# The Importance of Intersectionality in Evaluating the Surveillance and Protest Politics of the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL)

Shaneda L. Destine

<a>INTRODUCTION

> Seeing the way the Trump administration began rolling in, I think folks began to calculate the different political terrain that we were in and like "yo, some of the risks we've been taken ain't gone be the same." You know we began seeing—we saw it in Georgia, I think we saw it in Tennessee, and we saw it in North Carolina where they began to—these red states began passing like, pretty much, the anti-protest laws or whatever, like domestic terrorist laws and stuff. And so we knew that different states would be higher so when we decided to pull the trigger on direct action and turn up, we were like, "we damn sure we gone make sure it's connected to a sophisticated strategy." (Tammy, a 35-year-old, queer organizer in Atlanta, GA)

> I tear up every time…I just remember I had to go. I had to go. I was not organizing in a way that was sustainable for me. I was checking under my car every day, every time I got in my car. I was getting death threats. I had been kidnapped by the police—I just wasn't taking care of myself. And then on top of that, I had come out [out of the closet as queer] and people— I mean you know niggas in my organization tried to stage a coup. (Elle, a 25-year-old, queer cultural strategist in Atlanta, GA)

With the recent rebellions spreading across the globe in response to the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, KY, it is imperative that we foreground Black women and queer people at the helm of the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) since its founding in 2013. Since 2016, I have interviewed 45 Black women and queer folks in the Movement for Black Lives who faced the political and socially repressive policies of surveillance during Trump's presidential campaign and presidency. Focusing on Black women and queer folks in the Movement for Black Lives illuminates the need for intersectional politics that challenge patriarchy and homophobia, which is often divisive to the movement. Also, the lack of intersectional politics leaves room for state actors to incite tensions—as seen in

surveillance programs of Black social movements in the 1960s. In this paper, I will utilize intersectionality to illuminate three key problems: white (back-)lash, protest politics and surveillance, and internal homophobia and patriarchy, all of which are intensified by social apathy to Black uprisings by Trump's administration and his followers. For the purposes of this paper, whitelash is defined as the backlash of whiteness in response to Black Lives Matter's (BLM) being perceived as an impending threat to more than 500 years of European cis-heteropatriarchy hegemony. First, this research in part explores intensified authoritative policies that disrupt progress for the movement to include *all* Black lives. Second, this research is an exploration of internal challenges of patriarchy and queer antagonisms, which limit progress of the movement. This study is an overview of the movement's struggles particular to the South over a 3-year period but suggests problems that can stifle this global struggle for equity.

<a>THE MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES

Since 2013, the intersectional movement of Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the overall Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) have taken to the street with youthful ambition about the limitless opportunities for racial justice and all Black people in America (Khan-Cullors & bandele, 2018). The founders of Black Lives Matter[1]—Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Khan-Cullors—have a goal to include all Black people. The founders of BLM commenced this work following the non-indictment of George Zimmerman in 2013, after he killed Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old Black boy walking home from the store in Sanford, Florida (Taylor, 2016).

[1] BLM is a Black liberation global network that developed in 2013 and expanded into M4BL in 2016 to include more grassroots organizations.

The “Ferguson Uprisings” followed in 2014 after the non-indictment of Officer Darren Wilson, after he killed Mike Brown in Ferguson, MO (Hill, 2016). Then, in 2015, the “Baltimore Uprisings” followed after officers killed Freddy Gray in Baltimore, MD. A few years later, we are witnessing an uprising in Minneapolis, MN, and across the world that is exposed to heightened surveillance and media blackouts.

This movement was birthed in response to the killings of Black boys, such as these, but proved more intersectional when its platform—*A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, & Justice* (2016)—was released in 2016 to include all oppressed people. This report was authored by more than 26 chapters of Black Lives Matter (even one in Toronto, Canada) and extended to 50 or more grassroots organizations that, in order to systemically change the lives of working people, had been building movements around criminal justice, environmental justice, health care, education, etc. The report reads,

> While this platform is focused on domestic policies, we know that patriarchy, exploitative capitalism, militarism, and white supremacy know no borders. We stand in solidarity with our international family against the ravages of global capitalism and anti-Black racism, human-made climate change, war, and exploitation. We also stand with descendants of African people all over the world in an ongoing call and struggle for reparations for the historic and continuing harms of colonialism and slavery. We also recognize and honor the rights and struggle of our Indigenous family for land and self-determination. (The Movement for Black Lives, 2016, p. 4).

Legal scholar, Amna Akbar (2018) states,

> The Vision [of the M4BL] identifies policing as a historical and violent force in Black communities, underpinning a system of racial capitalism and limiting the possibilities of Black life. As such, policing as we now know it cannot be fixed. Thus, the Vision's reimagination of policing—rooted in Black history and Black intellectual traditions—transforms mainstream approaches to reform (p. 406).

