

What's Wrong with Saying "All Lives Matter" in response to "Black Lives Matter"?

Let me be clear: stating that black lives matter doesn't insinuate that other lives don't. Black Lives Matter is not a term of confrontation or an exclusionary demand. As Columbia Law Professor Kimberle Crenshaw explains, saying black lives matter "is simply aspirational;" it's a rallying cry for a shift in statistical numbers that show that people who are black are twice as likely to be killed by a police officer while unarmed, compared to a white individual¹. According to a 2015 study, African-Americans died at the hands of police at a rate of 7.2 per million, while whites were killed at a rate of 2.9 per million².

Anyone who has kept any type of pulse on civil rights and the black human condition in the United States since the transatlantic slave trade would understand the need to emphasize the protection of black bodies. The people who have had the luxury of ignoring this particular issue is the white community, which has had the privilege of not questioning—on a large scale—whether the systems they live in are detrimental to their livelihoods, based on their skin color.

Instead of exploring the reasons why a movement like this would even be necessary, many have a knee jerk reaction. "What about me?" "All lives matter," they cry. "Why be divisive and unfair, what about our safety?" The point these people miss is that the majority of experiences here in America already tend to center and highlight whiteness and cater to its safety. The country was built to function that way. Its roots of white supremacy and the marginalized concern for people of color has remained.

But let's get back to the issue of countering Black Lives Matter with the phrase "All Lives Matter." I've come to describe this as a collective gaslighting from the white community. Gaslighting is a tactic in which a person or entity, in order to gain more power (or in this case, keep their own peace), makes a victim question their reality. Why do those who counter black lives matter act as though black people aren't aware of the glaring disproportionate statistics of police brutality, of health care racism, and of mass incarceration? This is our reality. You deciding to ignore it for your own comfort doesn't make it any less true.

If a patient being rushed to the ER after an accident were to point to their mangled leg and say, "This is what matters right now," and the doctor saw the scrapes and bruises of other areas and countered, "but all of you matters," wouldn't there be a question as to why he doesn't show urgency in aiding that what is most at risk? At a community fundraiser for a decaying local

¹[Source 1 Police brutality](#)

²[Source 2 Police brutality statistics](#)

library, you would never see a mob of people from the next city over show up angry and offended yelling, “All libraries matter!”—especially when theirs is already well-funded.

Of course all lives matter. That doesn’t even need to be said. But the fact that white people get so upset about the term black lives matter is proof that nothing can center the wellbeing and livelihoods of black bodies without white people assuming it is to their demise.

For those of you questioning the reality or the gravity of systematic oppression of people of color, let me give you a little bit of a history lesson. Black lives did not matter when they were inhumanely transported like livestock from Africa³. Black lives did not matter when they were lynched by the hundreds at the hands of the KKK⁴. Black lives did not matter when they were attacked by dogs as they protested for equal rights⁵.

With the weekly news cycle seeming to, without fail, include the death of at least one black boy at the hands of the police⁶, or the body of a black woman being thrown to the ground by local law enforcement⁷, or a black child being manhandled by the services meant to protect them⁸, my heart sinks as I cling to the desire that black lives will matter. Today, looking at the gross brutality and murders of black American citizens like Ahmaud Arbery⁹, Breonna Taylor¹⁰, and George Floyd¹¹, we are still aspiring to convince you that black lives matter. Black lives did not matter throughout history, and black lives are still being threatened today. It isn’t hard to see the need to emphasize the protection of black bodies.

Even if it is not police brutality or overt racism that pose a threat to black lives, there are a plethora of other institutional and structural causes set up to threaten black lives. One study found that suicide attempts rose by 73% between 1991-2017 for black adolescents and listed exposure to racism as a factor¹². Another explanation of higher suicide numbers among black adolescents is the lack of treatment. Approximately 30% of African American adults with mental illness get treatment each year, below the U.S. average of 43%, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Many African Americans distrust the health system, and socioeconomic factors can limit access to treatment. It isn’t hard to see the need to emphasize the protection of black bodies.

