DISRUPTING THE STATUS QUO: A CASE STUDY OF DIGITAL MOBILIZATION & AWARENESS WITHIN BLACK LIVES MATTER

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ABSTRACT

What sparks a revolution? In August 2014, millions were spurred to action by the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. By fall of that year, protests surrounding Brown’s death were subsumed under the organization, Black Lives Matter (BLM). Continuing today, BLM has become a movement that fights to change social discourse and public policies that marginalize Black citizens. Researchers have found that the maintenance of this movement is contingent upon social networks built within the digital sphere. Through the use of social media platforms, BLM now has a community of supporters that stretches into the millions. This study examines the use of the popular Twitter hashtag #AliveWhileBlack in framing social discourse around racial inequality and the Tumblr blog Ferguson National Response Network, as a network used to mobilize citizens on the ground. Using the narratology paradigm and resource mobilization theory, my results find that social media—specifically Twitter—has the unprecedented ability to synthesis digital counter-narratives in a potent manner that quickly evokes reactions. This study also finds that the use of social media to mobilize is most effective at critical points in the movement—specifically 1 to 2 weeks after major incidents. Documenting specific periods, I found significant upticks in citizen activism 1-8 days after the non-indictment of Darren Wilson and 1-20 days after the non-indictment of Daniel Pantaleo.
This research would have never happened without the help of the following people:

**My Family** – I could not have gotten through six years of college without you. Thank you for your support, your love, and for the endless hours of manual labor you put in moving me in and out of dorm rooms and apartments across the country,

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And finally, **Mom**- You have always set the bar for excellence exceptionally high. While I did not appreciate it in my youth, I now know it was your drive and tenacity that helped me become the person I am today. Thank you for believing in me when I did not believe in myself.

This study is dedicated to the tireless men and women who continue to fight for a world where young Black boys and girls are raised to believe that their dreams, their goals, their laughter and tears are worth an infinite amount of love and respect. Your humanity will always be your own.

 Much love,

  Tyler
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Introduction

Throughout history, social movements have been marked by specific moments in time. These events function as catalysts that sets in order a conscious effort to expose and rectify the ills that organize civilization. Social movement often reflect a simmering boil, an imperceptible wound, that has begun to fester and complicate the meaning of the word democracy within any organized society.

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is the political and social manifestation of America’s 200-year-old racial wound. In 2012, 17-year old Black teenager Trayvon Martin was murdered after an encounter with an armed member of a gated community in the quiet suburb of Sanford, Florida. His death opened up long standing examinations of relationships between Black citizens and institutions of power, raising the question: What is the value of a Black Life in America?

As the BLM movement has unfolded, activists have utilized a number of strategies to mobilize large communities around this question. This study specifically focuses on mobilization and awareness through the digital lens. The movement has become a global phenomenon that focuses on the maintenance, caring and keeping of Black lives from a political, economic, and social lens. My research asks two specific questions:

1. How have BLM activists used social media as a mobilizing force?
2. How have BLM activist and private citizens used social media to raise awareness regarding racial inequality?

Through a number of content analyses on the logistical functions of digital spaces specifically Twitter and Tumblr and a historical overview of social movements as mobilizing force of change I found that the movement is a sum of moving parts. As individuals work in both literal and metaphorical spaces; their actions all supports one common cause: protecting the rights Black citizens. Moreover, BLM is the culmination of
traditional community based networks merging with new tools of mobilization.

Why Black Lives Matter

Following the announcement of the acquittal of George Zimmerman, 32-year old Bay Area community organizer, Alicia Garza, created a post on her Facebook. The words read:

“Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.” The simple Facebook post became a call of action for millions across the globe. For the first time, in decades, the articulation of Black life as important was stated in a few short sentences. What followed Garza’s post can only be described as an occurrence unique to the socio-cultural space of the digital world. Thousands of Black people on social media sites, particularly Twitter, began to express their opinions on what it means to be Black in a society that deems you the Other. All of these messages were punctuated with the simple phrase: Black Lives Matter.

In sum, Black Lives Matter is a negation of the norm. It is not simply a slogan that denotes the complicated relations between Black communities and law enforcement; it is a statement that reminds people that the bodies, spirits, and minds of Black citizens are just as valuable as those of their White counterparts. Black Lives Matter functions, from an epistemological perspective, as an assertion of Black humanity. Black Lives Matter has become both a call to arms as well as a message of hope. It reflects what America has never expressed politically, economically, and socially. Black Lives are important and black people are not disposable. Moreover, the function of black lives in the American framework is one that has primarily been subject to uses of the state. In Das Kapital, Marx articulates that in the capitalist framework, life is synonymous with the body and the labor that body can perform for the state. This construction of life is purposefully rendered when we look at the relationship between Black lives and the American political system. Our humanity, or the confirmation of our humanity, is often subjected to questioning. Are Black
boys and girls, youths on the cusps of adulthood trying to find their way, or are they threats that must be eliminated by any means necessary? While this may read as a subjective interpretation of race relations in America, it echoes the thoughts of millions of African Americans.

Black Lives Matter also works as a tool of mobilization. The hashtag became a call to arms for a number of activists—of all races—to address racial injustice on an institutional level. The maintenance of this movement is largely contingent upon the social networks built within the digital sphere. The words have taken on a new function, implicitly, encouraging individuals to collectivize and organize around the issues of racial disparity. Through the use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram and an initial reliance on citizen activism through a number of channels (digital campaigns, hashtags, editorials and blogs on alternative press), BLM now has a community of supporters that stretches into the millions. The hashtag sparked a number of protests and grassroots organizations that functioned for this specific purpose. What began as a disparate group of concerned activists, soon turned into a movement. The digital world has provided an outlet for BLM activists to organize in a quick and efficient manner. It's unique in that it utilizes the capability of massive audience reach on a global scale due to the affordances of the internet.

**Chapter Overview**

This study will specifically look at digital mobilization and awareness. My research examines at both key players in the movement, as well as larger moments within the collective discursive space that helped set the discourse surrounding rhetoric on the prevalence of death and brutality against black bodies within the American landscape. Moreover, this study examines definitions of mobilization and grassroots activism today.
The traditional framework that defines mobilization as the process of collective or individual activity working to achieve a public—or common—good has drastically changed over the past 30 years. Research dating back to 1994 highlights the growing importance of digital networks in garnering support for counter-cultural movements. While the utilization of dominant forms of media—television, radio—is still applicable, the internet is a distinctive space that distinguishes itself from other mediums due to its low barrier of entry. Additionally, tropes of mobilization have been subsumed in groundwork in predetermined towns and cities. The digital age has drastically altered this idea, facilitating the growth of large networks across geographical boundaries to form a collection of communities that work in tandem to accomplish the same goal. Each chapter addresses a unique and nuanced area of the Black Lives Matter movement. From the historical events that precipitated the creation of the movement to the evolution of traditional social movement strategies brought into the 21st century, through the lens of social movement theory and a number of communication theory frameworks, I show how activists within this movement address both the political and cultural microcosms that necessitated the need for individuals to proclaim that Black lives, do indeed, matter.

Chapter 1 lays the theoretical groundwork that frames this study, specifically new social movement theory. I provide a brief overview of new social movement theory (NSM), its origins and how it has culminated within the contemporary realm of social justice. Looking at the necessity of BLM from both a political and cultural standpoint, I address the integral parts of NSM such as resource mobilization theory, collective identity, and collective behavior theory. I will also discuss the creation and interpretation of the term digital activism. While the identity of digital activists has existed in some form or fashion for over 30 years, the term has only recently gained mainstream prominence with the
Occupy Movement, the Arab Spring, and the Ukrainian and Chinese Student movements of the past five years. Finally, Chapter 1 examines the role of the narrative, specifically collective narratives—in the process of counter-framing and transference.

Chapter 2 illuminates the causes and events that led to the formation of BLM. Chapter 2 examines the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Freddie Gray as catalysts that moved Black Lives Matter from a small fringe group to a major movement that garnered the attention of global media and major political figures. In documenting the first three years of BLM, Chapter 2 highlights some of the original figures and organizations that lay the groundwork for what has culminated in a global movement. Smaller groups such as One Million Hoodies and the work done by civil rights activists in cities such as Sanford, FL and Oakland, reiterate the traditional tropes of grassroots organizing that constructed the foundation of the movement.

Chapters 3 provides a methodological overview of the two content analyses that ground this study. I take a quantitative look at BLM in the digital sphere. I focus specifically on Twitter and Tumblr. Each of these platforms is invariably different, attracting different audiences and encouraging users to engage in semiotic, visual, and textual conversations. Within Chapter 3, I explore the unique facets of each platform, while also engaging with the methods and tools used to aggregate data. Chapter 4 is an in-depth analysis of the results of my two content analyses. I take a definitive look at the actions and tactics implemented by BLM activists to create a long-lasting movement rather than a brief moment in history. I look at the tangible elements of mobilization through statistical correlations and data tables that isolate the relevant variables that increase awareness and mobilization. Within my analyses, I observed that mobilization and awareness were decidedly contingent upon the potency of the message and the timely manner in with the
message is delivered. Finally, Chapter 5 takes an in-depth look at the implications of my analyses. Within both studies I found a number of results that stress the importance of narrative framing as an effective tool to mobilize on-the-ground action from people of all races. What do results like these mean for future strategist within the movement?

The research on Black Lives Matter is growing quickly, covering areas ranging from public policy to theological dimensions of the Black community. However, in completing my study, I hope that this research functions to help activists and academics alike better understand the unique ways social media has been used in this movement and how BLM continues to disrupt the status quo through innovation and originality.
Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework & Literature Review

The foundation of this study is the intersection of collective identity, new social movement theory (NSM), and digital activism. Over the past fifteen years, scholars have attempted to identify the relationship between a proliferation of social movements across the globe and the rise of social media. Social media sites—Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—are loosely crafted digital networks that are used for creation or sustenance of interpersonal relationships. While these networks are often subjectively constructed based on the platform—for example LinkedIn is a professional networking site, while Facebook is primarily used to reinforce relationships built offline—their intended use is often subverted by the users. It is imperative to note its integrality in the formation of social movements such as Black Lives Matter. Overall, I will look at two concepts: New Social Movement Theory and Digital Activism. Yet, while these two concepts frame my entire study, the foundation of my quantitative analyses look at two subsets of each of these ideas: Narratology & Mobilization. These theories—the first, rooted in the formation of social movements, the other the performance quality of social movements—denote two critical steps that underscored the success of Black Lives Matter.

New Social Movement Theory

A social movement is defined as a group of individuals joining forces to enact—or block—a change within a society that may have detrimental impact to a segment of the population. Social movements are denoted by an emphasis on the collective rather than the individual. The goals of a social movement do not effect one person, but a larger community. With this, traditional social movements are based around collective behavior theory (CBT). CBT is defined as the spontaneous actions of a group that buoys against traditional social norms.
thought and emotion (mobs, propaganda). However, it also highlights a mutual understanding of an inequality or deprivation that is shared by a—usually marginalized—sector. Scholarly discourse around social movements is often in flux; this is primarily due to the progress of society writ large. Social Movement Theory continues to evolve and grow as new social movements articulate different causes for mobilization and utilize different tools available.

Traditional social movement models—prior to the 1960s—focused less on the cultural impetus for social movements and more on macro socio-economic determinants. These theories included collective behavior theory (as noted above), value expectancy theory and relative deprivation theory. Yet, the most popular—and controversial—is the theory of rational choice. Rational choice theory (RCT)—with relation to social movements—was established by Mancur Olson in 1985 and was derived from economic theory. RCT states that individuals will act in a way that best suits their needs and individual preferences. According to Olson, RCT work with collective action through ‘selective incentives’, or individual gain for participating within a movement that may go against one’s better judgment. In sum, RCT is one rooted in self-interest, rather than the betterment of the community. The theory of rational choice was applied on a global scale by numerous scholar in the early 20th century, particularly those studying from a Western construct. However, the relationship between social movements and RCT began to dissipate in the latter half of the 1960s. Following a tumultuous period of social unrest in the US, social theorists in Europe began to look towards a newer way of framing social action: new social movement theory (NSM). This model, fixed in social constructivism, focused on social movements from a post-industrial lens. Scholars believed that newer social movements focused less on class and economics and more on politics and cultural
issues. New Social Movements were marked by:

- WWII post-industrial life (Claus Offe)
- The codifying and exposure of previously latent identities (Alberto Melucci)
- An increased intersection of the private and public spheres (Alain Touraine)

NSM is often split into two modes of theory: Resource Mobilization and Collective Framing. Resource mobilization theory (RMT) which emerged first, subverts the causes of social movements, and focuses on the tools and strategies used to mobilize massive groups of people. The RMT model looks at the relationship between artifacts—tools, resources—and those who utilize them for a particular cause. While CBT and RCT, denote—in the former—irrationality and emotion and—in the latter—self-interest, RMT believes that rational actors “employ strategic and instrumental reasoning at the political-institutional level.” This means that individuals will identify the needs and goals of the group, in conjunction with their own needs and behave accordingly. Finally, RMT posits that conditions of inequality do not act as catalysts for change. Inequality is a “precondition” and a constant; it is only addressed when an opportunity presents itself on multiple political and cultural levels.

