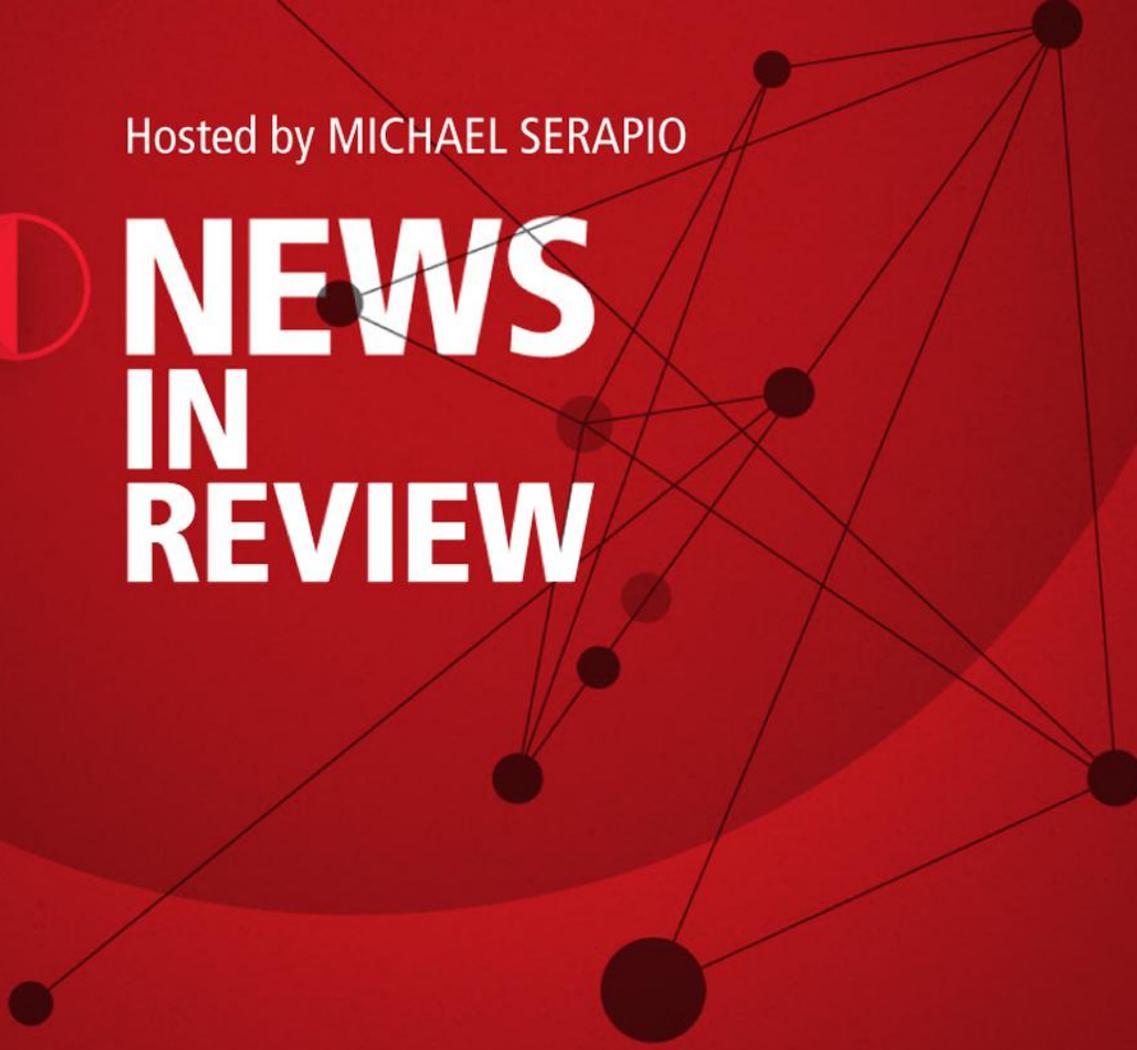


OCTOBER
2016

**BLACK LIVES
MATTER:**
Activism in the
Face of Racism
in the U.S.

Hosted by MICHAEL SERAPIO



**NEWS
IN
REVIEW**

IN THIS ISSUE

Black Lives Matter: Activism in the Face of Racism in the U.S. (Duration 21:19)

