Benevolent Racism and the Co-Optation of the Black Lives Matter Movement

Luigi Esposito- Barry University, Miami Shores, Florida

Victor Romano- Barry University, Miami Shores, Florida

Abstract

Our central aim in this paper is to address how recent efforts to discredit the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM) can be fruitfully conceptualized as examples of what Esposito and Romano (2014) have termed "benevolent racism." Benevolent racism breaks from the usual frame of de-racialization that characterizes other forms of post-civil rights racisms, whereby racial inequity is dodged, defended, or justified behind a facade of color-blindness and racial neutrality. Benevolent racism operates through a seemingly race-conscious frame that acknowledges and ostensibly condemns a system of White privilege and racial inequity, but does so in ways that legitimize and reinforce racist attitudes, policies and practices in the name of "benevolent" aims—i.e., in the name of uplifting the Black community. Drawing from this concept, we show how many critics of BLMM inadvertently perpetrate benevolent racism by co-opting many of the race-conscious demands of this movement (i.e., valuing the lives of Black people) while subverting its aim to promote racial justice. Specifically, critics' claims that BLMM has weakened policing, ignored Black on Black crime, and overlooked the so-called "abortion epidemic" in the Black community is also a call for attitudes, practices, and policies that, whether intended or not, ultimately hurt Black communities in the name of "saving Black Lives." We conclude with a brief statement about the importance of challenging benevolent racism in efforts to promote a transformative racial justice movement.

Introduction

The persistence of racial inequity and injustice in what a large segment of the U.S. population has considered a "post-racial" era under an African-American president has, particularly within the last five years, re-energized long-standing calls for color-conscious activism. As noted by Darryl Lorenzo Wellington (2015, p. 18), the "various setbacks, frustrations, and strange twists" that took place in the years following Obama's first presidential election have inspired calls for "peering more honestly" into racial matters in the United States. This call to veer the country into a more candid dialogue about race and confront the racial status quo is at the heart of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM).

As witnessed during the protests and uprisings in various U.S. cities, those associated with the BLMM seek to challenge the de-valuation of Black lives, which is most clearly manifested in the systemic violence inflicted on Blacks and other people of color that too often goes unnoticed and unchallenged. Contrary to what the mainstream media has typically stressed, the violence

Luigi Esposito, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Sociology and Criminology at Barry University. His research includes issues related to neoliberalism, race and ethnic relations, social theory, gun politics, globalization, and ethics.

Victor Eduardo Romano, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Barry University. He is also Chairperson of both the Miami Dade County Commission on Human Rights and HOPE, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to combating housing discrimination.

in question is not limited to the extrajudicial killings of unarmed Black people by the police and vigilantes, but also encompasses various, and often less blatant, forms of violence that are commonly state-sanctioned. Examples of this violence include (among many others): the system of mass incarceration that disproportionately affects Blacks, compromises the integrity of Black families, and puts African-American children at risk of various emotional and behavioral outcomes (e.g., Alexander, 2010; Miller, 2007); the system of racialized punishment (the so-called "school to prison" pipeline) that permeates the U.S. school system, even among elementary school children (Rocques & Paternoster, 2011); the gentrification of low-income minority communities and displacement of residents (e.g. Kirkland, 2008); the fact that low income minority communities are exposed to more air pollution than other communities (e.g., Jones et. al., 2014); and the impact of racism and discrimination on the mental health of Blacks and other racial and ethnic minorities (e.g., Kwate & Goodman, 2015). The BLMM is therefore an indictment of these and various other patterns of racialized violence and inequity, as well as an affirmation of Black people's humanity, contributions to society, and "resilience in the face of deadly oppression" (Black Lives Matter, 2015).

While BLMM has received widespread media attention in the U.S. and around the world, much of the response to the uprisings and protests associated with this movement has been predictably defensive, condescending and/or dismissive of the plight of Black Americans. Indeed, the legitimate grievances that motivate these protests and uprisings are often ignored in favor of an emphasis on looting, property damage, and criminal opportunism. These behavioral patterns are then explained via a series of interpretative frames that reflect and reinforce long-held White racial fears and resentments about Blacks without using blatantly racist language. Consistent with post-civil rights variants of racism, there seems to be an attempt among many critics of BLMM to delegitimize color-conscious activism through a process of de-racialization that involves attributing problems in the Black community to "non-racial" factors that include a pervasiveness of deviant values, a lack of stable families/households, a lack of competent leadership, and a lack of personal responsibility. These claims reflect what has been described as "color blind racism" (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2006) and/or "symbolic racism" (Kinder and Sears, 1981; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Hughes, 1997). Although there are differences between these variants, they both emphasize the idea that existing racial inequalities in the