These M4BL activists organized based on racial capitalism, the root of disenfranchisement. Their demands outline goals to systemically change the lives of Black poor and working people—particularly women and queer ones—in education, healthcare, criminal justice, etc. As Akbar (2018) states, the demands were rooted in a broader understanding of the need to place people's lives over capital gain, and radical change over reform. However, the state's response was violent repressive policies and policing on domestic soil.

<a>IMPORTANCE OF INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES

> Black women have consistently played a leadership role in struggles against state violence—from the Underground Railroad to the anti-lynching movement to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements to the current Black Lives Matter movement—yet the forms of victimization they face at the hands of police are consistently left out of social movement demands. Black women leaders are often asked to speak only about their fears of losing their sons, brothers, partners, and comrades. Yet as the tragedies that have befallen many Black women who have died at the hands of the police reveal, Black women and girls also face real risks of lethal police violence, which must be contested along with those facing Black men and boys. (Crenshaw et al., 2015)

The omission of Black women, queer folks, and girls as an essential site of surveillance and police killings in the Movement for Black Lives has been a major focus of intersectional scholars (Crenshaw, 2019; Ransby, 2018; Sutherland, 2017). The constant imagery of lifeless Black male bodies circulating on social media fosters the public's epistemology concerning police killings of "deserving" Black male victims (Sutherland, 2017). This epistemology is incentivized by clicks and views for outlets sharing these images, and it denotes that Black men are the only victims, without contextualizing the myriad ways that the state violates poor, Black women and queer folks (Ritchie, 2017; Sutherland, 2017). This discourse is rooted in patriarchy, homophobia, and transphobia and is transmuted through the movement politics that uplifts male victimization, as well as leadership, in an intersectional movement (Carruthers, 2018; Destine, 2019).

"Black women are about three times as likely as all women to be killed by police (Crenshaw, 2019; *Fatal Interactions with Police Study*, 2017). However, without any federal or local statistics or accountability for this violence, the public tends to center only Black men killed by police even though more people are affected(Crenshaw et al., 2015; Kelley, 2016). Intersectional legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw (2015) demonstrates how public discourse obfuscates Black women and femmes' experiences with state violence, as well as their organizing capacity and contributions to M4BL. For women and queer folks in the movement, this treatment looked like a culture of patriarchy, ageism, homophobia, and transphobia that had existed in movements throughout time. Black feminists (Collins, 2002; Davis, 2011) have long outlined how past liberation movements for Black people have embodied a culture of patriarchy that has degraded women's voices—a tension that state actors can incite to limit movement

effectiveness. Black women's experiences are imperative for a more inclusive approach to liberation (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Destine, 2019; Ransby, 2018). The social movement space must mirror the equality for which activists fight.

M4BL signals a turning point for generations of Black women, with three Black women—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, and Opal Tometi—who stand at the helm of Black Lives Matter, yet, like movements prior, they are labeled terrorists and anti-American (Khan-Cullors & bandele, 2018). In the past, these sorts of challenges left Black women to create organizations at the margins—e.g., the National Association of Colored Women or National Council of Negro Women—or to organize from behind the scenes in Black male-led and White women-led organizations of the early to mid-20th century (Cooper, 2017). These women aided in organizing against state violence and fighting for civil rights for Black women, men, and children. Their causes ranged from anti-lynching to reform and social services for their community (Hooks, 2015). In addition to the surveillance and threats these Black women faced by white mobs, they could not assure their voice and concerns would be included in the Black-led organizations due to patriarchy, or white women-led organizations due to white supremacy and state influence (Davis, 2011; Hooks, 2015; Ransby, 2003).

As I have written elsewhere, "Political education is integral to maintaining movement momentum, strategizing and building a broad-based movement that is anti-capitalist and has transformative goals" (Destine, 2019). Intersectional theory gives us a lens for outlining how authoritarian policies, intra-movement conflict, and whitelash thwarts a burgeoning movement's effectiveness for all oppressed people (Destine, 2020). Still, there are many challenges to achieving a collective understanding of the plight of the global working people across race,

ethnicity, and nationality. However, intersectional scholars outline how building a collective understanding of state's policies, protest politics, surveillance, sexism, and homophobia can aid in reducing divides amongst activists (A. Davis, 2016; Destine, 2019, 2020). This research will outline the state's influence on the Movement for Black Lives, Trump's surveillance policies, and the internal politics of sexism and homophobia that complicate movements intersectional goals.

<a>INTERSECTIONAL ACTIVISM

As a masculine Black sociologist and activist who lived in the Maryland, District of Columbia, and Virginia area for five years as a graduate student, I approached the Black activist community from a unique perspective. My established connections with activist networks at protests, events, and fellowship granted me access to participants. This research had become more than inquiry to me; it was a way to highlight the voices I had heard most prominently at protests, though silenced on corporate media platforms. I recruited respondents for this study through university listservs, activist networks, and activist events.

