive protests of the Black Lives Matter movement seem to have declined. Which issues did the movement encounter? And did the arrival of Donald Trump in the political sphere have an impact on how Black activists used to organize? As the movement has now been alive since 2012, one must question its achievements and see whether the situation has improved for the Black community on matters of police violence and racial inequalities between Blacks and Whites. Thus, did the movement achieve its goal and are massive protests likely to emerge again?

To understand the scope of the Black Lives Matter movement, one must study the social, political and cultural context that has brought it to life. The difficulty of studying a social movement lies in its unpredictability. Nevertheless, studying the context that has brought it to life can help determine the reasons of its surge and maybe help to predict the rise of future social movements. The major event that brought Black people in the streets in 2012 was the death of a young African American, Trayvon Martin, killed by a White police officer. Yet, if police violence is the main reason that pushed Black people to demonstrate in the streets under the slogan "Black Lives Matter", it is in no way the only reason of Black discontent. According to several Black Lives Matter activists, police violence engraves itself in a process of "structural racism" that prevents most African Americans from succeeding economically just like many White people in the United States. Thus, behind police violence, which is in Black Lives Matter activists' opinion the most visible part of racism in the United States, lies a structural racism that the movement aims at denouncing. Therefore, in order to understand the Black Lives Matter movement, the first part of this work aims at understanding activists' main claims by studying the social and political context that has brought the movement to life. In order to do that, the different aspects that make Black activists think that racial inequalities persist in the United States will be studied. As feelings among the population sometimes differ from the reality, the feelings of most African Americans and Black

activists towards those aspects will be contrasted to the facts. In order to understand the feelings of most African Americans, data from different census coming for example from the U.S. Census Bureau will be examined. The distrust of Black people towards law enforcement will be analyzed through those census, as well as their views of racial disparities in education, health, housing and employment. The perception of Black Lives Matter activists will be considered through the different books or essays they have written. The books *When They Call You a Terrorist* written by one of the co-founders of the movement Patrisse Khan-Cullors, *Making All Black Lives Matter* written by historian and activist Barbara Ransby and *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor will be analyzed to study the main claims put forward by Black Lives Matter activists. As for facts on health, educational achievement, employment, incarceration, and housing, they will be evaluated thanks to data from the National Center for Health Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. Department of Justice, Pew Research Center (etc.). Therefore, the first part of this work aims at understanding the main claims of Black Lives Matter activists. Studying those claims will then lead to building a connection between cases of police violence and the structural racism that seems to impact most Black communities in the United States. It is the political and social context in which the movement has emerged that will be first studied to understand the roots of police brutality against Black people in the United States.

The second part of this work aims at studying the rise of the movement and the evolution of the protest from 2012 to 2016. The first goal will be to trace back the exact moment when the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was created and understand where it came from. Thus, an analysis of several documents made by the three founders of the movement will be done. Among those sources is the short documentary made by the Black Lives Matter movement and entitled *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter Movement Documentary*, in which the three co-founders of the movement and

several other activists talk about the surge and evolution of the movement. The testimony of the three founders will be used to understand how the hashtag was actually created and how it has led to protests. The use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter through the years will be analyzed to trace back the evolution of the movement. Several Pew Research studies on the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter will therefore be analyzed in order to recall the different events and cases of police violence denounced on social media that then had led to the massive protests of Ferguson and Baltimore. In addition to that, newspaper articles from *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Washington Post* and several other American newspapers will be used to recall the very first signs of protests (started in 2012) but also all the different forms of protests against police brutality that started during that year. As the movement fully emerged in 2014 in Ferguson, the death of Michael Brown and the protests that followed it will be studied from different angles. Therefore, testimonies of Black activists, protesters in the streets and news channels reports will be examined to have a bigger picture on those protests. Protests in Ferguson are mainly remembered because of a high number of striking pictures of tanks and heavily armed police officers facing protesters in the streets. Therefore the response of police to the protests in Ferguson will be studied through the images published by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and other American newspapers, and through their analysis of police equipments during those protests. The demands and the actions taken by the movement will be examined through the analysis of the official website of the Black Lives Matter and thanks to articles published by the co-founders themselves.

The last part of this work will focus on the apparent decline of massive protests from 2016 to 2019. The main goal of this last chapter is therefore to study the reasons that could explain the decline of protests which started from the election of Donald Trump in 2016 to 2019. As the media have become part of our daily lives, constantly publishing news on social media, newspapers, television or radio, they have a massive impact on the population's opinion. Studying the media

coverage of protests in Ferguson and Baltimore will thus play a big part in understanding the decline of massive protests. News reports of Ferguson uprising on *CNN*, *MSNBC*, *NBC News*, and *Fox News* will be analyzed in order to understand the impact that it could have had on the movement. Those news reports will be contrasted with each other and used in order to make out how the "All Lives Matter" and "Blue Lives Matter" backlash were depicted by media to understand how it could have influenced the American population in supporting or not the Black Lives Matter movement. The documentary of the Black Lives Matter movement, *Stay Woke* also explains how this backlash has been felt by activists; it will therefore be used to depict Black activists' opinion on the matter. The presidential campaign of 2016 witnessed the rise of Donald Trump in the political sphere, bringing an atmosphere of hate during the entire campaign and even after. The consequences that this atmosphere of hate could have had on activists will be studied through the reading of activists testimonies in the books mentioned above. Moreover, because every social movement suffers from internal issues, the differences of point of view and strategies among protesters will be analyzed in order to understand whether they could have affected the movement since 2016. Finally, this part aims at understanding the achievements fulfilled by the movement and considering its future. The ongoing work of activists will therefore be examined thanks to the recent articles published by some activists of the movement. These achievements will be discussed by contrasting the different opinions on the success of the movement: articles written by historian and writer Barbara Ransby in which she gives her opinion on the success and failures of the movement will be contrasted with other views on the achievement and future of the movement.

**PART ONE :**  
**PERSISTING RACIAL INEQUALITIES**

# I. Structural Racism

## 1. Different views on structural racism and what holds Black people back

For many Americans, the United States has not achieved racial equality yet. Nevertheless these views of the country's progress on racial equality are not the same among all races in the United States. According to a census about discrimination and race inequality in the United States made by Pew Research Center, "Roughly six-in-ten (61%) say that the country needs to continue making changes for Blacks to have equal rights with Whites."<sup>5</sup> Black people are more likely to say that more change needs to be done to achieve racial equality in the United States, nevertheless many Whites agree that racial inequality persists in the country. Yet, the reasons that keep Blacks from achieving racial equality are not the same according to Blacks and Whites, and divisions between Black people even exist. According to the census:

Whites are more likely to point to individual prejudice than institutional racism as the biggest problem when it comes to discrimination against Black people today (70% citing individual prejudice vs. 19% saying institutional racism). Blacks are more evenly divided: 48% say individual prejudice is the bigger problem, while 40% point to discrimination that is built into the country's law and institutions.<sup>6</sup>

Black people would in fact blame individual prejudice as the major factor holding back Black people, but this idea is not shared by most Black activists. So, how do Black Lives Matter members define "structural racism" and how could it have impacted the rise of the movement? In her book *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, an historian who worked on the Black Lives Matter movement, writes: "Institutional racism, or structural racism, can be

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<sup>5</sup> Pew Research, « On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites Are Worlds Apart », June 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/06/27/on-views-of-race-and-inequality-blacks-and-whites-are-worlds-apart/>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

defined as the policies, programs, and practices of public and private institutions, that result in greater rates of poverty, dispossession, criminalization, illness, and ultimately mortality of African Americans."<sup>7</sup> Structural racism would therefore imply a number of discriminatory processes engraved in American society, that would forbid African Americans from achieving racial equality. Americans in general tend to blame the family structure of African Americans, as the census shows: "When asked about reasons that Black people in the U.S. may have a harder time getting ahead than Whites, about six-in-ten Americans point to family instability (58%) and lower quality schools (58%) as major factors."<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, as they recognize that Black people lack good quality schools they in fact and perhaps without even acknowledging it, blame structural racism. The main issue about trying to understand racial inequalities in the United States is the fact that most people do not agree on what holds Black people from achieving equality. According to Pew Research Center: "About half (53%) (of all Americans) say a lack of good role models or a lack of jobs (48%) are major reasons, and 45% point to racial discrimination."<sup>9</sup> Among African Americans, figures vary too. Nevertheless, Blacks mainly agree that it is discrimination that is the main issue: "Fully seven-in-ten blacks say discrimination is a major reason Blacks may have a harder time getting ahead than Whites."<sup>10</sup> Blacks also blame the lack of access to good education, the lack of jobs but also, and maybe more surprisingly, "the lack of motivation to work hard":

By at least 20 percentage points, Blacks are also more likely than Whites to say lower quality schools (75% vs. 53%) and lack of jobs (66% vs. 45%) are major factors holding black people back. Blacks are also more likely than Whites to say Blacks have a harder time getting ahead because they lack motivation to work hard; 43% of Blacks say it is a major reason, compared with 30% of Whites.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Chicago, HaymarketBooks, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Pew Research, « On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites Are Worlds Apart », *op.cit.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*



This idea of the Black community blaming itself for not getting ahead is an idea that according to Black activists engraves itself in the process of "structural racism". Institutional racism would hold Black people back because of lack of quality education, mass incarceration, lack of jobs or lack of quality housing and blames Black people for not doing enough to succeed. Yet, we can see that this opinion varies according to the level of education of the people questioned: people with more education will tend to blame institutional racism rather than a lack of motivation among African Americans. As the census highlights:

Among Blacks, those with a high school education or less are more likely than those with some college education and those with a bachelor's degree to say lack of motivation is a major explanation for why Blacks may have a harder time getting ahead (51% vs.40% and 31%, respectively).<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, the idea that structural racism is the main factor which holds back African Americans is not mainly shared among the Black community. When studying the different testimonies of Black people who decided to join marches for Michael Brown or Trayvon Martin at the beginning of the movement, the main idea that comes out is the fact that African Americans were "fed up". "Fed up" with hearing about the deaths of young Black people at the hands of law enforcement and "fed up" with those crimes being never punished. If Black communities did not seem to recognize structural racism as the main issue for it, Black activists do believe that the idea that Black lives do not matter engraves itself in the process of structural racism that they mainly denounce. Understanding the Black Lives Matter movement therefore will imply studying every aspect of structural racism that is thought to hold Black people back and conclude thanks to the analysis of facts if it does have an impact on the Black community and how it has participated to the rise of the movement.

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<sup>12</sup> Pew Research, « On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites Are Worlds Apart », *op.cit.*

## 2. Economic situation of the Black community

Understanding the structural racism that led Black activists to demonstrate in the streets starts by trying to understand the persisting racial inequalities that are thought to prevail in the United States. Understanding the claims of the Black Lives Matter movement therefore starts by studying the well being of African Americans first of all by focusing on their feelings and perceptions and then on facts by trying to see if inequalities in terms of income, wealth or poverty persist in the country. According to Pew Research Center, economic inequalities do persist between Whites and Blacks. Key factors of economic well-being such as the median net worth of households or the rate of poverty highlight those inequalities. An analysis of government data made by Pew Research Center shows: "The median annual household income for Black households of three in 2011 was significantly below that of Whites. Blacks were nearly three times as likely as Whites to be living in poverty. And the median net worth of White households was 14 times the median net worth of Black households."<sup>13</sup> As for the perception of economic inequalities among the population, most citizens, no matter their race, agree on the fact that the Blacks' financial well-being is worse off than that of the Whites (see Appendix 1). When asked if the economic situation of Black people is worse off or better off than the one of White people, 41% of all adults reply that the average Black person is worse off than the average White person in terms of income and overall financial situation, while 10% say that the average Black person is better off than the average White person.<sup>14</sup> If most people disagree on the fact that racial inequalities persist in the United States, as seen before, they on the other hand, admit that Black people are in a worse financial situation than White people. If Black activists indeed blame structural racism for it, most American citizens do not make

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<sup>13</sup> Pew Research, « King's Dream Remains an Elusive Goal; Many Americans See Racial Disparities, August 22, 2013. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/08/22/kings-dream-remains-an-elusive-goal-many-americans-see-racial-disparities/>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

any link between the Black community's economic situation and any kind of discrimination. Black people are also more likely than White people to say that the economic situation of most Black communities is worse off than the one of White people. According to the survey, 59% of Black people say the economic situation of Black citizens is worse off than that of the White citizens, when only 39% of White people say so. Approximately the same share of Blacks and Whites thinks that Black people are better off than White people in terms of income and overall financial situation (respectively 9% and 19%).<sup>15</sup> Those opinions vary according to the educational attainment of the people questioned, and also according to their financial situation. Indeed, people with a higher level of education will be more likely than their less-educated counterparts to say that Black people are worse off than white people in terms of economic situation.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, among Blacks, the ones with a better economic situation will be more likely than those living with less income, to say that the economic situation of Black people is worse off than the one of whites, as the census highlights.

Among African Americans with annual family incomes of \$75,000 or more, 79% say the average black person is worse off than the average white person in terms of overall financial situation. Among those with annual incomes less than \$75,000, 56% say the same. Lower-income African Americans are more likely than those with higher incomes to say the average black person is about as well-off as the average white person (31% vs. 16%).<sup>17</sup>

Opinions on the economic situation of African Americans therefore vary among Whites and Blacks. Among Black people it also varies depending on the several factors mentioned (the economic situation, the level of education, etc). As for economic disparities: if the situation between Whites and Blacks seems to have improved since the 1960s, several figures let us think that Black people's economic situation is far from being equal to the one of Whites. According to Pew Research Center : "The economic gulf between Blacks and Whites that was present a half century ago has not

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<sup>15</sup> Pew Research, « King's Dream Remains an Elusive Goal; Many Americans See Racial Disparities », *op.cit.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

disappeared. Measures of household income, household wealth, and homeownership show that the gaps are as wide or wider today as they were in the 1960s or 1970s."<sup>18</sup>

## **INCOME**

In terms of income, undeniable differences prevail between Blacks and Whites. The median household income for Whites in 2011 was \$67,175.<sup>19</sup> As for the median household income of Blacks, it represented almost half of the median household of Whites, with a median of \$39,760.<sup>20</sup> If the income of Blacks has increased since the 1960s, it remains far behind the one of Whites. The census made by Pew Research on DemoChart Datas (see Appendix 2) by race explains that the income gap between Whites and Blacks has even increased since the 1960s, it mentions: "Since the 1960s the difference in Black and White incomes grew from about \$19,000 in 1967 to roughly \$27,000 in 2011."<sup>21</sup> A slight improvement had happened from 1967 to 2011, with a Black median income that represented 54% of the White median income in 1967 to a modest increase of 5% in 43 years (the median Black household income represented 59% of median White household income in 2011).<sup>22</sup> In 2000, which was a period of economic growth and low unemployment, the Black income rose to 65% of the White income.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, according to the same survey the racial income gap between Whites and Blacks has increased since 2007.<sup>24</sup> As for the Great Recession of 2008, it impacted both Whites and Blacks, but it is thought to have had a devastating impact on the economic well-being of Blacks.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Pew Research, « DemoChart and Economic Data, by Race », August, 2013. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/08/22/chapter-3-demoChart-economic-data-by-race/>

<sup>19</sup> Pew Research Center, « Pew Research Center Analysis of Government Data », August, 2013. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/08/22/kings-dream-remains-an-elusive-goal-many-americans-see-racial-disparities/>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Pew Research, « DemoChart and Economic Data, by Race », *op.cit.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

## POVERTY

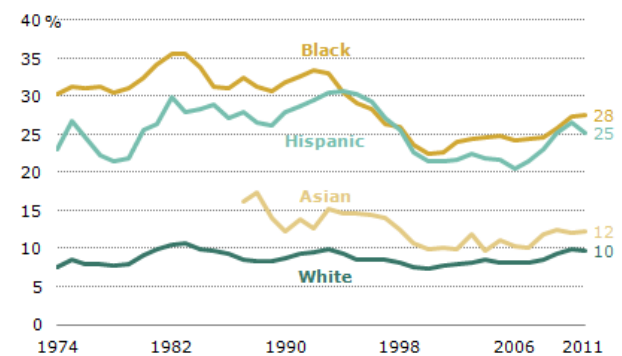
The rate of poverty is also a great indicator of economic well being among populations, it will therefore be useful to understand economic differences between Blacks and Whites. African Americans seem to be particularly impacted by poverty. If the Black-White poverty gap seems to have narrowed since the 1970s, it remains particularly wide.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, according to the analysis

made by Pew Research of the 2012 March Current Population Survey: "Black Americans are nearly three times as likely as White Americans to live in poverty."<sup>27</sup> In 2011, 28% of Blacks were poor which is more than twice the number of Whites (10% of whites were poor in 2011).<sup>28</sup> On the Chart made by the Pew Research Center (Chart 1), we can see that around 1993, the rate of poverty started to decline for Blacks and did not stop declining until around 2000. The study of

this rate of poverty testifies in favor of the fact that the situation for African Americans has improved since the 1970s. However, we can also see that around 2001/2002 the rate of poverty started rising again and in fact never reached the rate of poverty of Whites. If the situation has improved a lot since the 1970s particularly the 1990s (that saw a decline of poverty among African Americans) a major difference still exists between Whites and Blacks. Blacks are much more affected by poverty than Whites, and it is something that is strongly denounced by members of the

Chart 1.

**Persons in Poverty by Race/Ethnicity, 1974-2011**  
(%)



Note: For 2002-2011, whites, blacks and Asians include only persons who reported a single race; for 2001 and earlier years, respondents (including those who may be of more than one race) were allowed to report only one race group. Blacks and Asians include Hispanics for all years. Asians include Pacific Islanders prior to 2002. Data for Asians not available prior to 1987. Native Americans and other groups not shown.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Historical Poverty Statistics  
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/people.html> Table 2

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<sup>26</sup> Pew Research, « DemoChart and Economic Data, by Race », *op.cit.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Black Lives Matter. Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner and member of the Black Lives Matter movement would state: "Eric's senseless death has forced our country to confront the toxic effects of police brutality. My hope is that together, we can also charge the system that trapped him and so many black men and women across our city and nation in poverty."<sup>29</sup>

## WEALTH

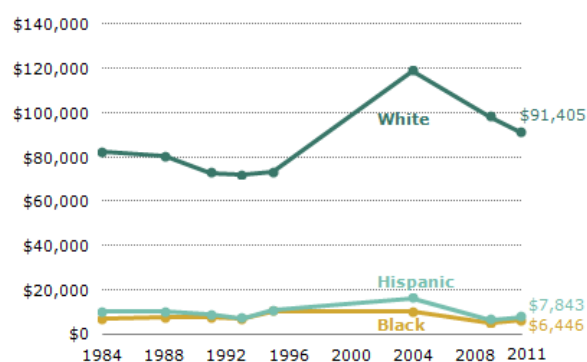
Intrinsically linked to the rate of poverty is the wealth of the population that can be studied through the median income of households. Major differences in median income households can be

seen between the different races and ethnicities in the United States (Chart 2). Typically in 2011, a White household had a net worth of \$91,405, an Asian one had a net worth of \$91,203, an Hispanic household had a net worth of \$7,843 and finally a net worth of \$6,446 for a Black households.<sup>30</sup> According to the study made by Pew Research Center, the wealth gap between Blacks and Whites has increased since 1984.<sup>31</sup> If this difference of wealth has always been present between Blacks and

Chart 2.

### Median Net Worth of Households, by Race/Ethnicity, 1984 to 2011

In 2012 dollars



Note: White and black householders include only persons who reported a single race. Native Americans and mixed-race groups not shown. Blacks and whites include Hispanics.

Sources: Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). For 1984 to 2004: various U.S. Census Bureau P-70 Current Population Reports. For 2009 and 2011 U.S. Census Bureau net worth tables: <http://www.census.gov/people/wealth/>

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Whites, it became particularly important in 2004 due to the rise of White wealth which rocketed while the one of Blacks stagnated.<sup>32</sup> In 2011, closer to the start of the Black Lives Matter

<sup>29</sup> Carr, Gwenn, "Mother of Eric Garner: Racial and Economic Justice Go Hand-in-Hand," *New York Daily News*, November 10, 2015. Retrieved from: [www.nydailynews.com/new-york/eric-garner-mom-racial-economic-justice-hand-in-hand-article-1.2428874](http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/eric-garner-mom-racial-economic-justice-hand-in-hand-article-1.2428874)

<sup>30</sup> Pew Research, « DemoChart and Economic Data, by Race », *op.cit.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

movement, the gap of wealth between Blacks and Whites was still extremely important.<sup>33</sup> If the study of levels of wealth, poverty and economic well-being by race highlights the persistent differences between Whites and Blacks, they still do not explain why those disparities happen and therefore it cannot be strictly stated that those disparities are in fact persistent racial inequalities due to discrimination and institutional racism. Therefore, in order to understand the idea of structural racism denounced by the Black Lives Matter, one must link those racial disparities to their causes to determine if those disparities are in fact consequences of persisting racial inequalities.

### **3. Educational disparities**

Education plays an important role in building societies as the educational system of a country designs the level of education of its future population. Yet, disparities sometimes prevail in educational systems and are therefore responsible for the social and economic disparities between individuals of the same country. The American educational system is designed in such a way, that from an early age, many Black children are less likely to succeed in school than White ones. Persisting educational disparities between Whites and minorities such as African Americans, would therefore be at the roots of structural racism. Those educational disparities would impact African Americans for the rest of their lives as it would forbid them from accessing to more qualified jobs. This subpart will analyze the levels of high school completion, the dropouts rates by race, but also the levels of post secondary educational attainment, in order to understand if educational disparities do persist and if there could be a reason for persisting inequalities between Blacks and Whites in the United States. Thanks to an annual Survey on Social and Economic Supplement, Pew Research Center managed to analyze the High School Completion evolution of pupils by race, from 1964 to 2012. Those figures indicate that the high school completion rate of African Americans rose from

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

around 27% in 1964 to 86% in 2012, almost achieving the high-school completion rate of Whites. The analysis also shows that in 2012, 92% of White adults had obtained their high-school diploma, when only 86% of Black adults had. If this gap narrowed thanks to the rise of the high-school completion rate for African Americans, it did not disappear and Black people seem to still have less chance than their White counterparts to graduate from high school. When studying the main differences between White and Black pupils to understand those differences of high school levels of completion, one can observe a correlation between the level of poverty of the families and the chances of their children to do well at school. Cris de Brey from National Center for Education Statistics observes:

Prior research shows that living in poverty during early childhood is associated with lower-than-average academic performance that begins in kindergarten and extends through high school, leading to lower-than-average rates of school completion. In 2016, the percentages of children living in poverty were highest for Black and American Indian/Alaska Native children and lowest for White and Asian children.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, the poverty of the family would impact the academic performance of the student. Thanks to data retrieved from the Digest of Education Statistics of 2014<sup>35</sup>, the difference of levels of poverty by race has been studied. As the family structure impacts the median income of households, the level of children under 18 years old living in poverty, have been studied by family structure (Chart 3). It must be taken into account that the level of poverty of a family also depends on how many parents live in the household. For single-parent households it varies depending on whether it is a father only household or a mother-only household. In 2013, 3,8 million Black children under 18 lived in poverty (39% of all Black families).<sup>36</sup> The same year, 13% of all White children under 18 lived in poverty. Therefore, the number of Black children under 18 living in poverty was much

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<sup>34</sup> De Brey, Cris, « New Report Shows Increased Diversity in U.S. Schools, Disparities in Outcomes », *National Center for Education Statistics*, June 2019. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/blogs/nces/post/new-report-shows-increased-diversity-in-u-s-schools-disparities-in-outcomes>

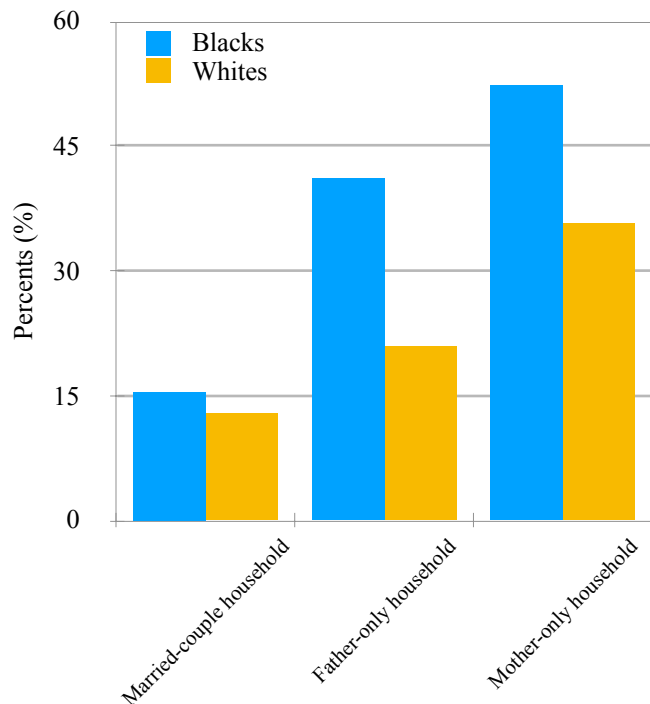
<sup>35</sup> D. Snyder, Thomas, De Brey, Cristobal, Dillow, Sally A., « Digest of Education Statistics 2014 », *National Center for Education Statistics*, April 2016. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016006.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



higher than that of White children that year. Furthermore, one can also note that children living in single parents households have many more chances to live in poverty than the ones living with both parents. If the number of children living in poverty rises for both races when the child lives with only one parent, this number is still much higher for Black children. 52,3% of Black children living in mother-only households lived in poverty in 2013 whereas 35,7% of White children did that same year.<sup>37</sup> As for father-only households, 41,2% of Black children under 18 lived in poverty in 2013<sup>38</sup>, whereas 20,8% of White children did (Table 1).

**Chart 3. Percent of children under 18 living in poverty, by family structure and race: 2013**



Source: De Grey, Chris, « New Report Shows Increased Diversity in U.S. Schools, Disparities in Outcomes », *National Center for Education Statistics*, June 2019.

**Table 1. Number and percent of children under age 18 living in poverty, 2013**

Race	Number of related children living in poverty (in thousands)	Percent of related children living in poverty, by family structure			
		Total, all families	Married-couple household	Mother-only household, no spouse present	Father-only household, no spouse present
TOTAL	15,649	21,7	11,0	44,9	29,1
White	4,897	13,0	6,7	35,7	20,8
Black	3,825	39,0	15,6	52,3	41,2

Source: De Grey, Chris, « New Report Shows Increased Diversity in U.S. Schools, Disparities in Outcomes », *National Center for Education Statistics*, June 2019.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

This percentage of children living in poverty in father only households is twice higher for Black children than for White ones. Therefore, those figures confirm that more Black children live in poverty. If one cannot be certain that it does impact the academic performance of Black children, one must bear in mind that those disparities are present and might impact pupils deeply during their educational path. Between 2008, the year of the Great Recession, and 2013, the percentage of Black children under 18 who lived in poverty had risen from 33% to 39%.<sup>39</sup> This increase of children living in poverty has been particularly important for those living in father-only households (29,4% in 2008 to 41,2% in 2013).<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the percentage of Black children living in poverty in the United States remains the highest in Black mother-only households (52,3% in 2013).<sup>41</sup>

## **SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES**

Another significant indicator that can help to determine the causes of school disparities between Whites and Blacks is the school dropout rate. According to data from the National Center for Educational Statistics, in the United States 9% of Black students of 16 to 24-years-old dropped out of high school in 2013 compared to 5% of White students<sup>42</sup>. Black young men are also more likely to drop out of high school than Black young women with respectively, 11% of drop outs for young men and 9% for young women. According to a study made by Cameron and Heckman, the largest difference in the dropout rates across different groups happens at the age of 16<sup>43</sup>. Indeed, that study finds that from the age of 16, Hispanics and African Americans are twice more likely to drop out of school than for example Asian students. In this respect, Magnus Lofstrom writes: "One plausible explanation for the substantially higher Hispanic and African-American 9th grade

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Lofstrom, Magnus, « Why Are Hispanic and African-American Dropout Rates So High? », *IZA*, December 2007. Retrieved from: <http://ftp.iza.org/dp3265.pdf>

conditional dropout probabilities, compared to Whites, is differential grade retention across ethnic groups".<sup>44</sup> Retention would thus play an important role in holding back Black students and then increase their chances of dropping out from high school. One must also mention that 16 is in fact the age students are legally allowed to leave school. Cameron and Heckman highlight the fact that: "Minority groups are significantly more likely to have fallen behind in school by age 15 relative to Whites."<sup>45</sup> Those percentages of minorities falling behind in school would be linked to their higher percentage of poverty. In fact, the same study explains that economically disadvantaged students would have 12% more chances of dropping out of school than other students.<sup>46</sup> As for African Americans, they would therefore have 8% less chance to complete high-school.<sup>47</sup> Other factors would have an impact on the dropout of Black students such as the location of the school they go to and the racial composition of its students. The study of Cameron and Heckman explains that African American students are more likely to attend schools in the city center of large cities than their white counterparts.<sup>48</sup> There are also more chances for African Americans to be in schools in which the percentage of Black students is higher, Cameron and Heckman state: "Hispanic and African-American students are most likely to attend schools where their ethnic/racial group is the largest ethnic/racial group."<sup>49</sup> In 2014, 57% of Black students attended a public elementary and secondary school in which there was 75% or more minority enrollment, whereas only 5% White students attended them.<sup>50</sup> However, 52% of White students attended a public elementary and secondary school in which there was less than 25% of minority enrollment, whereas this number represented only 5% for Black students. What can be concluded from these figures is that White

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Cameron, Stephen, V., Heckman, James J., « The Dynamics of Educational Attainment for Black, Hispanic, and White Males », *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 109, No. 3, June 2001.