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was formed in 2013 to bring attention to the plight of black people in America and to campaign against violence and systemic racism. African-Americans are five times more likely to be killed by police than white men in the U.S. The summer of 2016 saw still more black men shot by police. Activists responded with marches and protests that have been very effective in getting public attention. But amidst their accomplishments there has also been backlash, with some suggesting BLM protest tactics may hurt more than help their cause.

News in Review Study Modules

Anger and Authority in the United States,
February 2015

Our Canada: Are We Racist? January 2015

Policing and Race in Canada, December 2002

Racism: Then and Now, October 2001

Cole Harbour: A Racial Divide, December 1997

The Police and Changing Times, December 1992

Related CBC Programs

America's Unsolvable Problem

Are We Racist?

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Only in Canada: Rocky Jones

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BLACK LIVES MATTER: Activism in the Face of Racism in the U.S.

VIDEO REVIEW

Before Viewing

The advocacy movement Black Lives Matter takes exception to other groups co-opting their name. They say that groups formed in response to Black Lives Matter like All Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter are essentially missing the point. Black Lives Matter was never formed to say that all lives don't matter or that the lives of police don't matter; the movement was founded on the principle that societal systems are structured to make the lives of African-Americans more difficult. Black Lives Matter believes the system that has implemented police training programs has unwittingly created a culture of trigger-happy cops whose fear of black people makes them all too willing to choose firing a bullet over de-escalation techniques. This helps to explain the disproportionate number of black people shot by police.

1. What do you think? Does Black Lives Matter have a point when it comes to other groups using a variation of their name? Explain your point of view.

2. Do you believe that societal systems place one race above others? Explain.

Viewing

1. What incident inspired the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2013?

2. How much more likely are African-Americans to be killed by police than their white counterparts?

3. a) What happened to Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, that resulted in protests led by Black Lives Matter?

b) Why did Baton Rouge police target Sterling?

c) What happened to the officers involved in the shooting?

4. What happened in Ferguson and Baltimore to put the spotlight on police shootings of African-Americans?

5. a) Why was Philando Castile pulled over by police in Minnesota?

b) Why was his death particularly shocking? What did his girlfriend do to make sure the police were held accountable for the shooting?

c) What was Castile trying to do when the police shot him?

d) Who was in the back seat of the car when Castile was shot?

6. What did Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton have to say about the shooting of Philando Castile?

7. Diamond Reynolds believes that the shooting was an accident and that the police should be forgiven.
True _____ False _____

8. a) What happened in Dallas to make racial tensions even more volatile?

b) How many police officers lost their lives that night? How many were injured?

c) Who was responsible for the shooting? Why did he decide to attack the police that night?

9. The Dallas police chief referred to the shooting as a well-planned evil tragedy.

True False

10. a) What happened nine days after the shooting of police officers in Dallas?

b) Why was the incident described as an ambush?

c) What appeal did the family of Alton Sterling make in the aftermath of the Baton Rouge ambush?

11. What does civil rights activist Jesse Jackson propose as a potential solution to gun violence in the U.S.?

12. a) Why was the shooting of Charles Kinsey particularly infuriating? Why was he shocked that the police shot him?

b) Why did the Miami police chief say officers may have been confused based on the information they received on the way to the call that led to the Kinsey shooting?

c) What do you think of the Dade County police officer’s defence of what he did when he released a statement that said, “I took this job to save lives and help people. I did what I had to do in a split second to accomplish that and hate to hear others paint me as something that I am not.” Did the officer simply make a mistake or should he be held accountable for shooting Kinsey? Explain.

13. Charles Kinsey was handcuffed after he was shot — even though police say he wasn’t the intended target of the shooting. True False

14. What key point do the family of Keith Lamont Scott and the police disagree on in relation to Scott’s death in Charlotte, North Carolina?