I conducted forty-five in-depth interviews, using a semi-structured interview schedule, between September 2016 and August 2019 at universities and political organizations in College Park, Maryland; Washington, DC; Atlanta, GA; and Knoxville, TN (Daniel, 2012; Sobo, 2016). Participants were predominantly between the ages of 18 and 40 years old, religiously affiliated, college-educated, and from more than 14 organizations. These socio-demographics may have affected the findings, particularly the participants' developed analysis on the movement's challenges and their keen insight into political repression evident in their state and organization. To maintain confidentiality, respondents chose pseudonyms for this study.

The analysis of interview transcripts was inductive and focused on the identification of patterns in the data using thematic codes in NVIVO 11; the analysis proceeded after I outlined reoccurring themes by re-reading the interviews and seeking reviews from colleagues (Gibbs, 2008). I reexamined every transcript to see whether themes and categories applied to all other data. Overall, I remained critical and open-minded during the fieldwork process and analysis.

<a>BLACK WOMEN ACTIVISTS IN THE MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES

The findings presented here were in line with the questioning without too many surprising themes. The most persistent themes were (1) The whitelash of Trump's Presidency, (2) Protest politics and State Surveillance, and (3) Sexism and Homophobia.

<b>**The Whitelash of Trump's Presidency**

This chapter comes out of a larger project where participants were asked whether the election of Donald Trump had shifted their work. Many believed that Trump's election just signaled what they had already known about the white supremacist history of America. It showed people the anger of white people in the United States and their sentiments toward the Movement for Black Lives and Barack Obama's presidency. Trump's campaign of cis-heteropatriarchal, white supremacist ideology consisted of a platform for the deportation of Brown immigrants, the return of working-class white industry jobs, and the questioning of the first Black U.S. President's birthplace (Coates, 2017). Trump implemented federal policy that institutionalized a whitelash by also committing to decreasing oversight of police and strengthening military capacity through funding, which disproportionately affected Black queer women and young activists. Those who voted for Trump were predominantly white and

validated this rhetoric and practice (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Coates, 2017; Destine, 2019). Because of the threat of prison or other forms of political repression, Black queer women activists had to rethink how they positioned themselves. Tammy, a 35-year-old queer organizer in Atlanta, GA, explains how protesting and organizing had to shift in response to the Trump administration's policies. Black queer women activists had to rethink how they positioned themselves because of the threat of prison or other forms of political repression:

> Seeing the way the Trump administration began rolling in. I think folks began to calculate the different political terrain that we were in and like "yo, some of the risks we've been taken ain't gone be the same." You know we began seeing—we saw it in Georgia, I think we saw it in Tennessee, and we saw it in North Carolina where they began to—these red states began passing like the pretty much the anti-protest laws or whatever, like domestic terrorist laws and stuff. And so we knew that different states would be higher so when we decided to pull the trigger on direct action and turn up, we were like, "we damn sure we gone make sure it's connected to a sophisticated strategy" because, you know, I feel like we've seen some political prisoners, little homie Josh [a protestor and political prisoner] in Ferguson as one example. But we—And I still feel that we have not yet seen the slew of folk who would be caught up because of that. And again, that's not for us to be timid about the streets but it's also for us to be—you know, have some discernment and good risk-taking around what we do and why we do. And I think, you know, in other parts of where SONG [Southerners on New Ground] does work, you know the political threats are different and it's nuanced. But yeah, I think 2016 is when we getting to see a shift for sure, for sure.

Tammy explains the state and federal laws that repressed activists' work and made them shift to what seemed less publicly visible work for a moment. She discussed an activist in Ferguson, MO, who had already been targeted by the "Black Identity Extremist" program initiated by the FBI, and she recognized that there was more repression that might not even be revealed to the movement right now. This FBI program was corroborated by official documents leaked to the public in 2019, showing that the FBI was engaged in an authoritarian whitelash against political mobilizations of young Black activists most affected by the intensification of a racialized carceral state (ACLU, 2019). Tammy explains this whitelash of Trump's laws and policies to incarcerate activists. Threatening incarceration and state repression, these surveillance tactics and anti-terrorism laws affected the momentum of protest and visible movement work.

Like Tammy, Ella discusses the police reaction after the Baltimore Uprising, in response to Freddy Gray's killing by the police in 2015, on the cusp of the 2016 presidential campaign season. Ella outlines how the uprisings fueled more police funding and less accountability by local politicians, particularly the police commissioner:

> So they weren't arresting people. They weren't intervening. They weren't doing anything. So that—and it was just kind of like a stalemate. It was a purposeful stalemate, almost like a retaliation from police officers to say, "If you don't want us to police, then we won't." And there was some backlash as a result. You also had—directly after the uprising, you had the abundance of like over-policing. There were so many people, young people who were wrongly arrested, who were just kinda gathered up, swept up in the midst of any kind of protest, in the midst of any kind of public demonstration. Just like anything. Dirt-bike boys were rounded up and harassed so much so that like there was

> a—the City Hall shutdown was a result of young people petitioning the new police commissioner being voted in because he was responsible for like the way the please officers were acting. It was a top-down kind of order, and he was not in support of, you know, treating citizens of Baltimore with respect despite the Freddie Gray moment. I think now, you know, there's still just a huge level of distrust. I think that you know the murders in Baltimore is just potentially at an all-time high. And I think that funding for police officers is increasing, but the accountability is not.