<sup>46</sup> Lofstrom, Magnus, « Why Are Hispanic and African-American Dropout Rates So High? », *op.cit.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Cameron, Stephen, V., Heckman, James J., « The Dynamics of Educational Attainment for Black, Hispanic, and White Males », *op.cit.*

students tend to attend schools where the percentage of minorities is small whereas Black students seem to attend schools in which the percentage of minorities (Hispanics and African Americans) is the highest. More importantly the study adds: "(...) students attending schools with a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged students, *ceteris paribus*, are somewhat less likely to graduate high school."<sup>51</sup> Thus, African Americans would be more likely to be in schools with other minorities and with more economically disadvantaged children (whereas White students would more likely be in schools with small percentage of minorities).

## **PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS**

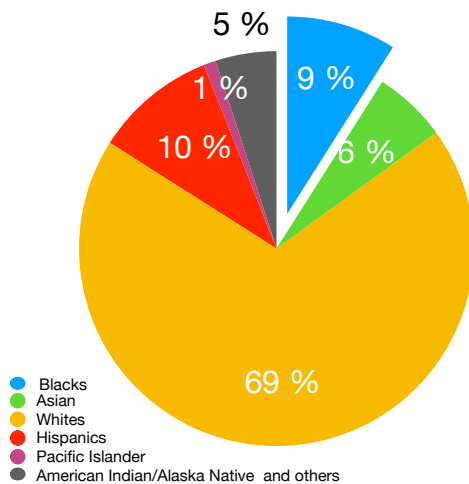
The amount of money spent by schools per student also impacts their educational achievement. Thus, studying the percentage of White and Black students in private and public schools can also help to understand if White students do have more opportunities to do well at school than Black students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 50% of "traditional public school" students were White, 15% were Black, 26% were Hispanic, 5% Asian and the rest were American Indian, Pacific Islander or Alaska Native.<sup>52</sup> In comparison, the same year 69% of all private elementary and secondary students were White, 9% were Black, 10% were Hispanic and 6% were Asian (Chart 4 & 5).

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<sup>51</sup> Lofstrom, Magnus, « Why Are Hispanic and African-American Dropout Rates So High? », *IZA*, December 2007. Retrieved from: <http://ftp.iza.org/dp3265.pdf>

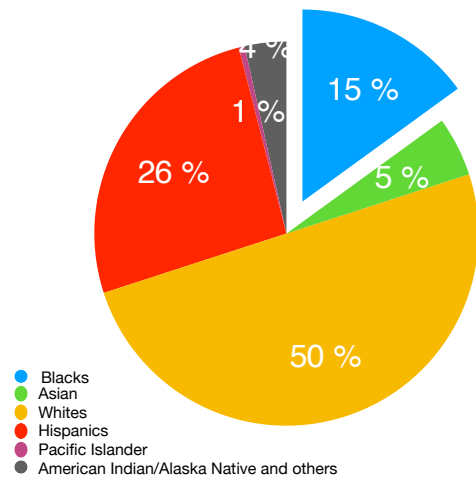
<sup>52</sup> Spiegelman, Maura, « New Data on Public and Private School Teacher Characteristics, Experiences, and Training », *National Center for Education Statistics*, Avril 2020. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/blogs/nces/post/new-report-shows-increased-diversity-in-u-s-schools-disparities-in-outcomes>

**Chart 4. Percent of students in all private elementary and secondary schools in the United States, 2015.**



Source: Spiegelman, Maura, « New Data on Public and Private School Teacher Characteristics, Experiences, and Training », *National Center for Education Statistics*, Avril 2020.

**Chart 5. Percent of students in all public elementary and secondary schools in the United States, 2015.**



Source: Spiegelman, Maura, « New Data on Public and Private School Teacher Characteristics, Experiences, and Training », *National Center for Education Statistics*, Avril

Not surprisingly, according to the National Center for Education Statistics<sup>53</sup>, the number of students living in poor households is higher in traditional public schools than in private ones:

The percentage of students living in near-poor households was highest for chosen public school students (26%), followed by assigned public school students (21%), and was lowest for private school students (13%). In contrast, the percentage of students living in non-poor households was lowest for chosen public school students (56%), followed by assigned public school students (61%), and was highest for private school students (79 percent).<sup>54</sup>

As seen previously, there are more Black children living in poor households than White ones, therefore, it is easy to understand why there are fewer of them in private schools. As for the quality of education between public and private schools, it is not because students complete their educational curriculum in a public school that they will inevitably receive a not as good education as students who graduate in a private school. Quality of education between private and public

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, « Public and Private School Comparison », *National Center for Education Statistics*, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=55>

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

schools is a subject that will not be discussed in this work, nevertheless one fact must be highlighted: Black students are more likely to be in public schools with a high percentage of students coming from poor households and different minorities than White students.

## **TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS AND STUDENTS' BEHAVIOR**

It is always hard to analyze the way students are treated by their teachers especially when trying to understand the role that teachers could play in enhancing disparities between the different races. Such studies are difficult to make and they may not always end in an unbiased analysis. Nevertheless, the way the different students are treated in high school will inevitably affect their educational path, so if there is a chance that teachers' behavior might explain the higher rate dropouts of Black students in the United States, those ideas must be mentioned even though they must be carefully taken into account. According to an article written by Kirsten Weir from the American Psychological Association (APA)<sup>55</sup>, many causes are responsible for the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites: causes such as home and neighborhood environments and other school factors that cannot be linked to teachers' performance. Yet, disparities between the way Black and White students are treated by teachers and school administrators do exist. Kirsten Weir writes: "In many cases, such differences in treatment aren't malicious or intentional. Some disparities arise from cultural misunderstandings or unintentional 'implicit biases' that unknowingly affect our thoughts and behaviors."<sup>56</sup> Those differences in treatments would appear for example in the number of Black students recommended for "gifted-education" programs as teachers would spot fewer Black students who excel at school. According to data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal

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<sup>55</sup> Weir, Kirsten, « Inequality at school: What's behind the racial disparity in our educational system? », *American Psychological Association*, November 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/11/cover-inequality-school>

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Study : "Black students are 54% less likely than White students to be recommended for gifted-education programs, after adjusting for factors such as students' standardized test scores."<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, those disparities between White and Black students would be far from being intentional but would in fact lie in teachers' expectations. Sometimes, White teachers judging a Black student essay would tend to be less critical than Black teachers. Kent Harber, psychologist at Rutgers University writes in *Journal of Educational Psychology*: "White instructors might go easy on their Black students in order to avoid appearing racist, if only in their own mind."<sup>58</sup> Harber also made a study on white middle-school and high-school teachers in white, upper-middle-class districts and found out that : "When White teachers give feedback on a poorly written essay, they are more critical if they think the author was a White student rather than a Black one."<sup>59</sup> Thus, it would occur that teachers' behavior towards students would differ according to their race even though, most of the time, in an unintentional way. Another aspect that must be taken into account is the higher number of suspensions among Black students. Data from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights show that Black students are more likely to receive an out of school suspension than White students. If their behavior could be thought to be responsible for it, Kirsten Weir writes in her article: "A variety of studies have found that even after taking achievement, socioeconomic status, self-reported behavior and teacher-reported behavior into account, Black students are still punished disproportionately."<sup>60</sup> Jason A. Okonofua and Jennifer L. Eberhardt found out in their study<sup>61</sup> that teachers were not influenced by racial stereotypes after the first infraction made by a student, but that they would tend to recommend harsher discipline after

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Harber, K. D., Gorman, J.L., Gengaro, F.P., « Students' race and teachers' social affect the positive feedback bias in public schools », *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 2012. Retrieved from: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2012-10763-001>

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Weir, Kirsten, « Inequality at school: What's behind the racial disparity in our educational system? », *American Psychological Association*, *op.cit.*

<sup>61</sup> Okonofua, Jason A., Eberhardt, Jennifer L., « Race and the Disciplining of Young Students », *Sage Journals*, April, 2015. Retrieved from:<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797615570365>

the second infraction of a Black student, concluding more quickly with Black students that they are troublemakers. In fact, Black children would have many more chances to be stereotyped as troublemakers from their youngest age. Walter Giliam, director of the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University School of Medicine, worked on preschool expulsions and noted: "When it comes to child-related factors, three things make a child more likely to be kicked out of preschool: being Black, being male and looking older than their classmates. If you are a big, Black boy, the risk is greater 'by far'."<sup>62</sup> Those are the same aspects denounced by Black Lives Matter activists when talking about racial profiling of young African Americans by law enforcement. Those ideas engraved themselves in a series of stereotypes which according to Black Lives Matter's members reinforce racial disparities in school and thus worsen structural racism.

## **POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

The last aspect of educational disparities that will be studied is the White-Black college enrollment rate (see Appendix 3). In 2013, data from the 'Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups' report of 2016 made by the U.S. Department of Justice highlighted the fact that: The 2013 total college enrollment for Whites 18- to 24-years-olds (42%) was higher than the rates for their Black and Hispanic peers (34% each). The White-Hispanic gap in the total college enrollment rate narrowed between 2003 and 2013 (from 18 to 8 percentage points); however, the White-Black gap in the total college enrollment rate did not change measurably during this period.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, those numbers show that young African Americans tend to enroll less in college degrees than their White peers. The reasons of those disparities could be explained by the high cost of

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<sup>62</sup> Weir, Kirsten, « What's behind the racial disparity in our education system? », *American Psychological Association*, *op.cit.*

<sup>63</sup> Musu-Gillette, Lauren, Robinson, Jennifer, McFarland, Joel, « Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups », *National Center for Education Statistics*, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016007.pdf>



college enrollments but no census among African Americans has been found which could assert that African Americans do not go to college mainly because of money related issues. The percentage of bachelor's degree holders also varies among White and Black adults. In 2014, 41% of Whites had obtained a bachelor's or higher degree compared to 22% of African American adults.<sup>64</sup> The percentage of adults having obtained a bachelor's or higher degree increased between 2004 and 2014 for Blacks and Whites nevertheless as the Chart shows, a gap still persists between Whites and Blacks bachelor's degree attainment. Thus, since the 1960s the situation has improved for African Americans in terms of education, their rate of high school completion is much higher than in the 1960s and has evolved to almost reach the one of Whites. Nevertheless, disparities still prevail and are even more important in post-secondary education. Certain issues still forbid African American students to succeed as well as their White peers. Grade retention and higher levels of dropouts are symptoms that persist among Black students. Discrimination in school (sometimes even unintentional discrimination) can be a reason of educational disparities between Whites and Blacks. Nevertheless it does not seem to be the major issue that holds Black student back from closing the education gap. The parental education, the family background and the neighborhood and peer effect are factors that are thought to affect children's schooling outcomes.<sup>65</sup> Yet, the one common determinant that seems to affect students dropping out of school is the level of poverty in which they live in. Magnus Lofstrom writes in his article entitled: "Why Are Hispanics and African Americans Dropout Rate so High?": "More than one third of the African American and White student difference in the dropout probability is linked to the simple measure of student poverty."<sup>66</sup> Students who are suspended more often and who drop out of school at an early age are more likely to run in the juvenile justice system; this pattern is known as the "school-to-prison pipeline". It

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Lofstrom, Magnus, « Why Are Hispanic and African-American Dropout Rates So High? », *op.cit.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

reinforces the idea put forward by Black activists that poverty among African Americans leads to lower education and therefore less access to jobs which require higher levels of qualification. The ‘school-to-prison pipeline’ is also thought to fuel the mass incarceration system that mostly impacts African American communities and it would therefore be one of the roots of structural racism.

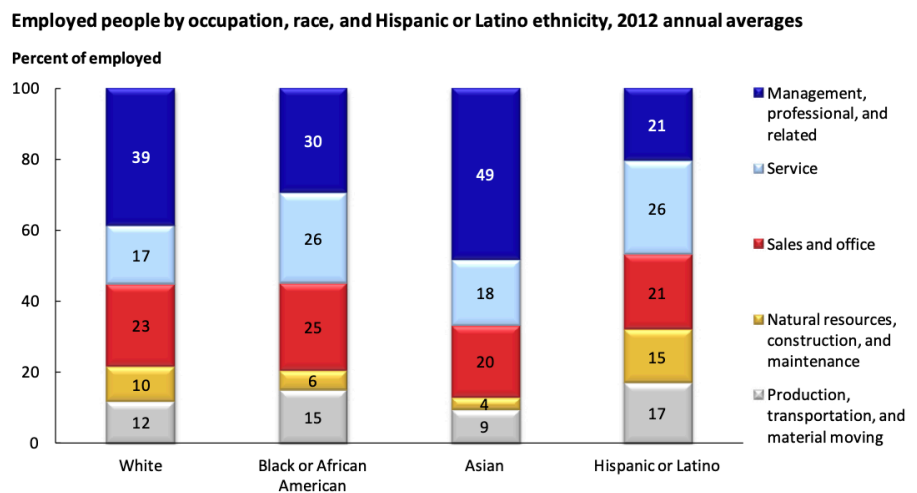
#### 4. Access to jobs and (un)employment rates

Different levels of education allow access to different jobs: people with a higher degree of education tend to have better job opportunities. People with higher degree of education are also more likely to be employed. And indeed, one of the major claims of Black Lives Matter activists concerning the issue of structural racism is the lack of access to jobs for many Black people. Barbara Ransby writes in *Making All Black Lives Matter*: "Movement organizers have pointed out the lack of affordable housing, the low wages, the erosion of public services and the lack of jobs (...)." <sup>67</sup> Previous figures have shown that African Americans have fewer University degrees than

Whites, therefore they will inevitably have limited access to well paid jobs. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: "The highest paying occupational category is management, professional, and related occupations." <sup>68</sup> The

Chart 6.

LABOR FORCE CHARACTERISTICS BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, 2012



Notes: People whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. Data may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS).

<sup>67</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *University of California Press, op.cit.*  
<sup>68</sup> BLS Reports, « Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity », *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012*. Retrieved from: [https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/race-and-ethnicity/archive/race\\_ethnicity\\_2012.pdf](https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/race-and-ethnicity/archive/race_ethnicity_2012.pdf)

Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity Report of 2012 (Chart 6) shows that White employed represent 39% of this occupational group, Black employed 30 % of it and Hispanic employed 21% of it, while Asians represent the highest percentage in this occupational group (49%). African Americans are more likely to work in "service occupations". In 2012, 23% of employed Black men worked in service occupations while 14% of employed Whites did.<sup>69</sup> The same report highlights the fact that employed Blacks are more likely than Whites to work in occupation categories such as production, transportation, and material moving occupations. The report states: "Blacks made up 11 percent of all employed workers, but accounted for about one-quarter or more of those in several specific occupations, including nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides (35%); security guards and gaming surveillance officers (27%); and bus drivers (25%)."<sup>70</sup> As for employed White women, in 2012, they were most likely among all other women working in management, professional and related occupations (43%) whereas 34% of employed Black women were working in this occupational group. The occupational groups where Black women were the most represented were "service occupations and sales" and "office occupations". As for 2018, African Americans workers were still less likely to work in higher paying jobs such as production, transportation, and material moving than White workers. The percentage of Black workers in sales and office was approximately the same as the one of White workers, nevertheless major differences could be observed in two major groups: the percentage of White workers in the "production, transportation, and material moving" group was much higher than the one of Black workers, and Black people were over represented in the group of "services". The earnings of workers must also be taken into account when studying disparities in employment. As figures from the U.S. Bureau of Statistics show, Blacks and Hispanics have lower wages than Whites and Asians. According to the figures from the Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity report of 2012,

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

the median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers were \$792 for White men and \$621 for Black men. As for women, the median earnings of White women was \$879 and \$710 for Black women. The same report also highlights the fact that earning disparities can be found between races in a same occupational group (see Appendix 4). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics writes:

The earning disparity across the major race and ethnicity groups for men holds for nearly all major occupational groups. For example, in 2012, median usual weekly earnings of Asian men (\$1,464) and White men (\$1,339) working full time in management, professional, and related occupations (the highest paying major occupation group) were well above the earnings of Black men (\$1,021) and Hispanic men (\$985) in the same occupational group.<sup>71</sup>

In other occupational groups earning disparities can also be spotted, for example in ‘natural resources, constructions and maintenance’ occupations, a White man earns 96% of the wage of an Asian worker, a Black man 85% of it and a Hispanic worker 72%. Even between workers with the same level of education, earning disparities can thus be found between different racial groups, the conclusion being that Black men often earn less than White men for the same work. Therefore, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, disparities of race can be found in employment, and are reflected through the smaller percentages of minority workers in the higher paying jobs and by disparities of earnings between White and Black workers with the same levels of education. In addition to those issues, the Black Lives Matter movement denounces the high rate of unemployment among Black people that would prevent African Americans from doing as well as White people. The report of 2012 of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics on unemployment states : "At nearly every level of education, Blacks and Hispanics were more likely to be unemployed in 2012 than were Whites and Asian."<sup>72</sup> (Chart 7) This study shows that jobless rates vary considerably according to race. In 2012, Blacks had the highest unemployment rate (13,8%), whereas White

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

unemployment represented 7,2%.<sup>73</sup> Unemployed Blacks are also more likely to experience longer periods of unemployment as the report states: "In 2012, the median duration of unemployment for

Blacks and Asians was 24.7 weeks and 24.0, respectively, compared with 17.6

weeks for Whites and 16.7 weeks for Hispanics."<sup>74</sup> If Blacks represent a high

number of unemployed, they also represent a large part of citizens

"marginally attached" to the labor force meaning that they are not employed but

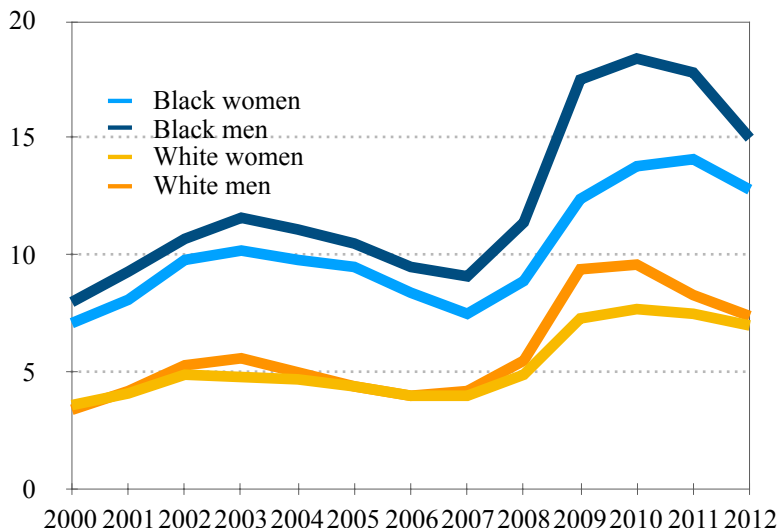
they are available for work and have looked for a job during the last twelve

months. An important aspect that must be mentioned is the fact that African Americans also represent a large part of discouraged workers (27%). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor

Statistics: "Discouraged workers, a subset of the marginally attached, are people not currently looking for work because no jobs are available for them."<sup>75</sup> Black Lives Matter activists add the

despair of many African Americans who face unemployment and poverty, as another reason for Black people to fill the streets and affirm that Black lives do matter.

**Chart 7. Percent of unemployment rates, 2000-2012 annual average.**



Source: BLS Reports, « Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity », U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5. Access to quality housing

Homeownership and access to quality housing are also aspects that impact the well being of population. The lack of access of many Black families to quality housing is part of the issue of structural racism. Therefore, the homeownership rate of African Americans will be studied to see if there are actual disparities between Blacks and Whites. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, in 2012, White households were much more likely than Black households to own their homes.<sup>76</sup> The report that evaluates disparities in housing states: "In 2012, Black homeownership levels were 60% of White levels. The Black homeownership rate in 2012 is no different from what it was in 1976, but the White rate has risen somewhat, contributing to a modest growth of the black-gap in homeownership rate."<sup>77</sup> Therefore, if improvements have occurred on different matters for the Black community, on the matter of homeownership the situation does not seem to have evolved. Homeownership is closely linked to the economic situation of households; to understand the rates of homeownership and the U.S. Housing Market, the economic situation of households must be studied. In 2008, the Great Recession resulted in a foreclosure crisis that had a disproportionate impact on African Americans.<sup>78</sup> As the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB) writes:

Since the beginning of the national foreclosure crisis in early 2007, nearly 8 % of both African Americans and Latinos have been foreclose upon, compared to 4.5% of non-Hispanics Whites, controlling for differences in incomes among the groups. African Americans have 7.8% of mortgage originations yet 11.6% of completed foreclosures, leading to a disparity ratio of 1.76 (based on the non-Hispanic White share of originations (65.9%) and their share of completed foreclosures (56.1%), making it a disparity ratio of 1.0, the base case for this comparison). African Americans and Latinos

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Pew Research Center, « King's dream remains an elusive goal; many Americans see racial disparities », *op.cit.*

<sup>78</sup> Ehrenreich, Barbara, Muhammad, Dedrick, « The Recession's Racial Divide », *The New York Times*, September 12, 2009. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/opinion/13ehrenreich.html>

are greater than 70 % more likely to have been foreclosed upon, even when controlling for income.<sup>79</sup>

Therefore, Blacks were more likely than Whites to be foreclosed upon. As the unemployment rate also worsened for Black people during the recession of 2008, the net worth of Black families declined as did the homeownership. The U.S. Bureau of the Census shows:

As of the first quarter of 2013, the non-Hispanics White, African American, and Latino rates were 73.4, 43.1, and 45.3%, respectively. In the fourth quarter of 2007, when the recession was officially declared, the homeownership rates were at 74.9, 47.7, and 48.5, respectively. In sum, the economic crises have caused the greatest percentage point losses among African Americans (4.6 percentage points).<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, the Recession of 2008 had a massive impact on homeownership of the Black community; many Black families were foreclosed upon and it became harder for most Black people to get a mortgage. Discrimination in the housing market is also thought to exist through residential segregation. Indeed, houses in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of African Americans are thought to be less valuable than the ones in White neighborhoods. A report made by the Center for American Progress<sup>81</sup> focused on the residential patterns of Black and White home mortgage borrowers and highlighted the racial disparities in home appreciation in the different neighborhoods. To understand this idea we must take a look at the notion of hyper-segregation. Hyper-segregation is thought to occur when: "a racial or ethnic group is highly segregated on at least 4 of 5 dimensions of segregation, including unevenness, isolation, clustering, concentration, and centralization."<sup>82</sup> Yet, residential segregation and the impact that it could have on the Black population is still debated. Certain studies argue that residential segregation is the result of demographic and socioeconomic circumstances that have nothing to do with racial discrimination,

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<sup>79</sup> Cartwright, Julius, « The State of Housing in Black America », *The National Association of Real Estate Brokers*, 2013. Retrieved from: [https://www.chapa.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20Black%20Housing%20in%20American%20NAREB\\_final\\_080413.pdf](https://www.chapa.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20Black%20Housing%20in%20American%20NAREB_final_080413.pdf)

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Zonta, Michela, « Racial Disparities in Home Appreciation », *Center For American Progress*, June 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2019/07/15/469838/racial-disparities-home-appreciation/>

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

while others show that residential segregation is in fact the result of racist practices. The Center for American Progress writes:

Similarly to precession years, African America, borrowers still predominantly buy homes in neighborhoods with large populations of color. On average, 51% of the population in the neighborhoods where African Americans typically buy their homes consists of people of color, compared with only 22% of the population in neighborhoods where white homebuyers predominate.<sup>83</sup>

In April 1968, the Fair Housing Act was passed to eliminate discrimination in the housing market and therefore end racial segregation. The Act states: "The Fair Housing prohibits discrimination in any activities relating to the sale or rental of dwellings, in the availability of residential real estate-related transactions, or in the provision of services and facilities in connection therewith because of race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national origin."<sup>84</sup> Since 1968, the situation has improved for the Black community; nevertheless new forms of racial bias are thought to have appeared in the housing sector. Racial steering, which is according to the *Open Education Sociology Dictionary*: "(...) when real estate agents guide home buyers away or towards certain neighborhoods on the basis of race and ethnicity", is something denounced by the *Center for American Progress* for being one of those new forms of racial discrimination. This practice is thought to be done by real estate agents who would steer African Americans away from certain neighborhoods so that they would stay in areas with larger proportions of Black people. Indeed, the report states: "Real estate agents tend to favor White homebuyers by providing information on and showing more available homes than in the case of equally qualified Black homebuyers. In addition, Black homebuyers are 2.4 percent more likely than equally qualified White homebuyers to be denied an in-person appointment."<sup>85</sup> Black citizens would therefore be encouraged to buy houses in

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Office of the Secretary, "Implementation of the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988", *Department of Housing and Urban Development*, January, 1989. Retrieved from: <https://fairhousing.com/legal-research/hud-regulations/54-fr-3232-implementation-fair-housing-amendments-act-1988>

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*



areas with high poverty levels and lower quality housing. This would in fact lead to hyper segregated neighborhoods in metropolitan areas such as in Baltimore or Chicago. This number of hyper-segregated areas is yet thought to have massively dropped since the 1960s. It must also be taken into account that even high-income African Americans borrowers tend to concentrate in predominantly nonwhite neighborhoods. As data of the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council show, high-income Black borrowers concentrate in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of Black residents.<sup>86</sup> In addition, what can be observed is the fact that African American neighborhoods are devalued compared with White neighborhoods. As the Center of American Progress states: "Not only are African homebuyers still buying homes in predominantly nonwhite neighborhoods, but home prices in segregated neighborhoods where Black homebuyers concentrate are also continuing a trend of slow appreciation compared with those in neighborhoods where white homebuyers purchase their homes."<sup>87</sup> Yet, those figures cannot help to conclude that those disparities are linked to discriminatory practices; Black people could from choice live in areas where the Black community concentrate. As Casey J. Dawkins writes:

The root causes of residential segregation have been and continue to be widely explored and debated in scholarly studies. Some argue that residential is the result of nonracial demographic and socioeconomic circumstances, whereas others attribute the separation of racial groups in the residential landscape to racist attitudes and practices such as prejudice and discrimination in the housing market.<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, those studies cannot help to conclude that residential segregation is a factor that prevents African Americans from accessing to quality housing as other aspects must be taken into account such as the fact that sometimes high-income Black families choose to stay in poor Black neighborhoods. Yet, it shows that most Black populations in the United States live in concentrated

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<sup>86</sup> Zonta, Michela, « Racial Disparities in Home Appreciation », *Center For American Progress, op.cit.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Ihlanfeldt, Keith R., Scafidi, Benjamin P., « An Empirical Analysis of the Cause of Neighborhood Racial Segregation », *UC Berkeley, CA: Institute of Business and Economic Research, 2002*). Retrieved from: <https://cloudfront.escholarship.org/dist/prd/content/qt70j3n8bh/qt70j3n8bh.pdf>

areas where levels of poverty are often much higher than in White neighborhoods, something that is denounced by activists of the Black Lives Matter movement.