post-civil rights era have little to do with race or with racial discrimination, and much more to do with cultural and moral deficiencies within the Black community. Some writers have also suggested that many Whites make these sorts of claims and/or embrace these sorts of attitudes as a way to defend their dominant positions and discredit Black demands for equality—a perspective known as "laissez faire racism," (e.g., Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Bobo, Kluegel & Smith, 1997). Those who insist that the problems plaguing Black communities might be related to systemic racism are often charged with being conflictive and engaging in corrupt attempts to "play the race card" in an otherwise fair and decent society where, perhaps outside a few isolated incidents of bigotry, race is largely irrelevant.

While the aforementioned claims are consistent with post-civil rights racist discourse and commonly invoked to criticize anti-racist activism, our central aim in this paper is to expose an alternative, and perhaps even more covert, type of racist discourse that has been employed in efforts to discredit the BLMM. This particular discourse breaks from the usual process of de-racialization by co-opting many of the race-conscious demands of BLMM (i.e., valuing the lives of Black people) while subverting its general aims. Consistent with what Esposito and Romano (2014) have termed "benevolent racism," this racist discourse is being employed by many journalists, law enforcement officials, and politicians to push for policies/practices that, whether intended or not, ultimately hurt the Black community in the name of "uplifting" or "saving" Black lives. In other words, rather than denying or dodging the reality of White privilege, or denigrating people who criticize racist practices as engaging in unjustified attempts to play "the race card," or making claims that the U.S. is a color-blind society where racial inequality is exclusively an outcome related to personal/cultural deficiencies among racial minorities, benevolent racism acknowledges the plight of Black Americans and ostensibly condemns the devaluation of Black lives. However, it does so in ways that further reinforce attitudes and practices that perpetuate racial inequity and Black disenfranchisement. It is therefore important to expose and recognize this type of "benevolent" racist discourse if those who are interested in racial justice want to prevent the transformative potential of BLMM from being appropriated by reactionary segments of U.S. society that support—either deliberately or inadvertently—the prevailing racial status quo.

Our discussion proceeds as follows: First, we discuss the origins of BLMM and some of its central ob-

jectives. Second, we draw from the literature on social movements, particularly the concept of "framing," to suggest that various opponents of BLMM are countering this movement's aims through a process known as "frame co-optation." We explain what is meant by this process and address how this relates to benevolent racism. Third, we further distinguish benevolent racism from other forms of post-civil rights racisms and offer various examples to illustrate how the co-optation of BLMM's central aims by many of its opponents is consistent with benevolent racism. Lastly, we conclude with a brief statement about the importance of challenging benevolent racism as a requisite for ensuring a truly transformative racial justice movement.

The Black Lives Matter Movement

The Black Lives Matter Movement began as a social media and Twitter hashtag (#BlackLivesMatter) created by activist Alicia Garza and her friends Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi in the wake of George Zimmerman's acquittal for the murder of Trayvon Martin. The hashtag quickly resonated with a broad array of primarily young activists and organizations committed to racial equality, particularly for Black Americans. The phrase Black Lives Matter soon transformed into a convenient banner and slogan for various groups protesting the extrajudicial killings of Black Americans and other issues affecting the Black community. These groups include The Million Hoodies Movement for Justice, Millennial Activists United, Dream Defenders and other youth-oriented groups across the country. Together these groups have come to comprise what is today referred to as the Black Lives Matter Movement.

A common denominator among groups that make up BLMM is an emphasis on the use of social media as a means of framing, claims-making, and as a tool for protest mobilization. The rapid rise of the BLMM to national prominence would not have been possible without social media. So fast was this rise, that in November 2014 various BLMM affiliated groups were granted a 45 minute audience with President Obama, in which they presented a list of demands centered on how the federal government could better handle cases of police misconduct, including the killing and abuse of citizens. Though the central aims of BLMM include the eradication of racism in law enforcement and the school-to-prison pipeline undermining the life

chances of Black youth, Alicia Garza is keenly aware and disapproving of how the Black Lives Matter slogan is being modified in ways that are at odds with the movement's central aims. She argues that, "when we deploy 'All Lives Matter' as if to correct an intervention specifically created to address anti-Blackness, we lose the ways in which the state apparatus has built a program of genocide and repression mostly on the backs of Black people—beginning with the theft of millions of people for free labor – and then adapted it to control, murder and profit off of other communities of color and immigrant communities" (Black Lives Matter, 2015).