Ella describes explains police's response as a whitelash, to the "Baltimore Uprising." Instead of moving towards abolition policies and/or more police accountability, police in Baltimore became more apathetic to Black pain. This sort of whitelash is institutionalized in Baltimore's police funding and support—and it negatively impacts the lives of young protesters and political activists in Baltimore.

As Ella discusses the aftermath of the Baltimore Uprising, Rose—a 35-year-old, heterosexual educator in Maryland—builds on Ella's narrative about the police response by including how it is part of an institutional whitelash of police violence that affects Black girls. Rose describes a recent case of a young girl who took a doll from a dollar store in Florida and whose parents were violently arrested at gunpoint as a result. She connects this to veterans who, without any regard for Black children, mobilize as police in Black neighborhoods across the United States:

> So, you got these hateful ass white people who couldn't wait to go to war after 9/11 to kill some [expletive]. And then now they back, and they're patrolling our streets and they literally acting like they in a war zone. That man [police in FL], the way he acted, I was

> like he acting like he is in Iraq and … I say that to also say those folks in Iraq don't deserve that. But now they're here, PTSD, systemic white supremacy ideals, and now they policing our neighborhoods.

Here, Rose links the carceral state to the military industrial complex, both fueled by the occupation and killing of Black and Brown bodies, particularly Black girls (A. Davis, 2016). Veterans returning with militarized weapons and ideology fell heavily on the most vulnerable communities. Also, she outlines how some of the racist sentiments that fueled the veterans' imperialist endeavors in Iraq spilled over to their occupation of Black communities. This is how war abroad spews over into marginalized communities. Love, a 41-year-old, gay organizer in Atlanta, explains how Trump's military policy and immigration crackdown are hurting soldiers and marginalized people. Love fears that Trump's policies, potentially fostering a despotic, non-democratic era for America, might ultimately lead to more white violence:

> And our bigger threat now, is Trump. When he sit there and ban Black men for being in the Army who standing up on the front lines and you tell 'em "you can't fight." Now he making laws for soldiers overseas fighting the war and they having children, they not part of America. He playing a big role of a dictator. And I—me and my family and couple of friends [inaudible] our worst fear if he gets voted out in 2020 next year and he say, "I'm not leaving," then the White nationalists, white supremacists will rise in the streets.

Though this interview was recorded before the events of January 6, 2021, when Trump supporters stormed the Capitol, Love brings up similar fears due to Trump's policies with the last line of his quote.

On the other hand, Jah—a 30-year-old, queer educator in Washington, DC—explains how Trump's election united different marginalized groups to fight back and helped to illuminate intersectional issues:

> And then even just Trump being elected in general was like a slap in the face and that slap really did wake some people up and it's like, "Oh shit, I can't afford to just sit back and wait for it to hit my doorstep. I need to be advocating on behalf of these people now so that when they come for me, I have people who are going to advocate on my behalf or I've been ready—I've been preparing for this by putting myself in a position to develop language and tools around how to fight back against these systems."

Echoing Jah's point, Joy, a 22-year-old, queer organizer in Atlanta, explains how Trump's policies have made her more aware of the issues of other vulnerable marginalized groups and have affected lives fundamentally.

> Yeah, I think this will speak to my privilege as someone who's like college-educated, a natural born citizen, and has class privilege. Like it felt like the world was gonna like fall apart, but then it didn't. But that's because I know a lot of documented people and I know a lot of people have access to higher education. That's not to say that the people in my circle who are trans, who are undocumented, who are relying on institutions like WIC and EBT, their worlds weren't radically shifted, but I can see that my personal life like was like—there was a frustration and like a disappointment and a disgust, but like none of my material conditions changed. And that is speaking to extreme privilege because so

many people's access to health care has changed, job security has changed, their ability to provide food for their families has changed.

Tammy, Rose, Love, Jah, and Joy outline here what Coates (2017) describes as white supremacy's response to a Black president and a movement that centered Black lives and questioned the functionality of policing. Though participants were clear that the history of cis, heteropatriarchal white supremacy did not begin with Trump's administration, they were also detailed in how it shifted their work, community, and the most vulnerable among them. They understood the nuance of policy across red states, and that its effect on their movement internally and externally would be one that they could not completely assess as policies across red states, but was important to outline the apparent and deliberate challenges. They also brought forth how the politics of war, including immigration, had become a concern of their movement, due to how it affected other marginalized groups, as well as militarized police and veterans entering their communities in police uniforms (A. Davis, 2016; Roberts, 2014).