## 6. Health disparities

Life expectancy is another indicator of the well being of a population. Therefore, its study can indicate differences of health treatment among different parts of the population. Health disparities are another result of structural racism that makes African Americans poorer than White people and therefore deprives them of proper health treatment. According to data from the National Center for Health Statistics: "White life expectancy at birth exceeds Black life expectancy at birth by nearly four years, (...). A white baby born in 2010 could expect to live to 78.9 years of age, while a black baby could expect to live 75.1 years."<sup>89</sup> (see Appendix 5). The situation is nevertheless thought to have improved since the 1960s. The gap in Black and White life expectancy at birth was of 7 years in 1960 and is now of 4 years. Since 2007, this gap is thought to have slightly narrowed according to the National Vital Statistics system. When studying the main illnesses that could be responsible for those disparities in life expectancy between Whites and Blacks, one can observe that several health issues are predominant among Blacks: more obesity among Black women, more asthma among Black children and more high blood pressure among Black people which result in more dramatic consequences for Black people than for White ones. Rates of obesity are thought to have increased among the whole American population these last decades, it is associated with serious health risks, such as coronary heart disease or end-stage renal disease.<sup>90</sup> According to figures from the National Center for Health Statistics (see Appendix 6), in 2018, the prevalence of obesity among non-Hispanic White adults was of 42.2% but 49.6% among Black adults, thus: Non-

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<sup>89</sup> Pew Research Center, « King's dream remains an elusive goal; many Americans see racial disparities », *op.cit.*

<sup>90</sup> Hales, Craig M., « Prevalence of Obesity and Severe Obesity Among Adults: United States, 2017-2018 », *National Center for Health Statistics*, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db360.htm>

hispanic Black adults had the highest prevalence of obesity compared with other races.<sup>91</sup> Among men, the prevalence of obesity for non-hispanic Whites was of 44.7% and 41.1% for non-hispanic Black men.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, the biggest disparity seems to happen among women. Indeed, 39.8% of non-hispanic White women are diagnosed with obesity while 56.9% of Black women showing a disparity of 17%.<sup>93</sup> Considering the fact that obesity can be associated with other outcomes such as cholesterol, hypertension, type 2 diabetes and diverse cancers, it is something that could explain the disparity of life expectancy between Blacks and Whites in the United States. Those issues of obesity are associated with the fact that most Black men and women, do not have access to quality food. In an article published in the *National Library of Medicine* entitled "African Americans' Access to Healthy Food Options in South Los Angeles Restaurants, LaVonna Blair Lewis and David C. Sloane write: "Poorer neighborhoods with a higher proportion of African American residents have fewer healthy options available, both in food selections and in food preparation; restaurants in these neighborhoods heavily promote unhealthy food options to residents."<sup>94</sup> According to the National Center for Health Statistics, obesity would be linked to mental disorders such as depression which is the leading cause of premature mortality in the United States.<sup>95</sup> Only a few studies have been made on the association between obesity and depression by racial groups in the United States. Nevertheless, other explanations have been put forward to explain the higher prevalence of obesity among African Americans compared with other racial and ethnic groups. E.A. Baker, M. Schootman and E. Barnidge write in an article entitled: "The Role of Race and Poverty in Access to Foods that Enable Individuals to Adhere to Dietary Guidelines":

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Lewis LB, Sloane DC, Nascimento LM, et al. « African Americans' access to healthy food options in South Los Angeles restaurants ». *Am J Public Health*. 2005. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1449239/>

<sup>95</sup> Hales, Craig M., « Prevalence of Obesity and Severe Obesity Among Adults: United States, 2017-2018 », *op.cit.*

(...) empirical findings from recent research suggest that individuals from disadvantaged populations, as indexed by Black race and low socioeconomic status, who are chronically confronted with stressful conditions engage in unhealthy behaviors such as eating energy-dense, low-nutrient foods and low physical activity that buffer the effects of stress on mental health, but contribute to poor physical health outcomes.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, those findings make a link between poverty and levels of obesity which explains why more African American women are impacted by obesity. It can be concluded from this article that Black people engage in poorer health behaviors than White people. This behavior is thought to increase the risk for chronic health conditions such as type 2 diabetes, cancers, heart diseases, etc.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, Black people could indeed engage in bad health behaviors because of poverty. Other issues such as high blood pressure or asthma would also be more prevalent among African American. Asthma impacts more Black children than White ones. The National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) states: "Non-Hispanic Black children had higher prevalence of current asthma compared with Hispanic and non-Hispanic White children from 2007 to 2017. The prevalence of current asthma was 12.6% in non-Hispanic Black children and 7.7% in Hispanic and non-Hispanic White children in 2017."<sup>98</sup> According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), pollution is the first issue that cause asthma among children<sup>99</sup>; Black children would be more affected by asthma because they may be exposed to more pollution than other children. EPA states in its report on Children's Environmental Health Disparities: "Children of racial and ethnic minorities and poor children may be exposed to more pollution."<sup>100</sup> Therefore, the environment in which children grow would be responsible for the level of asthma among them. Black children, because they have more chances to live in poorer families than White children, would therefore be

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<sup>96</sup> E.A, Baker, M., Schootman, E., Barnidge, et al. « The role of race and poverty in access to foods that enable individuals to adhere to dietary guidelines », *Prev Chronic Dis*, 2006.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Hales, Craig, M., « Prevalence of Obesity and Severe Obesity Among Adults: United States, 2017-2018 », *National Center for Health Statistics, op.cit.*

<sup>99</sup> « Children's Environmental Health Disparities: Black and African American Children and Asthma », *EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency*, Retrieved from: [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-05/documents/hd\\_aa\\_asthma.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-05/documents/hd_aa_asthma.pdf)

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

more impacted by asthma. Yet, one must take into account that other aspects can lead to asthma such as indoors triggers like secondhand smoke, dust mites, pets fur, mold, household sprays (etc.).<sup>101</sup> The Black community has also less access to proper medical care. This leads, for example, to the fact that many African Americans don't spend much time in hospital even when they need it, or that they are not treated soon enough for minor illnesses which then leads to more important illnesses.<sup>102</sup> This aspect can be analyzed through the distribution of ambulatory care visits in hospitals. Indeed, Ambulatory care visits vary according to the level of poverty of people. The poorer people are, the more likely they will tend to be 'outpatients' in a hospital (meaning patients who do not stay for the night in hospital).<sup>103</sup> People with higher levels of poverty will also be more likely to be patients in emergency departments.<sup>104</sup> According to data from The National Medical Care Survey, White people are more likely to go to medical specialty offices meaning offices that will treat illnesses at an early stage not in emergency, whereas Black people outnumber Whites in Hospital outpatient departments and hospital emergency departments.<sup>105</sup> (see Appendix 7) Those numbered were calculated from 1996 to 2005, since then, the election of Obama and the implementation of Obamacare allowed more Black families to benefit from healthcare (the impact of Obamacare on the population will be discussed later). Nevertheless, what can be concluded is that most Black people in the United States suffer from illnesses that can be linked to poverty. As many factors can cause obesity, asthmas or high blood pressure illnesses, it is hard to strictly assert that prevalent health issues among Black Americans are caused by the structural racism denounced by the Black Lives Matter movement. Yet, many studies show that the health issues that certain Black communities suffer from are often linked to their level of poverty. The fact that the United

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Schappert, Susan M., « Ambulatory Medical Care Utilization Estimates for 2006 », *National Health Statistics Report*, August, 2008. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr008.pdf>

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

States is a country where many citizens cannot afford healthcare explains the disparities in life expectancy that can be found. In addition, the fact that on average Black people tend to die at a younger age than White people shows that there are indeed persisting health disparities in the United States between the two races.

## II. The Justice System and Federal System and their Impact on The Black Community

### 1. The distrust of the Black population towards law enforcement

The main aspect denounced by the Black Lives Matter movement is police brutality towards the Black community. Activists denounce the fact that being Black in the United States involves having more opportunities to interact with the police and suffer from police violence. Black activists also denounce the fact that African Americans are disproportionately arrested by law enforcement very often for minor offenses. Wesley Lowery, a Black activist, writes in his book *They Can't Kill Us All*: "I've got clients who are arrested 12 or 13 times a year. Their charges are dismissed but they are still sitting in jails. That's why there is no trust in law enforcement."<sup>106</sup> When asked about their views of law enforcement, Black people are more likely than White people to say that they do not trust the police. A survey has been made by Pew Research Center concluding that 38% of Whites express a great deal of confidence in the local police to provide equal treatment while only 14% of Black people do.<sup>107</sup> In fact, the study states: "More than three times as many Blacks as Whites said they had very little confidence in their local police to treat the races equally (34% vs. 9%). Blacks' confidence in local police to provide equal treatment was little changed from 2007 or 1995."<sup>108</sup> Thus, the level of trust in law enforcement has always been and remains really low in the Black community. The main causes of this distrust towards law enforcement is thought, by BLM activists, to come from several facts: the number of young Black people having been killed

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<sup>106</sup> Lowery, Wesley, « They Can't Kill Us, the Story if Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

<sup>107</sup> « Views of Law Enforcement, Racial Progress and News Coverage of Race », *Pew Research*, March, 2020.

Retrieved from: <https://www.people-press.org/2012/03/30/blacks-view-of-law-enforcement-racial-progress-and-news-coverage-of-race/>

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

by law enforcement, the fact that the number of arrests of Black people is disproportionate to the one of White people, and the feeling of omnipresent fear that all those actions result in. Historian Barbara Ransby writes in her book *Making All Black Lives Matter*:

Baltimore police Department engages in a pattern of practice of making unconstitutional stops, searches, arrests and using enforcement strategies that produce severe unjustified disparities in the rates of stops, searches and arrest of African Americans, using excessive force; and retaliating against people engaging in constitutionally-protected expression.<sup>109</sup>

Several reasons are put forward to explain why many Black people do not trust law enforcement. One of them is the fact that law enforcement in Black communities often do not know the population where it is policing and does not try to know it, resulting in more violence and distrust from both sides. Clarence Edwards, a retired Chief of Police in Montgomery County writes: "The assignment of Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian and even African American police officers to police poor, predominantly Black neighborhoods who had little or no social contact with members of this groups or specific training in how to effectively interact in such environments is an ongoing recipe for disaster."<sup>110</sup> Law enforcement has been for years synonymous with violence for the Black community, and today it results in a persisting distrust. Edwards adds: "Some police forces in this nation have historically played critical roles in maintaining positional power for Whites. This has created a very difficult chasm to overcome when police departments attempt to implement community policing initiatives."<sup>111</sup> Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics show the number and percentage of U.S. residents aged 16 or older who had contact with the police, by type of contact and demographic characteristic. Those data from 2015, do show that Blacks are more likely than Whites to be pulled over in a traffic stop.<sup>112</sup> According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics: "A greater

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<sup>109</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

<sup>110</sup> Edwards, Clarence, « Race and the Police », *National Police Foundation*, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.policefoundation.org/race-and-the-police/>

<sup>111</sup> *Idib.*

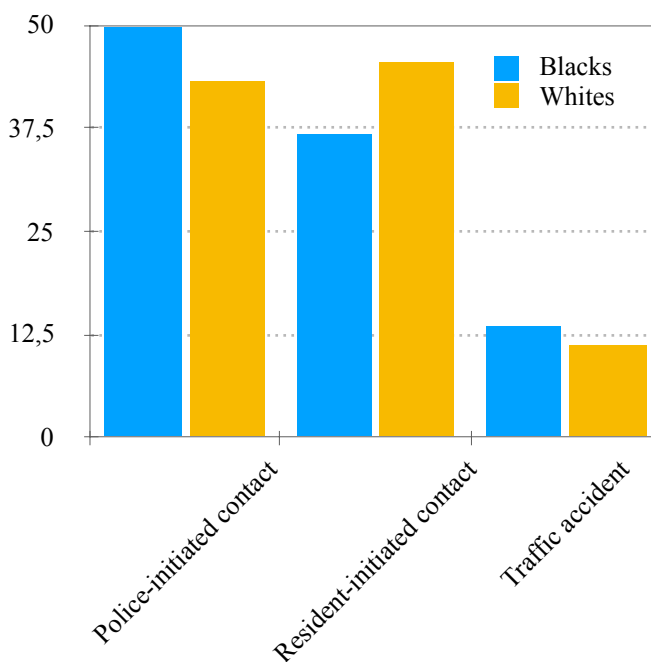
<sup>112</sup> Davis, Elizabeth, « Contact Between Police and the Public, 2015 », *U.S. Department of Justice*, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpp15.pdf>



percentage of males (10.2%) than females (7%) were pulled over as the driver in a traffic stop. Blacks (9.8%) were more likely than Whites (8.6%) and Hispanics (7.6%) to be the driver in a traffic stop. Across age groups, drivers ages 18 to 24 (14.8%) were most likely to be pulled over."<sup>113</sup>

Furthermore, those data show that Black people are more likely to interact with the police when it is a police initiated contact rather than a resident initiated contact.<sup>114</sup> On the opposite, White people are more likely than Black people to initiate contact with the police on their own will (Chart 8). In 2016, the number of resident-initiated contacts was higher for Whites (45.6%) than for Blacks (36.8%).<sup>115</sup> According to those data, Blacks are also more likely than Whites to be pulled over when they are the passenger in the car.

**Chart 8. Percent of contact initiated with the police, 2015**



Source: Davis, Elizabeth, « Contact Between Police and the Public, 2015 », *U.S. Department of Justice*, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.bjs.gov/content/>

To try to make a link between the distrust of

the Black community towards law enforcement and those data on traffic stops, the legitimacy of the traffic stop according to the driver must also be studied. According to data from 2015 (see Appendix 8), during 95% of traffic stop, police officers gave a reason to the driver, slightly more often to Whites (96.1%) than to Blacks (94.5%).<sup>116</sup> As for the legitimacy of the traffic stop according to the driver, Whites (86.2%) are more likely than Blacks (72.7%) to say that the traffic stop was

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

legitimate.<sup>117</sup> As for the outcome of the traffic stop, data show that White people are more likely to receive a warning (38%) than Black people (33.6%). And Black people are more likely to receive a ticket (49.9%) than Whites (46.4%).<sup>118</sup> In general, Black residents are less likely to say that the police behaved properly. As for the use of force during police initiated contacts, it is highly difficult to evaluate it and put numbers on those actions. Nevertheless, the Bureau of Justice Statistics released numbers on the matter and concluded that 1.8% of White people have experienced nonfatal threats or use of force during contacts with the police when 3.3% of Black people have (which is according to the study a significant difference from the comparison group at the 95% confidence interval).<sup>119</sup> Thus, those censuses show that Black people are more likely than White people to experience the use of force during a contact with the police. Those data can in part explain why Black people are reluctant to trust law enforcement in their communities; one must remember that other aspects must be taken into account to understand that distrust.

## **2. The "War on Drugs" and its impact on Black people**

One of the major goals of the Black Lives Matter movement is to denounce the disproportionate number of arrests of Black people on the suspicion of use or possession of drugs. Black people are indeed much more likely to be searched for drugs in the streets than White people. Denouncing the high number of arrests and "stop-and-frisk" effected by police in Black communities is therefore part of the fight against police brutality. According to a report made by *the Journal of the American Statistical Association*: "Police stops persons of racial and ethnic minority groups more often than Whites relative to their proportions in the population".<sup>120</sup> One can argue that police tend to control population according to the rates of crimes committed by each racial group,

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<sup>117</sup> Davis, Elizabeth, « Contact Between Police and the Public, 2015 », *op.cit.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Gelman, Andrew, Fagan, Jeffrey & Kiss, Alex, « An Analysis of the New York City Police Department's "Stop-and-Frisk" Policy in the Context of Claims of Racial Bias », *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 2007.

thus implying that Black people in fact use more drugs than white people do. However, Blacks and Whites are thought to use drugs at a similar rate. A study by the American Civil Liberties Union of 2013 states: "A Black person in the United States is 3.73 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than a White person, even though both races have similar rates of marijuana use."<sup>121</sup> The study takes as an example the state of Iowa where the highest level of disparity can be found. It adds: "Black people in Iowa were arrested for marijuana possession at a rate 8.4 times higher than White people. One factor that may explain the difference in arrest rates between Whites and Blacks is that Blacks are more likely than Whites to buy marijuana outdoors, from a stranger, and away from their homes."<sup>122</sup> The high number of Black people being arrested for the use of drugs is thought to be due to the War on Drugs ordered under the presidency of Nixon. The War on Drugs was mainly characterized by one act, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 which aimed at sentencing people to one year mandatory minimum penalty just for possession of crack. According to the United States Sentencing Commission: "Cocaine became the only controlled substance for which first possession involved a mandatory minimum penalty."<sup>123</sup> This act is thought to have particularly affected the Black community, not because they used drugs more than the White community, but because the type of drug that Black people were using (because less expensive) was also the one for which the sentence for possession was much higher.<sup>124</sup> The possession of 5 grams of crack cocaine would involve a minimum of five years in prison while for receiving the same penalty for the possession of powder cocaine, 500 grams had to be possessed.<sup>125</sup> Crack was indeed mostly used among Blacks whereas powder cocaine was the drug mainly used by White people.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ramchand, R, Pacula, R, Iguchi, M, « Racial differences in marijuana-users' risk of arrest in the United States », *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 2007.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> « 1995 Report to the Congress: Cocaine and Federal Sentencing Policy », *United States Sentencing Commission*, 2013.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Mauer, Marc, « The Obama Legacy: Chipping Away at Mass Incarceration », *TalkPoverty*, December, 2016.

Retrieved from: <https://talkpoverty.org/2016/12/21/obama-legacy-chipping-away-mass-incarceration/>

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

Possession of cocaine did not lead to harsh sentencing as possession of crack did. Therefore Black people received far more sentences to prison for the use of drugs than White people did. As the United States Sentencing Commission writes in its 1995 report to the Congress about Cocaine and Federal Sentencing Policy: "In 1995, The United States Sentencing Commission delivered a report to Congress concluding that, because 80% of crack offenders were Black, the 100:1 disparity disproportionately affected minorities."<sup>127</sup> In 1999, crime statistics also showed that in the United States: "Blacks were far more likely to be targeted by law enforcement for drug crimes, and received much stiffer penalties and sentences than Whites."<sup>128</sup> John Ehrlichman, Nixon's domestic policy chief said in an interview for *Harper's Magazine*:

The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. (...) You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or blacks, but by getting the public to associate the hippies to marijuana and blacks with heroin. And the, criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. (...) We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.<sup>129</sup>

Thus the War on Drugs is thought to have led to the mass incarceration of Black people in the United States and to have participated to the vilification of Black people (particularly black men), something that persists and results in more violence and distrust between Blacks and law enforcement.

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<sup>127</sup> « 1995 Report to the Congress: Cocaine and Federal Sentencing Policy », *op.cit.*

<sup>128</sup> Ramchand, R, Pacula, R, Iguchi, « Racial differences in marijuana-users' risk of arrest in the United States », *op.cit.*

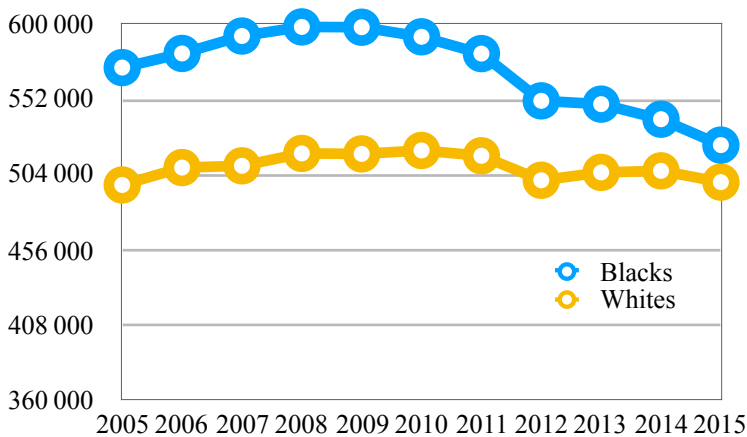
<sup>129</sup> LoBianco, Tom, « Report: Aide says Nixon's war on drugs targeted blacks, hippies », *CNN*, March 24, 2016.

Retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/23/politics/john-ehrllichman-richard-nixon-drug-war-blacks-hippie/index.html>

### 3. Mass incarceration

In her book entitled *When They Call You a Terrorist*, Patrisse Khan Cullors one of the founders of the movement would write about mass incarceration of Black people: "The mass incarceration of Blacks is largely the result of institutional policies in our police and judicial systems, which includes aggressive enforcement of low-level drug crimes and mandatory harsh sentencing laws that disproportionately affect Blacks."<sup>130</sup> The over-representation of Black people in prisons in the United States is an undeniable fact: in 2015, Black people represented 12% of the American population, but around 30% of the incarcerated population.<sup>131</sup> (Chart 9) In fact, according

**Chart 9. Number of sentenced prisoners in the U.S., 2005-2015.**



Source: Ann Carson, E., « Prisoner In 2014 », *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, September 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbse&sid=40>

to the Black Lives Matter movement, mass incarceration of Black people is one of the main consequences of structural racism in the United States. Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics show that Black people in 2010 were more likely to go to prison than White people: "In 2010, the incarceration rate for White men under local, state and federal jurisdiction was

678 inmates per 100,000 white U.S. residents; for Black men, it was 4,347. (...) Black men were more than six times as likely as White men to be incarcerated in 2010."<sup>132</sup> And it is a trend that had already started years ago. In 1960, the male incarceration rate was of 262 per 100,000 White men and of 1,313 per 100,000 Black men, which means that Black people were five times more likely

<sup>130</sup> Khan-Cullors, Patrisse, « When They Call You a Terrorist: a Black Lives Matter Memoir », *op.cit.*

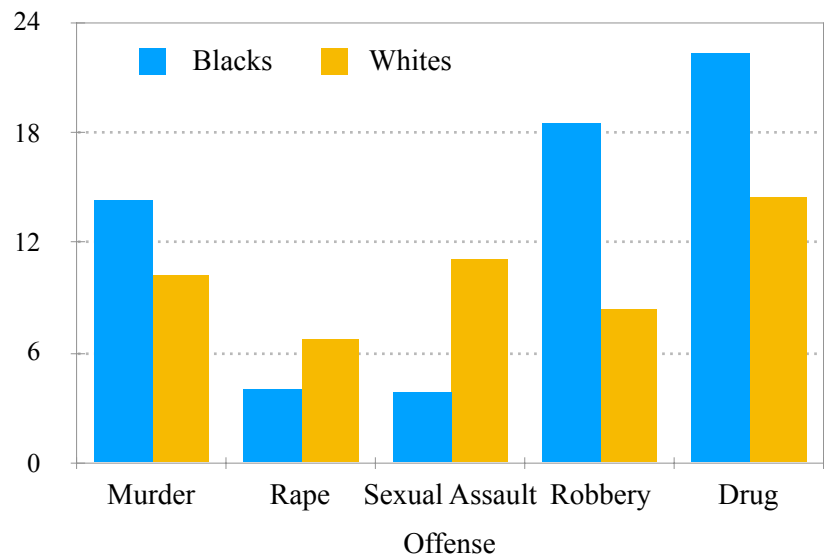
<sup>131</sup> Sakala, Leah, « Breaking Down Mass Incarceration in the 2010 Census: State-by-State Incarceration Rates by Race/Ethnicity », *Prison Policy Initiative*, May 2014.

<sup>132</sup> « King's Dream Remains an Elusive Goal; Many Americans See Racial Disparities », *Pew Research Center*, *op.cit.*

than White men to end up in prison.<sup>133</sup> As for Black women, they are also more likely than White women to go to prison, nevertheless the disparity gap narrowed from 1960 to 2010 in opposition to the male one. Mass incarceration should also be studied through the analysis of the offenses that mostly led Black prisoners to jail. Data from the National Prisoners Statistics Program were studied, the results of that research are

reflected through the different diagrams made, and focus on the figures of the two years 2008 and 2014, to see if any change happened within these two years (Chart 10 & 11). The figures from 2008 show that there are indeed

**Chart 10. Percent of sentenced prisoners under state jurisdiction, 2008.**



certain categories in which Black people are overrepresented: Black people are more often incarcerated

for robbery, possession or use of drug and murder, whereas White people are overrepresented in rape or sexual assault offenses. The main offense for which Black people are put in prison is the possession or the use of drugs. Indeed, in 2008, more than 22,3% of sentenced prisoners under state jurisdiction incarcerated for drug related offenses were Black while the percentage of White people incarcerated for the use or sale or drugs was of 14,5%.<sup>134</sup> The idea put forward by Black Lives Matter activists that Black people are massively incarcerated for the use of drug seems to be confirmed by data from the National Prisoner Statistics Program (Chart 10).<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, data

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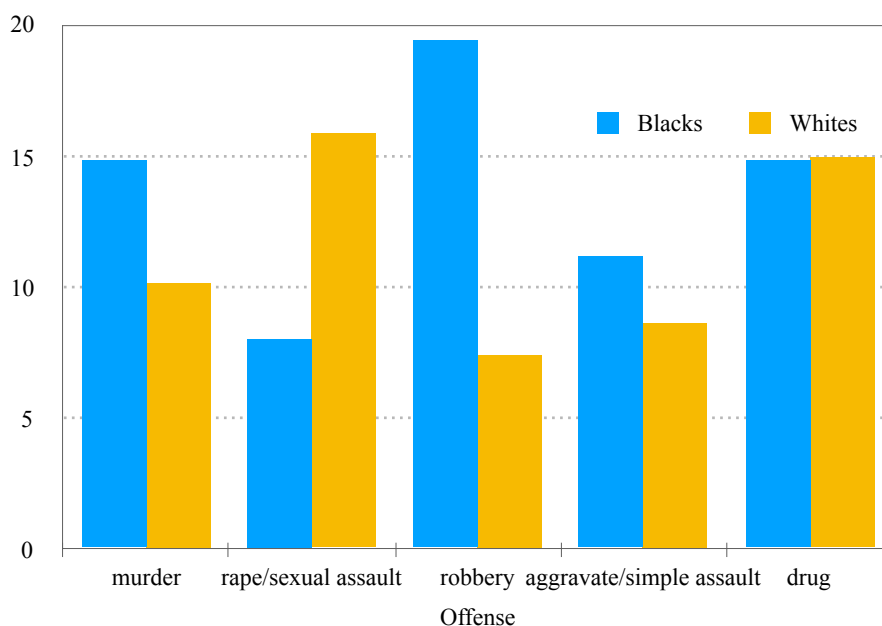
<sup>134</sup> « King’s Dream Remains an Elusive Goal; Many Americans See Racial Disparities », *Pew Research Center, op.cit.*

<sup>135</sup> Ann Carson, E., « Prisoner In 2014 », *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, September 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbse&sid=40>

from 2014 show that improvements have been made since 2008 (Chart 11). When Barack Obama was elected, he made fighting against mass incarceration one of his major targets. Thus, in 2010, Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act, which according to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, "(...) reduced the sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine from 100:1 to 18:1. The mandatory minimum penalty was amended to take effect for possession of crack cocaine in excess of 28

grams."<sup>136</sup> This Act aimed at reducing the racial disparities of imprisonment linked to the possession of drugs and according to data from the National Corrections Reporting Program, the National Prisoner Statistics Program and the National Inmate

**Chart 11. Percent of sentenced prisoners under the jurisdiction of state correctional authority, 2014.**



Source: Ann Carson, E., « Prisoner In 2014 », *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, September 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbse&sid=40>

Survey, the racial disparity in sentences linked to drugs was highly reduced. In 2014 the percentage of sentenced prisoners for offenses linked to the use of drugs was 14,9% for Black people and 15% for White people (Chart 11).<sup>137</sup> Thus, the Fair Sentencing Act seems to have had a positive impact on racial disparities in sentencing on drug use. In addition, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2015 the United States correctional population was at its lowest level since 2002.<sup>138</sup> The racial gap between the number of Black and White sentenced prisoners under the jurisdiction of

<sup>136</sup> Meierhoefer, B. S., « General Effect of Mandatory Minimum Prison Terms », *National Criminal Justice Reference Service*, 1992. Retrieved from : <https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/publications/Abstract.aspx?id=137258>

<sup>137</sup> Ann Carson, E., « Prisoner In 2014 », *op.cit.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

state or federal correctional authorities narrowed.<sup>139</sup> In 2005, 572,400 Black people were incarcerated under the jurisdiction of state or federal correctional authorities.<sup>140</sup> That same year, 497,600 White people were incarcerated which made a racial gap of about 74,800 prisoners. In 2014, the number of Black people incarcerated dropped to 523,000 and the one of White prisoners reached 499,400, resulting in a racial gap never hit before, of 23,600.<sup>141</sup> Since 2008, the number of Black citizens being incarcerated has therefore dropped to almost reach the one of White people. However, mass incarceration of Black people in the United States is still topical and is denounced by the Black Lives Matter movement. Certain activists even argue in favor of the end of the American justice system as it is.

#### **4. Black deaths by law enforcement**

If the lack of quality housing, the lack of access to education, the persisting disparities in employment (etc.) are aspects denounced by the Black Lives Matter, yet they are not the main reasons that pushed so many Black people to demonstrate in the streets in 2012. The rising number of cases of Black people being killed by law enforcement is what led the movement to erupt. It is not the only aspect denounced by the Black Lives Matter, yet the killing of Black people by police in the United States is the most highlighted issue that discrimination is thought to bring. If the hashtag "#BlackLivesMatter" started rising in 2012, one cannot say that it highlights a new phenomenon. Police violence engraves itself in a "trend" that started years ago in the United States. The ARD (Arrest Related Deaths) program is a census made each year, that identifies and counts all persons who died either while being arrested or while in the custody of state or local law enforcement personnel. The Bureau of Justice Statistics writes: "The ARD program collects data on civilian deaths caused by any use of force by state or local law enforcement personnel as well as

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*



those not directly related to actions of law enforcement, such as deaths attributed to suicide, intoxication, accidental injury, illness, or natural causes."<sup>142</sup> When studying data from the ARD program no number related to race could be found. Nevertheless, the United States Department of Justice released a report on police behavior which collects data on the number of citizens who died during arrest by demographic characteristics. According to that report, from 2003 to 2009, 4,813 people died during arrest, among them 2,026 were non-Hispanic Whites and 1,529 were non-Hispanic Blacks.<sup>143</sup> Thus, Black deaths by law enforcement represented 31,8% of all death during arrest, and 42,1% for Whites.<sup>144</sup> Taking into account that Black people represent around 13% of the total American population, the reported number of arrest-related is disproportionate among Blacks. It must be added that from 2003 to 2009, the ARD Program did not take into account deaths that occurred in a jail or in the custody of federal law enforcement officers. The federal Bureau of Justice Statistics argues that the ARD Program would in fact count only half at best of all people who died during arrest in America at the state level.<sup>145</sup>

Those Black deaths during custody are particularly denounced by Black activists. For example, the story of Sandra Bland, a 28 year old African American woman who was found hanged in a jail cell in Texas in 2015, was massively denounced by the movement. The cause of her death has been disputed leading to protest as alleged racial violence against her was put forward. A number of questions about the treatment of Black people during and after the initial arrest therefore were risen by the movement. Freddie Gray is another example of a 25 year old African American man who died in police custody on April 2015. A video of Gray's arrest was taken, showing him obviously injured, screaming in pain, and not able to walk to the police vehicle.<sup>146</sup> His death led to

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<sup>142</sup> Davis, Elizabeth, « Contact Between Police and the Public, 2015 », *op.cit.*

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Ordway, Denise-Marie, Wihbey, John, Kille, Leighton, Walter, « Deaths in police custody in the United States », *Journalist's Resource*, July 2016. Retrieved from: <https://journalistsresource.org/studies/government/criminal-justice/deaths-police-custody-united-states/>

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

the uprising of Baltimore which started on the 25th of April 2019; since then, his death has been ruled a homicide, the medical examiner's office having concluded that Gray's death could in no way be an accident.<sup>147</sup> The Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Police-Public Contact Survey have released figures on the number and percentage of American residents who had experienced nonfatal threats or use of force during contacts with police by demographic characteristics in 2015. In 2015, 37,334,200 White people aged 16 or older had had contact with police, among them 485,700 had experienced force during those contacts which represents 1,3%.<sup>148</sup> The same year 6,146,400 Black persons aged 16 or older had had contact with police, among them 201,100 had experienced force during those contacts, meaning 3,3% of them, which is according to the survey a significant difference from the comparison group at the 95% confidence interval.<sup>149</sup> Violence of police officers towards the population remains an issue in the United States and seems to particularly affect the Black community. Counting the number of Black deaths by law enforcement is a difficult task and no real figures of the number of Black people having been killed by law enforcement can be given.