Also emphasized by BLMM activists is the need for inclusivity. On their official website, it is clear that BLMM does not see Blacks as a monolithic group but as a diverse community that includes queer and transgendered people, disabled individuals, and undocumented immigrants who face unique challenges in a racist, hetero-patriarchal society. The aim, therefore, is to build a movement that embraces diversity and intersectionality in its quest to challenge the ideologies and social structures that have consistently ignored, devalued, and discounted the lives of Black people. Towards this end, BLMM calls for, among other demands, economic justice, more community control of the institutions and policies that effect Black communities, more investment in education and health, and an end to racial profiling and mass incarceration.

Framing, Frame Co-Optation, and Benevolent Racism

Various scholars have emphasized how social movements are involved in what Stuart Hall referred to as the "politics of signification" (Hall, 1982; Benford & Snow, 2000). Rather than simply the carriers of "extant ideas and meanings that grow automatically out of structural arrangements, unanticipated events, or existing ideologies," social movement actors are actively involved in generating alternative interpretative frameworks that challenge dominant conceptions of social reality (Snow & Benford, 2000, p. 613). Within the sociological literature on social movements, this process is often associated with the term "framing." Conceptually, framing denotes a process whereby agents actively shape, negotiate, and give meaning to social reality in an effort to effect social change.

The values, beliefs, and meanings that social movement actors develop as a way to garner and solidify support for political goals are known as "collective

action frames," which Benford and Snow (2000, p. 614), describe as "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate activities and campaigns of a social movement organization." There is no question that activists struggling for racial justice have, for decades, been engaging in processes of framing and counter-framing as they attempt to challenge, delegitimize, and redefine the myths, assumptions, and versions of reality that support a prevailing system of White supremacy. Even a cursory review of the various materials posted or linked on the BLMM official website makes clear that the myths and ideas that current BLMM actors seek to challenge include: (1) the myth that unnecessary police violence against Blacks is a product of a few bigoted, irrational cops as opposed to a symptom of systemic racism; (2) the idea that denouncing racism in policing practices is tantamount to waging a war against the police; (3) the misconception that racialized violence is always overt, deliberate and anomalous as opposed to a normative practice within the current system of White Supremacy; (3) the belief that anti-Black racism is a statistically fortuitous practice that has little impact on people's life chances, and (4) the myth that the doctrine of color-blindness is the ultimate antidote to whatever racism might still exist in the United States. Activists associated with BLMM seek to challenge these myths and redirect the current discourse on race and racism in ways that bring to light the need to move beyond accommodation into the status quo and instead promote an anti-racist praxis that actively confronts systematic racism, including patterns of racial inequity and the devaluation of Black lives. The collective action frames that guide these efforts are closely associated with the ideal of racial justice and emphasize the notion that the United States cannot be considered a fair and equitable society unless steps are taken to ensure that Blacks have the same value, freedom, safety, and life-chances that other groups enjoy.

Much of the literature on social movements has traditionally focused on single movement case studies and how those movements engage in processes of framing as they attempt to push forward and legitimize their objectives (Feree, 2003; Hoover & Cunningham, 2014). Some studies, however, have focused on analyzing movement-countermovement dynamics in which a particular movement's frames and messages are appropriated by activists associated with other, sometimes oppositional, movements that are guided by a very different type of agenda. For example, as discussed by Hoover and Cunningham (2014), many people who support the death penalty have appropriated the Death Penalty Abolition Movement's "innocence" frame (i.e., the idea that capital punishment should be abolished because the process of conviction is imperfect and has led to large numbers of wrongful convictions) to justify capital punishment. In effect, those who support capital punishment have taken the same innocence frame to legitimize capital punishment under the argument that promoting a more rigorous process of conviction will minimize the likelihood of executing innocent individuals. Similar dynamics have been described with respect to how right-wing conservatives who oppose most aspects of feminist agendas have appropriated feminist frames associated with "women's rights" to justify military intervention in Afghanistan (Abu-Lughold, 2002); and oppose pornography (see Strossen, 1993; Burke & Burnstein, 2014).

Of particular relevance for purposes of this discussion is what Burke and Burnstein (2014, p. 183) refer to as "frame co-optation," which they describe as "a process where opponents adopt aspects of the content of a movement's discourse, while subverting its general intent." Burke and Burnstein show how opponents of LGBT rights (e.g., those who oppose same sex marriages) co-opted Queer discourse for their own agenda. For example, while many proponents of Queer discourse seek to move beyond the more mainstream and culturally resonant LGBT frame associated with civil rights and challenge marriage as a patriarchal and heteronormative institution, opponents of LGBT rights co-opted this Queer frame to emphasize "alternative" relationships to marriage for gays and lesbians (i.e., to deny gays and lesbians equal rights). Thus, "while the content of [this sort of] proposal can be described as Queer, the intent of the policy was decidedly not" (Burke & Bernstein, 2014, p. 845). A similar dynamic is clearly discernible among many opponents of BLMM. Indeed, many critics of BLMM routinely attempt to legitimize their opposition to this movement precisely by invoking the very idea of valuing Black lives. We contend that this is consistent with what has been described as "benevolent racism" (Esposito & Romano, 2014).