<b>**Protest Politics and State Surveillance**

In light of whitelash and state surveillance, participants were asked about the importance of electoral politics and grassroots organizing for M4BL, and the ways in which they deem these strategies most successful in the face of authoritative policies. Many discussed the need for all forms of action, but a lot of the participants denounced centering voting or talking to political leaders as their work, when it did not yield tangible freedoms for the most vulnerable in their community. In the face of such barriers as voting privileges, gerrymandering, the influence of the Electoral College, and the history of apathy towards Black citizens for felons and undocumented people, civic engagement (or neo-liberal policy) didn't seem like the most viable option. Instead,

activists took an intersectional approach—decentering voting or supporting politicians as liberatory—because activists felt these foci limited their overall effect in marginalized communities, confronted with daily surveillance and authoritative policies.

Activists also emphasized how police repression and Black male provocateurs in the movement can surveil and disenfranchise movements. Surveillance tactics were seen as an insidious form of whitelash to the progress of a burgeoning movement. Elle, a 25-year-old, queer cultural strategist in Atlanta, explains this whitelash here:

> It was a couple organizers from around the country. Hillary's team called us all and brought us all up to DC and, you know, sat down with us to hear our qualms and to learn more and to take pictures. And I went because I thought some real shit could happen. And yeah, nah. Uhn-uhn. I think that Black folks, we have to stop zooming in on voting as a serious solution for anything. I think it is a time-sensitive strategy. But like right now our undocumented siblings are living in crisis, our Muslim siblings, especially Black Muslims and Black undocumented folks, living in crisis. Black folks living in crisis because of the President sitting in office. We've also never had a president who's been quite a fascist as much as this one, so I don't think that people really understood how bad it could get. I didn't understand how bad it could get.

Elle believed that leaders and organizers should better spend their time on strategies outside of discussions with political leaders and voter mobilization because neither of these strategies have rendered any success. In fact, these strategies of civic engagement are seen as neo-liberal, passive oppression for formerly incarcerated, undocumented, poor, and disadvantaged people. Elle details her time with the presidential hopeful as a waste and a form of oppression that does

not improve her community's everyday lives. She also explains how she miscalculated how "fascist" things could get under Trump's administration, which makes an anti-fascist movement strategy more necessary.

Like Elle, Joy uplifts protests as a necessary mode of resistance to organize people. However, she questions whether protests alone can provide strategies for transitioning the most vulnerable people to the life we want after these systems are destroyed:

> None of this is to like shit on like protests or anything like that because that is an incredibly strong method through which we can activate young organizers, but it's not—protest is about like shouting something down, which is necessary, but you need to have—like if you're telling people abolish prisons, you have to have a social system in place for when people are like, "Okay, we'll tear the prisons. What's next?"

Joy recognizes the need to build strategy beyond ending the systems that surveil and kill people; for her, liberation would resemble a plan beyond mere abolition. She wants to shift the focus to build an equitable society after prisons are no longer a viable option for the state. Rose's solution to Joy's call is to make police pay for their civil lawsuits whenever they kill citizens:

> And so actually I think like if we know that white supremacy is a system that is not going anywhere any time soon, maybe that's where radical people who running for office, that's one of the first thing they do. Is tell police officers, "y'all pay for your own shit, it don't come out of taxpayer's money. Y'all need to get a special kind of insurance that we don't got, you know?" …that $41 million that they paid them guys from New York, that came out of The Bronx, who doesn't have any money.

Rose questions why police can keep their jobs and pensions after killing someone in an increasingly fascist government. After they are found guilty in civil court, it is often taxpayers who pay the cost. She suggests a transformed carceral system, one that holds cops accountable to the people they serve. For Rose, politicians who promote radical campaigns should go beyond neo-liberal approaches and contend with how cops will be held financially accountable to the community. Rose offers this reform as a form of defunding the police that would release taxpayers from paying for police killings. Elle, Joy, and Rose bring up similar concerns about the current authoritative system. As the state gets increasingly authoritative, they question police accountability, voting, and movement strategy as robust measures to freedom alone for the most vulnerable in their community. All in all, while demonstrating the ways in which political savvy and neo-liberalism is often used to repress the masses, Elle, Joy, and Rose seek systemic changes that would fundamentally affect society and police killings for the most marginalized.

Discussions about the state repression that organizers and activists experience while demanding rights and fighting a political system. The political and social repression perpetuated by police onto leaders and movement participants, sometimes through infiltrators and instigators, have a human toll on Black women and queer activists. In Elle's words,

> I tear up every time. [Really?] Yeah, I just remember I had to go. I had to go. I was not organizing in a way that was sustainable for me. I was checking under my car every day, every time I got in my car. I was getting death threats. I had been kidnapped by the police—I just wasn't taking care of myself. And then on top of that, I had come out [out of the closet as queer] and people— I mean you know niggas in my organization tried to stage a coup.

Elle is discussing the overt political repression that she faced from police and unknown people making death threats for being a well-known activist affiliated with Atlanta's Black Lives Matter movement. Elle has faced death threats and police intimidation, all while dealing with the struggles of coming out. She was distraught and needed to leave for her mental health. This mental toll is common among activists on the front lines and brings up questions of movement sustainability in the face of police intimidation, legal repression, and intra-movement conflict (Destine, 2019).