Nevertheless, certain initiatives have been taken by newspapers such as *The Guardian* which created a web page: "The Counted", which tracks the number of people killed by the police in the United States. The Counted started collecting the number of deaths by law enforcement in the United States in 2015. It gives details on the race of the victim, his or her age, as well as details on the circumstances during which the death occurred. In 2015, The Counted reported 1146 deaths of American residents by law enforcement. Among them 295 were Blacks representing 25,7% of all deaths reported by The Counted. That same year, 584 White people are thought to have been killed by police (50,9% of the total number of deaths by law enforcement).<sup>150</sup> Those figures have to be qualified as some of the people killed by law enforcement were armed and could have therefore

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Davis, Elizabeth, « Contact Between Police and the Public, 2015 », *op.cit.*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

represented a danger for the policemen involved. Nevertheless, The Counted also reports if the people killed were armed or not, therefore the number of unarmed people killed by police in the United States can be studied. In 2015, among the 295 Black people killed, 79 were unarmed (26,7% of all black people killed by police).<sup>151</sup> As for Whites, in 2015, among the 584 killed by law enforcement, 106 were unarmed (18,15% of all White people killed by police that year). Thus, in 2015 the number of unarmed people killed by police was higher for Blacks than for Whites. When taking into account those data, it must be kept in mind that White people represent around 61% of the American population whereas Black people only 12%.<sup>152</sup> As for 2016, 1093 Americans are thought to have been killed by law enforcement, 574 Whites and 266 Blacks. Among those 574 Whites, 95 were unarmed (16,5%), as for the 266 Black people killed by the police, 39 were unarmed (14,7%).<sup>153</sup> If the number of White people killed by police is higher than the one of Black people, the rate at which Black people are killed by law enforcement is much higher than the one of White people.

Yet, both sides must be taken into account, policemen views must also be taken remembered when studying police misbehavior. The second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which allows citizens to carry weapons, makes the situation more difficult for policemen as they never know whether the person with whom they initiate contact is armed or not. Therefore their lives can always be threatened which might also explain the high number of cases in which police officers have shot residents because they thought they were armed and therefore dangerous. Nevertheless, what Black Lives Matter activists denounce the most, and what makes the Black community think that Black lives do not matter is the fact that in most cases Black deaths are not investigated and that when policemen act inappropriately, they seem to be rarely convicted for their mistakes. The death of

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<sup>151</sup> « The Counted. People killed by police in the U.S. », *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/series/counted-us-police-killings>

<sup>152</sup> United States Census Bureau. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219>

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

Trayvon Martin received a lot of attention from the media therefore his death has been investigated, nevertheless many other deaths of Black citizens killed by the police are thought to have never been looked upon. Furthermore, Black activists underline the fact that for a number of cases, even though Black deaths are investigated, it rarely ends up in at least one of the policemen involved being charged for murder. From 2012 to 2016, several deaths of African Americans are thought to have happened because of police misconduct. Among them the death of Trayvon Martin (2012), Junn Davis (2012), Renisha Mc Bride (2013), Eric Garner (2014), John Crawford (2014), Michael Brown (2014), Ezell Ford (2014), Laquan McDonald (2014), Tamir Rice (2014), Freddie Gray (2015), Sandra Bland (2015), Akai Gurly (2015), Anton Sterling (2016), Philando Castille (2016) and Charles Kinsey (2016). Among those 15 deaths, policemen were charged in 5 cases. Patrisse Khan Cullors: "Death with a common root: the hatred that tells a person daily that their life and the life of those they love ain't worth anything, a truth made even more real when the people who harm you are never made accountable."<sup>154</sup> So what is thought to have started the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2012 is not the death of Trayvon Martin itself, but rather the outrage of the Black population when they discovered on the 13th of July 2013, that George Zimmerman the man who killed Trayvon Martin would not be indicted. Thus, police violence towards the Black community engraves itself in a pattern that started decades ago and that seems to continue. According to Black Lives Matter activists police brutality is not just a Manichaeian issue in which White police officers kill Black people; it is a deeper issue that engraves itself in the process of structural racism and that is being manifested by a constant harassment of poor Black communities by police. Police violence would also be the result of the vilification of Black people that started decades ago. Barbary Ransby indeed writes: "Black men and boys like Trayvon Martin had already been systematically criminalized, not by their individual actions but by their collective identity,

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<sup>154</sup> Khan-Cullors, Patrisse, « When They Call You a Terrorist: a Black Lives Matter Memoir », *op.cit.*

their posture, their positionality, and sometimes even their fashion choices. They were typecast in popular culture and popular media as menacing, violent, and dangerous: bodies to be feared, contained or even killed."<sup>155</sup> So what is highlighted by the movement is that: police brutality towards the Black community has existed for decades and embeds itself in the process of structural racism that is being manifested by the constant harassment of poor Black communities.

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<sup>155</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

### **III. A Feeling of Disappointment from the Black Community towards Black People in Position of Power**

#### **1. The hope that Barack Obama represented**

##### **A. Candidate Obama: A hope for racial equality**

When Barack Obama was elected president of the United States in 2008 he represented hope for most Americans, especially for the Black community that had massively voted for him. In 2008, the financial crisis, later known as the Great Recession, had gripped the nation and the Black community had found itself greatly impacted. Obama's campaign represented the hope that Americans were looking for, especially African Americans who believed in the changes that Obama could bring on matters of racial disparities. This hope is highlighted by the voter turnout of 2008: African Americans massively voted compared to other presidential elections and the percentage of Black voters almost reached the one of White voters.<sup>156</sup> It can be read in a survey about voter participation published in Pew Research: "While Blacks had lagged behind Whites in voter participation for most of the past half century, turnout among Blacks nearly matched that of Whites in the 2008 presidential elections and surpassed it in 2012."<sup>157</sup> Obama used "hope" as the main feeling in most of his speeches, for example after his election in 2008 when he declared: "With hope and virtue, let us brave the icy currents and endure what storms may come."<sup>158</sup> He also raised expectations among the Black community; he declared in a speech at the Constitution Center in Philadelphia in 2008: "Race is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right

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<sup>156</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

<sup>157</sup> « King's Dream Remains an Elusive Goal; Many Americans See Racial Disparities », *op.cit.*

<sup>158</sup> Westphalen, Gary, « The Obama Legacy: a Promise of hope », *op.cit.*

now."<sup>159</sup> Black Lives Matter activists often express a mitigated opinion of Barack Obama's two presidential terms. Activists such as Barbara Ransby argue that he brought a lot of hope to the Black community and therefore raised many expectations, but did not achieve those expectations. This might therefore explain why the biggest social movement for racial equality in the United States since the Civil Right Movement rose under the presidency of the first Black president of the United States. Ransby writes about the support for Obama that the Black community at first manifested:

Many initially considered Barack Obama's election as the nation's first African American president to be milestone in the long march of racial progress. He won against the odds, with idealistic youth in the forefront, with a progressive populist message, and with legions of young white supporters. However, the dialectic of Obama's victory was a complicated one, as a number of provocative new books on the subject attest. African Americans initially rallied around him, supporting him almost unanimously at the polls and defending him from criticism during his first year or so in office. There was a kind of familial protectiveness of the commander in chief, as most African Americans struggled in disbelief that he had actually won.<sup>160</sup>

What Black Lives Matter activists add is that Black people were so proud of having a Black president at the head of the country that they did not really pay attention to his actions. The racist backlash that came from the Republicans in Congress reinforced the will of the Black community to defend their Black president no matter what he did. Nevertheless, after a while, Black activists have become harshly critical of Obama's presidency and of the legacy that he had left behind him. Ransby states:

The honeymoon eventually wore off for many, and Black activists confronted the hard reality that simply having a Black family in the White House was not going to save Black families in general. And, moreover, just because Obama was being criticized and attacked from the conservative right did not mean there were no legitimate criticisms to be made by Black people and the Left in general.<sup>161</sup>

According to Black Lives Matter activists such as Ransby or Charlene Carruthers, Black people rapidly discovered that having a Black president at the head of the country did not mean that

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* p.61/62

racial disparities would disappear during his presidency. Many were disappointed by what appeared to them as a lack of political actions in favor of the Black community. Carruthers, a leader of the Black Lives Matter movement, describes her disillusionment with Obama:

I voted for him when he ran for Senate, and I voted for him when he ran for president for the first time. It was with the understanding that there was an optimism and a sentiment of progressivism that his platform at least sought to achieve. And shortly after, there was a wakeup call, again, about the power of politicians in actually transforming society... And so what I've learned and what I hope many of us learned again are the limitations of any politician to change our lives or to transform our lives.<sup>162</sup>

Hopes originally raised by Obama's election have been so strong among Black people that their disillusionment seems to have been even more important. It is nevertheless not a belief shared by all Black Lives Matter activists, as some argue that Obama just did not have all the resources to achieve racial equality and that despite criticisms, he still improved the situation of many Black communities. Therefore, feelings about Obama's responsibility in the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement are disparate, Black activists do not come to an agreement on Obama's achievement on the issue of racial disparities.

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.* p.65



## B. Obama and racial equality

President Obama worked on several aspects of racial disparities in the United States: mass incarceration and injustices that could be found in the justice system, healthcare for those who could not afford it and actions such as "My Brother's Keeper" to help young African Americans to succeed thanks to tutors. Nevertheless, those efforts in favor of the Black community have not been seen as sufficient. As the *Washington Post* writes in an article entitled "Racism During Barack Obama Presidency":

Obama would spend much of 2015 declaring criminal justice issues as among his primary priorities. In addition to the policing question, Obama focused on disparities in sentencing, particularly in drug cases. Eric Holder said Obama saw the racial disparity of the decades-long war on drugs close up when he was a community organizer on the South Side of Chicago.<sup>163</sup>

Different views and conclusions are drawn from his actions on the criminal justice system. The *Washington Post* writes: "Obama became an increasingly forceful voice, pledging to address the epidemic of incarceration that disproportionately affects people of color and speaking out against what he described as 'a long history of inequity in the criminal justice system in America'."<sup>164</sup> On the other hand, certain activists argue that Obama did not do enough to stop racial disparities in the criminal justice system. Data from the Department of Justice Statistics give the number of Black people incarcerated in the United States because of drug related offenses. Charts were made thanks to those data in order to see whether the situation evolved when the Fair Sentencing Act was passed (Chart 12 & 13). Incarceration due to other types of offenses were included to show if other variations could be seen on the number of incarcerated people. Thus, those figures which illustrates the percentage of Black prisoners under the jurisdiction of state

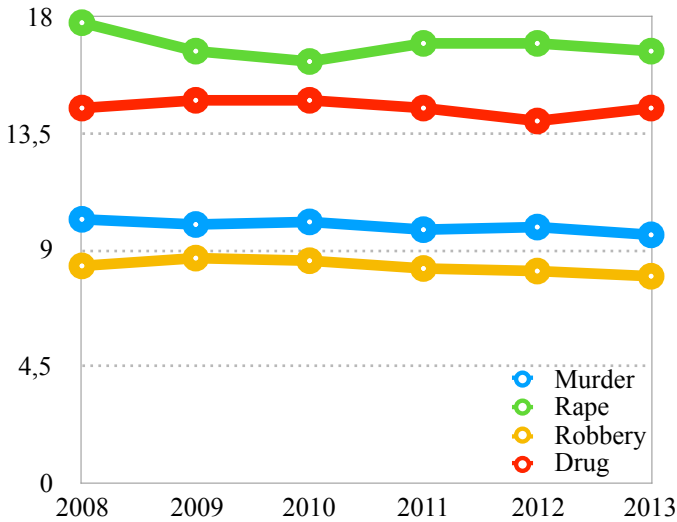
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<sup>163</sup> Horwitz, Sari, Lowery, Wesley, « Obama's crusade against a criminal justice system devoid of 'second chances', *The Washington Post*, April, 2006. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/Charts/national/obama-legacy/racial-profiling-criminal-justice-reform.html>

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

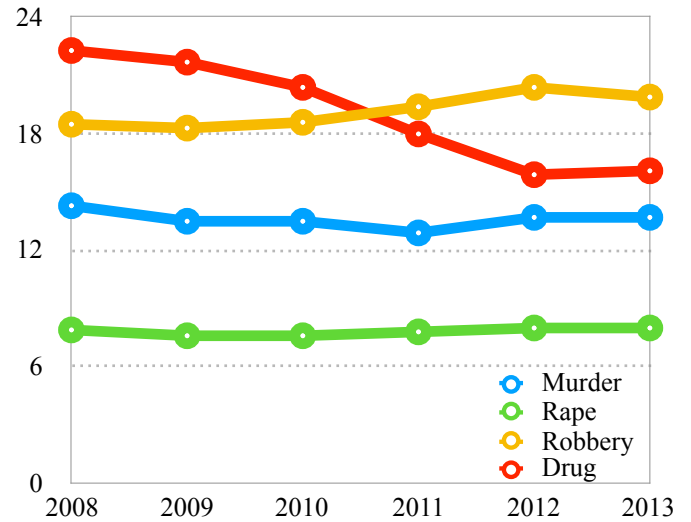
correctional authority by offenses from 2004 to 2014 show that starting from 2009 the percentage of Black people incarcerated for offenses linked to drugs went down (Chart 12 & 13).<sup>165</sup>

**Chart 12. Percent of White prisoners under the jurisdiction of state correctional authority, from 2004-2014.**



Source: Ann Carson, E., « Prisoner In 2004-2014 », Bureau of Justice Statistics, September 2015.

**Chart 13. Percent of Black prisoners under the jurisdiction of state correctional authority, from 2004-2014.**



Source: Ann Carson, E., « Prisoner In 2004 -2014 », Bureau of Justice Statistics, September 2015.

Obama’s crusade on mass incarceration seems to have had an impact on the number of Black prisoners incarcerated because of drugs. Figures studied show that the number of Black people incarcerated had dropped after the election of Barack Obama to almost reach the one of White people in 2015. Nevertheless, Black Lives Matter activists feel that not enough has been done. In 2015, the number of Black people incarcerated was still higher than the one of White people (figures in the part on mass incarceration).

Another major aspect that Obama focused on during his presidency is the healthcare system and what was commonly known as the Obamacare. The African American community is known for being particularly affected by the lack of healthcare in the United States. The Affordable Care Act also known as Obamacare was therefore designed to make sure that those who could not afford

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

healthcare, especially low and middle-income households a group in which Blacks are overrepresented, would receive health insurance coverage. According to the *Washington Post*, 30 millions of Americans were expected to gain health insurance through the Affordable Care Act (ACA). So what was the impact of Obamacare on ethnic disparities in health insurance coverage and how was it received by the Black community? Data from the American Community Survey from 2008 to 2014 were used to see the effects of Obamacare. The ACA came into effect in 2014, but before that, the percentage of uninsured people among the different ethnic and racial groups were the following: in 2013, 40,5% of Hispanics, 25,8% of Blacks and 14,8% of Whites.<sup>166</sup> When Obamacare came into effect the number of uninsured seems to have declined.<sup>167</sup> The study shows: "After the main ACA provisions went into effect in 2014, coverage disparities declined slightly as the percentage of adults who were uninsured decreased by 7,1 percentage points for Hispanics, 5,1 percentage points for Blacks, and 3 percentage points for Whites."<sup>168</sup> It must be mentioned that the different States could choose whether to expand Medicaid programs or not, therefore Obamacare was more "useful" in certain States than in others. Nevertheless, the study concludes that even though improvements have been made, and Obamacare has reduced racial disparities in health coverage, disparities still persist in the United States on the matter of health. No figures could be found on how Black communities received Obamacare and if they felt an improvement in health coverage after 2014. Nevertheless, what can be said is that Black Lives Matter activists still argue that there are racial disparities in health coverage between Blacks and Whites. Another initiative made by Barack Obama was the project called "My Brother's Keeper", which aimed at giving mentors to young African American children so that they could have someone to look up to. A

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<sup>166</sup> Buchmueller, Thomas C., Levinson, Zachary M., Levy, Helen G., Wolfe, Barbara L., « Effect of the Affordable Care Act on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Insurance Coverage », *U.S. National Library of Medicine*, August 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4940635>

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

mentor was given to young Black children who had no father to take care of them, and the role of these mentors was to help those children to achieve their educational goals but also to encourage them to do some sports etc. The initiative created by President Obama reinforces an idea harshly criticized by Black Lives Matter activists: if Black youth do not succeed it is not because of how the system is built but rather because of their own behavior. Political scientist Fredrick C. Harris writes to explain that idea:

What started as a philosophy promulgated by Black elites to ‘uplift the race’ by correcting the ‘bad’ traits of the black poor has now evolved into one of the hallmarks of Black politics in the age of Obama, a governing philosophy that centers on managing the behavior of Black people left behind in a society touted as being full of opportunity.<sup>169</sup>

It is from this idea that the gap between President Obama and Black Lives Matter activists has been drawn. Therefore, the main disappointment that came from the Black community towards the presidency of Barack Obama seems to come from the fact that he was in most people’s eyes, just a symbol. A symbol that gave the illusion that an improvement in racial disparities could happen. Mumia Abu-Jamal writes about Obama’s presidency: "Symbols are powerful things, but when they are empty of substance, they become hollow—like now. You’d think that perhaps Black lives might begin to matter more under the leadership of a Black president. But have they?."<sup>170</sup> A mixed response came from the Black community concerning Obama’s work at the White House. If actions have actually been taken by Barack Obama in favor of the Black community (The Affordable Healthcare Act is thought to have cut the number of Black uninsured by a third<sup>171</sup>, actions have been taken to diminish the number of prisoners incarcerated for minor offenses linked

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<sup>169</sup> Ransby, Barbara, *Making All Black Lives Matter*, *op.cit.*

<sup>170</sup> Abu-Jamal, Mumia, *Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?*, City Lights Publishers, July, 2017. p110

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a journalist and political activist who was sentenced to death in 1982 for the murder of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. Abu-Jamal became widely known while on death row for his writings on the United States criminal justice system. In 2011, his death sentence was overturned and he was sentenced to life in prison in December 2011.

<sup>171</sup> Bryant, Nick, « Barack Obama Legacy: Did he Improve US Race Relations? », *BBC News*, January, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38536668>

to drug), they have not reached the expectations of most Black people in the United States.

According to ABC News:

Nearly nine years later, ABC News polling indicates declining race relations. In 2008, 55% of American voters surveyed said they believe that race relations were 'generally good.' As he leaves office, more than 63 percent said they believe relations have become 'generally bad', and a full 83% said they want the next president to put a 'major focus' on improving the situation.<sup>172</sup>

Thus, even if Obama may have made more improvements than his predecessors in terms of race equality, the perceptions of race disparities do not seem to have improved under his presidency. The results of Obama's presidency in the matter of racial equality have not achieved the expectations of most Black people in the United States and the hopes that candidate Obama had risen during his first presidential campaign have not been fulfilled.

### **C. Obama's reactions to police killings**

Obama's reactions to police killings should also be studied as it could have played a role in the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. Obama was elected with the hope that racial equality would improve in the United States. So seeing young Black people, such as Trayvon Martin, die under the presidency of a Black President could have reinforced the anger of the Black community. Different opinions about Obama's reactions to police killings seem to come out: those who think that Obama did take side in favor of the Black community and others, such as many Black Lives Matter activists, who think that he was not strong enough in his words when condemning the killing of Trayvon Martin. When Trayvon Martin died in 2012, Barack Obama stated: "When I think about this boy, I think about my own kids. (...) My main message is to the parents of Trayvon Martin. You know, if I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon."<sup>173</sup> But what Black Lives Matter activists seem to denounce the most concerning Obama's reactions to police killings is the fact that he did not show

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<sup>172</sup> Westphalen, Gary, Marshall, Serena, « The Obama Legacy: A Promise of Hope », *ABC News*. Retrieved from: <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/deepdive/obama-legacy-promise-hope-44597110>

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

any kind of understanding towards the anger felt by most Black communities. Mumia Abu-Jamal writes in his book entitled *Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?*: "In the ashy aftermath of Ferguson, Missouri, after more than 170 cities in the United States faced spirited and sometimes violent protests, it was disturbing in the extreme to hear President Barack Obama come out and call for respect for the 'Rule of Law'."<sup>174</sup> Obama's calls for peace after the first protests in memory of Trayvon Martin were harshly criticized by the Black community who saw their Black president not taking their side. Obama acknowledged the issue of police violence, for example in 2016 when Alton Sterling was killed in Louisiana and Philando Castille in Minnesota, both by law enforcement, when he stated: "These are not isolated incidents. They're symptomatic of a broader set of racial disparities that exist in our criminal justice system."<sup>175</sup> Yet, his reaction seems to have been a disappointment for part of the Black community and for Black Lives Matter activists. Thus, Obama's reactions to the death of young Black people by law enforcement are thought to have disappointed the Black community and it could therefore have had an impact on the rise of the movement. Black people did feel that even under the presidency of Barack Obama, Black lives did not matter.

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<sup>174</sup> Abu-Jamal, Mumia, *Have black Lives Ever Mattered?*, City Lights Publishers, July, 2017.

<sup>175</sup> Bryant, Nick, « Barack Obama legacy: Did he improve US race relations? », *BBC News*, January 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38536668>

## 2. Black elite in position of power

### A. A Black elite standing in the White elite's path

The election of Barack Obama was seen as a major step forward in terms of racial equality in the United States but it also showed that having a Black president at the head of the country would not be enough to achieve racial equality between Blacks and Whites. According to Black Lives Matter activists, it also highlighted how Black elite could easily mold in the White mold and that putting African Americans in position of power would not be sufficient to achieve racial equality. Barbary Ransby writes: "One of the common prerequisites for individual Black success has been that Black elites, though they may engage in facile gestures of kinship, often effectively distance themselves from the suffering and struggles of the mass of ordinary Black people."<sup>176</sup> From Black elites' behavior resulted the slogan "*Unapologetically Black*" which aimed according to Ransby at showing the rest of the population that Black people were not responsible for the persisting racial disparities in the United States and that they would not "diminish" themselves (it is the feeling conveyed) in order to "mold in the White mold". Ransby adds:

*Unapologetically Black* as a slogan is also a counterpoint to Barack Obama's ambivalent relationship to blackness. During one of the 2008 Democratic primary debates, that ambivalence was revealed with painful clarity. It was when then-Senator Obama was forced to choose between being accepted by an overwhelmingly white electorate and Democratic Party power brokers, or affirming his relationship to his longtime spiritual leader, radical Black pastor the Reverend Jeremiah Wright of Chicago's Trinity Church.<sup>177</sup>

If the Black population supported Barack Obama from the very beginning of his presidency, it has not always been the case for Black activists. Obama's reluctance to fully support Black activists was seen as a 'betrayal' for many of them. Ransby denounces the fact that Obama was just an image to convey unity when, in her mind, the country was still divided by many racial disparities. Other Black elites are blamed by activists, for example Black officials at the beginning

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<sup>176</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

of protests who according to Barbara Ransby were taking a "dual approach" to the issue. Indeed, she writes: "While Baltimore uprising began as an expression of Black rage in the wake of Gray's death, Black officials had a dual approach- hardly condemning the militant protesters and feigning empathy for the peaceful ones."<sup>178</sup> So the main idea that seems to come out from most Black Lives Matter activists' discourse on Black elites is that many African Americans in position of power do not help poor communities. Not only because sometimes those Black Elite mold in the White system but also because the system is made in such a way that even Black elites cannot act or implement concrete actions in favor of the Black community. According to Ransby, having a Black president was just an illusion for the end of racial disparities, she writes: "To many in the mainstream, the post-racial ideal was a seductive one, made all the more visually appealing by the handsome and wholesome, brown-skinned First Family."<sup>179</sup> In most of Black Lives Matter activists' opinions Barack Obama was just practicing respectability politics. Indeed, Ransby states: "While Obama continued to enjoy soul music, admire Black artists and athletes, and express himself occasionally in Black urban vernacular, his political break with the Black working class-except as loyal voters- was clear."<sup>180</sup> Thus, Black elites are sometimes not seen by the Black Lives Matter movement as an asset for the Black community, but rather a drawback as they give the idea that racial equality has been achieved when the black poor are still struggling.

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.* p.83

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.* p.199

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.* p.199/200



## **B. Black policemen involved in killings of African Americans**

Police violence towards Black people is thought to always occur between White policemen and Black citizens; nevertheless the issue is not always as Manichaeian as it seems. There have been several cases of police violence towards Blacks involving the participation of Black officers. For example, when Freddie Gray was violently arrested in Baltimore in 2015, not all policemen involved were White. Three officers who were responsible for his death were indeed Black men. Barbara Ransby writes: "Gray's case was not a simple racial formula of white cop killing Black youth, as three of the six police officers indicted for Gray's murder were Black including a Black woman."<sup>181</sup> These cases show that police violence is not "just" a question of discrimination against Black people but rather engraves itself in a phenomenon started years ago by police districts. In Ransby's opinion, police violence is more than just White policemen against Black people, it is a consequence of structural racism. She writes:

Given these demographics (meaning the fact that Black officers were involved), one might have expected activists to hesitate before making the allegation of racism. But they did not. It was immediately clear to them that the problem was structural racism, which included profiling and harassment of a certain type of poor or working-class Black youth, an aggressive policing style in poor Black communities.<sup>182</sup>

Therefore, according to Black Lives Matter activists police violence in the United States is not aimed at all Black people but rather at the poorest part of the Black community. A separation is therefore drawn between Black elite, Black officials or Black police officers and the Black community. The Blue code among policemen is also questioned by Black activists. According to them it would forbid Black officers to take any step of "solidarity" towards Black citizens. Ransby states: "That notorious blue code of silence among cops, which often trumps any kind of racial solidarity that Black officers might otherwise feel toward the Black community is very real."<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.* p.83

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.* p.176

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.* p.83

Therefore, the difficulty to stop police killings seems to lie in the fact that police violence is not only a case of discrimination against Black people made by White police officers, it engraves itself in a process started years ago during segregation and which continues to affect Black poor as a consequence of structural racism. Black activists also underline the fact that politicians in the cities affected by police killings (for example the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore) were Black officials: "The fact that two of the most powerful politicians in the city, and one of the cops implicated in Gray's death, were Black women militates against any formula that would put all Black people on the same side."<sup>184</sup> Therefore, here again, Black officials at state or city levels, are thought by Black activists to be inefficient in the fight for racial equality. They argue that Black elites once in a position of power are not useful for the Black community as they are just an illusion of racial equality in the United States when poor Black communities still struggle. In the activists' opinion, the fact that their situation did not improve much when represented by Black officials, brought more anger among Black communities in 2014. Ransby adds: "Instead of a trickle down of resources from wealthy Black people to the Black poor, the growth of a more visible, albeit small, Black political elite has obscured the suffering below."<sup>185</sup> Nevertheless, all Black Lives Matter activists do not share the same opinion on the subject, some of them blame Black officials for not doing enough for the Black community while others argue that despite their high positions Black officials could not change the system of structural racism which is to blame for persisting racial disparities. It is therefore in this context that the Black Lives Matter movement rose in 2012.

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.* p.83

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.* p.23

**PART TWO:  
THE RISE OF THE MOVEMENT UNDER THE  
PRESIDENCY OF BARACK OBAMA**

When the first protests for Black lives happened in 2012, racial disparities were not a new issue in the United States, they had been present for the last decades yet no major movement for Black Lives had sparked since the Civil Rights movement. Police brutality and racial profiling of Black people was not a new issue either, and a number of Black people had died at the hand of law enforcement during the last years. So what was the spark that put the movement on fire? When did Black people decide to take their protest against police violence and racial disparities onto the streets, in the United States?

## **I. The Spark that Put the Movement on Fire**

### **1. Beginning of protests after the death of Trayvon Martin**

If the rise of a movement can be explained by the study of the cultural and political background in which it started, yet it is difficult to predict what will be the spark that will put a movement on fire. The very beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement is thought to have taken place after the death of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, on February 2012. Trayvon Martin was a 17 year old African American teenager who was fatally shot by George Zimmerman a man who claimed to do neighborhood watch in the district where Martin was shot to death. On a rainy evening of winter 2012 Trayvon Martin, who was visiting his father in Sanford, went to buy Skittles and some Arizona juice at a convenient store as reported by his brother. That same evening he was seen by George Zimmerman who called the police because he thought that Martin could be a threat to the neighborhood. Zimmerman was asked by the police not to follow Martin, but he nevertheless did. A few minutes later, Trayvon Martin was shot dead by Zimmerman. If those details might not seem relevant to the analysis of the Black Lives Matter movement they are really

important as they might explain why the death of Trayvon Martin led to the spark of the movement for Black lives. If Zimmerman started following Martin it is because in his words: "It seemed as if he was up to no good", more specifically because as Zimmerman mentioned to the police, Martin was wearing a hoodie. From that would later start the "Million Hoodies" protests during which protesters would wear hoodies during marches to denounce the death of the young African American. Just after the death of Trayvon Martin, Zimmerman was set free. According to the police, Zimmerman was not guilty as the 'Stand Your Ground' law of Florida enabled him to shoot if he felt his life was being threatened. The fact that Zimmerman was able to walk free just after having killed a young African American was the spark that is thought to have given birth to the feeling, from which would later rise the movement, that "Black Lives did not matter". The parents of Trayvon Martin, Tracy Martin and Alicia Stanley started asking for justice on social media. A Facebook page entitled "Would you help us achieve justice for our son?" was created and after a few days the death of Trayvon Martin was known all over the country. There had been several other cases of police violence before, so what made Trayvon Martin's death the spark that would lead to a new social movement for Black Lives? Pictures of the young Trayvon Martin probably played a role in outraging the Black population. The fact that he was out to buy Skittles and some Arizona juice seems to be details, but it reminded all Black citizens that when he died Trayvon Martin was doing something that anyone could have been doing: he was just buying snacks and walking down the streets at night. This bag of Skittles that Martin went to buy became a symbol of his death. When people started taking their protest onto the streets some of them came holding bags of Skittles and cans of Arizona juice. Patrisse Khan-Cullors who would later become one of the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement writes about the death of Trayvon Martin: "A White man is questioned and then released after he shoots and kills an unarmed Black boy who was walking

home. And in that instant I was filled with rage and confusion. Was this 2012 or 1955?."186 What she felt seems to be shared by the rest of the Black community: How could a man kill a Black teenager and just walk away free? The feeling of injustice came from the killing of a young African American but also from the failure of the American Justice system to punish the man responsible for Martin's death. Zimmerman was released a few hours after the death of Martin because he claimed that he had used self defense therefore using the Stand Your Ground Law in his favor. The "Stand Your Ground" law is thought to: "establish a right by which a person may defend one's self or others against threats or perceived threats, even to the point of applying lethal force, regardless of whether safely retreating from the situation might have been possible."187 Thus, the feeling that came out of that case was that Zimmerman was in fact *allowed* to kill Martin, which outraged the Black community. In 2012, several "Stand Your Ground" protests were organized to denounce the impact of that law. At that moment, protests were not organized under the name of "Black Lives Matter", nevertheless the spirit and the idea that will later be carried under the banner "Black Lives Matter" was already born. The petition made by the parents of Trayvon Martin was seen by thousands of people and Zimmermann was finally arrested even though later released. As *NBC News* recalls, the death of Martin led gradually to a bigger fight:

First there was a fight for Zimmerman's arrest and a thorough investigation. Then a fight to have a special prosecutor appointed in the case. Then a fight against racial bias, profiling and against the controversial "Stand Your Ground" laws that give wide latitude for citizens to legally kill others if they feel threatened. The fights kept gaining momentum, challenging historic disparities and ill treatment of people of color by government institutions and systems.188

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186 Khan-Cullors, Patrisse, « When They Call You a Terrorist: a Black Lives Matter Memoir », *op.cit.*

187 Elkin, Elizabeth, Andone, Dakin, « What you need to know about 'stand your ground' laws », *CNN*, July, 2018. Retrieved from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stand-your-ground\\_law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stand-your-ground_law)

188 Lee, Trymaine, « Analysis: Trayvon Martin's Death Still Fuels a Movement Five Years Later », *NBC News*, February, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/analysis-trayvon-martin-s-death-still-fuels-movement-five-years-n725646>

What was first an outrage over the death of a young African American, became a fight against police violence and persisting racial disparities in the United States.