Benevolent racism and its relevance to the frame co-optation of BLMM

Before we proceed to describe how the co-optation of the "Black lives matter" frame by critics of this movement is consistent with benevolent racism, it is

important to further clarify what precisely is meant by benevolent racism and how this concept differs from other post-civil rights forms of racism. We focus here on three of the most cited conceptualizations of post-civil rights racism within the sociological literature on U.S. race relations: laissez faire racism, symbolic racism, and color-blind racism.

Drawing from Herbert Blumer's group position theory, proponents of laissez faire racism focus on racial attitudes and explain how Whites defend the dominant position they consider to be rightfully theirs by making appeals to principles of free competition and meritocracy. In doing so, Whites justify racial inequalities as apolitical outcomes of a free market—e.g., Blacks have only themselves to blame if, for example, they are disproportionately poor or unemployed (Bobo & Kluegel 1993; Bobo, Kluegel & Smith 1997). Thus, any policy that is designed to challenge the racial status quo and/or "level the playing field" is regarded as an unwarranted imposition on the "neutral" system that bolsters White privilege.

In symbolic racism, the focus is on social learning and the psychological-effective nature of racial attitudes (McConahay & Hough 1976; Kinder & Sears 1981; Hughes 1997). Rather than emphasizing group position and the attitudes Whites have developed to defend their dominant status, symbolic racism relies on moral imperatives and the social learning of racial stereotypes. Specifically, symbolic racism is based on a combination of: (1) the belief that the U.S. is a fair and equitable society that offers all people ample opportunity to succeed through hard work; and 2) the social learning of Blacks as violators of celebrated American market values associated with self-reliance and competition. These two factors interplay to promote a common belief among Whites that Blacks "want more than simply the rights everyone else has. Blacks are too pushy, too demanding, and are getting more than what they deserve" (McConahay & Hough 1976:38).

A more recent variant of post-civil rights racism that has been widely cited within the sociological literature on race/racism during the last 10-15 years is what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva has termed color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2006). According to Bonilla-Silva (2003:68), color-blind racism "is centrally anchored in the abstract extension of egalitarian values to racial minorities and the notion that racial minorities are culturally rather than biologically deficient." In effect, rather than making appeals to innate racial superiority or inferiority, color-blind racism is predicated on various "frames," notably that

race is largely irrelevant and racial inequality has more to do with cultural habits or lifestyle choices that hinder some groups from attaining upward mobility. Yet by minimizing the reality of racism in the ways this phenomenon shapes human relations and people's life chances, all meaningful challenges to the racial status quo are discredited and/or seen as forms of "reverse discrimination."

In all the variants of post-civil rights racism noted above, there is an underlying presupposition among many Whites that the U.S. is an egalitarian or "neutral" society and that people's position and situations reflect their own personal choices, talents, hard work (or lack thereof). Despite their significant differences, therefore, all these types of racisms defend the overarching system of White privilege through a process of de-racialization whereby Blacks and other racial or ethnic minorities that openly challenge racism are accused of being combative, seeking special treatment, or being racist themselves.

Although the concept of benevolent racism is developed in much more detail elsewhere (see Esposito & Romano, 2014), it will suffice to say here that this type of racism, in contrast to other forms of post-civil rights racism, does not operate by ignoring or trivializing the relevance of race and racism. Instead, those who carry out benevolent racism typically recognize and condemn racism. However, they do so by supporting attitudes, policies, and practices that ultimately uphold the prevailing racial status quo in the name of uplifting or empowering the Black community. Benevolent racism promotes these outcomes by: (1) emphasizing racial accommodation to the racial status quo rather than the need for a transformation of the prevailing racialized system; (2) espousing a utilitarian-like logic whereby discriminatory policies and practices are condoned as "necessary evils" that will ultimately bring about the "greater good" for the Black community and society as a whole; and (3) discrediting policies, practices, or beliefs designed to correct structural inequities as not only "unfair" or "unjustified" but also counterproductive and ultimately detrimental to Blacks and other racial minorities (Esposito and Romano, 2014, p. 70).

