Black Lives Matter: A Movement in Context

Roseville Library: Feb. 2, 9, and 16, 2016
Feb. 2—Part I: Reconstruction to Brown v. Board of Education

...Hope and Despair
Hope: Emancipation

Despair: Resistance during Reconstruction that leads to 58 years of legal segregation after 246 years of slavery
Feb. 9—Part II: Civil Rights to the Clinton Administration

Hope and Despair
Hope: Civil Rights Act of 1964 that outlawed discrimination and the Civil Rights Act of 1968 that provided fair housing.

Black Feminism, Black Power, and the Black Arts Movement

Despair: Resistance of the Reagan/Bush Administrations, The Moderate stance of the Clinton Administration and Obama’s First Administration is reluctant to deal with race.
Black Lives Matter in the Age of Obama

... The Hope of Resistance and the Despair of Police Brutality
"If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon. I think all of us have to do some soul searching to figure out how does something like this happen. And that means we examine the laws and the context for what happened, as well as the specifics of the incident."

- President Obama, during a press gathering in the Rose Garden after being asked about the incident that sparked national debate
Trayvon Martin
February 12, 2012: The Death of Trayvon Martin

Trayvon Martin is walking home when he is stalked and eventually shot by neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman.

Zimmerman is suspicious of Martin due to his “suspicious” appearance—wearing a hoodie.

Zimmerman calls the police, who tell him not to follow Trayvon; Zimmerman persists regardless, which results in Trayvon’s death.

George Zimmerman on trial for Trayvon’s death
The Trial

Zimmerman claimed that Martin attacked him, and that he shot him in self-defense.

Zimmerman’s statement was inconsistent; he claimed that Trayvon reached for his gun, yet his gun was holstered on his back.

Prosecutors did not pursue inaccuracies, so Zimmerman was acquitted of charges.

Zimmerman’s injuries to support his claim of self-defense.
The Reaction
The Million Hoodie March
The Million Hoodie March

● March 21 - Hundreds gather in Manhattan to march in protest of Trayvon Martin’s death

● Protesters wear hoodies to emphasize that Trayvon was racially profiled because of hooded sweatshirt

● Trayvon’s parents are in New York at the time; they thank protesters for the support and say they will continue to demand justice

Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon’s parents, at the Million Hoodie March
Social Media Response

Polls run after Zimmerman’s acquittal show a racial disparity: the majority of people upset by the result are black, while the majority of those satisfied are white.

*Washington Post* poll indicated that 86% of African-Americans that responded were upset; only 30% of white respondents were upset.

Twitter also became a hub of protest; 5 million tweets about the acquittal in one day, the majority criticism.
July 2013 Protests

July 14- Protests spark in New York’s Times Square as hundreds march in further protest of the Zimmerman acquittal and Trayvon’s death

The next day protests spread to Houston, Texas, Atlanta, and California
July 19- President Obama holds a press conference to encourage Americans to examine racial profiling and other race issues in communities.

Encourages young African-American boys like Trayvon to continue to succeed.

“This could have been my son”
#BlackLivesMatter
Patrisse Cullors founds the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter in a tweet responding to Zimmerman’s acquittal, and in response to all injustices against Black people.

Cullors, along with Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi, then found the Black Lives Matter movement, which becomes an international organization focused on ending police brutality and injustices against the Black community.
Eric Garner

July 17, 2014- Eric Garner is held down by four police officers in New York City, and is placed in a chokehold by one of the officers

Eric repeatedly tells the officers “I can’t breathe”, even when the officers release him and send him to the hospital

An hour after he arrives at the hospital, Eric Garner is pronounced dead
Response- “I Can’t Breathe”

No charges are filed against the officers involved in Garner’s death

This sparks a wave of protests from the Black Lives Matter movement

Protesters carry signs and wear shirts saying “I Can’t Breathe”, Garner’s last words

The phrase symbolizes Garner’s death and the suffocation felt by the Black community

LeBron James wearing an “I Can’t Breathe” shirt in recognition of Eric Garner
Renisha McBride

1 am on November 2, 2013- Renisha McBride crashes into a parked car in Detroit. While a witness calls an ambulance, Renisha walks away disoriented

Nearby, Theodore Wafer hears banging on his doors, and believes people are trying to break into his house. He grabs his shotgun and approaches the door

Wafer opens the door, sees a figure, and fires his gun.

At 4:40 am, Renisha McBride is found dead from a shot to the face.
Protests immediately spark as the Black community loses another member at the hands of a white shooter

Civil rights activists like Al Sharpton call for an investigation; they believe Renisha is another victim of racial profiling

Protesters grew more frustrated as they waited for prosecutors to gather enough information for a case
Trial

Prosecutors mention Renisha’s intoxication at the time of the incident as evidence of her recklessness.

They also bring up her social media history, but this is turned away as irrelevant.

Wafer continues to defend that he believes his home was being invaded, and he acted in defense.

The judge does not believe the crime is racially motivated, but still sentences Wafer to 17 years in prison.
March 4, 2015- The Justice Department releases the report of its investigation of the Ferguson Police Department

The investigation found that the department was guilty of several civil rights violations, like using unreasonable force and unfair ticketing

The investigation also found that the violations were disproportionately targeted against African-Americans in the city
Calling for Change- Government Efforts

In December 2014, not long before the Justice Department’s report, President Obama creates the Task Force on Twenty-First Century Policing

The task force emphasizes building strong relationships between police departments and their communities, to combat the mistrust that has developed

To prevent more events like Ferguson, the task force calls for body cameras on police officers, and more community input for departments
December 20, 2014- The Black Lives Matter movement hosts a series of protests called die-ins, where protesters lie on the floor as if shot.

Die-ins are held in public places where they are hard to ignore, like the die-in in the Mall of America.

These protests are reminiscent of the protests of the 1960s lunch counter sit-ins.
Police respond to a call about a young man disrupting traffic in Madison, Wisconsin.

An officer forces his way into the house where Tony Robinson is and shoots him, claiming he was assaulted.

Protesters swarm the Wisconsin state capitol building to demand the officers be arrested.
Freddie Gray

25 year old Freddie Gray is arrested and loaded into the back of a police van to be taken to the police station in Baltimore on April 12, 2015.

When Gray was taken out of the van at the station, he was taken to the hospital due to severe medical issues.

Gray undergoes a spinal surgery, and falls into a coma. One week later, he dies at the hospital.

Protesters accuse the police of harming Gray on his way to the station.
In the days following Gray’s death, Baltimore saw some of the most passionate protests against the mistreatment of African-Americans. The protests began to turn violent; governor Larry Hogan calls in the National Guard to suppress the riots. The protests settled down when on May 1, six Baltimore police officers were charged with assault and second-degree murder.
Calling for Change- The Future

The quick response in charges against the officers in the Freddie Gray case suggested to activists that the Black Lives Matter movement was making a change in the racial situation in America.

Protests continued into the summer of 2015, with the Black Lives Matter movement protesting the death Sandra Bland, and the deaths of the South Carolina shooting.

The continued efforts of the Black Lives Matter movement toward ending racial discrimination has begun to produce change.
Regardless of what you think of their tactics, BLM has centered Black resistant politics in a way that has not happened in America since 1619 Jamestown
BLM and the White House

In September 2015, Valerie Jarrett met with Black Lives Matter.

Although BLM has refused to endorse a Presidential candidate, they have been the subject of Presidential debate.

Both Sanders and Clinton have been pushed to respond to their concerns.

Valerie Jarrett
This is good for all of America.

To quote the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "No one is free until we are all free."