## **2. Different protests but no main organization**

The Black Lives Matter movement is thought to have come to life in 2012 at the death of Trayvon Martin. Nevertheless, at that time the banner "Black Lives Matter" was not used. Indeed, at the very beginning of the movement there was no main organization but rather a number of different organizations at local levels that would hold different protests all over the country. Those different organizations would later lead to the movement for Black Lives mainly represented under the slogan "Black Lives Matter". Among those different organizations can be found the Dream Defenders, an activist group which aimed at stopping police violence against Black people. That group also fought against the "school to prison" pipeline that is thought to impact the Black community. Dream Defenders was created by Gabriel Pendas and Philip Agnew, who both decided to organize an event after the death of Trayvon Martin to protest against the failure to arrest George Zimmerman. A march from Daytona Beach Florida to Sanford where Trayvon Martin was killed was organized, it was thus the first protest that led to a number of other protests. Then, spontaneous protests started being held in Los Angeles, New York City, Sanford and other cities across the United States from Miami to Detroit demanding the arrest of George Zimmerman. Those protests were joined mostly by Black people who would come with their families. Infants in strollers and children waving homemade signs could even be found during the first protests. Crowds of protesters in Sanford chanting "No Justice, No Peace" were also joined by the Civil Rights activists Al Sharpton who told the crowd: "We live in the middle of an American paradox. We can put a Black man in the White House but we cannot walk a Black child through a gated neighborhood. We

are not selling out, bowing out or backing down until there is justice for Trayvon."<sup>189</sup> A dozen of buses brought protesters to the rally in Sanford, people wore T-shirts and hoodies with the picture of Trayvon Martin on them, and messages such as "Hoodies Don't Kill People, Guns Kill People" or "Mother's Tears Have No Color" could be seen and heard in the streets of Sanford. That same day, the chairman of the NAACP national board of directors joined the crowds and stated: "When the Sanford police did not arrest George Zimmerman, they essentially placed the burden of proof on a dead young man who cannot speak for himself."<sup>190</sup> Thus, those spontaneous protests are thought to have led to a new era of activism. A new era in which protests would be organized thanks to quick words on social media. Youth would gather in the streets after having seen images of protests published live on Twitter. As journalist Trymaine Lee writes in an article of *NBC News*: "Many of the young people who took to the streets in those early days, in some cases by the thousands, had never participated in any form of protest before. But in Martin, who turned 17 not long before his death, they saw themselves."<sup>191</sup> Marches and protests continued and did not stop until George Zimmerman was finally arrested. As the article from *NBC News* about protests in Sanford states: "(...) Martin's parents, Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton, had no idea that their child's death would spark a movement that would morph into what today is widely and loosely recognized under the banner of Black Lives Matter. But there was hope and belief that his death would somehow matter."<sup>192</sup> Thus, the fight of the movement was started by Trayvon Martin's parents call for justice in 2012. Nevertheless, the few demonstrations and rallies organized in the name of Trayvon Martin were just the beginning of what was to become a much wider social movement. Anger grew among

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<sup>189</sup> Associated Press, « Trayvon Martin death: thousands march in town where teenager was shot », *The Guardian*, March 2012. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/31/trayvon-martin-protest-march-sanford>

<sup>190</sup> Lee, Trymaine, « Analysis: Trayvon's Death Still Fuels a Movement Five Years », *op.cit.*

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*



crowds mainly made of Black youth demanding for justice and tensions continued to rise in Sanford until Zimmerman was eventually arrested. Trymaine Lee states:

But with each day that passed that didn't see Zimmerman in handcuffs, the nationwide protests were growing larger and more intense. Young protesters were galvanized in collective anger, not just because they considered Martin's death a cold-blooded murder, but because of what was perceived as law enforcement's lack of interest in holding anyone accountable.<sup>193</sup>

Six weeks after the death of Trayvon Martin and a number of protests all across the country, George Zimmerman was arrested which stopped protests until his trial.

### **3. The indictment of Zimmerman and the creation of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter**

The trial of George Zimmerman, known as *State of Florida v. George Zimmerman* started when Zimmerman was charged, on April 2012, with second-degree murder after the shooting of Trayvon Martin. On July 13, 2013, after weeks of trial and sixteen hours of deliberation, the jury came at a verdict and George Zimmerman was pronounced not guilty on all charges. The trial had been watched all over the country for weeks and people in Sanford had joined together to hear the result. The indictment of George Zimmerman provoked outrage and sadness in the Black community. A feeling of incomprehension and unfairness came and rose among Black activists. As Angela Davis explains, hearing about George Zimmerman's indictment was like hearing that the lives of Black people had no value, that young Black people could be killed and justice would not punish those responsible of those crimes. A documentary entitled *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter Movement (2016)* retraces the very beginning of the movement. In this documentary is shown the reaction of Alicia Garza when she heard about the indictment of George Zimmerman. At the beginning of the documentary she states: "I was at a bar and I knew that a verdict was due

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<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

because everything went silent. When I saw that George Zimmerman had been acquitted, I felt like I'd been punched in the gut."<sup>194</sup> In Sanford as in many other cities crowds gathered after hearing about the verdict. Slogans such as "No Justice, No Peace" could be heard in the streets and as most videos of protests on July 13, 2013 show, the main feeling that seemed to come from crowds was anger and disbelief. Alicia Garza recalls that from that moment she started thinking about how to organize: "How do we learn how to organize? How do we learn to develop a set of demands that will actually transform conditions in our communities?"<sup>195</sup> Thus, on July 13, 2013, Alicia Garza published on Facebook the three words that will later become the symbol of the movement: "Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter." She explains how those words came to her mind: "I wrote a letter to Black people on Facebook saying that there was nothing wrong with us and we deserved dignity and respect."<sup>196</sup> Patrisse Khan-Cullors then came across the words of Alicia Garza on Facebook and decided to put a hashtag before it, so that the phrase would go viral. From that moment the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was born and became the symbol of protests against police violence and racial injustice in the United States. The hashtag was then used on Twitter and rapidly became a tool used by people to express their anger and outrage concerning the indictment of George Zimmerman. According to Pew Research, following the acquittal of George Zimmerman the hashtag slowly gained prominence, it even became a tool to study the evolution of the movement through the years. Monica Anderson writes in an article from Pew Research: "The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag is an archetypal example of a hashtag tied to a political issue or cause, it maintained a relatively high baseline level of usage on Twitter over a period of several years."<sup>197</sup>

The hashtag was used at a particularly high rate after the indictment of Zimmerman, nevertheless it

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<sup>194</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, BET, May 2016.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Anderson, Monica, Toor, Skye, Rainie, Lee, Smith, Aaron, « An analysis of #BlackLivesMatter and other Twitter hashtags related to political or social issues », *Pew Research Center*, July, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/07/11/an-analysis-of-blacklivesmatter-and-other-twitter-hashtags-related-to-political-or-social-issues/>

was at the time nothing compared with what was to come a year later. On July 17, 2014, around a year after the creation of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, Eric Garner, an African American man died in New York City while being arrested by law enforcement. On July 17, 2014, NYPD officers approached Eric Garner on the suspicion that he was selling single cigarettes in the streets to which Garner replied that he was tired of being harassed and that he was not selling cigarettes.<sup>198</sup> On the video shot during the arrest, four police officers can be seen attempting to arrest Eric Garner, one police officer Daniel Pantaleo starts placing his arm around Eric Garner's neck and wrestles him to the ground. Pantaleo continues his choke hold on Eric Garner even though Garner is on the ground and repeats several times "I can't breathe".<sup>199</sup> Garner loses consciousness and was pronounced dead an hour later in a hospital. The difference this time with the death of Eric Garner is that there was a video that clearly testified of police misbehavior. As Mark Luckie, former manager of News at Twitter explains in the *Stay Woke* documentary: "The difference between Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner is that here you saw the injustices, there was a video associated with it."<sup>200</sup> Growing outrage started in New York City with crowds shouting "I can't breathe", and protests started again. A few weeks later, another African American man, John Crawford, 22 years old was shot dead in a store for holding a toy gun; he later died in hospital. Those two cases of police misbehavior that led to the death of two African American men rose tensions on the issue of police violence. Those cases having happened a few weeks apart and the fact that they were all denounced through videos on social media, led to more protests in the streets but that time under the banner of the Black Lives Matter movement. Actor and activist Jessie Williams states after different protests for Eric Garner:

The movement is actually happening and people are now connecting the dots, now we have instead of a scattered buckshot of black people talking about things that have happened to them and it's just word of mouth, now it is a hardcore human movement

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<sup>198</sup> « 'I Can't Breathe': Eric Garner put in chokehold by NYPD officer », *The Guardian*, December, 2014. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2014/dec/04/i-cant-breathe-eric-garner-chokehold-death-video>

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, *op.cit.*

that is crafty enough to use social media to lift up its voice, to have a serious impact and change the direction of the national conversation.<sup>201</sup>

Therefore, in 2014, if police violence against Black people was not a new issue in the United States, it was then relayed on social media thanks to Twitter and the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. If protests had already started a year before after the death of Trayvon Martin, all different groups such as Dream Defenders or BlackYouthProject100 were now starting reuniting under the banner: Black Lives Matter. Yet, it is in August 2014 that the Black Lives Matter movement experienced its major protests after the death of another Black teenager by law enforcement in Ferguson, Missouri.

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<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

## II. The "Full-Blown Emergence" of the Movement in Ferguson

### 1. Ferguson (2014): the catalyst of a national protest after the death of Michael Brown

The spark that is thought to have started the movement was the death of Trayvon Martin, yet what happened in Ferguson after the death of Michael Brown was as Barbara Ransby states: "the full blown emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement."<sup>202</sup> It is difficult to determine why the death of Michael Brown is the case of police violence that provoked the eruption of the movement, yet certain aspects of it can explain the sudden full emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown Jr. an 18 year old African American teenager, was shot by Darren Wilson, a White police officer. If reports on what happened that day differ widely depending on the sources, it seems as if an altercation had happened between Brown and Wilson, and that it resulted in the police officer firing at Brown as he was running away from him. Darren Wilson hit Michael Brown with at least 6 shots. Brown was unarmed and according to his friend Dorian Johnson who was there when it happened, Brown put his hands up and screamed 'Don't Shoot' at the police officer. The death of Michael Brown was not captured on camera, nevertheless there were witnesses who rapidly spread the information on Twitter that a policeman had killed a young Black man. What was seen as outrageous and demeaning by local residents is the fact that Michael Brown's body lied in the street for four hours before being taken to the morgue.<sup>203</sup> The fact that his body was left in the street for hours was seen as an extreme lack of respect from local police and was particularly denounced the days after the death of Michael Brown. Barbara Ransby writes:

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<sup>202</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

<sup>203</sup> Buchman, Larry, Fessenden, Ford, « What Happened in Ferguson? », *The New York Times*, August, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/13/us/ferguson-missouri-town-under-siege-after-police-shooting.html>

(...) What happened next probably triggered rebellion as much as the shooting itself. Michael Brown's lifeless body was left in the middle of Canfield Avenue as crowds gathered and news of the latest murder spread by cell phone, texts, and Twitter. This callous disregard for Brown's basic humanity had 'Black Lives DON'T Matter' written all over it.<sup>204</sup>

Several other disrespectful actions coming from the police department of Ferguson are thought to have provoked even more anger among a crowd already outraged by the death of another Black teenager. Ransby adds:

After the body was removed, protests and vigils sprang up spontaneously. A memorial with flowers, photos, and stuffed animals was first set up at the site of the shooting. A police car reportedly drove over the makeshift memorial and destroyed it, which many saw as another gesture of callous disregard for Black suffering and mourning.<sup>205</sup>

Therefore, if the killing of Michael Brown angered many African Americans in Ferguson and over the country, what seems to have outraged the crowds there, was the disrespect of police officers towards Black lives. Like the acquittal of Zimmerman, which had led to the feeling among the the Black community in Sanford that Black lives did not matter, the disrespect of law enforcement towards Michael Brown's death in Ferguson reinforced the anger of the Black community. People started marching in the streets of Ferguson, and were soon joined by many other protesters coming from other cities. Soon after, the slogan "Black Lives Matter" echoed in the streets of Ferguson. Historian Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor states: "There was something about August 9th in Ferguson that really became a catalyst for the eruption of the movement."<sup>206</sup> Protests started on August 9, 2014 and lasted until August 30. Ransby writes: "At the outset, the Ferguson protests included an assortment of forces: religious leaders held candles and knelt in prayer; Black civic leaders and elected officials from St. Louis, like Antonio French, who became ubiquitous on Twitter and CNN, gave speeches and interviews."<sup>207</sup> Ferguson became the place where all groups fighting

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<sup>204</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter* documentary, *op.cit.*

<sup>207</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.* p.115

for racial equality across the country joined to be one: members from Dream Defenders, Million Hoodies but also anonymous who wanted to show their support to the cause. Black youth was also massively present in the streets of Ferguson during those protests. Several interviews have been done by reporters on the ground during the protests and the feeling that mostly came out from young people in the streets of Ferguson was the fact that they were "fed up". Not only fed up with hearing about so many unpunished Black deaths but also with the disparities that they could see everyday in their neighborhoods. Ferguson is known for being a suburban town where the levels of poverty are high and the Black community is thought to be particularly impacted by those levels of poverty. CBSNews writes: "Ferguson itself is emblematic of the impact of poverty on America's suburb. The town's unemployment rate has more than doubled in recent years, from less than 5 percent in 2000 to over 13 percent in 2010-12."<sup>208</sup> Thus, the outrage of Black youth against police violence could indeed be seen as the expression of deeper issues engraved on American society. Ransby adds about Black youth in Ferguson: "They were angry and fed-up Black youth - Michael Brown's peers - who were tired of being harassed by the local police force. They were young people who would eventually read the whole system of injustice into Brown's untimely death, and disrespected corpse."<sup>209</sup> Ferguson's protests were at first characterized by spontaneous marches made to denounce the death of Michael Brown, but then those streets became the place where what was seen as the accumulated anger felt by African Americans towards police violence was released. If protests were mainly characterized by peaceful marches of young Black people, and families, violent actions also erupted in the crowd.

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<sup>208</sup> Von Hoffman, Constantine, « Hit by poverty, Ferguson reflects the new suburbs », *CBS News*, August, 2014. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/hit-by-poverty-ferguson-reflects-the-new-suburbs>

<sup>209</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

## 2. Police response to protests in Ferguson

In order to understand the full emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the streets of Ferguson, the police response to protests must be studied. Just after the death of Michael Brown, people started gathering in the streets. According to people there at the time, police officers started having a disproportionate response from the very beginning of the protests.<sup>210</sup> Johnetta Elzie who witnessed the protests and later became an activist states: "The police murdered Mike Brown and his body was laying down there for hours, people just wanted justice for this dead Black boy. But then the police were bringing dogs out, pulling guns out on women and kids. That's what took the turn."<sup>211</sup> The State of Emergency was pronounced on August 10th and the National Guard was sent to the city. The aggressive response of the police was denounced by most Black people who attended to the protests in Ferguson, as being the trigger that pushed so many of them to express their anger in the streets. Several testimonies of Ferguson residents recall what seems to have been from the very beginning of the protests an over reaction of the police. Brittany Packnett states: "I remember seeing elderly people out there, and children out there. We were being at home, in our own streets. (...) We were treated like we were in a war."<sup>212</sup> The outrage that was witnessed after the first protests in Ferguson seems to have actually been reinforced by the response of police forces there. *The Guardian* makes a description of police equipments used in Ferguson at the beginning of the protests:

The police presence in Ferguson has centered around two large armored trucks ferrying around officers in military-style uniforms. Officers wearing body armor and holding sniper-style rifles have been positioned atop them. Some have adorned night-vision goggles as the evenings grew darker. Accompanying the trucks have been hundreds of officers from various forces from around the region. Some state troopers and county

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<sup>210</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

<sup>211</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, *op.cit.*

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*



police officers have been kitted out in basic riot gear - shields, batons and helmets with visors - along with their standard handguns and plastics cuffs.<sup>213</sup>

The police answer to the protests in Ferguson was a military response that was felt disproportionate by many. Among protesters, it seems to have triggered different feelings: more anger for some of them, fear, but also the deep feeling that Black people were treated as enemies of the State in their own neighborhood. And that feeling is thought to have convinced other activists to join the protests in Ferguson. Actor and activist Jesse Williams who decided to join the protests in Ferguson recalls how he reacted to the images of army-like police in the streets of Ferguson: "Those visuals impacted my desire to go there. Seeing police pull out tanks, where did you get those tanks? And full body armor and bazookas and all of this tear gas?." <sup>214</sup> Protests were then a mix of acts of violence coming from both police and protesters and peaceful marches. Barbara Ransby states:

Some protested peacefully but defiantly, while a small number took out their anger on parked cars, and eventually, on local businesses. There was looting. Windows were smashed, cars and trashcans were torched, and a few cars were overturned in the course of the uprising. However, for the most part protests were both militant and nonviolent at the same time.<sup>215</sup>

What mostly came out of those protests in pictures were the anger and the outrage of Black youth, cars burning but also: lines of heavily armed policemen, army-like vehicles, sniper posted on top of those vehicles, and fogs of tear gas. As for the reaction of Black Lives Matter activists concerning the police response, most of them think that the police department provoked the uprising in Ferguson by acting fiercely from the very beginning of the protests. Ransby writes:

From the very beginning, a key factor fueling the historic Ferguson rebellion was the hyperbolic and militaristic response of the local and state authorities. Ferguson's police officers (and St. Louis - area backup teams) showed up heavily armed with combat weapons and tanks - surplus from the US military. Local cops took a hostile approach

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<sup>213</sup> Swaine, Jon, Holpuch, Amanda, « Ferguson police: a stark illustration of newly militarized US law enforcement », *op.cit.*

<sup>214</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, *op.cit.*

<sup>215</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

from the start. There were numerous accounts of cops touting the protesters, rough-handling reporters, and using a level of force seemingly designed to be provocative.<sup>216</sup>

Therefore, for most Black activists the violence that happened during the protests in Ferguson was in fact triggered by the police. Facilitate riotings in order to discredit a social movement is something that had already been done by different governments. If there is no evidence that the police did provoke the protesters in order to create a riot, this hypothesis must nevertheless be mentioned. This idea has also been shared by Patrisse Khan-Cullors who writes: "Many who were part of the protests, believed the police had purposely facilitated the rioting with the hope of discrediting the demonstrations."<sup>217</sup> The outrage in Ferguson led to a lot of damages in the city of Ferguson: certain local shops were looted and vandalized, others burned. The protests of August led to several members of the public and police officers being injured.<sup>218</sup> Many arrests were also made during those 17 days of protest. *The Washington Post* tracked down the numbers of arrests and the type of charges linked to them. In total, 155 members of the public were arrested during the first wave of protests in Ferguson. The arrests made on the first three days of protests were all related to burglary with 15 arrests on August 10th, 11th and 12th.<sup>219</sup> Starting from August 17th to August 19th, the number of arrests rocketed as the police started arresting protesters massively on the charge of "refusal to disperse". The highest number of arrests happened on August 18th when 52 protesters were taken to custody on the charge of "refusal to disperse".<sup>220</sup> The first wave of protests in Ferguson stopped on August 25th after 15 days of both peaceful marches and violent unrests. Nevertheless, protests in Ferguson did not end after this first wave of August 2014. The decision not to indict Darren Wilson, the police officer responsible for the death of Michael Brown, was given on November 24th, 2014, and was received by the Black community, especially

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<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> Khan-Cullors, Patrisse, « When They Call You a Terrorist: a Black Lives Matter Memoir », *op.cit.* p.14

<sup>218</sup> Keating, Dan, Rivero, Christina, Tan, Shelly, « A breakdown of the arrests in Ferguson », *The Washington Post*, August, 2014. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/national/ferguson-arrests/>

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

by residents from Ferguson, as another harm to the memory of Michael Brown. This decision not to indict Darren Wilson came out two days after the killing of another African American by a police officer. Tamir Rice was a 12 year old child living in Cleveland. On November 22, 2014, Rice was shot by Timothy Loehmann, a 26 year old police officer, as he was playing with a toy gun at the Cudell Recreation Center a park in the city of Cleveland.<sup>221</sup> The police officer had been sent to Rice's location, after a resident had called 911 to report that someone "possibly a juvenile" was pointing a pistol at people, insisting apparently twice that the weapon was "probably fake".<sup>222</sup> Yet, Rice was shot by the police officer. The death of Tamir Rice led again to several marches and protests in Cleveland and again it reinforced again the persisting feeling of injustice that had already been highlighted by the protests in Ferguson and all over the country during the year. When the Department of Justice took its decision two days after the death of Tamir Rice, not to indict Darren Wilson, the outrage of Ferguson's protesters that had happened a few months earlier, manifested itself again in the city. The second wave of massive protests in Ferguson therefore started on November 24, 2014, and was received again with a military-like response from the police department. Before hearing about the verdict, people had joined together around Brown's family, outside the police department of Ferguson. The news that Wilson would not be indicted for the death of Michael Brown rapidly provoked anger among the population, and it quickly led to clashes between protesters and the police. If during the first wave of protests in Ferguson, the hope that justice would be served could still be felt among protesters, the second wave was mostly about expressing anger. Patrisse Khan-Cullors, one of the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement was seen making peaceful protests in the streets, and protesters were seen blocking the main streets of the city. It was later in the evening that the first violent protests started. According to *The Guardian*: "The violence in Ferguson began shortly after 8.15pm outside the police department,

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<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

scene of recent protests and demonstrations, where hundreds had gathered for the grand jury's announcement."<sup>223</sup> Lines of police officers were stationed in the streets even before the announcement of the verdict and images from the November 24, 2014 show both protesters and the police provoking each other. Looting and rioting broke out and several local shops were burned. As videos made by *The New York Times* show: Army like vehicles were used again in the streets of Ferguson, and even a helicopter was deployed and could be seen flying over the city at night. The second wave of protests lasted a week and like the first one, the heavy response of the police led to question the real aim behind it. It cannot be asserted that the police, by using heavy force, aimed at provoking protesters to discredit the movement, nevertheless this theory has been raised by both Black activists and external reporters.

### **3. Massive protests in Baltimore: focus on a wider issue**

Five months after the second wave of protests in the city of Ferguson, new protests started in the city of Baltimore after the death of another young African American. On April 12, 2015, Freddie Gray, a 25 year old Black man was arrested by six police officers from Baltimore Police department, for possessing a knife. During the arrest of Gray, the six police officers are thought to have used unnecessary and excessive force that led to Gray's death. They are indeed accused of having intentionally done a "rough ride" during the transport of Gray to the police station, without buckling the young man in the van.<sup>224</sup> This act has been characterized as police violence since it was meant to injure the young African American; it resulted in Freddie Gray arriving at the hospital in critical condition. His spinal cord was injured which later caused his death and he suffered from injuries to his legs and his head.<sup>225</sup> Gray was caught on a camera asking the police to give him his

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<sup>223</sup> Swaine, Jon, Lewis, Paul, « Wave of violent civil unrest grips Ferguson after grand jury decision », *op.cit.*

<sup>224</sup> Dan, Keating, Christina Rivero and Shelly Tan, « A breakdown of the arrests in Ferguson », *op.cit.*

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

inhaler as he was suffering from asthma and had trouble breathing, yet the policemen did not give him his inhaler.<sup>226</sup> The young Black man fell into a coma and died in hospital a week after his arrest, leading again to protests, that time in Baltimore. Yet, one could say that there was a difference between the unrest in Baltimore and that in Ferguson as the protests in Baltimore are thought to have led to widen the scope of the Black Lives Matter movement. Indeed, if the first protests of the Black Lives Matter movement in Sanford, Ferguson and other cities were made to denounce a certain kind of police violence that involved White officers killing Black people, protests in Baltimore rose a much deeper issue. According to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor: "The movement erupted in entirely new way in the city of Baltimore in April of 2015."<sup>227</sup> The difference that time, with the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, was that it was not a case in which a White officer would kill a Black man. Indeed, among the six police officers responsible for the death of Gray, three of them were African Americans including one African American woman. It therefore rose deeper questions on police violence and on the issue of structural racism in the United States. In *Stay Woke*, the documentary made by the Black Lives Matter movement, protesters in Baltimore are seen outraged by police violence but also angry and fed up with the situation of poverty in which many Black people live in Baltimore. Riots in Baltimore were not only seen as a new wave of protest of the Black Lives Matter movement but also as a turning point from which focus of the movement shifted from "only" denouncing police violence to denouncing racial capitalism and structural racism. Shannon Wallace a Baltimore's resident talks about how Black youth felt about their living conditions in Baltimore and how this actually had an impact on the protests in Baltimore: "Everyone can see what's happening: Our villages are broken, so you know, this Freddie Gray story kind of escalated from people waking up into consciousness to people being fed up.

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<sup>226</sup> « Freddie Gray's death in police custody- what we know », *op.cit.*

<sup>227</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, *op.cit.*

Baltimore has been fed up."<sup>228</sup> She explains how Freddie Gray's death led to protests not only to demand justice but also and mainly to show the anger of the Black community living in the poor district of Baltimore. Taylor explains how protests in Baltimore were different from those in Ferguson:

I think Baltimore speaks to a deeper problem about policing in American cities. In fact, 3 of 6 police officers that picked up Freddie Gray were African American themselves. If people could say that Ferguson happened because you had a corrupt white government governing a mostly black population, Baltimore destroys all of that.<sup>229</sup>

Thus, the fact that Black police officers were involved in the death of a Black man made protesters question the deepest issues responsible for police violence in the United States. Taylor adds: "I think we have to take into consideration that inequality gives rise to police violence in Black communities."<sup>230</sup> So from that moment most protests of the Black Lives Matter movement started to denounce not only police violence but also the much broader issue of racial capitalism as an aspect of structural racism that led to higher levels of poverty in the Black community. Ransby writes:

Gray's case was not a simple racial formula of white cops killing Black youth, as three of the six police officers indicted for Gray's murder were black. Given these demographics, one might have expected activists to hesitate before making the allegation of racism. But they did not. It was immediately clear to them that the problem was structural racism, which included profiling and harassment of a certain type of poor or working class Black youth, an aggressive policing style in poor Black communities.<sup>231</sup>

Thus, Black youth protests in Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray were mainly about expressing anger against the system of structural racism that leads to high levels of poverty among Black youth living there. An article from CNN published in 2015 reported that Black people represented 63% of Baltimore's population.<sup>232</sup> This report also highlighted extreme disparities

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<sup>228</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, *op.cit.*

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.* p.176

<sup>232</sup> Malter, Jordan, « Baltimore »s economy in black and white », *CNN Business*, April, 2019. Retrieved from:<https://money.cnn.com/2015/04/29/news/economy/baltimore-economy>

between Black and White residents there. Disparities of income, but also in unemployment rates and housing; those figures were indeed particularly striking among young residents. The unemployment rate of young White men represented 10% in 2015 whereas the one of young Black men that same year was 37%.<sup>233</sup> Life expectancy rate in Baltimore is also thought to be well below the national rate.<sup>234</sup> In neighborhoods of Upton and Druid Heights, where many Black people live, the median life expectancy<sup>235</sup> was only 63 which according to CNN's article is: "20 years lower than the 83 year life expectancy for Roland Park, less than five miles away."<sup>236</sup> Roland Park was in fact a neighborhood with a median income of \$90,492 in 2015, whereas the median income in Upton and Druid Heights that same year was \$13,388.<sup>237</sup> Upton and Druid Heights neighborhoods also have less access to quality housing, higher levels of poverty, higher rates of unemployment and their residents suffer more from diabetes, heart disease, homicide and AIDS than residents living in Roland Park.<sup>238</sup> As for the high number of unemployment and the high level of poverty, they seem to be explained by the fact that many residents from Baltimore's neighborhoods went to jail or are now imprisoned.<sup>239</sup> Jordan Malter, journalist at CNN writes: "One reason the economy in Baltimore is so depressed is because so many of its residents are in prison. One-third of Maryland residents in the state's prisons are from the city of Baltimore."<sup>240</sup> Thus, protests in Baltimore are thought to have given a wider scope to the Black Lives Matter movement struggle. It has highlighted the poverty in which many Black communities live in the United States. The fact that Black officers were also involved in the death of Freddie Gray showed that police violence against Black people is not as

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<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

Manichaeism as it seems, but rather involves deeper and more complex issues linked to poverty and inequalities.