In conjunction, collective identification, or collective framing—a term crafted by Alberto Melucci in 1980—is the belief that a person shares concerns, ideals, and goals with a group based on a number of mutually agreed upon commonalities. Melucci’s construction through NSM—derived from the work of Touraine and Pizzorno—highlights collective identity as a “process” that is “concerned with the orientations of actions and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes places”. For this reason, collective identity is a critical component of any social movement, as it addresses the relationships, emotions, and experiences of a shared group of people. In Melucci’s paradigm, social
movements are contingent upon five shared realities. The most important of the five are those that place emphasis on the relationship between political expression and cultural spaces. Melucci stresses these spaces are where the political merges with the social. In these spaces individuals resist dominant forms of power and reject conventional politics. Collective identity as an idea has been used to discuss a number of cultural facets such as nationalism, xenophobia, and organizational psychology. With regards to social movements, collective identity has been used to explain the formation of large 20th century phenomena such as the Second Women’s Liberation Movement, the American Civil Rights Movement, and the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1970s.

**Digital Activism & Mobilization**

Working in tandem, Resource Mobilization Theory and Collective Identity Theory help situate Black Lives Matter in a contemporary moment. With regards to RMT, BLM has organized around a group of actors who have used modern tools—namely the internet—as a means to gather support, attention, and encourage people to participate. BLM is a movement that is based on a series of incidents that presented an opportunity to bring attention to a particular issue. Statistics show that Black males are 3 times as likely to be accosted or arrested by law enforcement than any other race for the same crime. However, the political and social affordances of the moment made it possible for individuals to move to action.

Social media functions as a contemporary example of RTM, as well as the classic communications theory, uses and gratifications. Uses and gratifications as a theory, denotes that individuals have the ability to—and often do—harness communication tools for purposes other than their original intended use. Through this process users seek gratification for their own personal needs and desires. These wishes and wants are often
unanticipated by the creators of these technological innovations and only arise after large bodies of individuals assert—explicitly and implicitly—a common use. The rise of digital activism through the use of social media is a relatively new phenomenon—15 years—that has subverted the original use of social media platforms into a tool of collective action.

Movement participation is varied and vast, particularly in digital media. Digital activism has been particularly difficult to define as it does not take on the traditional image of grassroots mobilization. Digital activism is both static and fluid; it can function as awareness building on an online forum, mobilizing large groups of people through digital campaigns, or using one’s personal social media account to support or promote a social concern. Digital activism over the past five years has recalibrated to encompass a number of new and unprecedented techniques. A rather benign example is the ALS Water Bucket Challenge of 2014. Through this challenge, participants were video taped pouring buckets of water on themselves in an attempt to raise awareness for ALS. In the concluding moments of the video, the participant asked three other people to participate in the “challenge” and spread the word on ALS. While hoards of people critiqued these videos as ridiculous and unrelated to the disease, the ALS Association estimated an $2.4-million-dollar increase in donations during the height of the phenomenon.\(^3\)

A more powerful example of digital activism are the events that surrounded the Occupy Movement of 2011. The use of social media, in particular Twitter, was an unprecedented move. The platform was used to connect disparate groups of individuals with only a shared concern of American capitalism.\(^4\) In a 2014 study, researchers found that organizers were able to use Twitter to communicate time-sensitive information relating to protest or law enforcement.\(^5\) Moreover, the literal movement of protesters was largely contingent upon predetermined spaces and areas of opportunity through the use of Twitter.\(^6\)
The study of digital activism has been wrought with many critiques such as the lack of tangible (i.e. on the ground) mobilization as well as the low barrier of entry for individuals to consider themselves activists. However, the effects of social media on activism have become a major area of interest. Hundreds of studies on the Arab Spring have noted the importance of social media in both organizing citizens into action and bringing global attention to the events occurring in Egypt. Additionally, the relationship between technology and human interaction has come into play when looking at its application for social movements. Social scientist Nathan Juregenson posits that a synthesis of geographic and digital spaces occur simultaneously during a social movement. As human-computer interaction develops, the bleeding of the digital into literal spaces becomes more and more salient. According to Juregenson: “Protest and rioting are all more possible, perhaps likely, because social media and smartphone technologies have united the power of both physical space and networked digitally. Some have even argued that the organizational structures of the Occupy movement mimic the network logic of the Internet.”

This same relationship is a primary function for mobilization within BLM. The use of social media to bring awareness and participate in collective framing was quickly overshadowed by the use of social media to organize protesters in specific regions and areas. Within 5 months, over a dozen Twitter accounts were created to specifically relay information on meetings and events within Ferguson. The use of mediated technologies was propelled even further through live streams and footage of protests across the country. Mobilization, or the movement of resources or individuals toward a common cause, was a consistent trend throughout the movement. Go-Fund Me Campaigns emerged prompting online users to provide monetary support to protesters in Ferguson. Additionally, social networking platforms were massive sites for individuals to connect with those who shared a
geographic space with them.

**Collective Identity & The Narrative Paradigm**

When we begin to look at the second paradigm that structures NSMs, we find that identity-orientation plays a critical role in the impetus of Black Lives Matter. The process of cultivating a collective identity in the digital world for Black Americans has arisen in a number of organic and often unanticipated ways. One example of this is the identification of “Black Twitter”. Black Twitter is a particular group of Black Twitter users who engage in collective bonding activities through the use of the platform. To elucidate on the complexities of Black Twitter, I can say that there is no definitive number that marks its identifiers. Black Twitter may constitute 1,000 users or 1 million. It is the process of crafting a collective identity that defines the demographic. Those that ascribe to the title often do so through a cultural meaning-making process that includes using specific hashtags or engaging with other Black users.

One of the primary ways this meaning-making process occurs is through the construction of the narrative, or, narratology. A number of scholars have written about the importance of narrative building in the reaffirmation of collective identity. This is especially important for marginalized communities whose opinions about their place in society is often questioned by dominant power structures. While it is difficult to gauge the original conception of the narrative as a concrete mode of communication, narratives have existed since the oral traditions of Ancient Egypt. The narrative is, in essence, the story or the relating of a singular personal story. It is a method of communication that is underscored by emotion, personal experience, and “aesthetic considerations”. One of the earliest documented examples of the narrative was displayed through oral history, however the narrative paradigm has become an increasingly important area of interest for
communication scholars. The narrative paradigm, created by Walter Fisher in 1987, implies that humans are natural storytellers. One of the interesting distinctions of the narrative paradigm is its emphasis on the narrator as the one who holds “the most trustworthy, reliable, and desirable guides to belief and to behavior”. Therefore, the narrative paradigm is rooted in subjectivity. In the wake of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, these narratives play a critical role in helping people identify some of the ways racial privilege works in American. The integration of the narrative into the digital world has been explored over the past 10 years, as scholars have looked at the immersive simulacrum of digital texts such as role-playing games (RPG) and online communities as examples of narrative. Within this framework, scholars have alluded to the same structural components—set, narrator, rising and falling action—that dictate any story as it has moved to a different platform. Additionally, work relating to the constructions of narratives through Twitter has been done looking at specific causes that have used social media to frame a number of stories.

Another important aspect of the narrative is the art of transference. According to Peter Brooks, transference—from a narratological perspective—is the emotional transmission of a narrative to its listeners. This process, rooted in Freudian psychoanalytic, represents the interpretation of the narrative through a secondary source. Within this framework, the narrative becomes so powerful, the reader begins to create personal meaning to the story and add additional context beyond the original intention of the narrator. Through this process of transference, the reader will retell the story again and again to different audiences providing their own emotional subjectivity to the content. The idea of narrative transference plays a critical role in awareness building. The intention of stories told within the digital sphere is to articulate an experience that moves its audience to action. In order for the collective narratives examined in content analysis 1 to be truly
effective, transference of these stories of inequality must take hold in those who have not experienced it firsthand.
Chapter 2: A Brief History of Black Lives Matter

“Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago.”

- President Barack Obama

**Trayvon Martin**

Though the watershed moment in BLM was undoubtedly the acquittal of Darren Wilson for the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in November of 2014, the first articulation of what would become BLM began with the shooting of 17-year old Miami teenager Trayvon Martin. The initial prosecution of George Zimmerman is an example of the tangible influence of public digital activism on the justice system. On February 26, 2012, Trayvon Martin was shot and killed in an altercation with neighborhood-watch captain George Zimmerman, in the gated community of The Retreat At Twin Lakes in Sanford, FL. According to trial testimony, Martin was visiting the home of his father’s fiancée—who resided in the community—over the weekend. While walking through the neighborhood back from the convenience store, Martin was accosted by George Zimmerman, who then phoned non-emergency 911 to report a “suspicious guy” in the neighborhood. What followed after this phone call comes down to a matter of opinion between what actually occurred and what George Zimmerman said occurred. What is known for sure is Trayvon Martin was killed at approximately 7:17 pm by a fatal shot to the chest from Zimmerman.

The events following the death of Trayvon Martin are indicative of BLM’s first entrance into the public consciousness. Miami-Dade prosecutors were hesitant to prosecute or charge George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin citing Florida’s “Stand Your Ground” law. In her book, *Suspicious Nation*, journalist Lisa Bloom succinctly sums up the Martin case: “Prosecutors did not choose it. They did not get to exercise their usual
discretion.” The impetus behind the prosecution of Zimmerman was largely due to the swift response from both private citizens and black journalists across the globe. Immediately following the death of their son, Tracey and Sybrina Martin sought out defense attorney Benjamin Crump—a well-known civil rights litigator in the Florida area—to seek justice. Realizing that Sanford police were not going to arrest Zimmerman, Crump began a national publicity campaign, bringing attention to the murder of Martin and lackluster response from Miami law enforcement.

In conjunction with Crump’s work, young activists across the country also helped propel the momentum of the case, using digital media to keep the story alive and in the forefront of mainstream news. On March 8, 2012, Howard law student Kevin Cunningham created a petition on Change.org in response to law enforcement’s refusal to arrest Zimmerman. The petition, “Prosecute The Killer of Our 17-Year Old Son Trayvon Martin”, was soon taken over by Martin’s parents. Within a week, the petition broke records for Change.org, reaching over 2 million signatures and attracting the attention of high profile figures such as Spike Lee, Mia Farrow, and Russell Simmons. The Change.org petition, however, was merely a drop in the bucket. Following the first mainstream coverage of the case on CBS This Morning, the story of Trayvon Martin—the young man buying Skittles and an Arizona Tea—became America’s story. According to the Associated Press (AP), Martin’s murder was mentioned over 600,000 times on Facebook by March 25. Trayvon Martin became the top trending hashtag for over three months.

A study done by the MIT Center for Civic Media mapped out the media “theater” of Martin’s death in five acts. Erhardt Graeff documents the important symbiotic relationship between mainstream media and private activists. In acts 2 and 3 both agents work with
each other: local media outlets providing information with certain private citizens driving
the story. However, in Act 4 of his study, Graeff documents the importance of President
Obama’s statement on the murder of Trayvon Martin. His utterance, “Trayvon Could Have
Been My Son,” sparked a new narrative on the way the story would be framed in the public
sphere. No longer was this a story about a gun-trigger vigilante who shot an unarmed teen
using Florida’s Stand Your Ground law. Martin’s death became the manifestation of
America’s fear of black men that echoes in the collective consciousness’ of many citizens.

With this articulated fear came the pushback from America’s black community. On
March 25, Howard University students began a video campaign, entitled “Am I
Suspicious?” questioning the role of racial bias in the murder of Trayvon Martin. Across
the country thousands of peaceful protests formed, the largest being a 30,000-person town
hall rally in Florida organized by Crump and the Martin family. On March 18th, Daniel
Maree, a NYC based digital strategist organized A Million Hoodies March for Trayvon in
NYC. One of the largest marches at this time, 1,000 people attended. Finally, on April 11,
2012, almost two months after Martin’s murder, George Zimmerman was arrested for
second-degree manslaughter. For many, the charges against Zimmerman meant justice, but
this was just the first moment in a long fight for Black lives.

**The Creation of Black Lives Matter & The Acquittal of George Zimmerman**

Black Lives Matter is uniquely divided into a number of components that distinguish Black
Lives Matter, the movement, and Black Lives Matter, the organization. The term was used
interchangeably on social media, however the movement and the organization did not
converge until the death of Michael Brown in August of 2014.