The Atlanta chapter of BLM had experienced a split early in its existence because of differences in strategy and the inclusion of queer, transgender, and non-binary folk. As it stands, initial members felt distraught by this split, and some either moved on to create another group or completely left like Elle. While discussing provocateurs, Tammy explains this split in more depth here:

> A provocateur is one who are knowingly or unknowingly is disruptive, confuses, undermines the political work of said organization or movement. I'll get a clear fucking example with fucking Anthony. I think he's at his point nationally known to be like, "yo, you know this cat is not here for the shit." When he joined BLM chapter here in Atlanta, which actually started later than most chapters. Most chapters began to form in 2014 and 2015. The Atlanta chapter didn't start until late December of 2015. And immediately in the first meeting, but he began to, you know, just be like, "OH, why we gotta talk about the gay and queer stuff. And we chalked it up to, you know, we know our folks. Patriarchy is a bitch, and our folks have internalized it, … then he called me while he was in jail and said, "Tammy, you're right. The state will use our tensions to try to break us or

> whatever." And he was like, "I will apologize," all sorta shit. I said, "This is your talking point, to apologize to the motherfuckers you been calling out, including me, online." And maybe two weeks later is when he launched the--what's it called?--the Black Lives Matter-Greater Atlanta chapter.

Tammy brings up a central question on the role of Black male provocateurs, infiltrators, and state actors who may have dubious roles in the movement. Part of what she describes is how the FBI causes discord through its COINTELPRO program that targeted the civil rights movement, or today's labeling of "Black Identity Extremists," by infiltrating and inciting tension (ACLU, 2019). The "extremism" label is liberally applied to BLM activists to silence young Black protestors and a growing intersectional movement. The intensified surveillance that these participants highlight proves that Black bodies are central to the development of surveillance techniques in the United States, not just incidental to it (Browne, 2015; Haley, 2016). Scholars (Miller & Alexander, 2016) illustrate the surveillance of Black bodies, who moved from slave ships during the trans-Atlantic slave trade to plantations as a central site of chattel slavery and then to jails, prisons, and ghettos as mass incarceration intensified. As Tammy notes, this surveillance challenges movement development and aids in breaking up chapters for political goals.

Khadijah, a 30-year-old organizer in Maryland, also explains how state violence by police plays out for Black women while protesting:

> [W]e know that women are like are gendered in their harassment, like we're more likely to be sexual assaulted, queer women are more likely to be targeted in different ways, trans women are more likely to be like raped and killed. Like we know that we're all

> assaulted by the police, but it just looks different. So, I mean, like I think it's important for us to realize like these are people's lives like this is more than just statistics and numbers and percentages like, I've had a cop who felt up on me. I've had a cop who threatened to rape me like these things happen this is real this is real life and like I mean it didn't help that I already didn't think highly of police when it happened, but it´s like if I had any faith [in police] at all, it was dead.

Khadijah, Tammy, and Elle demonstrate how the predominant strategy to protest and push liberation from the ground up can be littered with challenges on where to focus momentum—policy, voting, or chapter leadership. Elle and Tammy outline the ways in which the state can insidiously thwart movements, which brings up further questions on the ways in which movements are challenged in reaching their goals of liberation through police surveillance and violent oppressive tactics (Kelley, 2016). The danger that Black women experience in public space and activism engagement is both violent and predatory. Additionally, these participants not only discussed the well-known statistics for Black men being killed by police but also outlined how police have victimized Black women through intimidation and sexual harassment (Ritchie, 2017). Most participants denoted this treatment as a trajectory of historical policing of Black women in the U.S. They believed the violence inflicted on Black women and girls could be just as physical and repressive as with Black men and boys.

Intensified policing was noted across the globe in the aftermath of George Floyd's killing in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020. Protestors in London, England, reported that the police were "kettling," or blocking protestors from dispersing for refusing to identify themselves, while also

threatening arrest for staying to protest (Smoke, 2020). London officers justified their kettling and charging protestors by determining activists' protests as "anti-social behavior," by misusing Section 50 of the Police Reform Act (Smoke, 2020). Meanwhile, United States federal troops were sent to Portland and other cities to illegally harass and detain protestors (Baker et al., 2020). The legal precedents for this moment continue to reveal the legal repression and sophistication of surveillance techniques deployed by governments to stifle activism. This shift to authoritarianism across national borders leaves young, Black, queer women in M4BL more vulnerable to the state.

Lastly, participants highlight the thwarting power of internal conflicts. Movements are living and breathing entities with people who live in our patriarchy-littered society and can silence the community builders and strategists, often Black women and queer folks who organize those spaces (Collins, 2013; A. Y. Davis, 2011). Tammy brings up relevant questions about these contentions being incited by infiltrators, or "provocateurs," sent by the state to disrupt the movement, when she states, "A provocateur is one who are knowingly or unknowingly is disruptive, confuses, undermines the political work of said organization or movement."

