

## EDITOR'S NOTE

# BLACK LIVES MATTER: IMAGINING AND REALIZING AN EQUITABLE BLACK FUTURE

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The idea for this special *Ethnic Studies Review* edition, Black Lives Matter: Imagining and Realizing an Equitable Black Future, germinated prior to the election of the 45th president of the United States. However, what this series of articles and commentaries contribute to the movement for Black lives is even more critically important.

Black bodies are the original currency in the United States; the United States was founded on the literal mattering of Black lives. Meanwhile, a central component of some of the most effective Black political activity has included the mobilization of Black people targeting the state and demanding its active engagement in the expansion of resources and opportunities available to Black communities. According to organizers, “Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.” Black Lives Matter activists have lamented that Blacks do not have time to negotiate a radical future because many are trying to live. Thus, the context of the mattering is critical vis-à-vis the historical emergence of white supremacy.

Worldwide, as human beings nearly everywhere sought to mobilize against the racial and ethnic rhetoric of terrorism from candidate Donald J. Trump, American voters failed to prevent the Ku Klux Klan endorsed candidate from winning the most powerful public office on the planet. Throughout the presidential campaign, but particularly in the aftermath of the November 2016 election, people have attempted to grasp what the country does now immediately after the two terms of the nation’s first Black president.

Many Black leftists made morally righteous claims that a vote for anyone other than Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump was the most “socially conscious” decision. Other leaders hinted that a vote for Jill Stein, for example, was justified because she, in their view, held beliefs closest

to that of the marginalized Black voter. Much of this discord was and remains within the Black political community. Op-eds, social media commentaries, and media personalities' stints on television networks – all demonstrated a core disagreement within the mindsets of many Blacks heading to the polls in November 2016. At the center of the disagreement is one's conceptualization of the presidency, one's knowledge of what the president does (*vis-à-vis* the other two branches of government), and what matters most when voting: shared ideological beliefs or shared interests.

The articles in this volume speak to that contention. This special edition includes views about the status of the movement for Black lives in the United States with which the National Association for Ethnic Studies does not agree, but that we believe are central to give voice to so that we can better understand opposing views as we build a movement to combat dangerous ideology. This special edition is also 'special' because we conceptualize the viewpoints around Black Lives Matter as a political reckoning. Hence, the contributors herein responded to a call for submissions that sought to frame the discussion around the central importance of Black lives as a sociopolitical phenomenon. Thus, we, in part, seek to explore the pragmatic, short-term and long-term avenues for collective mobilization. We move beyond a theory of justice about the value of Black Lives Matter, to an actionable set of ideas that can be implemented to maximize the greatest possible impact on the socioeconomic and political conditions of Blacks in the United States.

As the contributors to this special edition argue, the Black Lives Matter network and the movement for Black lives is about more than policing, and the movement began long before the twenty-first century. Policing is just the most egregious act against Black lives. What is equally important to be mindful of is that there have been demands from Blacks in the United States for a long time with only tepid success. Central to this reality is the understanding that any Black future in the twenty-first century and beyond must be equitable for all members of the Black community – where Blackness is both an ascriptive identity and a political identity, where Blackness is not bounded by hegemonic perceptions that seek to narrow the breadth of Blackness.

Our challenges are many. How do we build a social and political justice movement centered on the insecurity of Black American lives? How do we ensure the success of calls for resistance? What does resistance look like? How do we explain the role of minority and women voters – urban and rural – in directly and indirectly helping to elect the first Ku Klux Klan endorsed candidate for president in modern history? Where do we focus our critiques and discord – the Democratic Party, the two party system, capitalism, the "failure" of the candidacy of Hillary

Clinton, a lack of political education, or all of the above? Perhaps most importantly, if we claim to care about Black lives – both now and in the future –how do we negotiate priorities? Do we espouse a series of core beliefs that are designed to ensure a greater protection of Black lives in the future? What is the best way to address the immediacy of danger surrounding many Black lives today? This volume does not seek to provide answers to those queries, but we do hope that the varied perspectives on how best to politically protect and engage Black lives serves as a generator of ideas that may spark the implementation of solutions to some of significant challenges faced by Blacks in America today.

One critical point of agreement in the essays in this volume is that Black political progress has to be more than theoretical. Ideas for substantive improvement in the socioeconomic condition of Black lives must be framed around more than moral crusades that embody the luxury of gradual solutions to pressing problems. Political actions must also be strategic, immediately impactful, and yet have implications for the long term. As these essays will attest to, without such an approach we may be boldly imagining a strong Black future, but will we witness the realization of an equitable Black future?