### **III. A New Kind of Social Movement that Seems to Reflect Nowadays Society**

#### **1. The use of new technologies to build a movement**

The fight of the Black Lives Matter movement is built on a long standing struggle for racial equality started by the Civil Rights movement. Yet, its creation attests of a new kind of social movement that seems to reflect nowadays society. During the last decade, the rise of new technologies has been so strong, that they have become an everyday life tool for people around the World, especially for young ones. Social media have become one of the fastest ways to communicate and spread information from one individual to the rest of his/her community or even to the rest of the World. The Black Lives Matter movement started with the creation of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter and was therefore in a sense created thanks to social media. Nevertheless, social media, especially Twitter, have been responsible for more than just the creation of the movement. When the hashtag Black Lives Matter was created young people started using it on Twitter and Facebook to talk about the issue of police violence in the United States. Actor and activist Jessie William states about the creation of the hashtag:

The moment was electric, #BlackLiveMatter was a brilliantly framed set of marching orders, slogans and pleas. I can't pretend that I saw a movement coming out of that particular moment but young black people they are plugged in and they are moving this conversation. They are driving this conversation.<sup>241</sup>

Through the common platform that they have created, social media have become a space to protest as everyone could share their own experience with law enforcement. Thus, new questions were raised: was it just a moment of expression of outrage that would later fade or was it the beginning of

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<sup>241</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, *op.cit.*

a social movement expressing itself in totally new way? Taylor states: "It was really taking off like wildfire and people began to ask the question: Is this just young people playing out on Twitter and on Facebook, is this legitimate activism? Or is it just people using their phone? Is it a moment or a movement?."242 As the creation of other social movements these last few years show (for example the rise of the #MeToo movement in 2017), social media have become the grassroots for protests and social movements to erupt. But social media have done more than just help create the Black Lives Matter movement, they have become a place to testify about police violence as each act of police misbehavior is being filmed and published online by those who have experienced it. Kwame Rose, a 22 year old activist from Baltimore states in an article from *USA Today*: "Black people have been having these conversations in our living rooms. But social media has invited our followers, and millions of them, into our living rooms to have this conversation with us."243 Twitter has helped connect the dots between many different cases of police misbehavior until a pattern of police violence stepped out and brought together all those who had suffered and who are still suffering from it. It also rose awareness on an issue that many were whether not aware of, or had chosen not to care about, and it gave visibility to a fight that could no longer be ignored. More and more videos of police misbehavior started circulating online and many of them led to protests in the streets. The fact that visual proof of police violence could now be given seems to have led to a rise of consciousness. For example, the death of Eric Garner in New York City in 2014 was entirely filmed, police officers were seen wrestling Garner to the ground, and the African American man, who later died, could be heard saying multiple times: "I can't breathe".244 This video provoked massive outrage and led to protests in many cities across the United States. Thus, Twitter and

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242 Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, *op.cit.*

243 Hafner, Josh, « How Michael Brown's death, two years ago, pushed #BlackLivesMatter into a movement », *USA Today*, August 2016. Retrieved from: <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2016/08/08/how-michael-browns-death-two-years-ago-pushed-blacklivesmatter-into-movement/88424366>

244 « 'I can't breathe': Eric Garner put in chokehold by NYPD officer », *The Guardian*, December 2014. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2014/dec/04/i-cant-breathe-eric-garner-chokehold-death-video>

Facebook have also become a tool to organize protests. Black Lives Matter organizers would share on social media information about protests, marches and sit-ins, it has therefore become a tool to mobilize as many people as possible. Beyond that, it gave birth to spontaneous protests each time a case of police violence was denounced. As Keeanga-Yahmatta Taylor clearly summarizes:

Social media extended the reach of the activists, it both allowed people in far away localities to have a minute by minute view of what was continuing to happen in Ferguson and it also meant that activists could communicate immediately about where demonstrations were. It just accelerated the rate of activism surrounding this case.<sup>245</sup>

So what can be said about the Black Lives Matter movement and what seems to differ from past social movement is that most protests were not organized protests but rather the result of spontaneous gatherings of people. For example the first gatherings in Ferguson after the death of Michael Brown, came, at the very beginning, from a will coming from the community to grieve the death of the young man. Therefore, social media are responsible for the creation of the movement: Twitter and Facebook are tools that can be used by everyone, they have become a place not only for individuals to denounce the case of police misbehavior that they have witnessed, but also a space where they can express themselves and organize protests.

## **2. The place of youth in building protests**

The fact that social media have taken such an important place in building the Black Lives Matter movement can be explained by the fact that youth especially Black youth have played an important part in the creation of the movement. Young Black people have been indeed the first ones to react to the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter. The fact that young people do use social media more than older ones can explain this tendency. Nevertheless, if Black youth first led the protest against police violence it is also because they had been its first victims and they could easily identify with those victims of police violence. Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddie

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<sup>245</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, BET, May 2016.

Gray, Jamar Clark, all those victims of police violence in the United States were young people sometimes not even 15. The youngest one, Tamir Rice, being only 12 years old when he was killed. According to the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement, those massive protests in Ferguson and Baltimore were before everything, the expression of anger of a Black youth that felt that racial disparities still prevailed in the World they lived in and that their lives in fact did not matter.

According to Black activists, racial profiling denounced by the Black Lives Matter movement also comes from the criminalization of Black youth. Trayvon Martin was perceived as a threat by George Zimmerman because he was wearing a hoody, something that many young people do. Hoodies became the symbol of that fight against the criminalization of black youth with for example the creation of "Million Hoodies", a protest started after the death of Trayvon Martin. Thus, there were many aspects of the fight in which Black youth could see themselves. On August 2014, in Ferguson all marches, sit-ins and protests were massively filled with late teens and young adults. Certain of those young adults were interviewed by journalists from *The Time Magazine* in a video entitled "Am I next? Ferguson's Protests Through the Eyes of a Teenager".<sup>246</sup> In this video, Shane Flowers a 16 year old Black teenager expresses what he felt after the death of Michael Brown: "I saw Trayvon Martin died and George Zimmerman get away with it, now it's another case, this policeman is going to get away with it. He (Michael Brown) was so young, he was going to go to college. What if it was me? I am fourteen. What if it was me who was to go to college? The only one of my family. But then I would die right before the first day of school would start."<sup>247</sup> Those words caught by the journalists of *The Time* seem to illustrate the main feeling that those cases of police violence rose among Black youth: the feeling that they were all concerned by the issue and that it could have been them. The slogan "Am I next?" thus became the symbol of a Black

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<sup>246</sup> Weissman, Nicholas, Levine, Jerry, « Am I Next?: Ferguson's Protests Through the Eyes of a Teenager », *Time*, August, 2014. Retrieved from: <https://time.com/3126991/ferguson-missouri-protests-michael-brown/>

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

youth fighting against racial injustice in the United States. The Black Lives Matter movement was at first seen as the renewal of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, yet, today's American Black youth is also responsible for an ideological split between those two movements. When massive protests started in Ferguson, Civil Rights leaders Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton started joining protests, yet divergences between the two generations of protesters quickly stepped out. At Mike Brown's funeral, Al Sharpton made a speech in which he blamed Ferguson protesters' behavior. In this speech, he stated: "We are not the haters, we are the healers. But then let me say this, what does God require: that Michael Brown does not want to be remembered for a riot. Sitting here, having ghetto pity parties rather than organizing and strategizing. You've lost where you're coming from."<sup>248</sup> From that moment, a clear separation was made between young protesters of the Black Lives Matter movement and old Civil Rights leaders. Black youth did not want to be blamed for their behavior anymore, they wanted to lead their fight their way. Wesley Lowery, journalist at the *Washington Post* explains: "There was this idea that this was a space created by these young people. They've been in the streets, they've been tear-gassed, they had been leading the chants and crafting the signs and they didn't want older civil rights activists taking what they had created and I think that what that exposed was one of the first kind of fault lines of what has been a deep ideological split between older black America and young black America."<sup>249</sup> The main aspect that is thought to have emphasized the division between the two generations is the fact that young Black protesters rejected the idea of "respectability politic" that older Civil Rights leaders wanted them to follow. Al Sharpton blamed them for their anger and the way they protested. But what Black youth in a sense wanted those Civil Rights leaders to understand is that they did not want to have to become respectable enough in order to be heard by the rest of the population. Black youth was showing their anger and did not want to apologize for the way they were. As Wesley Lowery adds: "This was

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<sup>248</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, *op.cit.*

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

about defiance. This is the movement."<sup>250</sup> In Ferguson, the defiance that Black youth showed was not in accordance with the older Civil Rights leaders' way. Jesse Jackson who came protesting without getting out of his car was even yelled down by some of the activists, who criticized the fact that he did not walk along with protesters. Mark Lucker, former manager of news at Twitter, states: "This was a very modern movement. People weren't expecting Civil Rights leaders of a bygone era to stand side by side to these young people who had a voice."<sup>251</sup> Keangaa-Yahmatta Taylor adds to that idea: "These protestors took control of the narrative and took it out of the hands of the old guard Civil Rights establishment."<sup>252</sup> Thus, Black youth became a prominent part of the struggle that the Black Lives Matter movement have risen. Young Black people have managed to use social media in a way that could be useful to their cause. They have denounced acts of police misbehavior by recording them on camera and spreading them across Twitter and Facebook, and therefore have become the main actors of the movement. Doing more than denouncing police violence on social media, young Black people have filled most marches and protests, they have used their voice and their anger to make sure that the struggle of the Black Lives Matter movement would be heard.

### **3. A "mosaic of activism" created through multiple forms**

The place of youth and new technologies in the building of the movement are not the only aspects that make the Black Lives Matter a new kind of social movement. One main difference between the Black Lives Matter movement and the Civil Rights movement is the fact that no main leader stepped out of the Black Lives Matter movement to lead other protesters. The Black Lives Matter movement is an organization that praises local organizing rather than national leadership. Protests such as the ones of Ferguson raised awareness on the issue of police violence at a national

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<sup>250</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, *op.cit.*

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

and even worldwide level. Nevertheless, the Black Lives Matter movement main focus is to build organizations at local levels all over the United States to make sure that the awareness raised during main protests is used to build community organizing. In fact, it could be said that the Black Lives Movement is not one organization but rather a multitude of groups fighting for the same cause. As Lowery states: "It (Black Lives Matter) is rather a mosaic of activism. It's bigger, much bigger than any given 'leader' or 'organization'."<sup>253</sup> The movement is therefore a multitude of small groups such as Millions Hoodies, BYP100 (Black Youth 100), Dream Defenders and many others, which have all joined together and formed the Black Lives Matter movement. Those organizations haven't lost their individuality when they formed together the Black Lives Matter movement but rather started organizing even more, thanks to the visibility that the banner 'Black Lives Matter' was giving them. This multitude of organizations all over the United States can also explain why spontaneous protests could emerge so fast every time a case of police violence was revealed, which seems to have been the strength of the movement during the last few years. The Black Lives Matter movement also differs from the Civil Rights movement when one considers the place that it gives to women in the fight for racial equality in the United States. First of all it was founded by three women: Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi and Patrisse Khan-Cullors, but it also gave space for women to express themselves. In her book entitled *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Memoir of the Black Lives Matter*, Patrisse Khan-Cullors highlights the role that women have played in the fight of the Civil Rights movement but also denounces their lack of recognition: "(...) Like the women who organized, strategized, marched, cooked, typed up and did the work to ensure the Civil Rights Movement, women whose names go unspoken, unknown."<sup>254</sup> This time the three founders of the Black Lives Matter movement wanted women to be part of the fight, and they also wanted to make sure that everyone would be included. Thus, the movement is also known for being a space of

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<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> Khan-Cullors, Patrisse, « When They Call You a Terrorist: a Black Lives Matter Memoir », *op.cit.* p.282

inclusion: protests were mainly organized by women including trans women and the main organizers made sure to show to the rest of protesters that trans Black women and men and LGBT+ people had their place in the movement. Barbara Ransby writes about the Black Youth Project 100: "There is an insistence, for example, on including cis and trans women, and queer and trans victims of police violence, in their campaigns (...)."255 This idea of including LGBT+ people in protests is also a good reflection of nowadays society: a society in which youth praises inclusion of trans, gay, lesbian and bisexual people, who were often left behind before. This mosaic of activism also enables different forms of protests. The Black Lives Matter movement has also gained visibility through the sport world. In December 2014, after the death of Eric Garner, the NBA player, LeBron James was seen like several of his teammates wearing a T-shirt with the last words of Garner written on it: "I can't breathe". This act of support spread to other sports such as the American Football League. On August 2016, Colin Kaepernick, player of the San Francisco 49ers, decided to kneel during the U.S. national anthem to protest against police brutality and Donald Trump's policies. Kaepernick was followed by several other NFL players and the protest known as 'Take A Knee' quickly expanded to other teams. Colin Kaepernick later explained:

I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football, and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder.<sup>256</sup>

This protest recalls the gesture of athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who during their medal ceremony in the Olympic Stadium in Mexico City on October 16, 1968 had raised their black-gloved fists during the playing of the U.S. national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner" to protest about racism and injustice against African-Americans in the United States. Thus, Kaepernick

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<sup>255</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.* p.75

<sup>256</sup> Mindock, Clark, « Taking a knee: Why are NFL players protesting and when did they start to kneel? », *Independent*, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/taking-a-knee-national-anthem-nfl-trump-why-meaning-origins-racism-us-colin-kaepernick-a8521741.html>



by kneeling during anthems showed his support to the fight of the Black Lives Matter movement and engraved himself in the history of Black protest in sport. This gesture was seen by many Americans as "unpatriotic" and provoked the outrage of Donald Trump who stated: "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, "Get that son of a b\*\*\*\* off the field right now, out, he's fired. He's fired."<sup>257</sup> After this statement, the protest spread even more and baseball and basketball professionals also joined in. Protests in the art world were also seen. In 2015, singer John Legend, after winning an Oscar for his song "Glory" in the movie "Selma" based on the 1965 Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches stated:

Nina Simone said it's an artist's duty to reflect the times in which we live. We wrote this song for a film that was based on events that were 50 years ago, but we say Selma is now, because the struggle for justice is right now. We know that the voting rights, the act that they fought for 50 years ago is being compromised right now in this country today. We know that right now the struggle for freedom and justice is real. We live in the most incarcerated country in the world. There are more black men under correctional control today than were under slavery in 1850. When people are marching with our song, we want to tell you that we are with you, we see you, we love you, and march on.<sup>258</sup>

Thus, protests led by the Black Lives Matter movement did not only appear in the streets during marches, they spread to the worlds of art and sport where they took different forms. Protests in Universities were also seen, among them a major one at the University of Missouri in which students, football players, coaches and educators protested after their student body president, Payton Head, was repeatedly called "nigger" and after he had found a swastika made of feces in his bathroom.<sup>259</sup> After having brought their concern to Tim Wolfe, president of the University, and received little reaction from him, students of the University started a number of protests.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> Rullo, Sam, « Transcript of John Legend & Common's Oscar Acceptance Speech Proves 'Glory' Has A Timeless Message », *Bustle*, February, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.bustle.com/articles/65840-transcript-of-john-legend-commons-oscar-acceptance-speech-proves-glory-has-a-timeless-message-video>

<sup>259</sup> Thrasher, Steven, W., « How racial justice advocates took on Mizzou and won », *The Guardian*, November 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/nov/10/racial-justice-advocates-university-of-missouri-won>

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

Coaches, graduate students and professors refused to work and were joined in their protest by the football players of the University which led to the resignation of their president Tim Wolfe.<sup>261</sup> Thus, the Black Lives Matter movement is actually made of a number of different forms of protests, directed by different organizations which all combined under the banner "Black Lives Matter", form the movement. From spontaneous marches in the streets, sit-ins in front of Police Departments, protests in Universities, and in the art world or in sport, the Black Lives Matter movement is in fact a mosaic of activism that fights against institutional racism and the police violence that derives from it.

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<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

**PART THREE:**  
**AN APPARENT DECLINE OF PROTESTS**  
**SINCE THE ELECTION OF DONALD TRUMP**

Protests of the Black Lives Matter movement have been particularly important from 2013 to 2015, nevertheless since 2016 the number of protests seem to have declined. Several protests erupted in 2016 after new videos of police brutality against Black people spread on social media, but these protests did not reach the scope that the uprising of Ferguson had. Different aspects can explain the decline of the movement during the last few years. Internal issues such as question of leadership and distribution of money across the different organizations can explain this decline. External issues can also be added, such as the difficulties to protest that are thought to have come from the feeling of hate that candidate Donald Trump brought to the Presidential campaign of 2016.

## **I. Issues Encountered by the Movement**

### **1. The media coverage of Ferguson uprising and its impact on the movement**

Media have always played a crucial role in spreading information and news to the population. It has been reinforced since the development of new technologies and the arrival of television in almost every household. The last few years have also been characterized by the creation of news channels relaying news all day and all night allowing people to keep track of what happens in the World instantaneously. This led to a rising competition between news channels which always try to be more competitive than others. "Entertaining" viewers has therefore become a part of news reporting which in fact impacts the way those news are reported. The uprising of Ferguson has been massively reported on television, thus those images had an impact on how the movement was perceived. During the weeks of protests, pictures of burning cars, looted stores and streets filled with tear gas spread non stop on television. If it helped to raise attention on the Black

Lives Matter movement it nevertheless did not always serve the movement. Depending on which news channel was reporting, the given facts about the uprising of Ferguson could vary widely. In fact, many journalists in Ferguson are thought to have taken side (either the movement's side or the opposite one). Ronald Eric Matthews writes in his book entitled *What Ferguson Can Teach Us*: "Many reporters covering Brown's death wove themselves into the fabric of the story. They chose sides."<sup>262</sup> If this aspect may seem irrelevant in the study of the Black Lives Matter movement, yet it must be taken into account as the fact that many journalists did not stay biased during their reporting of uprisings may have impacted the feelings that the people had on the movement. Seeing reporters taking side for (or against) the Black Lives Matter movement may have encouraged people to support the movement as well as reinforced the dislike that some people could already have towards it. The News Channel Fox News, known for supporting candidate and now president Donald Trump, was seen reporting videos of burning cars all day long as protests were getting more violent in Ferguson. Pew Research Center compares the reporting of Ferguson's uprising on CNN, Fox News and MSNBC. What can be drawn of those comparisons is that at the very beginning of the uprising, Fox News did not spend much time reporting about it. It states:

Of the 18 hours of prime-time programming that aired the week immediately following the shooting of Mike Brown, MSNBC devoted a total of 5 hours and 42 minutes to Ferguson, more than CNN's 3 hours and 59 minutes and almost twice as much as the nearly 3 hours Fox News spent on the story.<sup>263</sup>

Nevertheless, as days of protests went on, Fox News started spending more hours reporting on Ferguson. Ronald Eric Matthews states: "By Friday of that week (5th day of protest), Fox News increased its attention to the story to rival that of CNN, but still a full 20+ minutes behind."<sup>264</sup> Reports on Ferguson by Fox News essentially centered on the violent protests that happened in

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<sup>262</sup> Flaherty, L.M., Eric, Ronald, Matthews, Jr., Szalai, Leah, « *What Ferguson Can Teach Us* », *Cambridge Scholars Publishing*, 2016. p. 90

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.* p.94

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

Ferguson. News, that were later considered as Fake News, reporting that Michael Brown had badly beaten Darren Wilson were also spread on Fox News. Fox News stated that this information had been released by "the Gateway Pundit" which after researches is in fact a conservative blog of St. Louis not considered as a trustworthy source of information. The release of this information had of course an impact on the movement as it put the officer who killed Mike Brown in the position of the victim. As the protests went on, Black activists in the streets of Ferguson became more and more reluctant to the presence of cameras in the streets as, in their opinion, they were not reporting the truth on what was really happening in Ferguson. Clashes between protesters and journalists therefore happened in both Ferguson and Baltimore. As an example, on April 2015 in Baltimore, social activist, writer and artist, Kwane Rose, blocked the camera of Fox news journalist Geraldo Rivera, and stated live: "I want you and Fox News to get out of Baltimore, to get out of my city! Because you're not here to report about the boarded up homes and the homeless people under MLK, you're not reporting about the poverty levels, up and down North Avenue."<sup>265</sup> Thus, media have often been accused by protesters during demonstrations of altering the truth and not reporting on what should be reported such as the reasons that brought people to demonstrate. Instead Black protesters argue that news outlets mainly focused on the riots without reporting of what made those riots to happen. Rose later added: "When they are reporting about riots, when they are reporting about looting, they aren't reporting about the living conditions that Penn North was in before the CVS went into flames."<sup>266</sup> Another aspect that activists of the movement denounce is the vilification of protesters and Black young victims of police violence by certain media outlets. According to activists, the vilification and criminalization of Black youth, especially during the uprising of Ferguson and Baltimore, were aimed at discrediting the movement. The "cocky" attitude of Michael Brown that had been caught on camera minutes before his death was used by certain media outlets

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<sup>265</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, *op.cit.*

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

to explain and even justify his death. Calvin John Miley from the Department of Justice Studies from Montclair State University writes:

In recent years, law enforcement agencies have unreasonably used deadly force on Black males allegedly considered to be 'suspects' or 'persons of interest'. The exploitation of these often-targeted victims' criminal records, physical appearances, or misperceived attributes has been used to justify their unlawful deaths.<sup>267</sup>

In Black Lives Matter activists' opinion, media outlets far too often tried to justify the behavior of police officers who had killed young Black people, by saying that the victims actually looked suspicious. This idea has been spread with the word "thug", a word used by media multiple times to talk about the young Black people at the origin of riots in Ferguson and Baltimore.<sup>268</sup> In Black Lives Matter activists' minds, what media failed to report is that, according to them, riots in Ferguson and Baltimore were the display of the anger felt by a big part of Black youth and not just the action of a "group of thugs". Photographer and Baltimore resident, Devin Allen, whose picture captured in Ferguson made the headlines of *The Time* states: "These are not just random acts of riots, this is anger, (...) they are not thugs, these are brothers, these are sisters, fathers, these are human beings. They're not thugs, they're angry."<sup>269</sup> Media outlets helped to give visibility to the Black Lives Matter movement not only in the whole country but also worldwide, yet they were also thought by Black activists to relay untrue or not accurate facts about protests.

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<sup>267</sup> Smiley, Calvin John, Fakunle, David, « From 'brute' to 'thug': the demonization and criminalization of unarmed Black male victims in America », *U.S. Library of Medicine*, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5004736/>

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>269</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, *op.cit.*

## 2. The "All Lives Matter" : the backlash

Something that has also affected the Black Lives Matter movement is the harsh backlash that happened after the massive protests in Ferguson and Baltimore. The movement was indeed pictured by certain media outlets as a social movement against the police. Certain protesters were in fact seen with signs showing their hate for law enforcement, a few banners with "F\*\*\* the Police" written on them were carried during protests which led certain media outlets such as Fox News to say that Black Lives Matter movement was in fact a "hate group" calling for violence against the police. If the main figures of the Black Lives Matter movement made sure to state that the aim of the movement was not to fight against the police, the few images of protesters yelling against policemen were widely spread across media outlets. The picture that has particularly impacted the image of the movement was a video of a few protesters yelling "Pigs in a Blanket, fry'em like Bacon!"<sup>270</sup> This sentence angrily repeated by a dozen of protesters holding the banner "Black Lives Matter" was seen as a call, coming from the movement, to harm the police. The video was widely spread across conservative media outlets and it started a massive backlash against the Black Lives Matter movement. Bill O'Reilly, a famous journalist at Fox News stated on live camera: "Black Lives Matter. I think they're a hate group. They hate police officers. You would think that, if you have an organized group in America saying 'We want dead cops', that all decent people would reject that group correct?"<sup>271</sup> Fox News started showing on television signs such as "Black Lives Matter = radical group" or "Racist rhetoric: radical group calls for killing of cops"<sup>272</sup> and so, the main discussions on television about the movement became focused on whether Black Lives Matter should be characterized as a hate group. From that moment the conversation on Black Lives Matter shifted from reporting cases of police violence to conversations that, according to Black Lives

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<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*



Matter activists aimed at discrediting the movement. The backlash was reinforced in August 2015 when a police officer, Darren Goforth, was shot at a gas station while he was still wearing his uniform, by a Black man, Shannon Miles, a repeat offender with a history of mental illness. The death of the police officer happened when protests of the Black Lives Matter movement were rising again after the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore. As some argued that the movement called to harm the police, the Black Lives Matter movement was soon associated with the death of the police officer. The head of the Harris County Sheriff's Department made a speech on the day after Darren Goforth had lost his life, saying:

Today the Harris County Sheriff's Department mourns the loss of one of our own. Deputy Darren Goforth was senselessly struck down while pumping gas at a Chevron station in Northwest Harris County yesterday evening. We've heard Black Lives Matter, well cops lives matter too. So why don't we drop the qualifier and just say 'Lives Matter'?.<sup>273</sup>

"All Lives Matter" and "Blue Lives Matter" therefore became the "counter argument" to the phrase "Black Lives Matter". This speech, which connected the death of the police officer to the protests of the Black Lives Matter movement, quickly led to more questioning on the aim of the movement. On CNN live headlines such as: "Sheriff: Black Lives Matter to blame for cop murder" could be seen and the fight of the Black Lives Matter movement was quickly polarized: Black Lives versus Blue Lives (meaning law enforcement lives). Black Lives Matter's main figures such as DeRay McKesson made media appearances to remind the country that the Black Lives Matter movement was not a movement against law enforcement, he stated on MSNBC: "I think what's really important is getting the narrative right and the narrative from the movement has always been that we are not a movement about harming police, we are a movement about holding police accountable."<sup>274</sup> Nevertheless, the "All Lives Matter" backlash certainly put harm on the movement as it put shade on its image. Barbara Ransby stated:

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<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*

Activists had already jettisoned the "All Lives Matter" challenge, which attempted to dilute and diffuse the potency of the Black Lives Matter message. Of course all lives matter, movement leaders responded, but this new movement was responding to the systematic devaluation of Black life in particular.<sup>275</sup>

The "All Lives Matter" backlash had even more impact on the movement when in July 2016, in the wake of the killing of Alton Sterling, the shooting of "Baton Rouge police officers" happened. At that time, Baton Rouge was witnessing protests of the Black Lives Matter movement when a Black man, Gavin Eugene Long, ambushed six police officers killing three of them. Long had no relation to the Black Lives Matter movement but the fact that this shooting had happened during a protest of the Black Lives Matter movement automatically led to a connection between this incident and protests. The Black Lives Matter movement was seen as responsible for the rise of a feeling of hate towards law enforcement, headlines on CNN such as "Are Police Officers under Siege?" spread. Black Lives Matter activists made clear that 'harming police' was not the aim of the movement, but the association of those two cases of violence against law enforcement with the movement had inevitably an impact on the image of the movement. Added to that, certain groups in the movement were thought to have organized a protest in which only Black people could be present (something which has not been confirmed) which led to more critics of the movement in media outlets. Fox News spread headlines such as "Black Lives Matter bans other Races from Party", something which was later considered as Fake News.<sup>276</sup> Thus, the "All Lives Matter" / "Blue Lives Matter" backlash, reinforced by fake news, biased coverage of the protests but also protesters' actions themselves, may have participated in the decline of protests after 2016.

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<sup>275</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.* p.118

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3. The lack of leadership as the main internal issue in the movement

This backlash has made the social movement question internal issues that were starting to rise. One aspect that the Black Lives Matter movement had always praised is the fact that no leaders were at the head of the movement. Nevertheless, this lack of leadership quickly became a downside for the organization of the movement. The backlash against the Black Lives Matter movement started, as seen before, because certain protesters had expressed opinions that were later denounced by the main figures of the movement, as not in accordance with the main message of the BLM. So, this incident started rising questions about who should decide that certain protesters discourse is wrong or not. In *Stay Woke*, the documentary made by the Black Lives Matter movement, Alicia Garza states: "What do we do when people act outside of the expectations of who we want to be together? What does it mean for us to be group? I think in the pursuit of visibility, we can forget what we are fighting for."<sup>277</sup> Garza recognizes the difficulties that having no main leader at the head of the movement brought. Certain people, such as DeRay Mckesson, stepped out of the group and became faces of the movement which sometimes rose tension in the movement itself. In an article published in 2019 in *Jacobin*, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor reflects on the movement:

The BLM claimed to have no leaders, embracing the "horizontalism" of its Occupy predecessor. (...) But all movements have leaders (...) The issue is not whether there are leaders, it is whether those leaders are accountable to those they represent. It also matters the way in which those leaders are determined as leaders.<sup>278</sup>

Thus, the movement claimed to have no leaders but main figures that could be considered as leaders stepped out such as Erica Garner, DeRay Mckesson, Johnetta Elzie (etc.), sometimes provoking contestations. This idea of "horizontalism" became an issue when then president Barack Obama asked the movement to come to the White House to discuss the demands of protesters.

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<sup>277</sup> Black Lives Matter, *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter documentary*, BET, May 2016.