15. What does the Black Lives Matter movement hope to achieve?

After Viewing

There has been an ongoing debate in law enforcement communities relating to the use of body cameras for police officers. A body camera would record police encounters with the public. Law enforcement officials worry that the cameras will be used to punish police officers when the conflict and confusion of a volatile situation results in police use of force. Members of the public argue that body cameras would allow for a true account of police interaction with people and act as evidence of good policing and bad policing.

What do you think? Should the police be forced to wear body cameras? Explain your answer.

THE STORY

Minds On

- Conduct an internet search of the following people. What do they have in common?
 - Michael Brown
 - Eric Garner
 - Freddie Gray
 - Tamir Rice
 - Alton Sterling
 - Philando Castile
 - Charles Kinsey
 - Terence Crutcher
 - Keith Lamont Scott
- What happened to Trayvon Martin? Why did the circumstances surrounding his death act as inspiration for the Black Lives Matter movement?



Black Lives Matter is a break from traditional black civil rights advocacy. The civil rights era of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X was characterized by charismatic leaders acting as spokesmen for the cause. This trend continued until the emergence of fringe groups that eventually coalesced into the larger Black Lives Matter organization. However, “organization” may be a bit of a misnomer. Black Lives Matter is simultaneously a formal group (the one established by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi) as well as a large collection of other groups that affiliate themselves with the overall movement. In other words, Black Lives Matter is not a single-minded entity — instead it is a collective of like-minded groups all rallying around the same message: that black lives are deemed less valuable than other lives by those in power and that this attitude and belief need to be eradicated.

#blacklivesmatter

In the aftermath of the acquittal of George Zimmerman (the man who shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black youth, in Florida in 2012), Alicia Garza wrote a “love letter to black people” on her Facebook page. In the post she wrote “...stop saying we are not surprised. that’s a damn shame in itself. I continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter. And I will continue that. stop giving up on black life... black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.” Later Garza’s friend Patrisse Cullors, inspired by her friend’s post, created the hashtag #blacklivesmatter. And, with that, a movement was born.

One of Black Lives Matter’s early gestures of solidarity came in the aftermath of the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Black Lives Matter organized a **Freedom Ride** that brought over 500 protestors from across the U.S. to Ferguson to take part in civil rights protests.

In 2015, Black Lives Matter was shortlisted for Time magazine’s “**Person of the Year.**” The fact that the entire movement was listed is a reflection of the grassroots nature of the group and the shift away from charismatic, hierarchical leadership.

The Black Lives Matter movement has plenty of evidence to demonstrate the strength of their position, with the summer of 2016 providing many examples of black people being shot by police. Unfortunately, the summer also saw two retaliation attacks where black men killed police officers.

TIMELINE OF A VOLATILE SUMMER

Alton Sterling killed by police

It started with the shooting death of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Police were dispatched after a 911 caller reported a man with a gun outside a convenience store. When officers arrived, they went after Sterling and wrestled him to the ground. Sterling offered little resistance but police feared he was reaching for a gun — perhaps in his pocket. The officers shot him four times while they were on top of him. The point blank shots killed Sterling. The entire takedown was captured on smartphone video with the gun nowhere to be seen.

Micah Xavier Johnson kills five officers

Near the end of a Black Lives Matter protest in Dallas, Texas, Micah Xavier Johnson opened fire on police, killing five officers and injuring 11 others. A U.S. army reservist, Johnson used a rifle to pick off his victims from an elevated parking garage. Police ended a standoff by using a drone to deliver and detonate an explosive device to kill the shooter. Johnson, a black man, claimed a need to do something about the ongoing violence perpetrated by police against black people in the U.S. Johnson’s actions were condemned by government officials and the leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Charles Kinsey shot by police

Police in North Miami, Florida were dispatched after a 911 caller reported the presence of an armed, suicidal man sitting in the middle of a road. The person in question was actually a 23-year-old autistic man who had wandered away from the group home where he was living. Kinsey, a mental health worker, was retrieving the man when the police arrived. When police shouted instructions, Kinsey complied but was having difficulty getting his autistic patient to cooperate. The young man was holding a toy truck which police mistook for a weapon and, since he wasn’t following the direction of police, Kinsey worried the young man would be shot.