As I stated earlier, following the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of
Trayvon Martin Alicia Garza, crafted a message on her Facebook that read: “Black people.
I love you. I love us. Our lives matter, Black Lives Matter”. The message, read in conjunction with the outpouring of support for the Martin family following the verdict, would be the first inkling into what Black Lives Matter would soon become. Patrisse Cullors, Garza’s friend and another community activist, shared the message on Twitter, punctuating her ensuing tweets with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. Cullors and Garza began to contemplate the formation of an organization that reiterated the sentiment of Garza’s initial Facebook post. Garza and Cullors then contacted another friend, Opal Tometi, an activist in the field of immigration rights, about the formation of a campaign. The three women began crafting a platform to discuss the racial issues that were brought to light with the Trayvon Martin case including vigilantly justice, unequal treatment through the judicial system, and systemic racism. More importantly, BLM was used to affirm the importance of Black life both within and outside of Black communities. During this time Garza, Cullors, and Tometi created a Tumblr and Twitter account under Black Lives Matter and trademarked the phrase.

At the same time, millions of people across the country were echoing their disgust with the results of the Trayvon Martin case. On July 20th, following the announcement of the verdict, millions of people began to protest across the country. With more than 100 demonstrations taking place in the US, communities began to collectivize around questions of racial equality and its implications within the justice system. Most notably, on July 15th (the day after the verdict), 1,000 people protested in New York City. The impromptu demonstration, largely cultivated through social media, began in Union Square around 1pm and ended with a sit-in in Times Square just around 9pm.

...Emotions were high that day, but mine, specifically, were a mixture of anger, pride, and confusion. Anger because this event even had to occur. Pride, because I was out there making sure that my voice was heard. Lastly confusion, because I would have never
thought in 2013 that I would be marching down Sixth Ave in NYC for racial injustice. Following in the footsteps of those who came before me, I marched along with hundreds of other people from Union Square to Times Square screaming, “No Justice, No Peace” the entire time at the top of my lungs. People from all walks of life were there. Black, White, young, old. People in their cars honking in solidarity. Even army veterans were there.

-Ashley Mozone, March 25, 2016

The string of protests were punctuated by increasing political commentary on race in America. In a speech following the verdict, President Barack Obama uttered: “And I don't want to exaggerate this, but those sets of experiences inform how the African American community interprets what happened one night in Florida…The African American community is also knowledgeable that there is a history of racial disparities in the application of our criminal laws -- everything from the death penalty to enforcement of our drug laws. And that ends up having an impact in terms of how people interpret the case.”

The progression of this movement is denoted by peaks and lulls regarding the attention of African American deaths by the hands of police enforcement or those behaving under the guise of authority officials. Following the verdict of the Trayvon Martin case, Black Lives Matter, both the organization and the movement began to die down. Garza, Cullors, and Tometi continued activist work under the umbrella of their newly formed organization, Black Lives Matter, however mainstream coverage on the issue significantly subsided. According to the CMSI report on Black Lives Matter, the hashtag was only tweeted 48 times in the month of June 2014. This is an interesting note on the importance and utilization of mainstream media in counter-cultural social movements. The question of Black death ultimately fell to the wayside for approximately a year. This, however, did not reflect the actual deaths that would underpin a slew of activism in the oncoming year. For example, Renisha McBride was murdered in November of 2013. Her life and death would become an icon of the importance of black female identity within the
BLM movement. Yet, the death of individuals such as McBride went largely unnoticed by the public until the highly publicized murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The deaths of these individuals which would later serve the purpose of attention raising did not receive much mainstream coverage until they were brought up in conjunction with Brown. Furthermore, I found is that massive activism around the deaths of these individuals (with the exception of Brown) was related to the notion of a failed judicial system (i.e. the absence of an indictment for the murder of Eric Garner) rather than the deaths themselves.66 Overall, this period within Black Lives Matter allows us to explore two distinctive groups working on the same project without much convergence. It was only with the death of Michael Brown that BLM, as we now know it today, would come into formation.

**Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Unrest in Ferguson**

It is difficult to gauge why some stories receive more press than others. Many theorists posit that news framing and dominant narratives often situate which stories are brought to the forefront, while others only receive attention later on. However, within the framework of the BLM movement, I have found that the circumstances surrounding the particular case often denote which images make it to the front page of the news.

On July 17, 2014 43-year old Eric Garner was strangled to death by police officers in Staten Island, New York. Garner was confronted by the police for selling unlicensed
Garner was subsequently wrestled to the ground by police officers and put in a chokehold—a technique banned by NYPD—as a method of submission. While in the chokehold, Garner related to police that he could not breathe. During the chokehold, Garner—an asthmatic—went into cardiac arrest. He was pronounced dead at the hospital a few hours later.  

In an unexpected turn of events, Garner’s death was captured on a iPhone video camera by a witness and friend. The recorder of the video, Ramsey Orta released it to the New York Daily News for millions of citizens across the city. The release of the video, from a legitimate source, provoked an immediate and sudden reaction from citizens. Two days after the event, Reverend Al Sharpton staged a march with the family of Eric Garner demanding a full investigation of the events that occurred. On July 22 and 23 smaller vigils—approximately 200 people—occurred honoring the death of Eric Garner. Sharpton, gave the eulogy at Garner’s funeral on the 23rd articulated the communities demand for justice.

The evidence of Garner’s death became a catalyst for mobilization, specifically in the digital sphere. Individuals began to make references to Rodney King as an example of tangible police brutality without any repercussions for those involved. However, the death of Eric Garner did not attract much attention outside of the tri-state area. Though there was a video, Garner’s death did not become the main focus of BLM until December of 2014. Rather, the spark that lit the fuse on Black Lives Matter the movement would come a few days later in Ferguson, Missouri.

On August 9, 2014, 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot by Officer Darren Wilson at approximately noon in Ferguson, Missouri. Earlier in the day, Brown and a friend stole several packages of cigarillos from a local convenience store. The robbery was dispatched
to nearby police officers, with a call for a suspect who fit Brown’s characteristics. Officer Wilson spotted Brown and his friend, later identified as Dorian Johnson walking down the street and suspected they were the perpetrators of the crime.74 Blocking in Brown and Johnson with his police vehicle, a government issued Chevy-Tahoe, Wilson approached the two men on the street. A violent altercation then occurred between Brown and Wilson. The altercation resulted in Brown and Johnson fleeing on foot in an attempt to evade Wilson.75

The discrepancies over what followed became the impetus for the massive outcry that occurred over the next two years. According to initial reports Wilson shot Brown 10 times as he was running away from the SUV. Contradicting reports said that Brown turned around with his hands in the air and Wilson proceeded to shoot Brown 10 times in the front. Finally, Wilson’s testimony—and that of other witnesses—states that Brown turned around and began to aggressively advance upon Wilson once again and Wilson then proceeded to shoot him 10 times. Each of these reports was never substantiated through both the state and federal investigations. The only clear forensic evidence gathered is that Michael Brown was shot in the front from a distance. The shot that killed him was a clear hit to the apex of his head.76

The circulation of the death of Michael Brown within the predominantly Black community of Ferguson prompted immediate outrage. Although, it was never substantiated,
the common rumor spread was that Brown had turned around to surrender to Wilson and was promptly shot. The shock of this was further exacerbated by the acknowledgment that Brown was unarmed throughout this entire encounter. Finally, there was particular dismay about the openness of Brown’s dead body. According to reports, Brown laid in the street from approximately noon to 3:30. The body was exposed for people in the community to see and was only concealed around 2:30 after people began to express outrage at the lack of care paid to his body.

Almost immediately following the death of Brown, hundreds of people within the city of Ferguson began to protest. The initial reports of what occurred in Ferguson can only be attributed to both the circumstances surrounding the death of Brown, as well as the continued tensions between the Ferguson Police Department and the Black community. According to the *Washington Post*, racial tensions within Ferguson had reached an all-time high over the past few months. In December of 2014, the state chapter of the NAACP had filed a complaint against the St. Louis County police department, “over racial disparities in traffic stops, arrests and other actions.” These issues were only highlighted when according to reports, neighbors in the community created a candlelight vigil for Brown where he was shot. According to eyewitnesses, a police officer escorted his dog over to the area to pee on the vigil. It was later run over by a police car. The combined tensions with police, the speculated reports of Brown’s death, and the perceived disrespect from St. Louis law enforcement culminated in 24 hour protests throughout the city. While the protest began peacefully, many individuals began to act out in violence, looting stores within the community and aggressively confronting police officers. By the evening of August 10th, police had militarized within Ferguson. By August 11th, reports of tear gas being thrown into the crowds of protesters soon made national news and reporters began to flood the city.
Following four nights of malay—in which St. Charles' SWAT team was dispatched, several news correspondents and two state representatives were arrested—Governor Jay Nixon declared a state of emergency.80

As the story of Michael Brown and Ferguson began to fill the front pages of mainstream newspapers, private citizens and activists outside of Ferguson showed support for the protesters, in a variety of ways. Much of the work done with those in Ferguson represented traditional grassroots organizing and mobilization. For example on August 10th, a day after the shooting, 500 activists representing cities across the country participated in Ferguson “freedom rides” to assist protesters in their work. Additionally, solidarity protest in cities such as Chicago, Baltimore, Los Angeles, and New York ensue between the 13th and the 20th of August.81

The most critical aspect of Ferguson’s support undoubtedly came through the digital realm. Throughout the tumultuous time, there was an immediate uptick in the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. The hashtag was used 581 times in one day during the protests.82 Interestingly most of this work came from those within Ferguson. Major media outlets including CNN and Fox News began reporting live from Ferguson from August 10th onward. The increased media attention to the death of Michael Brown and the protest within Ferguson, however, was met with derision from the large population. The presence of CNN reporters Anderson Cooper and Don Lemon did not spark a sense of joy, rather activists and private citizens were both concerned with the framing of the Ferguson protest.83 In an unprecedented twist, activists on the ground began to frame the narratives around the protest, calling out journalists for their one-dimensional reporting on what was occurring on the ground and using social media to engage with a larger audience and provide context for the 24-hour events. Two of the best examples of this are, Johnetta
Elzie, and DeRay McKesson. The former, a resident of St. Louis, the latter a Baltimore native—are now considered the two most prominent members of the protests over the summer of 2014. Elzie began documenting the activity around Ferguson through tweets, relating the reaction of the police to the protesters and the increased attention from mainstream press. Beyond this, both McKesson and Elzie used their social media accounts to highlight some of the racial tensions that provoked the buildup to Ferguson, such as continued issues between St. Louis police and Black Missourians.

*Tumult in Ferguson: DeRay McKesson Speaks*

In order to better understand the events that occurred in Ferguson, I conducted a one-on-one interview with one of its most prominent activists DeRay McKesson. McKesson, a community organizer originally from Baltimore, Maryland, was at a panel on black education on August 9, 2014. Working as the Minneapolis Public School Human Resource Director, McKesson heard through word of mouth about the events in Ferguson. Watching the news on August 16, McKesson, horrified by what he saw, drove 9 hours to Ferguson to protest the death of Michael Brown and the lackluster response by Ferguson’s police department. He proceeded to stay in Ferguson for two weeks, helping organize protesters every night in the street. Upset by the bias reporting on the events in Ferguson, McKesson began documenting his frustrations regarding the events in Ferguson.

Through his on the ground work and his Twitter feed, McKesson soon became one of the most prominent figures in Ferguson and subsequently, the Black Lives Matter movement. Using his platform, McKesson became a voice for millions of people. Articulating the hurt, pain, and anger regarding police brutality, McKesson also preached about some of the major issues affecting the Black community, including mass incarceration, violence against trans women, and the school to jail pipeline. In conjunction
with Johnetta Elzie, Samuel Sinyangwe, and Brittany Packnett he also created Mapping Police Violence. The website, an offshoot of We The Protesters (Campaign Zero), is a digital data source of instances of police brutality across the country. This site was the first time anyone had aggregated data that documented instances of police violence against Black people. Today, McKesson represents the first vocalization of what Black Lives Matter was to become. Currently running for mayor of Baltimore, McKesson has continued to focus on the care of Black communities across the country.

The mechanisms of mobilization within Ferguson are reflective of both the affordances of modern technology and the organic structure that begets many social movements. The protests of Ferguson were not planned or coordinated around any particular effort, rather they were spontaneously set in place by citizens inspired to act. McKesson highlights this fact when discussing his own person experiences in Ferguson. According to McKesson, social media functioned on a local level as a mobilizing force and on a national level as a tool to bring about awareness of state violence. The utilization of social media was not something that protesters methodically planned; it was an instinctual reaction brought on by the immediacy of the events:

“There was something powerful about the movement, at first, with social media. We would tweet ‘come out’ and all of these people who would have never come out would join. They didn’t have a friend, they would just come, and that was something the traditional could not do.”

As McKesson examines, the ubiquitous use of social media during the onset of the Ferguson protest also prompted an implicit critique of old modes of mobilization versus newer tactics. Traditional networks relating to collective action are always contingent upon time and previously existing relationships. However, the use of social media allowed those
who may not have engaged with BLM to do so without judgment. According to McKesson, the distance between interpersonal networks in the past versus today played a huge role in the amount of people that joined protesters on the street. “I think that social media gave permission to people to come out and stand in a way that we’ve never seen trigonal organizing do. It brought together such diverse groups of people around a common cause so quickly.”