<b>**Sexism and Homophobia**

Participants discussed the internal challenges presented in their organizations. This topic unfolded into a discussion of antagonisms that affected movement spaces and their work. These antagonisms are often part of an insidious plot of infiltrators to incite tensions amongst movements and have often benefitted state actors in diminishing movements' effectiveness. This surveillance was discussed in the previous section about Anthony in Atlanta, GA. After being arrested at a BLM demonstration, he called Tammy and stated, "Tammy, you're right. The state

will use our tensions to try to break us or whatever." Such was the sentiment of most of the respondents throughout the interviews, stories of the contentions of their organization with mobilizing for Black women victims. Elle adds to this by exploring a similar experience she had in the Atlanta Black Lives Matter chapter.

> And I think that a lot of Black men are scared that if we expand the center, then that must mean that they're gonna pushed to the side again in their eyes…I mean the men—it took some years, but the men just stopped coming. They just stopped coming! I remember when Black Lives Matter, the organization, started a chapter in Atlanta… [Black men were saying about queer activists] "Well, we ain't always gotta have you pushing it on us." And they left. A lot of them left and left violently, right, like interrupting the meeting, cut people off, started yelling.

Elle explains a more disruptive pushback from some of the Black men who did not want their liberation tied to others in their community. Elle questions whether they wanted freedom or white male privilege. The interruptions and Black men's departure from organizations are the kinds of provocation and dissension that surveillance programs have caused in past and current movements (Khan-Cullors & bandele, 2018; Taylor, 2016). This occurrence not only outlines an awareness of internal conflict in the movement that outlines systemic problems but also brings up questions of state influence on internal conflict, as Tammy and Elle note. Trey, a 27-year-old, gay, gender non-conforming organizer in Washington, DC, expands on Elle and Tammy's notions by discussing how his organization's horizontal leadership is not implemented well:

> I got in trouble with [BLM affiliated org] with this 'cause their quote is "through a black queer feminist lens." And I said but if your idea of a black queer feminist lens is just pick

> none of the people at the top, then that's not liberation. I'm not here to recreate the same systems. I'm here to completely tear them down, to do something else. it's been so much of our lives of these systems, these hierarchies that we naturally find ourselves recreating them, which is why that myth of horizontal leadership is a myth.

As the organization struggles to utilize a Black queer feminist lens towards this leadership model, it often fails to include Black queer femmes at the top (Carruthers, 2018). Trey situates the failures in the fact that participants live in a broader society that is very hierarchal, and sometimes their theoretical goals are harder to implement in political practice. What this research offers is a particular challenge to this generation of organizers who, in theory, promote the politics of intersectionality and horizontal leadership but may have challenges implementing them throughout the multiple organizations affiliated with the M4BL (Destine, 2019). These challenges that have existed in movement spaces throughout iterations can offer insight to the process of development and the impediments to reaching goals. Including the most marginalized groups could offer possibilities for a broader liberation project, one that affects all facets of people and necessitates the destruction of all the systems while reimaging more democratic ones (A. Y. Davis, 2011; Hooks, 2015). This study continues to bring up questions about how much internal tensions are affected by state influence.

<a>DISCUSSION OF POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

The Movement for Black Lives extends intersectionality by demonstrating how mass mobilizations face legal challenges in the 21st century, when working to liberate working people across nations, genders, ethnicities, etc. (Crenshaw et al., 2015). M4BL struggles to demand abolition, police accountability, and economic investment in disenfranchised communities

(Collins, 2013; Kelley, 2016; The Movement for Black Lives, 2016). However, movements are riddled with internal contentions, factions, militaristic policing and legal repression under Trump's administration, and increasing authoritarian regimes across the world (ACLU, 2019). Here, participants utilize their voices to discuss the intricacies of surveillance, patriarchal leadership, and legal repression that challenge their goals, thereby offering insight into the challenges of the movement.

As the Movement for Black Lives continues to develop, research should focus on local organizations' variability in relationship to the intensification of authoritarian policies—like "Black Identity Extremist" or the use of Section 50 in London—and the conflicts that grow within the movement. Overall, the literature on social movements, law, and society must do more to situate an intersectional focus in the rise of Black social movements within this capitalist crisis and the call for more sustainable working-class coalitions (Hill, 2017; Robinson, 2014; Brown et al., 2017). M4BL uses political mobilization and grassroots organizing as its pre-eminent tactic, though not void of voter registrations or court engagement. Its political mobilization is riddled with repression by policing, law, and patriarchy. Still, it shifts the conversations in a way that the vulnerable masses across the globe, who are also connected to increasingly authoritarian regimes, understand.

Black women in this study have a unique positionality in M4BL to uncover the patriarchy and capitalist motive at the crux of state violence that impedes a global intersectional movement (Collins, 2013; Destine, 2019). Moreover, the leaders represented in this study demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of what is at stake for M4BL. In order to build a vision of a just world that extends to a global working-class movement, scholars, political

organizations, and theorists must center the most oppressed in an ever-diverse, global working class, and continue to share organizing best practices more widely.