July 5

July 6

July 7

July 17

July 18

Philando Castile killed by police

The day after Sterling was killed, Philando Castile was pulled over by police over a busted tail light near St. Paul, Minnesota. After he was directed to show his license and registration, Castile warned police that he was licensed to carry a weapon and that he had a gun in the car. As he reached across to the glove compartment to get his paperwork, police officer Jeronimo Yanez shot him. The last moments of Castile’s life were live-streamed on Facebook Live by his girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds. What the video doesn’t capture is Reynolds’ four-year-old daughter sitting in the back seat of the car.

Gavin Long ambushes police

Police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, were dispatched to a gas station after reports of a man with a rifle were reported. When they arrived, Gavin Long, a decorated U.S. Marine who served in Iraq, opened fire in a deadly ambush. Long killed three officers and wounded three others before the police shot and killed him. Long shared the same motive as Micah Johnson — as a black man, he was tired of seeing police shooting and killing black people. As was the case with Johnson, authorities in law enforcement, the government and protest movements like Black Lives Matter emphatically condemned Long’s choice to ambush the police.

Kinsey, continued...

Eventually, the police fired three shots at Kinsey despite the fact that he was lying on the ground with his hands in the air. One of the bullets struck Kinsey in the leg. Fortunately, Kinsey’s injuries were not life threatening. The young autistic man escaped without injury.

Terence Crutcher shot and killed

Terence Crutcher’s SUV stalled in the middle of a road in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Police arrived on the scene and, according to responding officer Betty Shelby, Crutcher was incoherent and, in her judgment, impaired — possibly high on PCP. Gun drawn, Shelby was issuing instructions to Crutcher when backup arrived. According to police, Crutcher was not responding to instructions and, hands raised, walked away from the police back to his SUV. When he tried to reach into the vehicle, Shelby shot him while a fellow officer tasered him. Crutcher died of his wounds as a result of the altercation.



September 16



September 20

Keith Lamont Scott shot and killed by police

The incident was captured on smartphone video taken by Scott’s wife, Rakeyia. It was also recorded by the body cameras of attending officers and one of the dashboard cameras on a cruiser. At no time was a gun visible from any of the camera perspectives. However, police contend that Scott was armed and non-compliant. Scott’s family contend that he was reading a book in his vehicle and was shot shortly after he exited his vehicle while attempting to cooperate with the police.

African-Americans accounted for almost 25 per cent of shooting deaths involving police in the first nine months of 2016 — that’s 184 of 738 shooting deaths — despite the fact that black people only make up 12 per cent of the U.S. population.

All of the incidents involving the shooting of black people by police resulted in protests led, at least in part, by Black Lives Matter. They have become the go-to rallying group when it comes to activism in the face of incidents where black people are attacked, either through acts of violence (like police shootings) or acts of institutional racism (like laws and rules that make the lives of black people more difficult). They accomplish this through a combination of hashtag activism, where social media is used to rally supporters quickly, and direct action in the form of protests, sit-ins and demonstrations. By some estimates, Black Lives Matter has staged over 1,500 protests since the movement began in 2013. Some critics claim the movement is inspiring anti-White racism and hatred of authority.



Others believe they are providing a valuable voice for a race problem that continues to plague the U.S.

Colin Kaepernick of the San Francisco 49ers drew attention to the issue of racism and police brutality when he chose to sit for the national anthem prior to pre-season NFL games. He was criticized for the action. Once the season started he chose to take a knee instead of taking a seat and his form of silent protest grew with more than a few of his NFL player colleagues following his lead. What do you think? Is this an effective form of protest or is it disrespectful?

To Consider

1. How was Black Lives Matter founded?
2. How is the Black Lives Matter movement different from previous civil rights movements?
3. Return to the list of names in the Minds On section. In two to three sentences, explain the circumstances surrounding the deaths of the people listed.
4. What forms of protest do you think will be most effective in helping Black Lives Matter make their point regarding systemic racism?