One of the more interesting notes from McKesson is the partitioning of mobilization within the digital sphere. For McKesson, mobilization throughout the movement represented a simultaneous multi-step process. McKesson asserts that he would encourage followers to join the protest in Ferguson, while also building awareness of the issue of police violence. “Originally it was about helping people see there was a crisis that we needed to address and that this crisis is much closer to people than they thought,” said McKesson, “Then it shifted to helping people understand what the goals for the movement were, and finally it was about being clear about how to make change.”

In conjunction with this study, McKesson made it known that awareness was a key focus of the movement in its onset. However, McKesson is not the only one that echoes the importance of awareness. Samuel Sinyangwe, McKesson’s peer, has focused on the importance of awareness building within the movement. “Mapping Police Violence is about incorporating data into what we already know exist…Black voices are not validated until we have the data,” said Sam in a discussion with McKesson.

“There were so many of us. It was like if you didn’t believe that one person there were ten others and that was really powerful. Also, there is something about the consistency, you could actually follow 5, 10 people, you saw the range of experiences,“
said McKesson. The relationship between awareness building and its impact on the events in Ferguson function as illustrations of the many affordances of the social media, when reaching out to disparate communities. The “permission” of social media enables a particular discourse that opens up channels to people both in the digital and real worlds to engage with these problems in manners that were not open prior.

Through my interview with McKesson I was able to better understand his role in Black Lives Matter as well as some of the tools activists used to mobilize. This trend Ferguson struck a chord with many Americans. The reliance on mainstream media to document what was occurring was no longer tried and true. The racial biases—explicit and implicit—that framed the cases discussed underscored much of the reporting. For example, a Twitter post from NBC News used a photo of Michael Brown that showed him holding up purported gang signs. In an effort to redirect the story, Black Twitter users created the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. Within this hashtag, users highlighted the misrepresentations of Black individuals within the media that has been a common trend. Setting up two separate pictures, users displayed one that was unflattering and one that showed them in a more socially acceptable light to underscore the media biases that exist.

Figure 2.3: Tweets of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, Courtesy Of Live Magazine UK
when reporting on Black people. This hashtag and many others—including #AliveWhileBlack, which will be explored in Chapter 4—helped set the stage for the proliferated use of social media throughout the movement's beginnings.

On the ground in Ferguson, continued activism now included prominent social organizations and groups such as Amnesty International. Amnesty’s president, Stephen Hawkins issued a statement regarding the protests in Ferguson and the death of Michael Brown, highlighting that while Ferguson was not an “international space”, it was a space in which the civil rights had been severely compromised by the state. Following this statement, hundreds of Amnesty volunteers entered into Ferguson to help protesters organize and form a stronger unit against increasing law officials. Across the country, the stirrings of other acts of mobilization were forming. Yet, Ferguson was only the impetus of Black Lives Matter. Massive mobilization would not occur until November of 2014 when the ruling of Darren Wilson, changed the course of history.

**Non-Indictment of Darren Wilson and the deaths of Eric Garner and Tamir Rice**

One of the most impactful mobilization tools utilized by BLM activists was—ironically—one they had no control over: time. Within the span of four weeks, three major events occurred that fundamentally changed the course of the movement. As I expressed earlier, the death of Eric Garner went largely unnoticed by the larger public until the end of November. The deaths of other Black Americans—John Crawford, Aiyana Jones—also functioned as mere blips on the radar. The events in Ferguson, while horrific, were still generally looked upon as an isolated issue. What occurred in late November and December of 2014, proved that police brutality against Black people was not merely a problem, it was a far reaching epidemic. Moreover, the events that occurred in the final weeks of 2014, solidified the rhetoric Obama had echoed over a year ago: The system does not recognize
injustice when it is performed on a person of color.

In Cleveland, Ohio, on November 23, 2014 12-year old Tamir Rice was shot and killed by law enforcement officials. According to reports, Rice was in Cudell Recreation Center Park playing with a BB gun. An anonymous caller reported Rice to the police, stating that there was a young man playing with a gun in the park, however they believed him to be a juvenile and believed the gun to be a fake. Neither of these messages were relayed to the officers who reported to the scene. Within 5 minutes of their arrival, Officer Timothy Loehmann fired two shots at Rice, the second one striking him in the torso and killing him. The death of Tamir Rice was met with particular grief, as the victim in question was 12-years old. Sparking national debate about the treatment of Black children, Tamir Rice became the first nail in the coffin of 2014.

On November 24, 2014 a grand jury in Ferguson, Missouri ruled against the indictment of Darren Wilson for the murder of Michael Brown. Wilson’s freedom sparked outrage in the hearts of million. Almost immediately, citizens across the country began to mobilize in support of the Brown family and in protest of the ruling. The sentiment behind reactions to the ruling was underscored by a common understanding of the justice system: Justice is never doled out fairly, especially in the cases of Black Americans. The announcing of the ruling prompted massive protests in every major city. In Washington, D.C. thousands of protesters marched through the city to the Justice Building with their hands up, chanting “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot”. On the 25th, thousands of protesters in New York City shut down Manhattan, blocking traffic from the Brooklyn and Williamsburg Bridges to Time Square yelling “Black Lives Matter”. In Ferguson, the announcement of the verdict was met with community uproar. Citizens of the city began to protest throughout the night, some of these protests resulting in violence and looting. November
24, however, marks a pivotal moment in the use of digital media with regards to Ferguson and more specifically Black Lives Matter. Following the prosecutor Robert McCulloch’s announcement of the non-indictment of Darren Wilson, the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter dramatically spiked. On the day of the announcement the hashtag was used approximately 103,319 times.\textsuperscript{90}

The protests relating to the failed indictment of Darren Wilson and the death of Tamir Rice were unexpectedly subsumed after the final strike in 2014. On December 3, 2014—only a week after the Wilson verdict—a NYC grand jury announced its decision not to indict Daniel Pantaleo for the death of Eric Garner.\textsuperscript{91}

The announcement of the verdict became the peak in the Black Lives Matter movement. Immediately following the verdict, thousands of people gathered across the country to protest the combined indignities that had occurred in the span of two weeks. In New York City, over 5,000 protesters met in Union Square and proceeded to walk across both the Brooklyn and Williamsburg Bridges, indefinitely shutting down traffic. In Los
Angeles, hundreds of people blocked the southbound entrance of the 405 highway for days on end. In Washington, DC, protestors planned strategic moves, blocking the traffic of DuPont Circle, Gallery Place, and U Street during the height of traffic. In Philadelphia a die-in at the 30th Street Station with over 100 demonstrators occurred.

The coordinated efforts of private citizens were reflected in the behavior and actions of government and public officials as well. On November 31st, on the floor of the House, New York Representative Hakeem Jeffries and Ohio Representative Marcia Fudge raised their hands in solidarity with the victims and protesters. The day prior, St. Louis Rams players began a game on the field symbolizing ‘Hands Up Don’t Shoot’. On December 11th, 100 Black Congressional staffers walked off the Hill in solidarity.

These on-the-ground efforts were largely formed and continued within the digital sphere. During the final week of November and the first two weeks of December, dozens of social media accounts from a number of platforms—Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr specifically—began to use pre-existing digital networks to spread the word around community activism and actions across the country. Within the span of three weeks ten different marches occurred in Washington, D.C. One of the most infamous marches in the country occurred during the Christmas Tree Lighting in Rockefeller Plaza. Through the live broadcast taping of the event, millions of Americans across the globe could hear protesters screaming, “I Can’t Breathe!” in the distance. The back-to-back events that occurred during the 2014 holiday season were integral in cementing BLM, the movement.
The constant rotation of stories within the media and the continued conversation through social media facilitated the legitimization of BLM. By December 2014 the hashtag reached peak capacity, garnering 100,000 tweets per day.\textsuperscript{95} At the same time hashtags that focused on individual occurrences began to fall out of favor. As I will discuss in Chapter 4 of my study, towards the beginning of 2014 we see a synthesizing of the events that occurred through the year under the hub of Black Lives Matter. The incidents, which were originally thought to be isolated by geography and specific jurisdiction found a common thread to merge under. For the next 4 months, BLM would go through a number of specific transitions that helped to collectively assemble protesters and activists. One of the primary examples of this was to craft affiliate chapters within different cities. Today, Black Lives Matter has 26 affiliate chapters with its most active chapters being New York City and Washington, DC.\textsuperscript{96} Additionally, other tertiary groups began to form under the umbrella of
BLM. In February of 2015, Samuel Sinyangwe, Elzie, and McKesson formed We The Protestors, a collaborative that focused on the policies and issues relating to institutional inequality and disproportionate treatments of Black citizens under the judicial system. We The Protestors eventually became Campaign Zero, a data centered organization that focuses on statistical proof of discriminatory policing across the country. The activity surrounding Black Lives Matter was shifting from on-the-ground action to legitimate engagement with policies and laws that affect people of color.

Yet, the culmination and cementing of BLM as a necessary movement would end in Baltimore as another high profile story—incorporating elements of both Brown and Garner—would soon grab public attention. Prior to the death of Freddie Gray, there was a noticeable shift in the relationship between BLM protesters and methods of organization. In February and March of 2015, BLM activists across the country began to protest and interrupt the campaign stops of presidential hopefuls, specifically Bernie Sanders. However, in this case we find that the power fueling BLM was already at a point of maximum capacity and for the first time the police officers involved in the case were brought to justice. On April 13, 2015, 25-year old Freddie Gray died in a Baltimore area hospital after an encounter with police the previous day. On the morning of April 12, Gray encountered a group of 6 police officers in front of the Gilmor Housing Projects. After making eye contact with the police, Gray fled on foot. He was then apprehended by police officers and taken away. During the time of his apprehension, Gray’s arrest was filmed by two bystanders. On the video, there is evidence of unnecessary force from the police officers to Gray. Within an hour of his arrest, Gray was taken to the hospital in a coma.

The ambiguous details surrounding Gray’s death, especially with the presence of a video reopened the same issues surrounding earlier deaths. In Baltimore, thousands of
protesters took to the street in anger. Unlike Ferguson and NYC, many of these protests turned violent, resulting in the destruction of many predominantly Black communities. However, while the anger and frustration relating to Black death was similar, the reaction from judicial officials was not. On May 1, 2015 state prosecutors announced that they would file charges against the six police officers involved in the death of Gray. This moment marked the first time in BLM history that charges had been filed on police officers involved in the death of a Black citizen. Within this case, activists were beginning to see some of the effects of BLM on the judicial system. While, five of the six officers are still awaiting trial the response to the death of Gray marks a major shift in the relationship between Black people and incidents of state violence.
Chapter 3: Methodology

When we begin to look at my studies in relation to the theoretical framework and the history of BLM, it is imperative to first discuss the methods used to conduct my analyses. For this project I performed two separate content analyses that focus on awareness and mobilization. Each of my analyses look at a specific social media platform and its utility for BLM activists. Although I have found, through interviews, that Twitter remained the most prevalent site for mobilization and awareness in 2014 and 2015, it is important to engage different social media platforms that have largely been ignored in quantitative studies on the movement. While there have been numerous reports on the digital presence of BLM, they focus solely on Twitter. Moreover, they address the statistics relating to retweets and scope while failing to examine the importance of the content of the tweets. Therefore, my studies look at both the metrics of information as well as the textual content within tweets and posts. Content analysis 1 (C1) focuses on awareness and the importance of consciousness raising through the communications theory of narratology. Content analysis 2 (C2) focuses on mobilization, looking at four distinct periods within the Black Lives Matter movement from December 2014 to January of 2016 on the social media platform, Tumblr. This analysis examines digital mobilization and its relationship to major moments in the BLM movement. For my content analyses, I developed a coding scheme with distinct categories relating to the visual and textual content of each post or tweet (Appendix B).

Intercoder Reliability

In order to confirm that my content analyses were reliable, I had a group of 8 coders analyze 20% of each of my samples. This is standard procedure. Coders worked in groups of two and were asked to examine 5 tweets from C1 and 7 to 8 tweets from C2. People
remained in the same group they were placed in for both content analyses. Additionally, they were allowed
to consult their partner with
regards to their answers, but were
not compelled to do so. Finally,
coders were allowed to change
their answers as many times as
they wanted before a final
submission. Each coder was asked
to submit their responses
individually. The general make-
up of my coders was young
college-educated Millenials ranging in sex, economic background, sexuality, and
interest. All of my coders—with the exception of one—were Black Americans. This was
largely intentional, as I feel that it was imperative to gauge the specifics of C1 with the
ideas and rhetoric around Black identity with Black people. However, I did have one non
Black coder—a White female. Though unplanned, this coder acted as a temperature gauge
to see if the same conclusions would hold for people of different races. In all, I found there
to be consistency with identifications on topics, visuals, and issues across all
demographics. To gauge reliability I used both Krippendorffs Alpha as well as basic
percentages. Overall, KA necessitates that coders be reliable at least .70 of the time in order
to achieve reliability. I coded each group of coders for each content analyses separately in
addition to coding them as a collective. Overall, for C1, I have a reliability rate of
.708. For C2, my reliability was .755. I believe that reliability in C1 is significantly lower

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Analysis 1</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Krippendorffs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cases 1-5</td>
<td>83.30%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cases 6-10</td>
<td>76.70%</td>
<td>0.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cases 11-15</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>0.614</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cases 16-20</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Analysis 2</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Krippendorffs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>0.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cases 8-16</td>
<td>85.20%</td>
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<td>Cases 17-23</td>
<td>87%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cases 24-30</td>
<td>75.30%</td>
<td>0.672</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1: Intercoder Reliability Results
because I asked coders to choose the best answer for a number of questions rather than giving them the option to choose multiple categories. However, this will be discussed in the limitations section of my study in Chapter 5.