<a>CONCLUSION

Black women and queer people are founders, organizers, and leaders of M4BL who are intentionally striving for an intersectional, equitable, and liberatory global movement. This study is a snapshot of the challenges presented at this juncture between theoretical demands and the political repression from the state that comes with organizing and educating multiple local organizations towards the same goal. Even when law does not seem present, it shapes how organizers function through threats of state violence, needs for protection, etc. While cis-heteropatriarchal white supremacy can offer limitations to Black women's and queer leadership's immediate goals, history and this current movement show how it has also propelled them to continue struggling for freedom, affecting oppressed people across the globe (Cooper, 2017; Combahee River Collective, 2000; Taylor, 2016). This research brings forth the developing consciousness of a nascent movement and the legal struggles towards global consciousness dedicated to freedom.

## References


ACLU. (2019, August 9). Leaked FBI documents raise concerns about targeting Black people under ‘Black identity extremist’ and newer labels. American Civil Liberties Union. https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/leaked-fbi-documents-raise-concerns-about-targeting-black-people-under-black-identi-1

Baker, M., Fuller, T., & Olmos, S. (2020, July 31). Federal agents push into Portland streets, stretching limits of their authority. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/25/us/portland-federal-legal-jurisdiction-courts.html

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America.* Rowman & Littlefield.

Browne, S. (2015). *Dark matters: On the surveillance of Blackness*. Duke Press.

Carruthers, C. (2018). Unapologetic: A Black, queer, and feminist mandate for radical movements. Beacon Press.

Coates, T. (2017, October). Donald Trump is the first white president. *The Atlantic.* https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/

Collins, P. H. (2013). *On intellectual activism*. Temple University Press.

Cooper, B. C. (2017). Beyond respectability: The intellectual thought of race women. University of Illinois Press.

Crenshaw, K. (2019, October 28). Opinion: ‘You promised you wouldn’t kill me.’ *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/28/opinion/police-black-women-racism.html

Crenshaw, K., Ritchie, A. J., Anspach, R., Gilmer, R., & Harris, L. (2015). Say her name: Resisting police brutality against Black women. *African American Policy Forum, Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, Columbia Law School.*

Davis, A. (2016). *Freedom is a constant struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the foundations of a movement.* Haymarket Books.

Davis, A. Y. (2011). *Women, race, & class*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Destine, S. (2019). #Reclaiming my time: Black women movement actors' experiences with intra-movement conflicts and the case for a transformative healing justice model. *Societies without Borders: Human Rights and The Social Sciences,* 13(1).

Destine, S. (2020). From a hashtag to a movement: Black women movement actors' challenges to leading a radical movement in a "postracial America." *Humanity & Society*, *46*(1), 28–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597620969755

Fatal Interactions with Police Study. (2017). Institute for Public Health at Washington University. https://sites.wustl.edu/fips/

Haley, S. (2016). N*o mercy here: Gender, punishment, and the making of Jim Crow modernity.* UNC Press Books.

Hill, M. L. (2016). *Nobody: Casualties of America's war on the vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and beyond.* Simon and Schuster.

hooks, b. (2015). Black women: Shaping feminist theory. *Revista Brasileira de Ciência Política, 16*, 193–210. https://doi.org/10.1590/0103-335220151608

Kelley, R. D. G. (2016, August 17). What does Black Lives Matter want? [Text]. *Boston Review*. http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/robin-d-g-kelley-movement-black-lives-vision

Khan-Cullors, P., & bandele, a. (2018). *When they call you a terrorist: A Black Lives Matter memoir*. St. Martin's Press.

Miller, R. J., & Alexander, A. (2016). The price of carceral citizenship: Punishment, surveillance, and social welfare policy in an age of carceral expansion. *Michigan Journal of Race & Law, 21*(2), 291–314.

Ransby, B. (2003). Ella Baker and the Black freedom movement: A radical Democratic vision. University of North Carolina Press.

Ransby, B. (2018). *Making all Black lives matter: Reimagining freedom in the twenty-first century*. University of California Press.

Ritchie, A. J. (2017). *Invisible no more: Police violence against Black women and women of color.* Beacon Press.

Roberts, D. (2014). *Killing the Black body: Race, reproduction, and the meaning of liberty*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Smoke, C. (2020, June 9). Did the Met police break their own rules at the London Black Lives Matter protests? *Vice.* https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/pkypnz/london-black-lives-matter-protest-met-police

Sutherland, T. (2017). Making a killing: On race, ritual, and (re)membering in digital culture. *Preservation, Digital Technology & Culture, 46*(1), 32–40. https://doi.org/10.1515/pdtc-2017-0025

Taylor, K.-Y. (2016). *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black liberation.* Haymarket Books.

The Movement for Black Lives. (2016). A vision for Black lives: Policy demands for Black power, freedom, & justice.