

Black Lives Do Matter

Jeff Cunningham

In this essay, I'm going to explain why I think the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is a good thing. It keeps the police in check and reminds them they are not above the law. I also think there needs to be a voice out there to stand up for those who have been wrongfully murdered by the police. Lastly, I think the BLM movement might, like other mass movements in the past, have enough power to change things for the better.

Police Accountability

The police have always seemed to me like they think they are above the law. And I am not the only one who thinks this. A *USA Today* poll found that "Americans by 2-to-1 say police departments don't do a good job in holding officers accountable for misconduct."¹ A researcher quoted in the *Wall Street Journal* backs up this perception. He says, "It's very rare that an officer gets charged with a homicide offense resulting from their on-duty conduct even though people are killed on a fairly regular basis."² As everyday citizens, we don't have much control; that's why we need movements like Black Lives Matter. The police will always think



they are all powerful until we stand up together and demand that they be held accountable.

Many Voices More Powerful than One

One person's voice usually doesn't hold much weight, but when people unite many voices into one, they have more power. For example, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where police have a history of killing unarmed victims, people in the commu-

Black Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter

Why does the Black Lives Matter movement emphasize *black* lives instead of *all* lives? Because, according to their website, "When Black people get free, everybody gets free. #BlackLivesMatter doesn't mean your life isn't important—it means that Black lives, which are seen as without value within White supremacy, are important to your liberation... This is why we call on Black people and our allies to take up the call that Black lives matter. We're not saying Black lives are more important than other lives, or that other lives are not criminalized and oppressed in various ways. We remain in active solidarity with all oppressed people who are fighting for their liberation and we know that our destinies are intertwined."

– from <blacklivesmatter.com>



What is the cartoonist saying in this cartoon? After studying the cartoon and reading the article and the box on p. 46, what do you think about the phrase “black lives matter”? (Used with permission from Kris Straub <chainsawsuit.com>.)

nity protested and pressured the Department of Justice (DOJ) to investigate the police department.³ By raising their voices together as one, they convinced the DOJ to investigate, and the DOJ found that the Albuquerque Police Department fostered a “culture that emphasizes force and complete submission over safety.”⁴ That’s why movements like Black Lives Matter are so important. Like the people in Albuquerque, they help get justice for those wrongfully murdered and harmed by police.

Organizing Works!

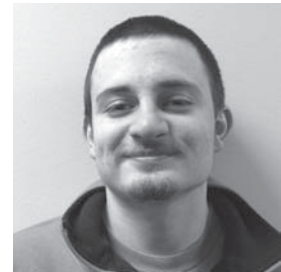
Think back to all the gains that groups of people have won when they united with one voice: the abolition of slavery, the women’s rights movement, and the fight for the equality of all people! When people fight for something together, they eventually put enough pressure on the right people. When that happens, either the government will make new legislation, or the court will stop protecting crooked public servants who believe they are above the law.

My hope is that, one of these days, real justice will be served to everyone who needs it. That will only happen through movements like the Black Lives Matter. It takes the voices of many standing together and protesting in a legal and nonviolent way. So far, the Black Lives Matter movement is doing just that.

Endnotes

1. <www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/08/25/usa-today-pew-poll-police-tactics-military-equipment/14561633/>
2. <www.wsj.com/articles/police-rarely-criminally-charged-for-on-duty-shootings-1416874955>
3. <www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-launches-investigation-albuquerque-nm-police-department-s-use-force>
4. <www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/02/son-deceased>

Jeff Cunningham is a student at North Kansas City Schools in Kansas City, MO. He has successfully finished three of the five sections of the HiSET exam. He is looking forward to taking the last two portions of the test in the near future.



Examine the Structure

What does the author say he wants to accomplish in this essay?

Break down this article into an outline. List his three main arguments and the details he uses to support those arguments.

Critique it! How well does the author make his case? How could he improve it?