**Content Analysis 1**

Content Analysis 1 (C1) provides a framework for the impetus and necessity of BLM, the movement. As I addressed in Chapter 1, awareness as a theory denotes the particular process of conscious raising relating to an issue or concern. This activity is integral to garnering support for a social movement on political, economic, and social levels. There have been many examples of this process within the public sphere relating to Black Lives Matter. Op-eds in some of America’s most prominent media outlets—*Huffington Post, New York Times, Washington Post*—have attempted to extrapolate on issues concerning institutional racism and police brutality. However one of the most salient methods of awareness building is often cultivated through social media. The social media platform, Twitter, has unwittingly become a site for social activism and mobilization. Though this process is further examined in Chapter 2, it is imperative that we look at Twitter as a unique platform that has unintentionally facilitated the growth of a number of social movements.

Created in 2006 by Jack Dorset, Evan Williams, Noah Glass, and Biz Stone, Twitter is a social media site that connects users—both private citizens and organizations—through a large social network. With over 1 billion accounts, Twitter users are allowed to articulate their thoughts and opinions in 140 characters that can be seen by both followers of the particular user, or—in the case of a public account—anyone in the world. Although Twitter follows Facebook as the most used social media venue, it is by far the most notoriously cited and addressed. This is largely due to the public nature of the platform.
Unlike other social media sites such as Facebook or Tumblr, interested parties can access the tweets of any public user through the insertion of a simple hashtag.\textsuperscript{101}

Hashtags, denoted by the use of an actual pound symbol, are simple data aggregators that identify a topic or theme. These hashtags can range from the benign—#onfleek—to the prolific—#BlackLivesMatter. These hashtags also represent—what is now used by many media outlets—trending topics. These trending topics represent a new identification of audience engagement. Through trending hashtags, audiences are able to see what topics are important to Twitter users and what concerns rise to the top of the list. This process is integral to the spread of Black Lives Matter. In August of 2014, there was a dramatic rise within the use of the #BlackLivesMatter as well as #Ferguson. The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was used over 13 million times within the span of one month.\textsuperscript{102} Though it is necessary to address the relatively younger demographics of Twitter, the proliferation of the hashtag decidedly affected the mainstream agenda, as prominent news sites such as Washington Post, Essence, and The Chicago Tribune began writing and documenting the events occurring in Ferguson on a consistent basis. It is also worth noting that many of these papers including the Los Angeles Times hired journalists to specifically focus on the use of Twitter with relation to the Black Lives Matter movement.\textsuperscript{103}

With all of this in mind, it is important that my data address the mega-force that Twitter has become when discussing agenda setting and consciousness raising. C1 looks at the use of the Twitter hashtag #AliveWhileBlack. #AliveWhileBlack emerged on December 4, 2014 following a New York City grand jury’s decision not to indict the officer responsible for the death of Eric Garner. On Wednesday afternoon, Jason Ross, a writer for the Late Night Show with Jimmy Fallon, created the hashtag #CrimingWhileWhite. Discussing his own misdeeds and interactions with the police, Ross
urged other White Twitter users to discuss their own stories and experiences with law enforcement. Very quickly, the hashtag became a trending topic as White citizens across the country began to discuss and relay stories of #CrimingWhileWhite. Underscoring each of these stories was the implicit nod to the privileges afforded to White people when dealing with law enforcement—a privilege not given to minority persons. Some of these stories were humorous, such as a young kid stealing a toy from the store, while others were downright terrifying. In 140 characters, one user recounted the time he and friends attempted to break into someone’s home and were let go with a warning by their local police.

As these stories continued to move around Twitter, some readers found the hashtag to be a patronizing exercise in insincerity. While the motivation behind #CrimingWhileWhite might have been to highlight the privileges of being White in America it also took the focus off of racial injustice by framing it under the perspective of those who are not victim to it’s inequalities. In short, the #CrimingWhileWhite hashtag became a method and mode for White Americans to discuss racial injustice without actually discussing those it negatively impacts. Another critique of the hashtag was the obvious nature of the content. As one Twitter user so aptly pointed out, “#CrimingWhileWhite is proving that white people know about their privileges. They just aren’t doing anything about it.”

Ebony Magazine’s senior digital editor, Jamilah Lemieux, created the #AliveWhileBlack hashtag as a way of returning the focus to the injustices faced by African Americans. The hashtag became a watershed moment as Lemieux consciously sought to give Black Americans the opportunity to discuss the racist treatment they face everyday.

In our experiences as black people, [police officers] treat us like a threat routinely
and get away with it. It's important to look at the different ways that black and white people are treated by police and law enforcement, but right now our stories should be at the forefront instead of the permissive ways many white people are treated by the police. 105

What followed was the unintentional creation of a narrative. The use of this communication tool illuminated a number of the issues that Black Americans live with on a consistent basis. This performance was punctuated by the number of individuals that participated in this alternative form of storytelling. Thousands of users articulated their experiences with law enforcement, casual racism, and intersectional racism in a simple 140 characters. The effects of the massive amounts of narratives was hard to ignore by the public at large.

**Metrics**

In examining, #AliveWhileBlack I compiled 100 random tweets that use the hashtag. My sample was a random aggregation provided through Twitter’s API; however, all of the sample’s tweets are from December 4, 2014—the day the hashtag first emerged and was at its peak. Because my sample was randomly compiled, I had no control over which tweets were chosen, therefore my sample includes some of the same Twitter users multiple times (approximately 4 users appear twice in my sample). I decided to gather a random sample because I felt it was the most appropriate way to gather an authentic narrative. In synthesizing the tweets of dozens of people, I—and my coders—were able to gauge a consistent trend in stories that structure a common trope regarding racial inequalities in America.

Including questions regarding metrics (date, retweets, likes), I compiled three qualitative categories that examine the textual content within each tweet. These questions address *narrative, race, tone,* and *topic.* Each of these questions provides a deeper look into the formation of a narrative and the trends around the narrative. Even though all of
these tweets function under the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack some of them do not address the reason the hashtag was first invented. Many people used the hashtag to critique the stories of black individuals, support causes like BLM, or link to outside material such as articles and videos. Therefore, it was important to distinguish those that were narratives versus those that were not. For the hashtags that did fit under the category of a narrative, I asked coders to define what types of information was being displayed within the tweet. Some of these categories are jokes, links to outside material, support for the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack or criticism for the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack. For those that were coded as narratives, I asked coders to look at the tone of the message, using the categories positive, negative, or neutral.

With respect to race, I wanted to gauge which types of users were engaging under this hashtag and what their racial makeup represented. In order to understand the relationship between race and racial inequality, I wanted to confirm the ethnicities of those displaying narratives. To determine race, coders were asked to focus on the avatar of the Twitter account. If the avatar featured a picture of the user, they were asked to distinguish a race. Those that did not include a picture, had pictures that were not human, or pictures of more than one person were not coded for race. Finally, I asked my coders to look at all of the tweets within the sample—narrative or not—to distinguish a topic. They were given a list of 10 categories: Communities & Neighborhoods, Law Enforcement, Gender/Sexuality, Personal Relationships, Interracial Disputes, Education/School, Workplace, Casual Racism, Institutional Racism, and Other. I asked coders to choose the best possible answer. Although some of the tweets in the sample discussed a variety of the categories list, I felt that it was imperative to identify the primary concern structuring the story. The parameters around gauging race were well-defined. Because many of these terms and concepts have a
number of definitions—sometimes contradicting each other—I gave my coders a strict set of guidelines when identifying a narrative, a topic, and the race of the users.  

I also kept a running tab of basic metrics such as retweets and likes for each tweet. However, I did not ask coders to code for these because they were not constant variables.

For each of my content analyses, I have constructed a number of hypotheses derived from my original research questions. For C1, they are as follows:

H1: The majority of the narratives will be constructed by Black Twitter users.
H2: The majority of tweets—narrative and non-narrative—will focus on issues with law enforcement.
H3: In my sample of non-narrative tweets, the primary racial makeup will be White.
H4: Non-narrative tweets will primarily be commentary on the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack.

**Content Analysis 2**

Content analysis 2 (C2) focuses on mobilization using a platform other than Twitter. For C2, I decided to look at the social media site Tumblr, specifically the blog, Ferguson National Response Network (FNRN). Ferguson National Response Network is a blog that posts solely on events pertaining to the movement. It first appeared in November of 2014 following the non-indictment of Darren Wilson. Each post within this blog focuses on demonstrations around the country rather than narrative concerns. Though the blog’s initial focus was on mobilizing around Brown’s death it quickly became a site for activists to post events on upcoming protests, demonstrations, and activities relating to Garner, Gray, Rice and later Sandra Bland. The blog is incredibly comprehensive; it compiles thousands of actions based on time, date, and location. The managers of the blog invite activists to submit their events. While the posts—alerts—are similar in visual format they are uniquely situated based on the individual user’s needs and desires. Therefore, some posts articulate demands and instructions for participants, while others simply invite all interested parties to join in an activity. Though FNRN has a twitter account, I thought it imperative to look at
BLM activism in other modes and avenues that denote particular affordances.

Described as a hybrid of a number of social media platforms, Tumblr is a microblogging site driven by original user content and discussion based wordplay. Created by David Karp, in 2007, Tumblr is now ranked the second largest blogging site after Twitter with over 350 million monthly users. In contrast with its contemporaries, Tumblr has remained relatively insular, consisting of smaller communities and groups. Tumblr incorporates the blogging aspects of WordPress, the relatively open dialogue of Twitter and the creative content of Pinterest, giving its users a synthesis of many popular networking sites.

Where Tumblr differs, however, is in the relatively private nature of its content. Sites such as Twitter are open; anyone can view a Twitterfeed by simply searching through a #hashtag on Google. To view posts on Tumblr, one must either join the community or have the link to a specific blog. Additionally, Tumblr holds a large database of user created content: From memes to fanfiction, Tumblr is often used as an exhibition for forms of art such as photography, writing, and fashion. While Tumblr as a whole is relatively closed to non-members, a level of openness exists within the community that does not occur on other social networking sites. Tumblr is very hesitant to censor its users, often letting communities perform a type of pseudo-policing on their own. Tumblr is a social network that draws pieces from it counterparts to create an entirely new user experience. Tumblr’s users and its creator have identified the platform as the “subversive social media site”. When creating Tumblr, Karp asserted that he wanted a place where people could be themselves, not “giant directories” of profiles. This idea has reverberated through the ‘Tumblrsphere’. Tumblr’s audience is a very specific segment of the social networking population that focuses on community building through similar interest or already
established commonalities. The site is comprised of, what we often refer to as Millennials, young adults between the ages of 18 and 29.\textsuperscript{112}

Although Tumblr posts vary from user and community, an increasing number of blogs are politically centered or in some way address social activism. As a whole, political engagement on Tumblr falls into one of three categories: Civic activism and organizing, nonprofit or political figures & government institutions. Each of these groups performs very different functions that highlight the importance of digital media in socio-political discourse. With this in mind, Tumblr presents a very interesting case study of the Black Lives Matter movement. Going into C2, I focus on the importance of mobilization on this platform, examining reach, audience, and response. Additionally, I wanted to see if the support garnered on Tumblr was similar or reflective of what we observed on Twitter.

\textit{Periods of Mobilization}

Because there is a vast amount of data within this blog, I crafted a number of carefully marked periods that denote major events in the BLM movement.\textsuperscript{113} Period 1 begins on November 24, 2014 and ends December 2, 2014. This period is marked by the Wilson verdict. Period 2 begins immediately after Period 1, as a similar verdict was handed down in the Eric Garner case within less than two weeks. Period 2, therefore, begins December 3, 2014 and ends January 3, 2015. Periods 1 and 2 are particularly interesting as they reflect a moment of high media saturation relating to the deaths of young Black men. The high volume area of Period 2 also reflects the murder of Tamir Rice.

Period 3, which is denoted by the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, takes place between April 19, 2015 and May 19, 2015. Finally, Period 4 ends with the combined incidents of a grand jury’s refusal to indict the police officers involved in the death of Rice and the investigation around Sandra Bland’s death in Texas.\textsuperscript{114} This marks the final period in
my study and is dated between December 28, 2015 and January 28, 2016.