<sup>278</sup> Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta, « Five Years Later, Do Black Lives Matter? », *Jacobin*, September, 2019. Retrieved from <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/09/black-lives-matter-laquan-mcdonald-mike-brown-eric-garner>

Because the movement had no main voice, it is the White House itself who decided who to invite.<sup>279</sup> In a sense it was therefore the President himself who was proclaiming who the leaders of the movement were when making the invitations. Taylor writes: "In the case of the meeting with Obama, it appears that the attendees were selected by the Obama administration as individuals or organizations they determined were the leadership of the movement."<sup>280</sup> That meeting also led to differences in strategies: some argued that the fight of the movement had to be held at the highest levels while others thought president Obama's invitation to the White House was just a sham. Ailish Pulley, an activist from Chicago thus refused the invitation stating:

I could not, with any integrity, participate in such a sham that would only serve to legitimize the false narrative that the government is working to end police brutality and the institutional racism that fuels it. For the increasing number of families fighting for justice and dignity for their kin slain by police, I refuse to give its perpetrators and enablers political cover by making an appearance among them... <sup>281</sup>

Disagreement on the strategies that should be used by the movement could therefore be seen and were reinforced by the fact that the movement mainly acted on local level rather than national level. The invitation to the White House highlighted those disagreements and also drew a major line between protesters who thought that the fight should be led at a state level and those who believed in local organizing. If organizing is already difficult in any given social movement, the fact that the Black Lives Matter movement was characterized by a "mosaic" of different organizations made the situation even more difficult. Taylor adds: "The Black Lives Matter movement was not uniform in its thinking, strategies, or tactics. And those divergent ideas about political objectives and the process through which the movement should arrive at its decisions were deeply contested within the movement."<sup>282</sup> Furthermore, tensions over the fundings of the different organizations rose within

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<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>281</sup> Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta, « Five Years Later, Do Black Lives Matter? », *Jacobin*, September, 2019. Retrieved from <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/09/black-lives-matter-laquan-mcdonald-mike-brown-eric-garner>

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

the movement; distributing and reallocating funds that were aimed at helping the movement were sometimes done in an unbalanced way.<sup>283</sup> Indeed, the uprising of Ferguson helped rise donations for the Black Lives Matter movement, nevertheless most organizations which were working at a small level did not feel comfortable having to handle such an amount of money. Barbara Ransby writes: "The money helped and, in some unintentional ways, it also hurt. (...) few, if any, Black organizations in Ferguson were willing and able to accept this volume of donations."<sup>284</sup> The money was therefore sent to an organization called MORE (Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment), which in collaboration with the Organization for Black Struggle worked to distribute the money to the different groups.<sup>285</sup> Certain activists did not agree with this decision which rose tensions.

Barbara Ransby writes:

Some activists were upset when they got wind of the money sitting in MORE's bank account. They felt they should have a say in how the money was distributed, but there was not an overarching movement infrastructure that everyone agreed to that could have resolved such a dispute.<sup>286</sup>

The fact that the movement brought together people from different social backgrounds is also thought to have been a source of tension within the movement, on matters of money but also ideas sharing. Ransby states:

When broad-based movements are at their peak, they bring together people with very different levels of class privilege. Folks who are barely getting by on poverty-level wages or below are in a coalition that includes professionals with college degrees and lucrative salaries. This is a recipe for some level of tension.<sup>287</sup>

If bringing together people from different social backgrounds might have been an asset for the movement, in Ransby's words it was also a disadvantage that rose tensions inside the movement.

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<sup>283</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.* p.180

Therefore, internal issues in the movement were added to external ones which all together might have led to less protests starting from 2016.

## II. Difficulties to Protest in the Trump Era

### 1. A feeling of hate during the presidential campaign

The number of protests of the Black Lives Matter is thought to have declined starting from 2016, something that cannot be explained by a decline of Black deaths by law enforcement during that year, as according to an article from *The Guardian*: "Young black men again faced highest rate of US police killings in 2016."<sup>288</sup> 2016 was characterized by the presidential campaign and, with it, the rise of candidate Donald Trump in the political sphere. What many protesters recall about that period is the atmosphere of fear and hate that they felt rising as Donald Trump was campaigning to become president of the United States.<sup>289</sup> From the very beginning of his campaign Donald Trump used a discourse of hate to galvanize his supporters. Immigrants and minorities were often the target of his discourse and one of the main issues that came out of this presidential campaign was the racial gap that seemed to divide the country.<sup>290</sup> When analyzing candidate Donald Trump's speeches a clear idea emerges: Trump uses the memory of some kind of ancient order to exacerbate the bitterness of a number of White people. Terms which often have a connotation linked to threats, and danger are often used. For example, during one of his campaign speeches in Phoenix (2016), Trump spoke about immigration using terms such as "invasion of illegals"<sup>291</sup> or "Hispanic invasion of Texas" etc. If those terms do not refer to the Black Lives Matter movement itself, it might still have impacted the movement as this discourse of hate, which dominated his entire campaign, could in fact be linked to the atmosphere of fear and hate that worsened during the presidential campaign. Barbara Ransby writes: "Large crowds, overwhelmingly, if not all, white gathered to hear Trump

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<sup>288</sup> Swaine, Jon, McCarthy, Ciara, « Young black men again faced highest rate of US police killings in 2016 », *op.cit.*

<sup>289</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>291</sup> Politico Staff, « Full text: Donald Trump campaign speech in Wisconsin », *Politico*, August, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/08/full-text-donald-trumps-speech-on-227095>

belittle Mexicans, Muslims, and women."<sup>292</sup> If African Americans were not the main target of his speeches, Trump still managed to create an atmosphere of division in the country. According to statistics from the FBI, the number of reported hate crimes increased during this period. In 2016, 6,121 hate crimes happened in the United States, which represents a jump of 5% from 2015; half of those crimes are thought to have been motivated by race.<sup>293</sup> Beyond this atmosphere of hate that was created, Trump also openly attacked the Black Lives Matter movement and its protesters, and participated to the backlash which the movement suffered from. In an interview in July 2016 on Fox News, Trump stated on the Black Lives Matter movement : "I've seen them marching down the streets essentially calling for death of the Police and I think we will have to look into that"<sup>294</sup>, Trump added a few days later in another interview: "First of all, I think the term is very, very, very divisive (...) I would say that they are dividing America, statements that I have seen, I saw what they said about the police in various marches and rallies, (...) I think they are hurting themselves."<sup>295</sup> Donald Trump in fact participated to the creation of the idea that the Black Lives Matter movement was a movement calling to harm police officers. That atmosphere kept growing after his election as president of the United States, indeed Patrisse Khan-Cullors writes:

As soon as he is inaugurated, Trump not only removes any vestige of the nods toward human rights that Obama had erected, but he says very specifically that he will have zero tolerance for we who are demanding police and law enforcement accountability, that his administration will be "a law and order administration... and that he will end the 'dangerous anti-police atmosphere in America'.<sup>296</sup>

That idea was reinforced in August 2017 when a neo-nazi rally turned deadly. On August 12, 2017, a "Unite The Right" rally was organized regrouping neo-nazi and White supremacists protesting so that a confederate statue in the city of Charlottesville would not be removed.<sup>297</sup> During

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<sup>292</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.* p.187

<sup>293</sup> BBC Staff, « FBI: U.S. hate crimes rise fro second straight year », *BBC News*, November 2017.<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41975573>

<sup>294</sup> « Donald Trump discusses Black Lives Matter », *CBS News*, July 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/donald-trump-discusses-black-lives-matter/>

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.*

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*



the afternoon, a counter protest organized by the Black Lives Matter movement started and tensions between the two groups of protesters rose, until one 'self-identified' White nationalist deliberately rammed his car into the counter-protest of the Black Lives Matter movement leaving one person dead and dozens injured.<sup>298</sup> Three days after this event, Donald Trump reacted to what had happened in Charlottesville and condemned: "hatred, bigotry, and violence *on many sides*."<sup>299</sup> Those words which put the blame as much on the Black Lives Matter protesters than on white-supremacists were seen as a failure to condemn violent acts of racism. Thus, if Donald Trump has never actually called for violence he, on the other hand, did not denounce acts of violence towards the African American community. If it cannot be stated that the Black Lives Matter movement declined from the moment Donald Trump became president of the United States, it still cannot be left behind that protests started declining in 2016, the same year Donald Trump was elected as president. Patrisse Khan-Cullors indeed summarizes this feeling:

His campaign and election has put all of our lives even more at risk. In 2016, hate crimes in the United States rose 6% in 25 of the larger cities. And we, Black people, were the most common target of them, with hate crimes directed at us disproportionately, at nearly 30 %, according to FBI statistics.<sup>300</sup>

In 2016 several marches of the Black Lives Matter movement were organized, for example in Washington D.C. where peaceful protests took place; those marches did not reach the scope that protests in Ferguson and Baltimore had had.

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<sup>298</sup> Keneally, Meghan, « What to know about the violent Charlottesville protests and anniversary rallies », *ABC News*, August 2018. Retrieved from: <https://abcnews.go.com/US/happen-charlottesville-protest-anniversary-weekend/story?id=57107500>

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>300</sup> Khan-Cullors, Patrisse, « When They Call You a Terrorist: a Black Lives Matter Memoir », *op.cit.*

## 2. The consequences of protesting on Black activists

If protests of the Black Lives Matter movement were most of the time peaceful, it must still be taken into account that protesters faced risks of being injured, charged with penalties or even sent to jail. During protests in Ferguson and Baltimore, protesters were teargassed several times, police officers proceeded to many arrests and certain Black activists were even charged with criminal offenses. Barbara Ransby writes: "Hundreds were arrested in the streets of Ferguson and Baltimore, and hundreds more were teargassed, roughed up, and shot at with rubber bullets. There were detentions, overnight arrests, and, in a few cases, serious criminal charges."<sup>301</sup> If the harsh reaction of the police to the uprising of Ferguson in a way reinforced protesters' will to demonstrate for what they were fighting for, it also had consequences for protesters. The physical and mental impact of being teargassed by heavily armed police is something that has not been taken into account but must most be forgotten when trying to understand the decline of massive protests. In addition to that, many protesters could not risk being charged with criminal offenses or being put in detentions. If most of the time protesters got off with only community service or with their charges being dropped<sup>302</sup>, there are several cases in which protesters received heavy charges. Ransby writes: "In some cities, however, prosecutors sought to teach activists a lesson."<sup>303</sup> The harshest sentence was the one of Josh Williams, a teenager who was caught on camera throwing a match into a trash receptacle during the protests in Ferguson. Williams was sentenced to eight years in jail. Other protesters faced harsh sentences, for example, Jasmine Abdullah Richards, who faced four years in prison for attempting to "de-arrest" a fellow protester. Ultimately Richard received a ninety-day sentence and three years of probation nevertheless those charges left a mark on her criminal

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<sup>301</sup> Ransby, Barbara, « Making All Black Lives Matter », *op.cit.* p.182

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.* p.182

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.* p.183

record.<sup>304</sup> Ransby explains: "While Jasmine Abdullah Richards was able to escape a longer sentence, she still carries a felony conviction and all the restrictions that come with it. The last time I saw her at BLM national gathering, she was still traumatized and distraught by the entire ordeal."<sup>305</sup> Despite those individual harsh sentences, there were also cases of mass arrests and trial, the most important one being the case of the group of Bay Area activists known as the Black Friday 14. This mass arrest of November 2014 included the arrest of Alicia Garza cofounder of #BlackLivesMatter. Activists were arrested for having chained themselves to a BART train in Oakland on Black Friday.<sup>306</sup> The trial lasted for a year until the charges were finally dropped. Thus, if sentences were often dropped or minor, several activists still had to face justice for having protested. Added to this fear of facing criminal charges was, according to many activists, the fear of being assaulted. Many Black activists received death threats on social media especially after the shooting of the five police officers by a single Black gunman. As Ransby highlights: "Social media were even more vicious, and some activists feared for their safety amid threats of retribution for something they had no hand in."<sup>307</sup> In addition to those death threats received from the very beginning of protests, were the rising tensions during protests organized in campaign meetings of candidate Donald Trump. During those protests, activists received many verbal threats, but more importantly, there were cases in which Black protesters were assaulted and feared for their lives. Barbara Ransby recalls: "In addition to making racist and xenophobic remarks— calling protesters 'monkeys', and telling them to 'go back to Africa'— some Trump supporters even physically assaulted Black protesters, who were invariably outnumbered."<sup>308</sup> Protests in 2016 were therefore focused towards campaign meetings and often met with heinous crowds, reinforcing the feeling of

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<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.* p.186

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.* p.182

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.* p.187

insecurity that certain protesters of the movement might have felt while protesting. In addition to that, since 2016, several deaths of Black activists having led protests in Ferguson seemed to have happened in "mysterious" circumstances. Six cases of young Black activists have been reported, all connected to protests that happened in Ferguson in 2014.<sup>309</sup> As the *Chicago Tribune* writes in an article published in March 2019: "Six deaths, all involving men with connections to protests in Ferguson, Missouri, drew attention on social media and speculation in the activist community."<sup>310</sup> Among those six deaths, two were found dead inside torched cars, three died of what have been ruled by police "apparent suicide" and one man collapsed on a bus.<sup>311</sup> The first death that happened is the one of 20 years old, Deandre Joshua, who was shot in the head and whose body was found in a burning car a few blocks away from where protests had taken place in Ferguson. According to the *Washington Post*, it is the body of Darren Seals who was found in identical circumstances, two years after the death of Deandre Joshua.<sup>312</sup> The article explains that Seals had been seen, on many videos of Ferguson's uprising, comforting Michael Brown's mother. Added to that list are four deaths ruled as suicide: the death of MarShawn Mc Carrel of Columbus, Ohio who according to the article: "Mc Carrel shot himself in February 2016 outside the front door of the Ohio Statehouse police said."<sup>313</sup> Twenty-seven years-old, Edward Crawford Jr., the man who was appearing on a Post-Dispatch's Pulitzer Prize winning coverage firing a tear gas canister back at police during protest in Ferguson is also thought to have shot himself in May 2017. Even more disturbing, the death of 24 years old Danye Jones, in October 2017, whose body was found hanged from a tree in the yard of his home in St.Louis. Danye Jones's death, horrifyingly resembled a lynching and his mother who had been active during the protests, posted on Facebook after the death of her son:

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<sup>309</sup> Salter, Jim, « A puzzling number of men tied to the Ferguson protests have since died », *The Washington Post*, March, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/ct-ferguson-activist-deaths-black-lives-matter-20190317-story.html>

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

"They lynched my baby".<sup>314</sup> Finally, in November 2018, Bassem Masri a 31 years old Palestinian-American activist who live-streamed during protests in Ferguson and who also appeared on pictures confronting St. Louis police officers during protests, collapsed in a bus on Bridgeton, Missouri and was later declared dead at a hospital. According to the *Washington Post*: "Toxicology results released in February showed he died of an overdose of fentanyl."<sup>315</sup> No report showed that there is a link between those preoccupying deaths of a number of young activists having been involved in the uprising of Ferguson. Nevertheless, it still rose questions and fear among activists of the Black Lives Matter movement at the time. Those cases also rise questions on the mental health of Black activists, particularly on the 'residual stress' that might have resulted from protests. Several activists said that they feared for their lives and were constantly watching their backs. Cori Bush, an activist from Ferguson said: "Something is happening. I've been vocal about the things that I've experienced and still experience — the harassment, the intimidation, the death threats, the death attempts."<sup>316</sup> Reverend Darryl Gray said he found a suspect box in his car, and after the arrival of the bomb squad, they discovered a six-foot python inside the box.<sup>317</sup> According to the same article: "Cori Bush said that her home has been vandalized, that her car has been run off the road and in 2014 someone shot a bullet into her car, narrowly missing her 13 years old daughter."<sup>318</sup> So, it is possible that many Black activists experienced stress that might have stopped them from protesting. The *Washington Post* wrote: "It's unclear if residual stress from the protests or harassment contributed to the suicides, but Johnson said many activists feel a sense of hopelessness."<sup>319</sup> If there is no evidence that the different deaths of Black activists were linked to protests in Ferguson, it is undeniable that those suspicions rose fear among Black Lives Matter activists. In addition to these

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<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

fear was the stress of being sued that certain activists experienced. For example, the three founders of the movement: Opal Tometi, Alicia Garza and Patrisse Khan-Cullors were sued by a right winger who claimed that the three of them investigated riots.<sup>320</sup> Patrisse Khan-Cullors testifies in her book of the stress that she and her counterparts experienced; she says: "Because along with the horrors our communities face, we, as organizers, face real and imminent threats"<sup>321</sup> and adds: "So yes, yes it is a terrifying time, as an organizer, as a new mother and as the wife of an immigrant living in a Queer relationship, to be in this nation."<sup>322</sup>

### **3. A return to a fight for the more basic rights since the election of Donald Trump**

Having Donald Trump as newly elected president of the United States has also changed the priorities of the Black Lives Matter movement. Under Barack Obama's presidency, the movement would fight to improve the situation of the Black community whereas according to Black activists, under Donald Trump it has become more a question of making sure the improvements made under president Obama would not go back to ashes. Patrisse Khan-Cullors writes about the election of Donald Trump: "Clinton had a universe of faults but under her administration healthcare, including Planned Parenthood, which is the only access to prenatal and gynecological health care many poor women have at all, wouldn't be at risk. (...) We wouldn't be going the other way on mass incarceration, and the drug war."<sup>323</sup> The ACA (Affordable Care Act), more commonly known as Obamacare, has indeed been one of the most remembered actions taken by Barack Obama which has impacted the life of the Black community. According to an article published by the American Public Health Association: "The Affordable Care Act has made new health insurance options

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<sup>320</sup> Khan-Cullors, Patrisse, « When They Call You a Terrorist: a Black Lives Matter Memoir », *op.cit.*

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.* p.314

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.* p.313

available to uninsured individuals in low- and middle-income households, a group in which Blacks and Hispanics are overrepresented."<sup>324</sup> Thus, Obamacare was in fact an asset for the Black community, nevertheless from the very moment Donald Trump became president of the United States, his administration started a fight to repeal Obamacare, trying to take out the improvements that had been done on the matter of healthcare. Thus, as Black Lives Matter activists explain, the action of the movement could not focus on fighting for more rights and improvements for the Black community as its major focus shifted to a fight to protect the improvements achieved under Obama's administration. As Laurie Collier Hillstrom writes in her book entitled *Black Lives Matter: From a Moment to a Movement*: "The Trump administration signaled its intention to roll back some of the gains the BLM movement has made toward criminal justice reform. (...) Attorney General Jeff Sessions outlined administration goals that included cracking down on drug offenses and constructing additional prisons."<sup>325</sup> Making sure that the new administration would not go back on the improvements made by Obama to diminish mass incarceration became a priority for activists. This fight took form in the organization of local protests in the states where expansion of jails was planned.<sup>326</sup> For example in September 2017, BLM protesters gathered outside the Los Angeles County Hall of Administration to protest against the expansion of prisons in the county.<sup>327</sup> In addition to that, the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States has also brought up new issues such as for example the deportation of immigrants. As those new issues rose, Black Lives Matter activists (who, it must be remembered, had always identified as a human rights movement on top of their fight for racial equality) added those fights to their fight against police

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<sup>324</sup> Buchmuller, Thomas, C., Levinson, Zachary M., « Effect of the Affordable Care Act on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Insurance Coverage », *National Library of Medicine*, August 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4940635/>

<sup>325</sup> Hillstrom, Laurie, Collier, « Black Lives Matter: From a Moment to a Movement », *Greenwood*, 2018. p.94

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>327</sup> Agrawal, Nina, « Black Lives Matter, other activists protest to stop jail expansion », *Los Angeles Times*, September 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-black-lives-matter-protests-jail-expansion-20170926-story.html>

violence and racial disparities. For example, in 2019, the Black Lives Matter movement launched a petition so that 21 Savage, a famous rapper, would not be deported.<sup>328</sup> 21 Savage was arrested and put in detention as he was thought to have illegally overstayed a visa issued in 2005.<sup>329</sup> By fighting to make sure that the rapper would not be deported, the Black Lives Matter movement has drawn attention to an issue that has become part of their fight for human rights. Yet, the movement could not include all the fights that have risen after the election of Donald Trump as part of their organization. The months after the election of Trump witnessed the rise of a number of movements which have followed the steps of the Black Lives Matter movement. Those movements like the Black Lives Matter movement before them, engraved themselves in a time of protests and therefore, the focus once put on the Black Lives Matter movement shifted to other fights (for example the rise of the #MeToo movement to denounce sexual assaults on women). Laurie Collier Hillstrom writes:

Meanwhile, Trump's election has aroused new levels of activism among other groups of citizens who object to the tenor of his campaign or the policies of his administration. New protests movements have emerged to advocate for progressive causes and the rights of women, LGTBQ individuals, immigrants, and low-income families. Some of these movements have adopted the model established by BLM, with trending hashtags followed by organized protests and marches.<sup>330</sup>

Thus, it seems as if the Black Lives Matter movement has drawn the path for other social movements to emerge, yet those new social movements might also have overshadowed the Black Lives Matter movement itself. Nevertheless, this is not something that Black Lives Matter activists have disapproved as the fights led by other movements such as #MeToo shared the same values as the BLM. Laurie Collier Hillstrom ends by saying: "Some BLM organizers have shifted their strategy to embrace these movements and support their priorities, such as increasing the minimum

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<sup>328</sup> Klinkenberg, Brendan, « Black Lives Matter Petitions Against Deportation of 21 Savage », *RollingStone*, February 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/black-lives-matter-deportation-21-savage-789730/>

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> Hillstrom, Laurie, Collier, « Black Lives Matter: From a Moment to a Movement », *op.cit.*



wage, protecting immigrants from deportation, or standing up for victims of sexual assault."<sup>331</sup> And Patrisse Khan-Cullors added: "We are also doing a lot of work to build bridges between other movements and communities."<sup>332</sup> The election of Donald Trump has therefore given rise to new fights for new issues. The Black Lives Matter movement like those new protests has thus engraved itself in what could be seen as a time of protest. The rise of those new fights has diminished the scope of the attention that had been put on the Black Lives Matter movement but has also highlighted the will of the co-founders of the movement to include in their fight other movements that share the same values as the Black Lives Matter. It has reinforced the idea of 'mosaic activism' that the movement has put forward.

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<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

### **III. Mixed Opinions About the Achievement of The Movement and its Future**

Establishing whether a movement has been successful mostly depends on whether its goals were achieved or not. Yet when those goals are as complex as the issue of structural racism and police violence in the United States, it is hardly possible to think that such issues could be solved in just a few years. Thus, it is more the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement that should be analyzed in order to assess if the movement has until now been successful in any way. Seven years after its creation in 2013, opinions on the success of the movement and on the strategies adopted since the major protests in Ferguson and Baltimore are mixed and different interpretations are given.

#### **1. A difficult shift from protests to politics**

Among the different opinions given on the evolution of the Black Lives Matter movement, some argue that the Black Lives Matter movement has declined during the last years to the point that it has almost disappeared. This decline would be explained by the fact that activists have not managed to go from the streets to places of governance in order to reach their goal. Greg Howard in the *NYTimes Magazine* writes: "(...) the viability of any civil rights movement lies in its ability to move from the streets to places where governance happens."<sup>333</sup> The Black Lives Matter movement has not really managed to reach high places of governance, in fact, as seen before, activists were divided between those who thought the fight had to be carried among the high places of governance and those who believed that the struggle had to be carried on local levels and among populations. It cannot be said that activists have not managed to fulfill their plans of reaching places of governance

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<sup>333</sup> Lowery, Wesley, « They Can't Kill Us All », *op.cit.*

as many of them were against that will. Nevertheless, if it cannot be considered as a failure of Black activists, it can however be seen as a wrong strategy by certain analysts. In an article published in *Jacobin*, Keaanga Yamahtta-Taylor gives an evaluation of the movement's evolution. She writes: "As the persistence of police abuse and killings made the problem seem intractable, the absence of democratic debate and strategy-making led to the de-emphasis of mass marches and mass actions. Instead, the actions got smaller, more secretive, led by small groups of people who were then vulnerable to arrest."<sup>334</sup> Thus, according to Taylor, the movement has in fact declined and this, because it did not focus on building together a fight at a higher level but rather let the small groups that constituted the movement evolve by themselves. According to her, this strategy has forbidden activists from reaching the major causes that have led to police violence in poor Black communities. Taylor adds: "However, the bigger problem was the movement's inability to create space to date and work out the tension between reform and revolution, or more crudely between body cameras and prison abolition (...)." <sup>335</sup> Thus for many, the Black Lives Matter movement has managed to raise attention on the issue of police violence in the United States. Yet, it has not pushed forward the fight. Because activists have not chosen to build political power by assembling together the different groups that constituted the Black Lives Matter movement, they are thought to have only overlooked the main issue that is structural racism. Taylor explains: "Thus, five years later, much of the institutional discussion about police reform remains focused on bad apples, implicit bias, and better training. As a result, the main policy shift has been the widespread use of 'body cameras'." <sup>336</sup> According to her, the Black Lives Matter movement would have therefore managed to improve the situation in certain areas, yet, it would not have made any improvement on structural issues such as mass incarceration, racial disparities that persist in employment or the lack of quality education for

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<sup>334</sup> Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta, « Five Years Later, Do Black Lives Matter? », *op.cit.*

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*

poor black communities. Thus, in Taylor's opinion the Black Lives Matter movement has not managed to solve the issues that the Black community faces. What Baltimore and its mainly Black police department had revealed was that the anger of the Black community came not only from police violence but also from the structural racism that made racial disparities between Whites and Blacks persist in the United States. Taylor writes:

Since 2014, police forces around the country have spent upwards of \$192 million on body cameras. In Ferguson, where the movement found its heart and soul, there are now more black police officers than white. Ferguson finally caught up with the rest of the United States. Meanwhile, black people are stopped 5 percent more and white people are stopped 11 percent less than they were in 2013.<sup>337</sup>

It can be understood in Taylor's words that Ferguson thus has become a "new Baltimore": Black people being stopped at a disproportionate rate but now by a mainly Black police force. It therefore proves that police violence does not only come from implicit bias but rather from the structural racism that is thought, by many Black activists, to result in the constant harassment of poor Black communities by police. Moreover, some people think that Black Lives Matter activists have not managed to achieve their goals because their strategy was built on having Clinton as President of the United States rather than Donald Trump. Keaanga Yamaha-Taylor indeed explains:

As 2015 and 2016 wore on, no one believed that Trump would win; instead, activists began to focus on ways they could shift a new Clinton administration on police reform. Of course, Trump was elected, and all the plans to move to Washington, DC, to begin the "inside" phase of the movement never materialized.<sup>338</sup>

Activists did focus a lot on protesting at candidate Clinton's meeting during the presidential election with the hope that once elected, she would hear their demands. Nevertheless, the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States seemed to have impacted their strategy. What was also seen as the decline of the movement was the diminution of the number of mass protests after

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<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*

2016. Alicia Garza had indeed spoken about a change of strategy in the movement after the election of Donald Trump. She had stated after being asked if the Trump era demanded a new approach to Black organizing: "We haven't seen comparable policies and practices since the McCarthy era. So, yes, our tactics do have to change."<sup>339</sup> This change was characterized by fewer protests and more organizing at local levels, which was sometimes seen as the end of the movement. Keeanga Yamaha-Taylor questions that decline of mass protests:

Some have concluded that mass mobilizations are no longer necessary; that people just show up and then go home. Of course, that can be one effect, but we should not underestimate the transformative power in the assembly and collective action required to demonstrate together. It is not only about its influence in policymaking or in governing institutions but also the ways that power manifest itself among those who make up the ranks of the march.<sup>340</sup>

Thus, whether it was important to organize mass protests or not, rose questions among activists. What can be concluded is that the decline of protests has conveyed the idea that the movement was indeed fading, and many people think that the movement will never reach the scope of the Civil Rights movement.