³[Source 3 Transatlantic slave trade](#)

⁴[Source 4 Lynching](#)

⁵[Source 5 Attacking Civil Rights Activist](#)

⁶[Source 6 Mapping Police Violence against POC](#)

⁷[Source 7 woman thrown to ground by police](#)

⁸[Source 8 white cop using excessive force on young black boy](#)

⁹[Source 9 death of Ahmaud Arbery](#)

¹⁰[Source 10 death of Breonna Taylor](#)

¹¹[Source 11 Death of George Floyd](#)

¹²[Source 12 emotional toll on black lives](#)

Global pandemics also affect black lives with greater severity than others. With the recent coronavirus pandemic, many front-line jobs were disproportionately held by people of color. Furthermore, adults of color were more likely than white adults to report significant stressors in their life as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, including getting coronavirus (71% vs. 59%, respectively), basic needs (61% vs. 47%), and access to health care services (59% vs. 46%), according to the American Psychological Association's "Stress in America" report published in May¹³. It isn't hard to see the need to emphasize the protection of black bodies.

My personal message to those committed to saying “all lives matter” in the midst of the justice-driven work of the Black Lives Matter movement: prove it. Point out the ways our society—particularly the systems set in place to protect citizens like police officers and doctors and elected officials—are showing up to serve and protect black lives. Illuminate the instances in which the livelihood of the black community was prioritized, considering the circumstances that put us into less-privileged spaces to begin with. Direct me to the evidence of justice for the bodies discarded at the hands of those in power, be it by unjustified murder¹⁴, jail cell¹⁵, poisoned water¹⁶, or medical discrimination¹⁷.

These are the things that must be rectified for us to be able to exhale. Until then, I'll be here, with Black Lives Matter on my lips.

¹³ [Source 13 Stress and the virus](#)

¹⁴ [Source 14 unjustified murder of POC](#)

¹⁵ [Source 15 a law system that discriminates against POC](#)

¹⁶ [Source 16 poisoned water affecting communities of POC](#)

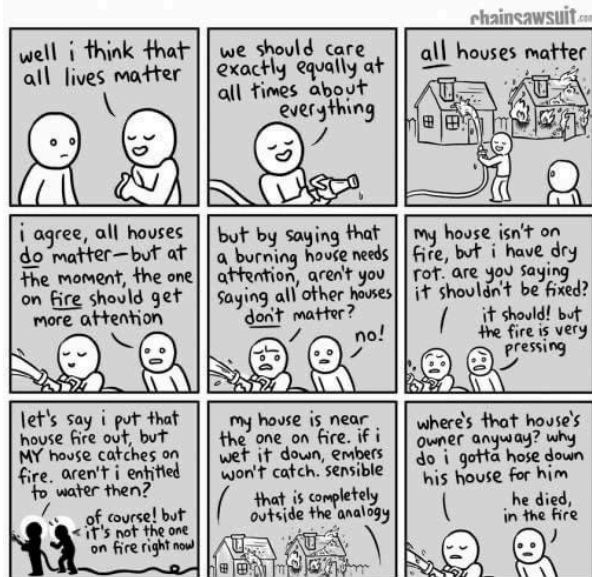
¹⁷ [Source 17 medical discrimination](#)

Sources

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Pictures explaining why saying “all lives matter” is the wrong response to “black lives matter”.





"If my wife comes to me in obvious pain and asks "Do you love me?", an answer of "I love everyone" would be truthful, but also hurtful and cruel in the moment. If a co-worker comes to me upset and says "My father just died," a response of "Everyone's parents die," would be truthful, but hurtful and cruel in the moment. So when a friend speaks up in a time of obvious pain and hurt and says "Black lives matter," a response of "All lives matter," is truthful. But it's hurtful and cruel in the moment". ~ Doug Williford 💜

For my all lives matter folks: When the Boston marathon was bombed everybody's profile picture went "Boston strong" nobody said "all cities are strong"!

When Las Vegas shooting happened people changed their profiles "stand with Vegas" nobody says "well what about the people that got shot in my city"!

Have you ever seen someone counter a "breast cancer" post with "what about colon cancer"?

But for some reason if someone says "black lives matter" it turns into all inclusive "all lives matter"

It's not an either/or proclamation. When there is a crisis we have always rallied around that particular group. It doesn't discredit or diminish any other group it just brings awareness and support to the group that needs attention.

IF **BLACK LIVES MATTER**
BOTHERS YOU BECAUSE IT DOESN'T SAY
ALL LIVES MATTER
BUT **BLUE LIVES MATTER**
DOESN'T BOTHER YOU,
THEN WHAT REALLY BOTHERS
YOU IS THE WORD
BLACK