It must be noted that there were other important moments within the movement over the two-year span examined. However, the periods chosen marked the highest amount of web traffic and media attention outside of the original events in July of 2014 with Garner and August 2014 with Ferguson. The summer of 2014 is not covered in this analysis for a number of reasons. Though most would mark the protests in Ferguson as the first mass scale example of mobilization relating to Black Lives Matter, the events that occurred in Ferguson were largely spontaneous and therefore poorly documented through any quantitative means. While the blog I am choosing to analyze does take its moniker from Ferguson, Missouri, it did not begin posting on events in Ferguson until the last week of November.

**Metrics**

Using the framework of the 4 periods, I compiled a sample of 150 posts. This sample was purposefully chosen and only includes events from the times marked above. Additionally, the posts featured in my sample are only for events in New York, Missouri, Ohio, and Maryland. I thought it imperative to focus on the spaces in which the events propelling the movement actually occurred. In doing this, I was able to gauge whether mobilization and activity was higher or lower based on the primary event. In short, do we see more demonstrations in Ohio following the death of Tamir Rice versus the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore?

The questions relating to C2 largely focus on the volume of actions that occur in this period, the types of events that occur in these periods, and finally the digital response to each event. Using these metrics, I gauged the proliferation of the posts—how many times they were reblogged, liked, or commented on—as my measure of mobilization. I
also look at the semiotic structure of the tweets—what sort of visuals are included, does the
text denote specific actions or demands—and the events affiliation with Black Lives
Matter. As I have expressed throughout this thesis, BLM is largely a synthesis of highly
publicized events that occurred concurrently, making for a consistent pattern used to
mobilize. Yet at the beginning, many events and actions did not function under the moniker
Black Lives Matter, choosing to individualize each demonstration and highlight the
specificity of the victim. Therefore, I examined the use of the #BlackLivesMatter and its
ubiquity over time to understand when activists decided to all work under the same
proverbial umbrella. As with C1, coders were given a strict set of parameters to use when
gauging the structure of each post. The instructions and working definitions for C2 can be
found in Appendix 2.

My hypotheses for C2 are as follows:

H₁: Visuals of activists and victims will appear at the highest frequency in posts.
H₂: Demands on posts will appear more frequently as time increases.
H₃: The use of Black Lives Matter will increase as time increases. The use of other phrases
    will decrease as time increases.
H₄: Digital Mobilization will increase as time increases.
H₅: Events held in public spaces will increase mobilization and interest.

Overall, my content analyses were crafted to examine the unique nuances of each platform
as well as the motivation behind #AliveWhileBlack and FNRN. With C1, I hoped to find
that the narrative proved to be a useful tool in building awareness and engaging large
audiences into conversations about systemic racism. In C2, I suspected that the results
would show a significant relationship between mobilization, time, and the proliferation of
the movement across the country.
Chapter 4: Results

Within this chapter, I will begin by looking at C1 first examining the results of narrative tweets and then moving on to my results for non-narrative tweets. I then explore my findings in C2, looking specifically at frequencies related to visuals, locations, and events. I subsequently move on to my most interesting discoveries on the periods of mobilization and the proliferation of Black Lives Matter.

Content Analysis 1

When looking at Content Analysis 1, I ran a number of correlations using an independent Chi-square to analyze the relationships between race, narrative, positivity, and topic. I also ran three frequency test to analyze the number of narratives versus non-narrative tweets, the emergent topics relating to narrative and non-narrative tweets, and what types of non-narrative tweets emerged within my sample. Overall, my sample was comprised of 55 narrative tweets (55%) and 45 non-narrative tweets (45%).

Narrative Tweets

In determining whether there was a relationship between the race of those who wrote narratives and the tone in which they told them, I performed an association, using a contingency table and the X² test.

When looking at the racial makeup of narrative tweets I found that overwhelmingly, narratives were being told by Black tweeters (72.7%), confirming my first hypothesis. Within my sample, I identified only 1 White narrator. The remaining narratives...
(25.45%) were relayed by those whose race was unidentifiable. When looking at my test, $X^2$ denoted that there was a relationship of statistical significance between race and tone of narrative ($p=.002$). More interestingly, the ratio of negative encounters was significantly higher than the expected count. In all cases in which the person was identified as Black and produced a narrative the tone was negative. This may represent a false positive as the sample of narrative tweets was overwhelmingly Black. However, in cases in which the narrator could not be racially identified, I also found that 100% of the tweets had a negative tone. All races expressed negative experiences within the narrative context, thus proving $H^2$ correct.

When looking at the frequencies of topics within narrative based tweets, I found that 47.3% dealt with the topic and incidents with law enforcement. This includes stories of personal arrests by law enforcement officials, witnessing incidents involving police and personal acquaintances, or coming into conflict with the police as the victim of a crime. The second highest category were instances of casual racism, coming in at 20%. Instances of casual racism were denoted as stories that involved racial bigotry, intolerance, or ignorance, but had no correlation to issues of institutionalized racism. Most of these stories were personal in nature and dealt with microaggressions.

![Figure 4.2: Frequency of Race & Narratives](image)

Non-Narrative Tweets

The sample of non-narrative tweets revealed a number of things relating to awareness and the consciousness-raising functions of the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack. Within this sample, the majority of tweets were crafted by Black users (53.3%). However, the number of White
users went up dramatically when compared to narrative-based tweets. The non-narrative tweets had a racial demographic of 26.6% White. The remaining non-narrative Twitter posts were compromised by those who race was unidentifiable. With the exception of Black and White, there was only one tweet in which coders identified another race.

When looking at topic, results found that the largest majority of non-narratives fell under the category of “Other”, 35.6%. The next two topics that appeared the most frequently were “Casual Racism” and “Institutional Racism”. Within the category of institutional racism, I found most of the tweets were analyses of the American judicial system or critiques of policies that negatively impacted Black Americans at a disproportionate level.

After observing that most of my non-narrative tweets were categorized as “Other”, I reanalyzed this portion of my sample and found that the overwhelming majority of them (81%) were reactions to the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack. This was an unanticipated category that articulated itself within my sample. The tweets categorized as “Other” were negative reactions to what was being articulated in the narratives of #AliveWhileBlack. While I created a category for this in Q3 (If the tweet is not a narrative, what is the general theme?), I did not account for the fact that the overall tweet and the message could be the same thing.

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
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<th>Non-Narrative</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</table>

*Figure 4.3: Topics of Tweets*
Running a frequency of the types of non-narratives tweets (Q2) research indicated that the majority of my non-narrative tweets were categorized as “general critiques of racism”, 26.6%. These were tweets that generally discussed issues of institutional racism, casual racism, and inequality within American political and social culture. The second largest portion—matching up with my analysis on topic—consisted of posts that fell under the category of “commentary of the #AliveWhileBlack and/or #CrimingWhileWhite” (20%). These tweets were generally comparisons of the two hashtags and the social function or support for the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack. Looking at the statistics for both of these questions, I discovered that twitter users who were not performing the actual process of storytelling were engaging with the #AliveWhileBlack in a way that supports the general intentions behind the hashtag and, more importantly, BLM. This will be addressed further in Chapter 5, however it is imperative to note that within the “Other” category, there was an even split, 7-7 between White tweeters and Black tweeters (this excludes two cases where race could not be determined).

Content Analysis 2

Frequency of Visuals, Locations, & Events

Looking at visuals and images within C2, 5 different frequencies were run on each type of visual—activists, victims, representational art, stock images, and images of city/state—to gauge how often they appear within my sample. Overall, images appear in 100% of the posts. Within the sample images of activists appear the most, represented 78% of the time.
This is followed by representational images appearing 29.3% of the time. Representational images were works of art that had symbolic meaning to BLM. For example, one post featured a shadowed figure with his arms up in the air and long rectangles pointing towards him. This image is clearly rendered to evoke the “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot” phrase and the death of Michael Brown. Looking at these frequencies, H. was both correct and false. While activists played a major role in the visual aspects of the posts, pictures of victims and their families were not as prevalent (20.7%).

Most of the actions within the sample occurred in public spaces, happening approximately 37.3% of the time (56 cases in total). The most frequently seen public spaces were parks and specific streets. While there appeared to be no significant relationship between the type of location and the city the action occurred, there was a higher frequency of events in public spaces in Maryland than in any other state (42.4%). The second most common space where actions occurred were “government entities”. These locations—which included courthouses, police precincts, and in one case the Gracie Mansion—were seen in 20.7% of my sample (31 cases).

52% of the actions within my sample were coded as protests/demonstrations. This category specifically focused on stationary demonstrations that were demarked as protests. Therefore, this excluded marches (12.7%), sit-ins (3.3%), and boycotts or walkouts (6%). Finally, most of my cases were actions in NYC. Approximately 38% of my sample featured actions that were happening in New York. Interestingly, all of these actions were

Figure 4.5: Frequency of Visuals
also New York City-based. Although the sample includes protests and events in New York State, result only showed demonstrations that were occurring in the five boroughs.

*Periods of Mobilization*

In order to gauge the amount of people who mobilized around an event, I performed four separate crosstabs. The first one looked at the relationship between location and mobilization, the second—which was an expansion of the first—looked at state and mobilization. My third test examined mobilization and the type of action, and the final one looked to see if there was a significant relationship between the time periods and the amount of people who engage with an action.

The first test performed was a contingency table and associated Chi-Square test of statistical significance \((X^2)\) using the variables “mobilization” and “location”. Within this test, no significant correlation was discovered between the location of the protest (i.e. public space versus private home) and the amount of people who engage—my p value result was .474. To look further at the relationship between mobilization and geography, another contingency table was done using the variables “mobilization” and “state”. Reaffirming test one, I determined that there was no significant relationship between the
state of an event and how many people mobilized digitally around the event (p= .066).

Question 3 examined mobilization in relation to the type of action occurring. Looking at
the variable, “event”, no significant relationship was discovered (p= .906). The final
contingency test analyzed the relationship between time and mobilization. H. stated that as
time increased, mobilization would decrease. To examine H., a contingency table analysis
was performed on the variables “mobilization” and “period”. The results for this test found
there to be a very significant relationship between time and mobilization in the digital
realm (p= .000). However, the original hypothesis was incorrect; dramatic moments of
mobilization occurred within periods 2 & 3. There was no incremental increase, rather,
very little action in P1 and very little action in P4.

*Use of Black Lives Matter & Articulation of Demands*

H. and H. theorized that the articulation of demands and the use of “Black Lives Matter”
would increase as time increased. Two contingency table and associated Chi-Square tests
were performed in order to examine each of these questions. The first one
analyzed the relationship between the nominal variable “demands” and the “period”. Within this test, it was
found that a significant relationship existed between demands and time
(p=.000). However, overall the posts that featured demands were

very small. Only 14 posts in my entire sample featured demands. While this number did
increase, through each period, it does not reconcile the 136 post that do not feature any
demands.

The final test performed was a Chi-Square using the variables “BLM” and “period”. What I found was a significant relationship between the ubiquity of the phrase and time (p=.000). Within P1, Black Lives Matter appeared in none of the posts, by P4 it appeared in 100% of the posts within my sample. Additionally, with the exception of within P2, there was no indication that other phrases affiliated with BLM were used at a high rate. During P2, “I Can’t Breathe” was found in 20 posts, however following this other phrases such as “Say Here Name” only appeared 5 times between periods 3 and 4.

Summary

Overall my findings for content analysis 1 supported hypotheses 1, 2, and 4. I found that Black twitter users did make up the majority of my narrative tweets, most of the narratives did focus on issues with law enforcement, and non-narrative tweets were largely commentary on the #AliveWhileBlack. When looking at content analysis 2, I discovered that all of my hypotheses with the exception of H. were in some manner proved incorrect. For issues of mobilization and time for example, there was a statistically significant relationship, however it was not the one that I had anticipated. This reveals news information about the momentum of Black Lives Matter that I will discuss in the following chapter.
Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion

Content Analysis 1: The Importance of the Narrative

The findings of content analysis 1 explain some of the strategies of BLM in the digital sphere. In particular, C1 highlights the productivity of digital narratives during the process of awareness building and consciousness raising. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the majority of the narratives crafted under the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack were created by Black Twitter users. In my sample, I found dozens of varying stories that punctuated the complicated history of Black identity within America. More to the point, every single tweet featured a negative experience. All of the stories, in some form, dealt with horrific everyday occurrences with racism. While some were more benign than others, they all alluded to a particular trope of a false pathology that Black Americans are forced to reconcile. For example, one young man described the experience of being pulled over by a police officer as a child when his mother was accused of being a prostitute. Another young woman related the story of being called a “slut nigger” in front of a police officer by a stranger and receiving no help from the law official who witnessed the incident. While these stories reflect a particular psychological wound that exists between people of color and law enforcement, they also work as a counter-narrative to expound on racial dynamics in the 21st century.

Throughout all of the narratives within my sample, readers are left with the feeling that these stories are particularly damaging because they are dehumanizing. Moreover, this is underscored by the presence of law enforcement. The hegemonic dogma of the American judicial system implies a level of trust between citizens and police. However, these narratives show that this is not the reality for persons of color. Historically, stories of police brutality and benign neglect have shaped relationships between Black communities and
political institutions. These stories of random citizens reiterate the consistent thread of distrust that has been a common account for decades.