BLM TORONTO

Since its formation in 2014, Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO) has grown in power and influence with 2016 representing a break-out year of sorts for the organization. In March, BLMTO erected a tent-city in front of Toronto police headquarters. The group was drawing attention to institutional racism and the deaths of black people at the hands of police. Despite the fact that the police and fire services tried to disrupt the protest by taking down tents and putting out barrel drum fires (usually standard features at cold weather protests), BLMTO persevered for 15 days. Their protest included a visit to Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne’s home. The tent-city protest ended with a “funeral march” from the encampment to Queen’s Park, where the group had an impromptu meeting with the premier.

BLMTO next made headlines in June after staging a sit-in that disrupted the Toronto Pride Parade. The group brought the parade to a halt for about 30 minutes and issued a controversial demand: that Toronto Police Services no longer be invited to participate in Pride events. Organizers quickly conceded but came out after the parade to say that BLMTO would not dictate who Pride Toronto can or cannot invite to the event.

Then, in August, BLMTO staged a “die-in” at Yonge-Dundas Square following the death of Abdirahman Abdi while in police custody in Ottawa. BLMTO claimed the Ottawa police and a local hospital withheld information surrounding Abdi’s death. Once again, the organization was drawing attention to what they describe as inherent, institutional racism.



Janaya Khan, co-founder of Black Lives Matter Toronto

The number of black inmates in **Canadian prisons** grew by 69 per cent between 2005 and 2015.

According to BLMTO, evidence of institutional racism can be found quite easily. Consider these two examples:

- Black people represent about three per cent of the Canadian population but account for 10 per cent of the inmate population.
- The Toronto Children’s Aid Society say that 40 per cent of youth in foster care are black (a little over eight per cent of Toronto’s population is black).

BLMTO believe that these types of statistics indicate a systemic bias against black Canadians. In response to bad press after the Pride Toronto sit-in, Janaya Khan of BLMTO said the following:

// When language is being used like ‘hijacked,’ when language is being used like ‘bullied,’ when language is being used like ‘hostage,’ these are really problematic and very dangerous, particularly when we hosted a sit-in in a public place. So the question that always comes up is: would this have been

different if we were six white men? Would they be using that language then? I don't think so. I've never seen that language used when white people have demonstrations. We didn't see the media cover Occupy the way that they covered BLMTO Tent City. We saw the police treat Occupy in a certain way. They were allowed to have tents and fire. We were not allowed to have those in the middle of winter at Tent City for all 15 days that we were there. So I think the media has been deeply irresponsible. I think the media has been anti-black in its practice. The media is a reflection of society, and I think we're seeing also a shift in how people understand what happened, we're seeing a debate. We're seeing tension, and that to me is a sign of growth and I think the media is reflecting that and that's integral. // ¹

Perhaps the perspective of BLMTO was best explained by Anthony Morgan in an opinion

piece written for the Toronto Star called "Why Canada needs Black Lives Matter." Morgan writes:

// Long before the blast of a police bullet burns through a black body, far too many black people in Canada have been subjected to disproportionately high police scrutiny and surveillance, racial profiling, carding and other invasive intrusions that ultimately impale their life prospects, tear away at their humanity and compromise their sense of belonging in Canada. // ²

Sources:

1. Schwartz, Zane. (July 8, 2016). How Black Lives Matter Toronto co-founder sees Canada. Maclean's. Retrieved from www.macleans.ca.
2. Morgan, Anthony. (July 25, 2016). Why Canada needs Black Lives Matter. The Toronto Star. Retrieved from www.thestar.com.

To Consider

1. How did BLMTO make headlines in 2016?
2. What do you think of Janaya Khan's assessment of media coverage of BLMTO's Toronto Pride Parade sit-in? Does she have a point or is her criticism misguided? Please explain.
3. Answer Anthony Morgan's question: Does Canada need Black Lives Matter?