EXAMINING THE STRATEGIES OF FORMATION AND ACTION AMONG SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: A COMPARISON OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND BLACK LIVES MATTER

Senior Thesis by Hailee E.I. Saxton
Introduction

How does Black Lives Matter hold up as a social movement?
Does it follow traditional criteria?

- Comparing two well-known movements.
  - The African-American Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968)
  - The Black Lives Matter Movement (2009-present)

- They have often been compared.
- Examining the accuracy of that comparison.
Historical Context of BLM

- Founded by three black women; began as a hashtag on Twitter
- First started after the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012
- Really took off after the police-involved shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014
  - Coalesced into a movement at this point
  - BLM has become one of the most controversial movements in recent history
  - Often cited as violent or unnecessary by outside forces/public

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*Please Note*

1. Black Lives Matter is NOT a violent movement.
2. Violence occurs due to a VERY small percentage of movement participants and,
3. Violent riots/protestors have been denounced by prominent movement members - multiple times.
BLM Co-Founders

- **Opal Tometi**
  - Nigerian-American writer
  - Strategist
  - Community organizer

- **Patrisse Cullors**
  - NAACP History Maker
  - Artist
  - Fulbright Scholar

- **Alicia Garza**
  - Special Projects Director for the National Domestic Workers Alliance
  - Public speaker
  - Community organizer
Reviewing the Literature

- Social movements have been studied for decades
  - Both nationally and internationally

- Big names in the field include:
  - Jasper and Polletta
  - McCarthy and Zald
  - Morris and Staagenborg

- They have attempted to fill in various gaps in how influential factors are all connected.
Methodology

- Devised four criteria for examining social movements
  - Identification of Goals
  - Strategies of Communication and Mobilization
  - Leadership
  - Collective Identity
Previous Research

- Goals act as both short-term reinforcement of commitment and identity, and as the “raison d’etre” or the pinnacle reason for existence. (Curtis and Zurcher, 1974)
- Movements are groups of people who share grievances, who then communicate, coordinate, and mobilize together. (McCarthy and Zald, 1973)
- Leadership is greatly beneficial due to the position of power and ability to direct member energies. (Morris and Staagenborg, 2004)
- Collective identity forms loyalty, commitment, and community which sustains momentum. (Polletta and Jasper, 2001)
Why?

- Relevant to both movements
- Strike the core pillars of movement behavior
- Provide the clearest picture
- All criteria intersect
  - Often cannot have one without another
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Black Lives Matter</th>
<th>Civil Rights Movement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification of Goals</td>
<td>End police-involved shootings</td>
<td>End institutional/legal segregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication/Mobilization</td>
<td>Widespread protest, sit-ins, social media usage, etc.</td>
<td>Protest, sit-ins, legal activism, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Have directly opposed traditional leadership</td>
<td>Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Bayard Rustin, Rosa Parks, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collective Identity</td>
<td>Police-involved shootings/unsatisfactory verdicts leading</td>
<td>Racial violence, segregation, Jim Crow, etc.</td>
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<td>to a continued sense of dehumanization.</td>
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</tbody>
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Conclusions

- When examining, we face “traditional” and “new age” styles between these two notable movements.
  - CRM is often exemplified as “legitimate”
  - BLM struggles with public legitimacy
- CRM is more of a “movement” in a traditional sense
- BLM and other movements can cement success in various ways.
Future Research

- How will movements continue to evolve?
- Will Black Lives Matter find success in dismantling the concept of “respectability politics”?
- Will Black Lives Matter succeed in creating institutional change and/or cultural change? Have they already?
- To that note, what will determine future movement success?