The digital narratives under the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack also serve as a static reminder of this issue. They permanently exist in the digital sphere as a reminder of America’s “race problem”. More importantly, the concentrated volume of these stories makes them more impactful. As I discussed in Chapter 1, one of the outcomes of the narrative is the process of transference. Through the use of the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack, people of color were given the opportunity to evoke more than just a passing interest in the ways in which law officials relate to Blacks. There were over 1 million tweets on December 4th alone, providing a space of saturation that was difficult to ignore. This process is critical for Black Lives Matter.

Within my results, I found that approximately 1/6 of the tweets in the sample were compromised by White users. Though they did not construct their own narratives, they engaged in the process of transference through retweets and reblogs of articles that discussed the issues in #AliveWhileBlack. They took the narratives of others, internalized them, and then spread them within the digital world. Other White tweeters used the hashtag to point to issues of institutional racism at a particularly high rate. This result supports the implicit affordances of the digital narrative. White users—who may not be affected by racism on a personal level—were engaging in conversations about the policies and social norms that perpetuate the oppression of Black citizens. Using the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack as a jumping off point, White users explored some of the notions of systemic inequality in a safe space. The necessity of this is integral for BLM. As many activists have discussed, the importance of White allies in this movement cannot be diminished or dismissed. People of all races must mobilize around BLM in order to
maintain its productivity. While the movement is about preserving Black lives, an important aspect of this is making people who are not African American aware of the issues people of color face.

This idea was stressed through one of my final analyses of the hashtag. Going back into my sample, I did a qualitative overview of what people—who were not narrating—were saying. A lot of the responses were shock and sadness. While it may be inconceivable to some that there are individuals who do not know that racism is still a major issue in America, my sample proves otherwise. Furthermore, for those who are aware, a difference exists between knowing and understanding. The narratives within the hashtag displayed the unique qualities of social media: personalization. Social media grants its users the illusion of personal connections that may not exists in the real world. These digital communities work as traditional spaces for interpersonal communication. In short, on Twitter and Tumblr, users often feel that they have a strong and personal connection to someone, even if they have never met. This fact works in favor of BLM. Those that may not engage with issues of systemic racism in their everyday relationships, are now participating in these conversations with people they feel close to based on the norms of social media.

**Content Analysis 2: Digital Mobilization**

The use of the Tumblr page, Ferguson National Response Network to digitally mobilize individuals around BLM was both an interesting look at the functions of a specific platform and the overall success of digital activism. Within my study, I found that the affordances of Tumblr were only used in relation to visuals. Every single post had more than one image and most of them featured activist engaged in some mode of protest. However, I found no correlation between the amount of people who engaged with a post and the types of images used. Rather, my results showed a convergence between the private and the public when
inciting citizens to mobilize. In one of my original hypotheses, I asserted that mobilization would increase with time. The theory behind this was, the more people were made aware of an issue, the more people would be moved to action. What culminated in my results, however, is what I iterated in Chapter 2: The concurrent high profile events motivated people more than their knowledge of BLM. Within my results, digital engagement was significantly higher in periods 2 and 3. These two periods mark the fallout from the deaths of Tamir Rice and the decision of the Ferguson grand jury. It also marks the non-indictment of Daniel Pantaleo for the death of Eric Garner and the murder of Freddie Gray. More importantly, it is the moment that Black Lives Matter was most frequently in the media.

Prior to this, mainstream media covered the Ferguson results as an isolated incident. Periods 2 and 3 were the moments that Black Lives Matter was articulated as a movement. This result implies a number of things relating to mobilization both in the digital sphere and in the real world. The first of which is that mobilization is at its most potent when a movement is new. The second is that mobilization is most powerful when there are numerous voices, from different avenues, discussing a particular issue. In their study, “Beyond the Hashtag”, researchers found that the digital networks surrounding BLM grew exponentially in November and December of 2014. The more immediate networks around BLM and Ferguson were smaller liberal outlets as well as channels that catered to Black audiences. By the conclusion of 2014, the BLM network had expanded to include sites such as the Wall Street Journal and conservative sites like Breitbart.com. This expansion of voices discussing BLM as a movement may be directly ties to the amount of people mobilizing within my sample.

A trope that appeared within my study was the use of public spaces in efforts to
mobilize. Within my study parks, streets, and areas of the public sphere (bridges, squares) were utilized at the highest frequency for protests across the country. The use of public spaces is a common theme within traditional social movements. The employment of these spaces works to garner as much attention as possible and to, ultimately, disrupt the status quo. In my New York City sample, protest in Union Square occurred 4 different times. Union Square represents both a space of high traffic and industry within Manhattan as well as a space that holds cultural capital. Historically—and to a certain extent currently—Union Square is known for its relationship to political protest. From the first assembly of the Civil War to the Labor Day protest to the Earth Day protest of 1970, Union Square has been used as a site for democratic gatherings. In accordance with this concept of traditional spaces of protest, we also saw high frequencies of actions and demonstrations occurring at government entities and schools. The spaces in which we observe events taking place harkens back to the traditional structural components of democratic social movements throughout history.

Another interesting note was an increase in actions with relation to major events within the city. While my results yielded no concrete conclusions about the amount of people mobilizing digitally in particular geographic spaces, I found that when events occurred in specific cities, the amount of protest in these cities increase. For example in New York, we saw only 6 actions in my sample during P1, during P2 this increased to 25. This same result held true for Maryland as well. Within P3—the death of Gray—my sample showed that actions went from 9 to 19. Finally, underscoring my result is lack of action in Missouri. My sample begins in November of 2014, three months after the protests of Ferguson. Therefore, I found exceptionally low numbers across the board for Ferguson throughout all four periods.
When looking at the relationship between Black Lives Matter and the use of the phrase within post, I found a trend that succinctly follows the history of the movement. As I expressed in Chapter 2, during the onset of the movement, BLM was not the uniting force. It represented a separate group dealing with police brutality that had little to do with the work happening in Ferguson. However, by the end of my sample, I found that BLM was used ubiquitously in every single post. The rise of Black Lives Matter within these post is representative of the convergence of a number of events under one umbrella. It symbolizes a conscious move to tie the events of 2014 together and to focus on them as incidents reflecting a larger issue. The use of BLM within these posts also highlights the necessity of movement stabilization. In order to craft a less fragmented collective, activists joined together under one unifying message. This move is reflective of both resource mobilization theory and collective identity. The existence of BLM—the phrase and the organization—gave activists an already crafted platform to unite under and use in when engaging with macro level institutions. The phrase was also picking up traction with activist in the digital sphere (tweeted 100,000 times in the month of October) making it a particularly powerful mobilizing tool.117 Finally, the use of Black Lives Matter helped cement a collective identity for protesters across geographical spaces. In utilizing “BLM” and turning it into a movement, activists were able to highlight the pervasive issue of police brutality across America. Using Black Lives Matter in Los Angeles and in New York City implies not only a sense of unity, but solidifies the idea that the problems of one community are similar to the problems of another community across the country. The binding factor being race.
Conclusion

“We didn’t invent resistance; we didn’t discover injustice. We are in a legacy of struggle.”

-DeRay McKesson

This study presents a look at a small fragment of the mobilization within the Black Lives Matter movement. The social media platform, Twitter, is a powerful tool that was utilized to shift dominant narratives away from secondary interpreters and instead put the power back in the hands of the victims of racial injustice. Twitter was also used to make those who are not directly affected by institutional racism aware of its effect on millions of Black Americans. Ferguson, National Response Network is a primary example of digital mobilization outside of Twitter and Facebook. Through the blog, analysis showed that mobilization is contingent upon time and major events within a movement. The study also proved that traditional organizing methods still hold weight in 2016.

When examining the results of my study, particularly those of content analysis 2, it became clear that mobilization around Black Lives Matter had dissipated at a remarkable speed. The frequency and participation in one the ground action had severely diminished over a few months. When asked about the future of BLM, McKesson explained to me that the change in mobilization was not a reflection of diminished interest, it was a look at a movement shifting towards more sustainable goals that would have a permanent affect on society.

There are always those that focus on the fight rather than the win. Now that we have identified the issues, it is important that we work within the system to change it. Those that say different are not being honest with themselves. The movement has moved past on the street demonstrations. It's now about changing institutions.

—DeRay McKesson
Limitations

Many of the limitations of my study are logistical constraints. Because I did not receive funding for my study, all of my data was open source material, limiting the amount of content I could gather. For Content Analysis 1, for example I was only able to do a study on the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack because it is still searchable within Twitter’s database. However, mapping data based on popularity and real time would have required that I purchase the data from Twitter. Another limitation of my study was time. In order to condense my research into a manageable timeframe, I crafted samples that were less than 200 posts or tweets. However, given more time, I would have liked to explore samples in the thousands. For Content Analysis 1, I believe that more tweets may have made my results more impactful. Additionally, within my sample, I only encountered one dissenter. I do not believe this is representative of those who tweeted under the hashtag, however within my sample that is what I found. When looking at content analysis 2, I would have liked to analyze the posts from every single city across the country. In doing this, I would have been able to gauge mobilization in states that were not as pointedly targeted as New York and Maryland. However, that sample would have been over 5,000 tweets.

Another limitation to my study was geography. While Black Lives Matter does have a strong affiliate chapter in Washington, DC, there are 24 other chapters across the country (and 1 in Toronto). Additionally, some chapters are more active than others (the Bay Area chapter for example). Due to traveling restrictions, I was only able to meet with activists in New York City and Washington, DC, leaving a large group of people out of my study. In mentioning activists, I must also acknowledge that BLM—while very inclusive—is a particularly insular group with regards to the media and the academy. Although, I was familiar with many of the activists in BLM-DMV getting them to agree to do interviews
proved exceptionally hard. Moreover, during these interviews many people were hesitant to talk about their participation in the movement.

**Further Research**

This study elucidates on a number of topics of research that call for further investigation by other scholars. One of the most salient is the rise of the digital narrative through the use of hashtags. Although this analysis specifically focuses on the Twitter hashtag #AliveWhileBlack there are a number of other hashtags relating to socio-cultural phenomenon that focus on the importance of narratology within the digital sphere. One of the cultural spaces where these hashtag narratives often display themselves is through the lens of other marginalized communities. In 2014, the hashtag #WhyIStayed—created in response to the incident regarding Ray Rice and his then fiancé—detailed the stories of women who discussed their decision to stay in abusive relationships.

Another area of research revealed in this study is the relationship between digital mobilization and tangible numbers within live protests and demonstrations. One of the drawbacks and critiques of online mobilization is that it encourages partial participation. One way to fully gauge this, is a quantitative study that looks to see if the amount of engagement with an event online translates to full participation.

Finally, this study opens up the door for more research on the relevance of social media for the Black Lives Matter movement. As I expressed earlier, there has been little scholarship on BLM that looks at the importance of social media in a quantitative and qualitative fashion. I hope that this study functions as a starting point for more in-depth research on the utilization of different platforms, different users, and the overall success in the future.
Notes


5 Williams, Kidada E. They left great marks on me: African American testimonies of racial violence from emancipation to World War I. NYU Press, 2012.


8 Studies done by both the RAND corporation US Defense Department in 1997 examined the role of digital networks in the proliferation of the Zapatista Rebellion in Mexico in 1994. Despite intense government scrutiny, revolutionaries were able to control their own message with the use of digital media (in additional to more traditional forms of communication such as mailing list), Ibid, 5.

9 Ibid 2.


11 Ibid 10.


Ibid 18.


Ibid 23.


Ibid 28.


38 Ibid 15.

39 Ibid 27.


41 Ibid 2.

42 Ibid 2.

43 Ibid 63.


48 Ibid 48.


54 Ibid 56


59 Freelon, Deen Goodwin, Charlton D. McIlwain, and Meredith D. Clark. "Beyond the Hashtags:# Ferguson,# Blacklivesmatter, and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice." Available at SSRN (2016).

60 Shor, F. (2015). "Black lives matter": Constructing a new civil rights and black freedom
http://search.proquest.com/docview/1699259508?accountid=11091

61 Rickford, Russell. "Black Lives Matter Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle." In

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protests-us-cities.

63 Mozone, Ashley. Interview by Tyler Goodridge. Phone Interview. Washington, DC,
March 25, 2016.

64 "President Obama Speaks on Trayvon Martin." The White House. Accessed
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obama-speaks-trayvon-martin#transcript.

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66 Ibid 63.

black-wom_b_6630968.html.

Awareness Within Black Lives Matter” Georgetown University. April 25, 2016.

