

BLACK LIVES MATTER - AND ME

July 13th, 2013. At face value, this date holds little to no importance. Especially to the younger me. The four-year-old Māori/Niuean/Samoan me. The 'living in a state home in the notorious and equally feared suburb of Mangere, South Auckland' me. Yet on the other side of the world, a world so far yet so close to mine, suffering in colored communities was coming to light. A call for the end of police brutality. A movement was being born. A movement promoting anti-racism, advocacy, and equality.

Alicia Garza, Patricia Khan-Cullors, and Opal Tometi, three strong black women created, perhaps unknowingly, what was to become the largest and most publicized campaign for liberation, freedom, and justice that this century has ever seen. Little did I know how their injustices mirrored that of our people in every aspect. How the media never fails to present us as the 'bad guys'. The "scum of society". The 'government handout bludgers'. Little did I know how important and life-altering the effects would be for me, people just like me and those who were to follow, born in media-built environments like mine.

Born out of the burrows and a social media post, the Black Lives Matter movement has created a major discussion about race and inequality across the world. Millions from communities took to the streets in support of change. In the 21st Century, Digital Media, both the hero and the villain, is at the forefront, of its exposure of racial plight and its presence in the never-ending fight for justice. The unjust and untimely death of Trayvon Martin in 2013 was the catalyst behind the creation of Black Lives Matter. Much how the unjust actions of the New Zealand Government with their Dawn Raids gave birth to the Polynesian Panthers.

Black Lives Matter's purpose is to raise the consciousness of real systemic issues such as racial profiling, police brutality, demonization, and criminalization of colored people. With the help of digital media, this movement has lifted the lid off the 'hear no evil, see no evil' approach, allowing conversations to be had about this and other race-related issues. The exposure of real-life events through video footage such as

the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles, March 3rd, 1991, the cam footage of the shooting of Breonna Taylor in her Louisville home on March 13th, 2020, to the real-time video recording of the death of George Floyd, has had an everlasting effect on society, internationally.

In this digital age, witness accounts of racism and police brutality are easily and quickly circulated and shared, even quicker than news outlets. Circulation of such evidence on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Tik Tok, etc has held the attention, awareness, and support of the BLM movement, all across the world. It was never this easy back in the day. The days of slavery and genocide of its indigenous were only ever documented in photographic form. Now we have 1080p quality video footage with crystal clear audio documenting atrocities that only mimic what people of the past had to experience. "If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the people who are doing the oppressing" is a famous quote from black activist Malcolm X, that pinpoints exactly what the media has done for so long.

And yet the media themselves take no responsibility. And no prisoners. Media exposure of Black Lives Matter to the masses via television/radio and newspapers have deemed the movement an atrocious threat to the constitution and of the laws in which the founding fathers committed their lives to govern and protect. This representation has created divisiveness that cannot be easily remedied, and one that both coloured and white people struggle with today. Peace Protests are labeled as localised terrorism green lighting the use of martial law, and the vicious cycle of police brutality starts once more. The selective journalism and race-baiting shared on news channels such as Fox News, MSNBC, CNN, Free Speech TV and more provide the foundation and fuel racists need to justify their thoughts, actions, and support of the mistreatment of black and coloured civilians. You ask why?

Because, it SELLS. An idea. Image. An agenda. Ashton P. Woods, Black Lives Matter Houston organizer explains in a manner that is representative of all coloured people suffering from the same injustices. Behind the movement of *Black Lives Matter*, is 400 years of a broken system that needs to be reversed. Something that could take many more years to fix. Ashton P. Woods claims that the system in place

is preventing us from being able to build our own table and supply our own needs. The more I investigate, the more it rings a bell from the perspective of the now twelve-year-old me. The Māori/Niuean/ Samoan me. These same troubles experienced in a world that seems so far from mine, are mirrored in my everyday life. Systematic oppression, face-value racism, passive-aggressive behavior, unbreakable stereotypes. Because of the color of my skin. The texture of my hair. My surname. It's all there. In black and white. The fight of my parents, their parents, and their parents. How are we to build OUR own table in a system created to stifle our very ethnicity and cultural upbringing? Our own unique perspectives and ideas? It's almost near impossible.

Racism at its core is well and truly alive in New Zealand, and we're living testament to that. From being followed in the supermarket under suspicions of shoplifting in 2021, to the occupation and protest of Bastion Point back in 1977. To the massacre of our indigenous tribes and their lands in 1845-1872. To the discrimination and martial law, the New Zealand Government expressed on the Pacific Island community leading to deportation, dubbed the "Dawn Raids" in 1974-1976. To the unfairly publicised events of Covid 19 within South Auckland in which led to the barrage of racial insults directed to its Pacific Island inhabitants. Just last year. All of these are fueled by the racial narrative "White GOOD, Black/Brown BAD" spread by the media. Society hasn't changed in its way of dealing with "us". And how in this day and age, can we be any different from what's being said about us?

It may as well deem itself a fools wish, but out there, in the 21st-century digital space, there is hope. A surge of sharing what could've been forgotten artistry in forms of Music, Art, Food, Literature, the list goes on. A resurgence and rebirth of our mother tongue and all its cultural beauty. There will always be backlash. Aggression. A moment in which it will be denied and disparaged. Where we will be told to "GET OVER IT" as we've been told to do so many times before. And that is ok. The society I've been brought up in encourages me to push even harder. To not be afraid or ashamed. And that I, along with other Māori/Pacific Island kids like me, have the power and strength of our ancestors guiding us. Always.

We don't ask for much. Just acknowledgement. And a promise to do better. To be better. And now we know we don't need a place at "the table". We have always been enough. We have always been worthy! And we are working as a people and as a generation in building a table of our own. One culturally unashamed nut and bolt at a time.

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