## **2. An ongoing fight with new forms of activism**

If it is undeniable that the number of street protests of the movement has declined since 2016, yet it cannot be stated that the movement has disappeared. Today, Sixteen "chapters" have been created around the country to act at state and local levels. The cities of Boston, Chicago, D.C., Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, Lansing, Long Beach, Memphis, Nashville, New York City, South Bend but also Toronto, Vancouver and Waterloo in Canada have their own Black Lives Matter organizations. It has been highlighted before that the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States has made protests more difficult for Black Lives Matter activists for several reasons

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<sup>339</sup> McClain, Dani, « Can Black Lives Matter Win in the Age of Trump? », *Nation*, September, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/can-black-lives-matter-win-in-the-age-of-trump/>

<sup>340</sup> Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta, « Five Years Later, Do Black Lives Matter? », *op.cit.*

(among them: the atmosphere of hate that rose during the presidential campaign and the growing fear among black activists). Nevertheless, it is argued that the Black Lives Matter movement has not disappeared, but rather changed strategy in the light of the election of Donald Trump and the severe backlash that came with it. Indeed, it cannot be stated that the movement ended in 2016 as initiatives still take place but on different levels. Activist and writer Frank Leon Roberts writes: "The idea that BLM is in a 'decline' stage is false. Instead, what is true is that American mainstream media has been much less willing to actually cover the concerns of the BLM in part because it has been consumed by the daily catastrophes of the Trump presidency."<sup>341</sup> According to Frank Leon Roberts it is the lack of coverage of Black Lives Matter initiatives that led most people to think that the Black Lives Matter movement had disappeared without having been able to positively change the situation for Black people in the United States. Each group constituting the Black Lives Matter movement (BlackYouthProject100, etc.) started different initiatives to make sure that the mass protests that had happened from 2013 to 2015 in the streets, would be translated in local actions which aimed at stopping police violence against the Black community. Frank Leon Roberts argues that: "(...) it would be a mistake to assume that the BLM is 'dwindling' away simply because the cameras are no longer present. The revolution is still happening — it is just not being televised. All throughout the country, BLM organizers are at work in their local communities feverishly fighting for change and relentlessly speaking truth to power."<sup>342</sup> Certain initiatives such as for example "The Police Union Contract Project" were indeed launched. The aim being to determine which police departments have contracts to protect their police officers in case of police misbehavior, to make sure that all police officers would be held accountable for their actions. It can be read on the webpage of that project: "Police unions have used their influence to establish unfair protections for

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<sup>341</sup> Roberts, Frank Leon, « How Black Lives Matter Changed the Way Americans Fight for Freedom », *ACLU*, July 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.aclu.org/blog/racial-justice/race-and-criminal-justice/how-black-lives-matter-changed-way-americans-fight>

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

police officers in their contracts with local, state and federal government and in statewide Law Enforcement officers' Bills of Rights."<sup>343</sup> Among those protections denounced by Black Lives Matter activists are provisions that allow officers 48 hours before being interrogated, or that prevent officers from being investigated for an incident having occurred 100 days or more before<sup>344</sup>, etc. Until now, the initiative has reviewed the police union contracts in 81 of the largest U.S. cities and concluded: "72 of the 81 cities' contracts imposed at least one barrier to holding police accountable."<sup>345</sup> Activists also analyze and class those different issues in order to raise awareness on those police contracts and then be able to change them. Among all those initiatives created by activists must be mentioned the police reform campaign "Campaign Zero". Launched in 2015, Campaign Zero consists in a plan to stop police violence in ten proposals: 1. End broken windows policy, 2. Community oversight, 3. Limit use of force, 4. Independently investigate and prosecute, 5. Community representation, 6. Body Cams/ Film the police, 7. Training, 8. End for-profit policing, 9. Demilitarization, and 10. Fair police union contract.<sup>346</sup> Founders of Campaign Zero created a website on which every individual can choose one of the ten proposals that they want to defend. The website indicates the progress of legislations aimed at addressing police violence and gives indications on how people can demand action from their representatives. Therefore, it is through this kind of actions that Black Lives Matter activists have aimed at raising awareness on police brutality after the end of mass protests. Yet, the movement also had to adapt to what the election of Donald Trump meant for the American society, Fake News and disinformation have thus become one of the main fights of the movement. Since Donald Trump became president of the United States it is the issue of Fake News that quickly rose, to the point that it even became a threat to Freedom of Press around the World. That issue has also deeply impacted the Black Lives Matter movement

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<sup>343</sup> Campaign Zero website. Retrieved from: <https://www.joincampaignzero.org/contracts>

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

during the last few years. Thus since 2019, the movement has decided to use social media to fight against disinformation. It can be read on the Home Page of the website of Black Lives Matter:

Combined with our own tools and diligence, we aim to empower our 1 million+ social media followers to help us identify and take down fake accounts, bots, and disinformation as they attempt to twist and manipulate our work and messaging.<sup>347</sup>

A massive campaign has been raised by the movement so that protesters could themselves identify and denounce false accounts trying to spread fake news about the movement. Added to that, since 2016 the main goal of the activists has become the fight against Trump policies to make sure that their achievements under Obama's presidency are not erased. Today, the main focus of the movement is about helping the Black community to fight against Covid-19. In April 2020, was created on the website, a "Covid-19 Resources" page to help the Black community impacted by the virus. The main focuses are to inform Black population, but also help small business owners to get federal loans and guidance. The last research has shown that African Americans are in fact disproportionately affected by Covid-19. The pandemic is indeed having a deadly impact on the Black community, considering the difficult access to health that the Black community already have to face. Added to that is the economic impact of the virus that is already hitting poor Blacks. In an article from *The Guardian*, director of the Economic Policy Institute's Program on Race, Ethnicity and the Economy, Valerie Wilson, writes about the economic impact of Covid-19 on Black people : "The usual relationship that we see between the national employment rate and the Black unemployment rate is typically really close to a two to one. Whatever is being projected for the national unemployment rate, in most instances, we expect to see something close to twice that for Black Americans."<sup>348</sup> Thus, the aim of the Black Lives Matter movement for now is to bring relief

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<sup>347</sup> Black Lives Matter website. Retrieved from: <https://blacklivesmatter.com>

<sup>348</sup> Aratani, Lauren, Rushe, Dominic, « African Americans bear the brunt of Covid-19's economic impact », *The Guardian*, April 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/28/african-americans-unemployment-covid-19-economic-impact>



to the Black community by giving people as much access to relief grants as possible. Initiatives are being held to raise money for vulnerable families who have lost their jobs.

### **3. Achievements of the movement**

So what has actually been the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement on American society up to now? Seven years after the creation of the movement, racial disparities still persist in the United States and police violence is still inflicted on Black people. Strictly speaking, the Black Lives Matter movement has not managed to reach its goal to stop police violence; yet, it does not mean that the movement has not achieved anything. As said before the Black Lives Matter movement is in fact a mosaic of different groups and organizations that all fight against police violence at their own levels which makes it difficult to analyze at a wider level the efficiency of the movement as a whole. The Black Lives Matter movement takes its roots from the Civil Rights movement, it even engraves itself in a longstanding fight started years ago by the Civil Rights movement. Thus studying the achievements of the Civil Rights movement and comparing them to the current movement can help determine the effectiveness of the Black Lives Matter movement. The success of the Civil Rights movement is represented by the different Acts that were signed to improve the living conditions of Black people in the United States and reduce racial inequalities. From 1956, the year when the Civil Rights movement rose to the end of the movement in 1968, the efforts of Civil Rights activists were rewarded by several laws and acts that gave more rights to African Americans. Among those acts that are remembered are the Civil Rights Act 1964, the Voting Rights Acts of 1965 and Fair Housing Act of 1968, all signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. When considering the major improvements that the implementation of those laws represented, the results of the Black Lives Matter movement do look minor. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the Black Lives Matter movement has not been alive as long as the Civil Rights

movement. Moreover activists have to face a government extremely reluctant to listen to their message. President Obama could have represented more hope for the Black Lives Matter activists but the movement existed under the presidency of Barack Obama for only three years. Nevertheless, the movement still had an impact on American society, even though at a smaller level than the Civil Rights movement before it. First of all, thanks to the mass street protests that the movement has orchestrated, the Black Lives Matter movement managed to raise worldwide attention to the issue of police brutality in the United States. By putting pressure on police departments, activists were able to demand justice for cases of police brutality that would have otherwise been buried. Thanks to actions of the movement, several reports of police departments' corruption were also released therefore bringing attention to the issue to the point that it could no longer be ignored. Frank Leon Roberts indeed states: "The Black Lives Matter movement's unrelenting work on the issue of police corruption, helped incite the release of four unprecedented U.S. Department of Justice reports that confirm the widespread presence of police corruption in Baltimore, Chicago, Ferguson, and Cleveland."<sup>349</sup> More locally, organizers have been able to have an impact by evicting prosecutors who had failed to indict policemen responsible for police violence. Roberts adds: "Collectively, since 2013, these organizers have effected significant change locally and nationally, including the ousting of high-profile prosecutors."<sup>350</sup> Black activists also managed to win a lawsuit against Baton Rouge police involved in the killing of Alton Sterling. If winning that lawsuit represented a small victory in the fight for racial equality in the United States, it still had a wider scope on protesters and the Black community as it showed them that police departments, who had seemed "untouchable" up to then, could in fact be prosecuted for their wrong behaviors. In Los Angeles, the *Dignity and Power* organization launched by Patrisse Khan-Cullors in support of incarcerated people was able to stop the creation of a new prison and instead brought the city to implement

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<sup>349</sup> Roberts, Frank Leon, « How Black Lives Matter Changed the Way Americans Fight for Freedom », *op.cit.*

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

community-based alternatives to incarceration. It can be read on the webpage of *Dignity and Power*: "We are all celebrating the L.A. County Board of Supervisor decision to honor the People's request to nix a nearly \$2 billion contract to build a jail for people with mental health needs."<sup>351</sup> Students in Missouri, members of the #ConcernedStudent1950 protested until the resignation of the president of their University, who had failed to address acts of racism on campus.<sup>352</sup> Alicia Garza launched the *Black Census Project*, a massive census whose goal is stated by Garza: "This new project seeks to start off by compiling a detailed snapshot of black life."<sup>353</sup> The final aim of the census is in fact to harness the political power of the Black community in America. Thus, all of those initiatives aim at tackling the issue of structural racism by fighting at local levels against mass incarceration, police brutality, disparities in health and education, etc. For now, it is difficult to measure the efficiency of all those initiatives, what is nevertheless sure is that their impact, at least on a symbolic level, is not as significant as for example the signature of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by president Lyndon B. Johnson. What is nonetheless undeniable is the cultural impact of the Black Lives Matter movement, as Robert writes: "By using the tools of social media, BLM was the first U.S. social movement in history to successfully use the internet as a mass mobilization device. The recent successes of movements, such as #MeToo, #NeverAgain, and #TimesUp, would be inconceivable had it not been for the groundwork that #BlackLivesMatter laid."<sup>354</sup> The Black Lives Matter movement has shown the rest of the World the power that lies behind social media. It has also given birth to a new kind of social movements whose achievements can still not be measured but whose ability to raise awareness on police violence in the United States is undeniable.

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<sup>351</sup> Dignity and Power website. Retrieved from: <http://dignityandpowernow.org/2019/08/19/victory-jail-contract-nixed/>

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>354</sup> Roberts, Frank Leon, « How Black Lives Matter Changed the Way Americans Fight for Freedom », *op.cit.*

## CONCLUSION

Studying the evolution of the Black Lives Matter movement has permitted to reflect on nowadays American society. The study of the different cases of Black deaths has shown that police violence engraves itself in a much broader issue of structural racism. The fact that Trayvon Martin had not been killed by a policeman or that some of the police officers involved in the death of Freddie Gray were Black, disrupted the idea that police violence only resulted from a "simple" yet disastrous pattern, of racist White police officers killing Black people. The study of that movement has highlighted the fact that police brutality is the result of a much broader issue of structural racism that affects every aspect of most Black people lives in the United States. It has shown that what is seen by Black Lives Matter activists as a constant harassment of poor Black communities engraves itself in a pattern of institutional racism that starts from the very beginning of many young African American lives. The study of Black activists' claims on the issue of structural racism has shown that despite a positive evolution since the 1960s, educational disparities at school still exist, often explained by the level of poverty in which many Black students live. Studying that aspect has also shown that the percentage of Black people living in poverty in the United States is still much higher than the one of White people. That inherently affects Black educational achievements. The study of structural racism denounced by the Black Lives Matter movement has also shown that because many African Americans cannot afford to go to college, they will inevitably have less access to higher paying jobs which will affect their entire lives. Thus, more than denouncing police violence towards Black people, the Black Lives Matter movement denounces the fact that institutional racism forbids African Americans from succeeding in life as well as White people because it confines them in a never-ending cycle of poverty. The study of mass incarceration in the United States has highlighted the fact that Black people are incarcerated at a disproportionate rate in the

United States. It has also shown that "the War on Drugs" started under the presidency of Nixon purposely aimed at criminalizing Black people and that it massively impacted the Black community, resulting in a constant vilification of Black people especially Black youth. The criminalization of Black people, started decades ago, is thought to be the reason of today's constant harassment of Black people by law enforcement which results in the high number of Black deaths due to police behavior. The study of the social context that has brought the movement to life has shown the complexity of the issue of police brutality against Black people, and disrupted the Manichaeian view of police brutality towards the Black community. The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement under the presidency of the first ever Black president has shown the limits that electing a Black president, in the hope that racial inequalities would stop, had. It has shown the disappointment of the Black community towards Barack Obama's presidency. The fact that Black deaths due to police violence would still happen in cities represented by Black officials has also shown that having Black elites in position of power would not be enough to solve the issue. Through the study of massive protests in Ferguson and Baltimore, it is the anger of Black youth that has been highlighted: a Black youth tired of seeing Black deaths not being punished and who used the tools (social media) that were given to them to denounce those deaths. The study of the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement has shown the role that social media have played in spreading the movement. By using Twitter and Facebook to denounce, to protest and to organize marches, protesters, especially Black youth, have allowed the creation of a new kind of social movement. Like several other social movements launched these last few years (for example: the Yellow Vests protests in France), the Black Lives Matter movement refuses to have any leaders at their head, but rather focuses on the movement as a group. Its study has also shown that the particularity of the movement lies in the fact that its creation comes from the gathering of dozens of small organizations at local levels that have joined together to create the Black Lives Matter movement.

That idea of ‘mosaic activism’ was praised as an asset by the members of the movement at its creation yet it has also been seen as the reason of the decline of the protest movement from 2016 to the beginning of 2020. Indeed, the decline of the movement during the presidency of Donald Trump seems to reflect the issues of these last few years. The rise of Donald Trump to power reinforced the issue of Fake News and deeply impacted the press. It also had an impact on the Black Lives Matter movement and participated to the backlash that put shade on it. Trump’s presidency has been marked by the rise of different other movements such as the #MeToo movement, which might have put shade on the Black Lives Matter movement. As an illustration of nowadays society in which news are quickly spread but also rapidly replaced by new ones everyday, those protests rose at high levels but also quickly declined as the public attention rapidly changed. Today, opinions on the success of the movement vary. For many, the movement has not managed to shift from the streets to places of governance and therefore, it has not had such an impact on society as the Civil Rights movement had had before it. Others argue that the movement has managed to raise awareness on an issue deeply rooted in American society and that massive protests in Ferguson and Baltimore were just the beginning of a long fight for racial equality in the United States. Today, activists still continue to work on local levels to improve the situation of the Black community, for example by fighting against mass incarceration on local levels or working on holding police officers accountable in cases of misbehavior. Yet, racial discrimination, police violence against Black people and institutional racism have not been erased, which leads to think that new protests could rise again at any time. In fact, during the last few months different cases of police violence and Black deaths have risen attention on social media again. Among them: a few months ago, a video of a White police officer wrestling a 12 year old handcuffed African American girl provoked outrage on

social media<sup>355</sup>. In March 2020 in Louisville, Breonna Taylor, a 26 year old emergency medical worker, was shot by police officers after they had entered her home without having announced themselves, searching for a suspect who was in fact already in custody<sup>356</sup>. In April 2020, Ahmaud Arbery, a young African American was shot by two White men as he was jogging<sup>357</sup>. In May 2020, the video of a woman calling 911 in Central Park<sup>358</sup> and pretending to be attacked by a Black man, Christian Cooper, specifying on the phone several times that he was African American to threaten him, showed how profound the issue of racism is in the United States and highlighted the vilification of Black men. Lastly, on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, four officers were captured on video wrestling to the ground George Floyd, an African American man, and suffocating him to death by keeping a knee on his neck. On the video, later spread on social media, George Floyd was seen begging for his life repeating the words "I can't breathe" several times. That death recalls the one of Eric Garner, a Black man who died in the same conditions in New York City in 2014. Since the killing of George Floyd, massive protests have started again in Minneapolis spreading to the entire country and even to the rest of the World. A week after the death of George Floyd, protests are still rising all over the country demanding for change and the end of police brutality. Five years have passed since the massive protests in Ferguson and Baltimore, but those new events show that the Black Lives Matter movement is still alive and ready to rise again. The scope of protests seems to be even more important than the ones of Ferguson and Baltimore a few years ago. What seems different this time, is that more White people are getting involved in the fight of the Black Lives

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<sup>355</sup> Lockhart, P.R., « Police officer resigns after video shows him using excessive force on an 11-year-old girl », *Vox*, October 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/10/24/20929397/police-officer-excessive-force-school-11-year-old-girl-new-mexico>

<sup>356</sup> Richard, A, Oppel, Jr., « Here's What You Need to Know About Breonna Taylor's Death », *The New York Times*, May 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/article/breonna-taylor-police.html>

<sup>357</sup> Fausset, Richard, « What We Know About the Shooting Death of Ahmaud Arbery », *The New York Times*, May 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/article/ahmaud-arbery-shooting-georgia.html>

<sup>358</sup> Griffith, Janelle, « NYC officials call for police probe of white woman's 911 call on black man in Central Park », *NBC News*, May 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/nyc-officials-call-police-probe-white-woman-s-911-call-n1216451>

Matter movement and that certain police officers have been seen kneeling among protesters, something that had not happened during previous protests. Yet the response of the police is again harshly denounced by demonstrators; protests have been a mix of peaceful and violent actions and the national guard has been dispatched in several states. President Trump, following his policy of "law and order" threatens to send the army to the cities where violent protests have taken place. Those new massive protests across the country, happen on the eve of the American presidential election of 2020. They will certainly have an impact on the presidential campaign and the future of the movement is still to be written.



# **Appendices**

# I. Persisting Racial inequalities

## - Income and economic well being of the black community

Appendix 1.

### Perceptions About the Financial Situation of Blacks

% saying the average black person is ... than the average white person in terms of income and overall financial situation

	Worse off	Better off	About as well off
All adults	41	10	41
Whites	39	10	43
Blacks	59	9	27
Hispanics	36	12	44

Notes: Based on all adults, N=2,231. "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

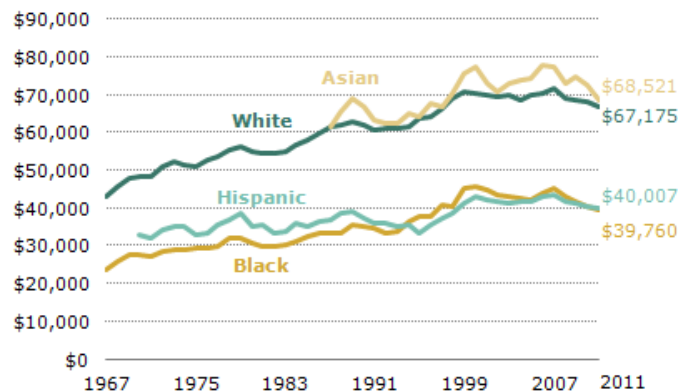
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Appendix 2.

### Median Adjusted Household Income by Race/Ethnicity of Householder, 1967-2011

in 2012 dollars



Note: White, black and Asian householders include only those who reported a single race. Native Americans and mixed-race groups not shown. Data for whites, blacks and Asians from 1971 to 2011 include only non-Hispanics. Data for whites and blacks prior to 1970 include Hispanics. Comparable data for Hispanics not available prior to 1970. Data for Asians not available prior to 1987. Asians include Pacific Islanders. Income standardized to a household size of three. For details, see <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/11/07/the-rising-age-gap-in-economic-well-being/4/#appendix-a-data-sources-and-methodologyappendix>.

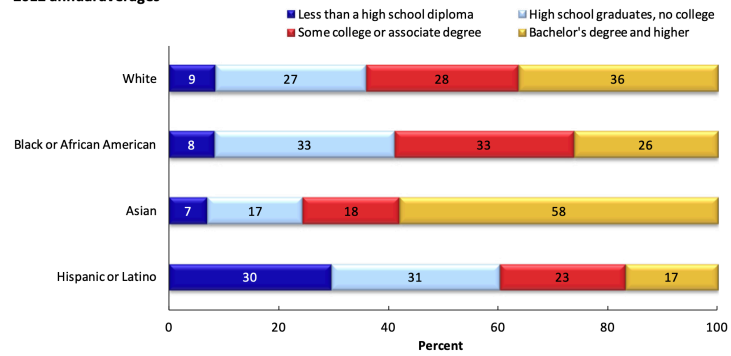
Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (IPUMS)

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## - Educational disparities

### Appendix 3.

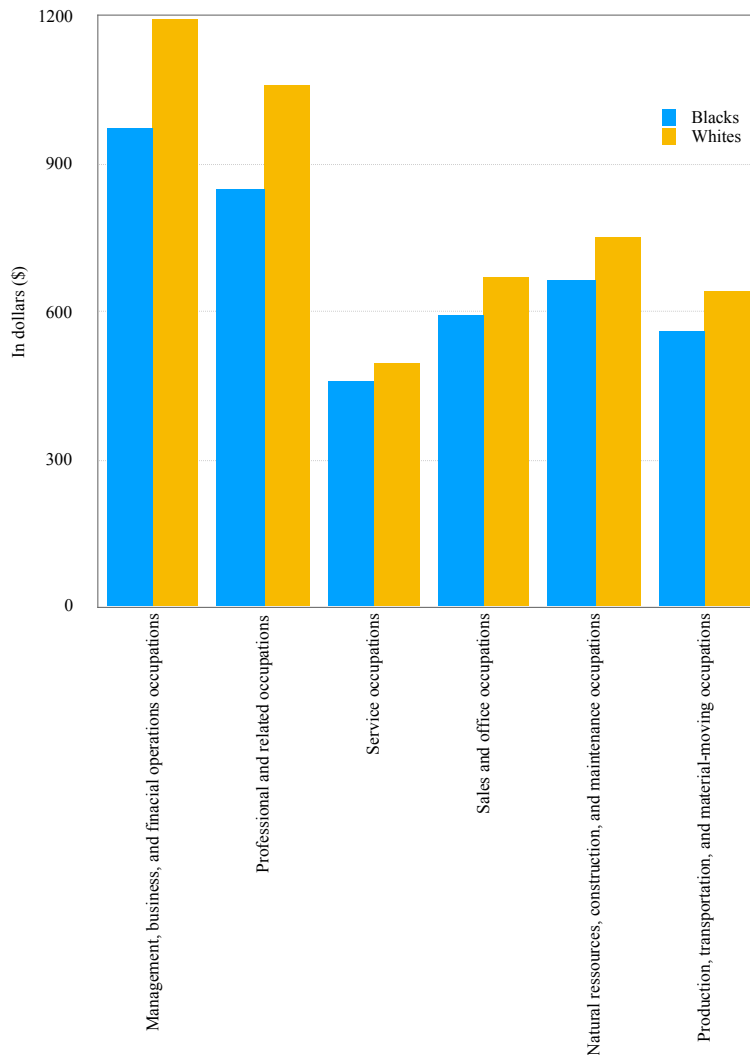
**Educational attainment of the labor force age 25 and over by race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2012 annual averages**



Notes: People whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race.  
Data may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.  
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS).

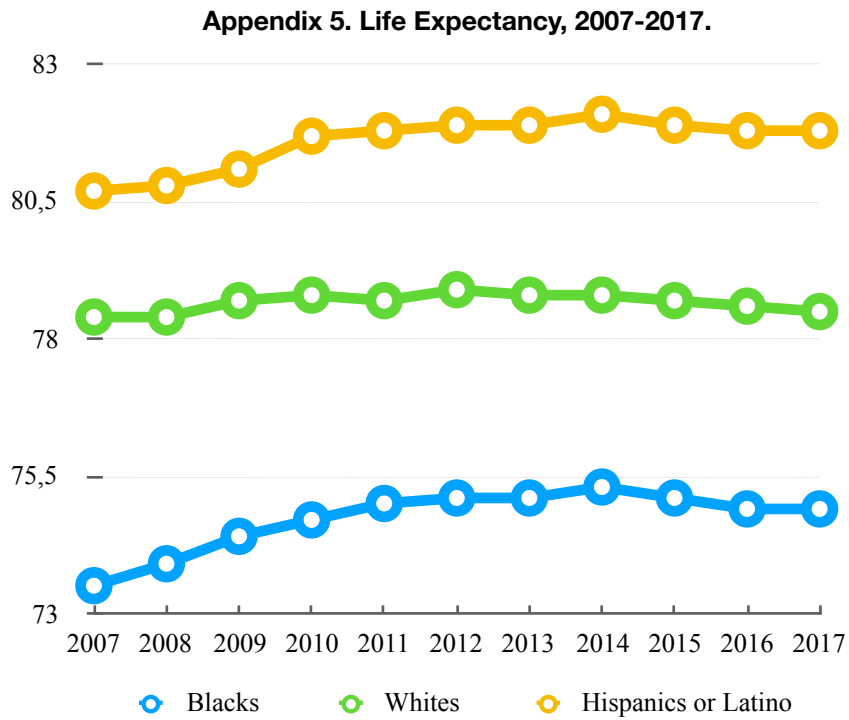
## - Access to jobs and (un)employment rates

**Appendix 4. Median Usual Weekly Earnings of Full-time Wage and Salary Workers, 2012.**

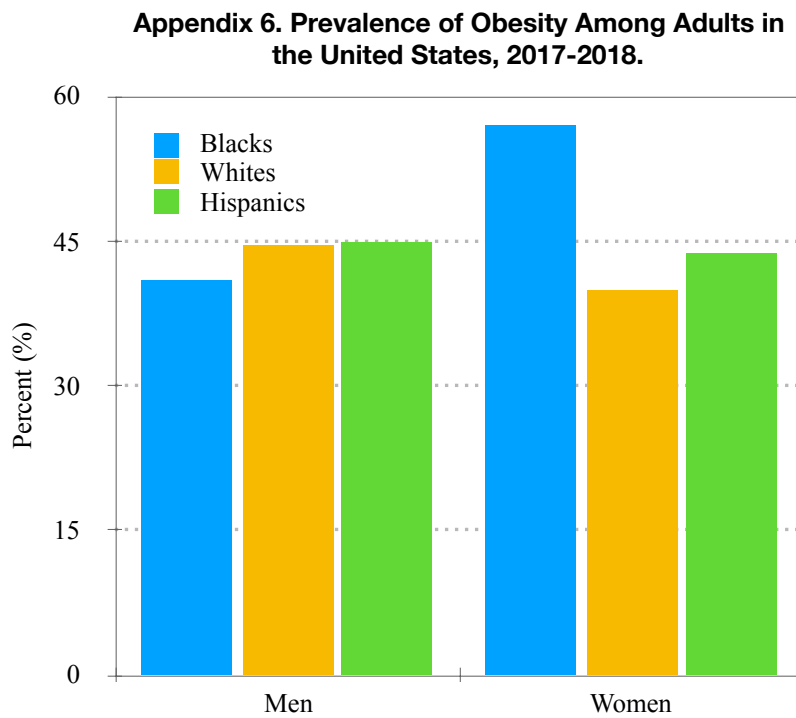


Source: BLS Reports, « Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity », U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012.

**-Health disparities**



Source: « Life Expectancy at Birth, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin: United States States, 1900-2017 », *National Center for Health Statistics, 2017.*



Source: Hales, Craig M., « Prevalence of Obesity and Severe Obesity Among Adults: United States, 2017-2018 », *National Center for Health Statistics, 2020.*

## Appendix 7.

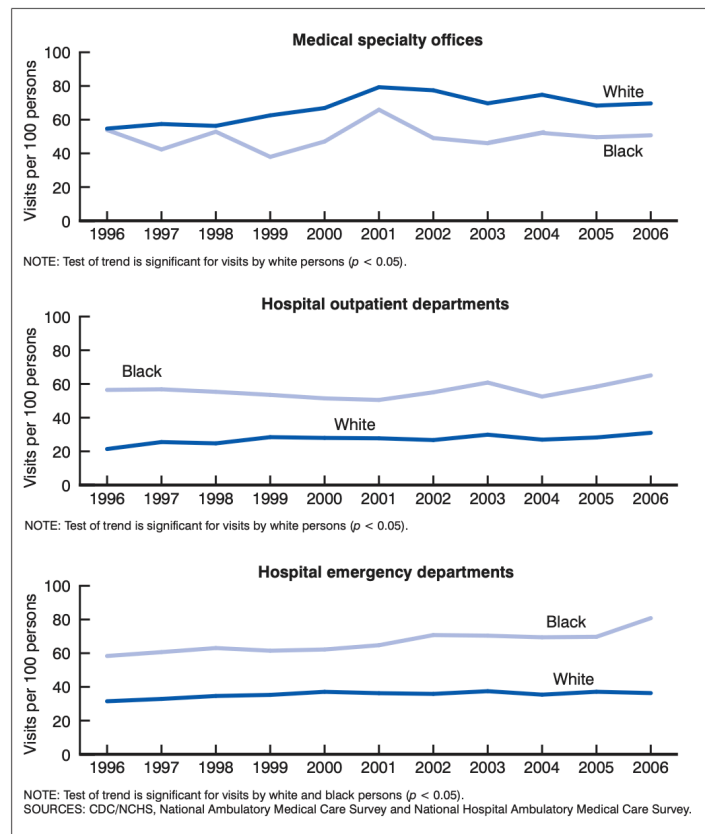
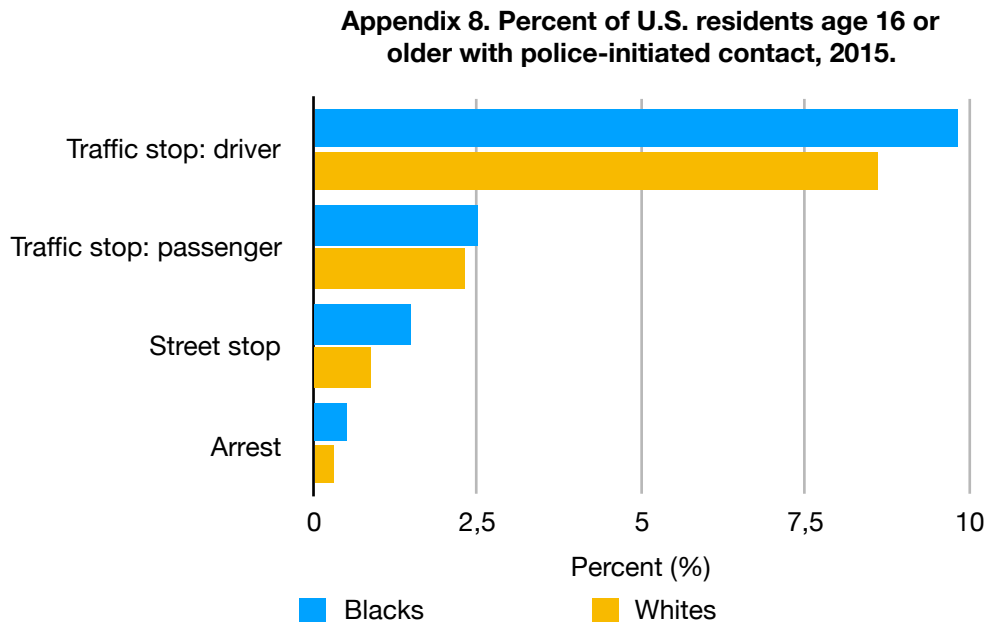


Figure 3. Age-adjusted ambulatory care visit rates by patient race for selected settings: United States, 1996–2006

## -Law enforcement: the distrust of the Black community



Source: Davis, Elizabeth, « Contact Between Police and the Public, 2015 », U.S. Department of Justice, 2018.

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