



Credit: Stephen Maturen/Getty Images

DISSENT WITHIN DEMOCRACY: BLACK LIVES MATTER

POSSIBLE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to dissent against the government and why do people do it?
- What role does dissent play in making our democracy strong?
- How does a person's social class influence their ability to participate in democracy?
- Is the language of the First Amendment adequate for today's digital world?

BACKGROUND

From 1882 to 1968, "...nearly 200 anti-lynching bills were introduced in Congress, and three passed the House. Seven presidents between 1890 and 1952 asked Congress to pass a federal law. Not one bill was approved by the Senate because of the powerful opposition of the Southern Democratic voting bloc. On June 13, 2005, in a resolution sponsored by senators Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and George Allen of Virginia, together with 78 others, the US Senate formally apologized for its failure to enact this and other anti-lynching bills "when action was most needed."

Between the 1890's and 1830's, the anti-lynching movement reached its height in the United States. Lynching was a form of terrorism used to repress African-Americans after emancipation during Reconstruction to suppress their voices and enforce racial subordination and segregation. In 1892, a woman, newspaper editor, suffragist, sociologist, and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Ida B. Wells launched the anti-lynching campaign in when her newspaper's office and printing press were destroyed. Ms. Wells used her investigative journalism skills to publish and distribute (20,000) pamphlets and write editorials documenting the horrors of lynching and its impact on communities. To assure her message of dissent reached more Americans, Ms Wells launched a speaking tour in New York, published her data in other newspapers and organized boycotts. To support her efforts, Ms. Wells also completed two tours in Europe to organize the anti-lynching campaign in Europe to protest lynching in America and urge the United States government to act to secure the safety and constitutional rights of African-American citizens.

In 1955, the brutal murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi, became the seed for the Civil Rights Movement. On September 15, 1955, photographer David Jackson's pictures of Emmett Till's tortured body was published in Jet Magazine. On January 24, 1956, Look Magazine, printed the confessions of the killers who murdered the little boy. One hundred days after Emmett's death, Rosa Parks, refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery city bus and was arrested for violating Alabama's bus segregation laws. The Women's Democratic Council, under Jo Ann Robinson, called for a citywide bus boycott led by Martin Luther King, Jr. who brought Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent resistance campaign to America for racial equality.

On July 13, 2013, The Black Lives Matter movement began as a phrase on Facebook, in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the killing of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. Shortly thereafter Black Lives Matter became a hashtag, a national, and an international movement for social justice. Like the anti-lynching movement and the civil rights movement of the 1960's, this movement was started by women. Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi are the original founding members of the organization to bring awareness to state sanctioned violence via police activity against citizens of color. The BLM organizers recognize the influence of other movements of dissent including; Anti-Apartheid, the Civil Rights Movement, Pan-Africanism, Occupy Wall Street, the LGBTQ movement and feminist movements. Besides rallies and die-ins, the BLM movement utilizes hashtags, memes and tweets to mobilize and activate voices and actions of dissent. Unlike the previous movements for racial equality, with the availability of social media and digital technology... anyone with a smartphone can become an investigative reporter, commentator and agitator in the name of dissent. In May of 2020, the highly publicized killing of George Floyd of Minneapolis, MN by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin sparked a massive uprising throughout the country. A new wave of the Black Lives Matter spread throughout the country because of yet another misuse of power.

RESOURCES**Personal Stories**

- [Black Lives Matter Founders Describe 'Paradigm Shift' in the Movement \(NPR\)](#)
- [Young, Black, and Unsettled After the Trayvon Martin Case \(The Washington Post\)](#)
- [Youth Explain Why They March in the Current Protests \(PBS\)](#)
- [Happy Birthday Philando Castile \(ColorLines\)](#)
- [What Students Are Saying About the George Floyd Protests \(The New York Times\)](#)

Art

- [The Most Powerful Art From the #BlackLivesMatter Movement \(The Washington Post\)](#)
- [How Artists Are Supporting #BlackLivesMatter in the Wake of Brutality \(The Huffington Post\)](#)
- [10 Artists Respond to Black Lives Matter \(Jackson's Art\)](#)
- [33 Powerful Black Lives Matter Murals \(The Verge\)](#)

Articles

- [The Next Civil Rights Movement? \(Dissent\)](#)
- [The Class Politics of Black Lives Matter \(Dissent\)](#)
- [BLACK LIVES MATTER..... What We Believe](#)
- [Some of the Loudest Voices from the Women's March Were the Youngest \(Vox\)](#)
- [Black Lives, Protest, and Democracy \(Harvard Kennedy School\)](#)

Audio

- [Report Finds Police Worldwide Criminalize Dissent, Assert New Powers in Crackdown on Protests \(Democracy Now\)](#)
- [Republicans Push Wave Of Anti-Protest Bills In 'Alternative Universe' Backlash \(NPR\)](#)

Data

- [An Analysis of #BlackLivesMatter and Other Twitter Hashtags Related to](#)

[Political or Social Issues \(Pew Research Center\)](#)

Photos

- [Images of Protests: Rallying for Trayvon Martin Across the U.S. \(Mother Jones\)](#)
- [A Single Photo From Baton Rouge That's Hard to Forget \(The Atlantic\)](#)
- [All of the Moving Photos from George Floyd's Memorial in Minnesota & Around the World \(People\)](#)
- [What Students Are Saying About the George Floyd Protests \(The New York Times\)](#)

Social Media

- [15 Black Twitter Accounts You Should Follow Today \(Black Youth Project\)](#)
- [13 Black Activists My Friends Follow to Stay Woke and Engaged \(Blavity\)](#)
- [An Analysis of #BlackLivesMatter and Other Twitter Hashtags Related to Political or Social Issues \(Pew Research\)](#)
- [Black Tweets Matter \(Smithsonian\)](#)
- [A People's History of Black Twitter, Part II \(Wired\)](#)

Websites

- [Black Lives Matter](#)
- [Black Youth Project](#)
- [We The Protestors](#)
- [Art, Imagination, and the Quest for Racial Justice](#)
- [The Newberry - Dissent and Democracy in Modern American History](#)
- [Black Lives Matter: Continuing the Civil Rights Movement](#)
- [National Constitution Center - Amendment I](#)
- [Solutions Journalism](#)