69 Powell, Kashif Jerome. "Making# BlackLivesMatter Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and
the Specters of Black Life—Toward a Hauntology of Blackness." Cultural Studies↔

70 Friedersdorf, Conon. "Eric Garner and the NYPD's History of Deadly Chokeholds." The
killing-of-eric-garner/383413/.

71 Sanburn, Josh. "Eric Garner Witness Ramsey Orta Has Regrets One Year Later." 

72 Bloom, Deborah & Imam, Jareen. "New York Man Dies After Chokehold by Police 
chokehold-death/.

73 Ibid 77.
Although the DOJ’s report is cited within the text, the report came under harsh criticism from many. Within the report many eyewitnesses that reported on the misdeeds of Wilson were deemed unreliable. In addition, the report has been labeled as explicitly bias against Michael Brown.

Ibid 79.


Ibid 63.


John Crawford was a young man shoot to death by police officers in Beavercreek, Ohio in August of 2014. Crawford was accosted by police officers in a Beavercreek area Walmart. Similar to Tamir Rice, Crawford was shot after police officers mistakenly believed that Crawford was in possession of a gun. It turned out to be a BB gun. Aiyana Jones was a 7-year old girl murdered by police officers in Detroit, Michigan. While searching for a resident of Aiyana’s home (an uncle who was a suspected drug dealer) police shot the young girl, killing her instantaneously. In both cases, the police officers involved were not convicted of any crime relating to their deaths.


Ibid 63.


Ibid 63.


Ibid 63.


Ibid 109.

For all definitions used in coding, I provided coders with working definitions of each phrase. These definitions are included in the glossary (see Appendix 2).

While this was presented in PowerPoint form for my coders, the guidelines and working definitions for each of these ideas are in Appendix 2 and the Glossary, respectively.
I compiled the data on March 4, 2016. My coders did not code until April 4, 2016. Within that timeframe, retweets and likes may have increased.

Tumblr has consistently been defined as a microblogging site in popular literature; however, I would argue that Tumblr has the ability and capacity to perform the same mechanisms as a full-scale blogging site such as Wordpress. The site actually falls somewhere between microblogging and full blogging. While much of the content is in real-time and quickly disseminated and integrated within the “Tumblrsphere”, there is also an increased presence of long-form writing and discussions on the site.


I decided to compile the posts into specific periods that denote big moments within the movement. This framework was inspired by the period framework used in Freelon et. Al study.

In July 2015, Sandra Bland was arrested by Waller County police in Texas. Bland’s unlawful arrest was punctuated when see was found dead in her holding cell. Though Bland’s death was ruled a suicide, many believe she was injured or murdered while in custody.

Ibid 63.


Ibid 63.
Appendix A: Code Book

Content Analysis 1 Coding Scheme

Q1: Is There A Narrative Within The Tweet?
1. Yes
2. No

Q2: If Yes, Is The Narrative Positive, Negative, Or Neutral?
1. Yes
2. No

Q3: If No, What Is The Tweet?
1. Link to Outside Material
2. Joke
3. Commentary on the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack and/or #CrimingWhileWhite
4. Support For The hashtag #AliveWhileBlack
5. Critique Of The Hashtag #AliveWhileBlack
6. Critique Of Racism (generally)
7. Reflection On A Number Of Incidents
8. Other

Q4: What Is The Topic Of The Tweet?
1. Communities & Neighborhoods
2. Law Enforcement
3. Gender/Sexuality
4. Personal Relationships
5. Interracial Disputes
6. Education/School
7. Workplace
8. Casual Racism
9. Institutional Racism
10. Other

Q5: Can You Identify The Race Of The Tweeter?
1. Yes
2. No

Q6: If Yes, What Is There Race?
1. Black
2. White
3. Hispanic
4. Asian
5. Other
6. Not Applicable
**Coding Instructions: Content Analysis 1**

1. For Content Analysis 1, you will be looking at the first 5 cases (above the horizontal yellow line) in your spreadsheet. For each case, you will click on the link in Column B and answer the questions beginning with C1Q1. THE LAST QUESTION IS C1Q8. These are the questions that come before the vertical yellow bracket.

2. For these questions, we will be examining the concept of a narrative.
   a. A narrative—for the purposes of this study—is any articulation of an experience or story that follows that basic structural components of storytelling.
   b. This includes:
      i. Actors
      ii. Scene
      iii. Plot

3. For tweets you mark “YES” please answer Q2: Is This Narrative Positive, Negative, or Neutral?

4. For tweets marked “NO” please answer Q3: What Is The Tweet? For this question, please look over your options carefully and pick the best response.

5. Other Questions & Categories: The next question you will answer is regarding the topic. For this question, all coders will look at the entire tweet and choose the overarching topic of the text.
   a. Topic Of The Tweet
      i. Law Enforcement: incidents involving relating to police (arrests, tickets, etc)
      ii. Communities & Neighborhoods: stories that discuss small communities and neighborhoods
      iii. Gender & Sexuality: stories in which a person’s gender or sexuality plays a significant role in the plot; i.e. the incident documented is largely contingent up the person’s sex or sexual identification
      iv. Personal Relationships: familial ties, romantic relationships, friendships
      v. Interracial Disputes: disputes that occur between two people of a different race and focus primarily on this as the focal point of the tweet
      vi. Education/School: stories that place and focus on interactions in a school setting
      vii. Workplace: Stories that take place and focus on workplace interactions
      viii. Casual Racism: Racism that is benign and has no larger consequence outside of the interaction between the “characters”
      ix. Institutional Racism: incidents that discuss larger systemic issues such as mass incarceration, laws and policies, rules and regulations

6. Your final questions will focus on Race.
   a. You will be asked if you can identify the race of the tweeter.
      i. This will be done ONLY through their avatar, not through the content
within the tweet. If they do not have an avatar picture, do not mark a race. DO NOT use textual content to determine race.

b. If you can gauge the person’s race, please mark down what race they are in the next category. USE YOUR BEST JUDGEMENT.

Content Analysis 2 Coding Scheme

Metrics

M1: Notes (Mobilization)
A: 20-40
B: 41-60
C: 61-80
D: 81-100
E: 101-120
F: 121-140
G: 141 – 160
H: 161-180
I: 180 – 200
J: 200 – 300
K: 300 – 400
L: 400 – 500
M: 500+

M2: Period
1. Period 1
2. Period 2
3. Period 3
4. Period 4

M3: State/City
1. NYC
2. Missouri
3. Maryland
4. Ohio

Categorical Questions

Q1: Does The Flyer for The Event Include A Visual?
1. Yes
2. No

Q1A: Image Of Activists?
1. Yes
2. No

Q1B: Image Of Victim/Victim’s Family?
1. Yes
2. No

Q1C: Representational Art?
1. Yes
2. No

Q1D: Stock Images?
1. Yes
2. No

Q1E: City/State?
1. Yes
2. No

Q2: Does The Post Include the Words “Black Lives Matter” In The Visual, Text, or Hashtag?
1. Yes
2. No

Q5: Are There Any Other Slogans Affiliated with Black Lives Matter Included In The Post?
1. Hands Up Don’t Shoot
2. I Can’t Breathe
3. Shut It Down
4. Blackout Black Friday (particular movement)
5. Say Her Name
6. No Slogans

Q6: Does The Flyer List Any Demands?
1. Yes
2. No

Q7) What Type of Event Is It?
1. Town Hall/Community Meetings
2. Protests/Demonstration
3. Sit-ins
4. Marches
5. Walkouts/Boycott
6. Spiritual and Emotional Healing Event
7. Educational events relating to the history of BLM or tactics being implemented by protesters
8. Debates/Panels
9. Artistic/Cultural Events
10. Other
Q8: Where Is the Event Being Held?
1. Government Building Entity
2. Public Spaces (Park, Squares, Specific Streets)
3. Corporate & Private Entities (Walmart, Pepsi Factory)
4. Church or Religious Site
5. Community Center
6. Private Home
7. Schools & Universities
8. Other

Coding Instructions for Content Analysis 2
1. For Content Analysis 2 you will examine 7-8 posts from the Tumblr blog, Ferguson National Response Network. You will be exploring both textual and visual evidence.

2. Visuals Your first question will ask you if there are visuals within your posts. For those, that you mark “YES”, please answer the next 5 yes or no questions.

3. For the next 5 questions you are asked if the posts, includes the following: images of activists, images of victims/victim’s family, representational art, stock images, and images of the city or state. For C2, you will be asked if your post has visuals. Most of the post have two visuals, however you will be coding for them as ONE CASE. Many of the visuals include more than one of the mentioned elements, therefore mark “Yes” if it is present in all visuals in the post, or “No” If it is not present in any.
   a. Images of Activists: any image of individuals participating in political protest
   b. Images of the Victim or victim’s family: This includes posed pictures, animations, or screen shots of the victim or the victim’s family
   c. Representational Art: Any image that specifically relates to the causes of BLM, i.e. a man holding his hands in the air (Hands Up, Don’t Shoot) or a black power fist (black solidarity).
   d. Stock Image: An image used that does not evoke any specific context relating to the cause i.e. a man in a hat.
   e. Image of City/State: images that include any visual indicative of the city the event is taking place. For example, a skyline of NYC or a picture of the outline of the state. These can be literal or animated images.

4. Q2: Inclusion of Black Lives Matter
   a. Does the phrase “Black Lives Matter” appear anywhere in the post? This includes the visual, the text, and/or the hashtags at the bottom of the post.

5. Q3: Are there any other phrases affiliated with BLM within the post?
   a. Do any other phrases associated with BLM appear anywhere in the post? This includes visual, text, or hashtags at the bottom of the post.

6. Q4: Demands
a. Is there an inclusion of any carefully articulated demands? This can be extensive “We want x and y to change Policy A” or it can be simple: “We will not leave x building until the mayor answers questions about Garner’s murder”

7. Q5: Type of Event: What type of event is the action?
   a. Town Hall/Community Meetings
   b. Protests: stationary demonstrations
   c. Sit-ins: infiltration of a place for a set amount of time
   d. Marches
   e. Walkouts/Boycott: the refusal to patronize a place or entity
   f. Spiritual and Emotional Healing Event: includes vigils and funerals
   g. Educational events relating to the history of BLM or tactics being implemented by protesters
   h. Debates/Panel
   i. Artistic/Cultural Events

8. Q6: Where Is The Event Being Held?
   a. Government Building Entity: city hall, police precincts, courthouse, public housing
   b. Public Spaces: Park, Squares, Specific Streets
   c. Corporate & Private Entities: factories, stores, major offices
   d. Church or Religious Site: churches, mosque, temple
   e. Community Center
   f. Private Home
   g. Schools & Universities
### Appendix B: SPSS Data

#### Chart I: Frequency – Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is There A Narrative?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Chart II: Crosstab - Relationship Between Narratives & Topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative?</th>
<th>Communities &amp; Neighborhoods</th>
<th>Law Enforcement</th>
<th>Gender &amp; Sexuality</th>
<th>Personal Relationships</th>
<th>Interracial Disputes</th>
<th>Education &amp; School</th>
<th>Casual Racism</th>
<th>Institutional Racism</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \chi^2 = 46.425 \quad df: 8 \quad p = 0.000 \]
Chart III: Crosstab – Relationship Between Race and Narratives

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>No Race</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Asian</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Narrative</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Value: 15.095<sup>a</sup>  df: 3  P= 0.002
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narratives</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link to Outside Material</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joke</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary on the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack and/or #CrimingWhileWhite</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>74.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support of the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3.0</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique of the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique of Racism (generally)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection On A Number of Incidents</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Non-Narrative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Race</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Value: 15.095  
df: 3  
P= 0.002
Chart VI: Frequency – Types Of Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Townhall/Community Meeting</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest/Demonstration</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sit-ins</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marches</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walkout/Boycott</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual and Emotional Healing Events</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Event</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artistic/Cultural Event</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chart VII: Frequency – Visuals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Activists</th>
<th>Victims/Victims Family</th>
<th>Representational Art</th>
<th>Stock Images</th>
<th>City/State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>1 (.7%)</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
<td>1 (.7%)</td>
<td>1 (.7%)</td>
<td>1 (.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>117 (78%)</td>
<td>31 (20.7%)</td>
<td>44 (29.3%)</td>
<td>10 (6.7%)</td>
<td>19 (12.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart VIII: Relationship of Use Of BLM & Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Period 1</th>
<th>Period 2</th>
<th>Period 3</th>
<th>Period 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Value: 78.622  df = 3  p = .000
Chart IX: Crosstab – Relationship Between State & Number of Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Period 1</th>
<th>Period 2</th>
<th>Period 3</th>
<th>Period 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NYC</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Value: 26.549   df: 9   p = .002
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Period 1</th>
<th>Period 2</th>
<th>Period 3</th>
<th>Period 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (20-40)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (41-60)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (61-80)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D (81-100)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E (101-120)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (121-140)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G (141-160)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H (161-180)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I (181-200)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J (201-300)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K (301-400)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L (401-500)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M (500+)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>150</td>
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Value: 71.950  df: 36  p = .000
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<th>Location</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government Entity</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Space</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate or Private Entity</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church or Place of Worship</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Center</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Home</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
References


91


53. Williams, Kidada E. *They left great marks on me: African American testimonies of racial violence from emancipation to World War I*. NYU Press, 2012.