The logic underpinning benevolent racism is consistent with the ways that many opponents of BLMM co-opt this movement's frame related to valuing and uplifting the lives of Black people to justify positions, policies, or practices that ultimately legitimize the prevailing racial status quo and the various forms of racialized violence that are structured therein. Although benevolent racism is not necessarily intentional and

often operates through the creation and perpetuation of "sincere fictions" or "mythic facts" about the circumstances, causes, and solutions to Black inequality, this form of racism is clearly discernible in the ways that many opponents of BLMM adopt key aspects of the movement's content (i.e., recognizing how the lives of Black people are too often de-valued and/or ignored) while subverting its general intent, which is to promote deep structural changes so as to encourage racial justice. Below we offer two of the most common criticisms against the BLMM that illustrate this dynamic of frame co-optation and benevolent racism.

The "Ferguson Effect" and the Need for Aggressive Policing as a Requisite for Saving Black Lives

One common criticisms directed against BLMM by its opponents is that this movement has gone too far in its condemnation of the police. While most people who support this position recognize that police misconduct is a frequent problem that must be addressed, they also argue that BLMM's rhetoric against the police is irresponsible and incites violence against law enforcement. This criticism against BLMM reached unprecedented fervor after the murder of five police officers on July 7, 2016 in Dallas, Texas, and three others 10 days later on July 17, 2016 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana (e.g., Geraghty, 2016). Not only is BLMM often blamed for promoting an "anti-cop" attitude, but, perhaps more significantly, opponents argue that by calling for more public scrutiny of law enforcement, BLMM has made it harder for police officers to fight crime. This perspective, often referred to as the "Ferguson effect," has gained currency among various critics of BLMM and revolves around two basic claims: (1) the past year has seen a significant increase in the rates of violent crime, particularly homicide rates in various cities and (2) this increase is directly related to a heightened criticism of the police, encouraged by BLMM actors, which has "demoralized angered, frustrated, or otherwise caused police officers to refrain from vigorous enforcement activity, [thereby] resulting in more crime" (Rosenfeld, 2015, p.1).

This "Ferguson effect" theory is endorsed by various BLMM opponents in law enforcement, the media, politics, and academia. Recently, current FBI Director James Comey, for example, sparked controversy when he stated that perhaps one of the most compelling explanations for the increase in violent crime witnessed

in various U.S. cities has to do with the fact that police officers are being scrutinized more than ever before because of the ease with which citizens can now use cellphones to record police officers, use social media to disseminate what they capture on film, and accuse officers of racism or brutality. This reality, he claims, has generated a "chill wind' that has blown over law enforcement over the past year and has "made officers more reluctant to get out of their car and do the work that controls violent crime" (Chapman, 2016, para. 4). Various national political figures from Texas Senator Ted Cruz to former Democratic presidential candidate Martin O'Malley; conservative media personalities including Elisabeth Hasselbeck, Bill O'Reilly, and Sean Hannity; and the current chief of the Drug Enforcement Administration appointed by President Obama, Chuck Rosenberg, have echoed this perspective and believe that the Ferguson effect is causing police officers to withdraw from their duties and thus promoting crime (Lopez & Suen, 2015).

Policy researchers have also given credibility to the idea of the Ferguson effect. Heather MacDonald, for example, a fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, wrote an article for the Wall Street Journal in which she claims that we are witnessing a new nationwide wave of violent crime, most notably in cities such as Milwaukee, St. Louis, Atlanta, New York, Baltimore, and Chicago. MacDonald argues that "the most plausible explanation of the current surge in lawlessness is the intense agitation against American police departments over the past nine months." She goes on to say that because of the so-called Ferguson effect, cops are "disengaging from discretionary enforcement activity and the criminal element is feeling empowered" (Macdonald, 2015). While some city-level police data does show a sharp increase in murder rates in various U.S. cities, the changes are not uniform across the country and vary from city to city. Unfortunately, the two primary sources of crime data in the United States do not offer a comprehensive view of recent changes in crime rates (Rosenfeld, 2015). Specifically, the Bureau of Justice Statistic's National Crime Victimization Survey does not offer city-level data, while the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports are published annually and cannot reveal changes in crime rates over the past several months. More significantly, the claim that increases in violent crime rates are somehow linked to BLMM and a so-called Ferguson effect is, at best, debatable. As Attorney General Loretta Lynch has recently stated, there is no data to suggest that police officers are withdrawing from their obligations (Horowitz, 2015). Furthermore,

the FBI has now confirmed that 2015 was a particularly safe year for police officers (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016).

Despite all this, opponents of BLMM have co-opted this movement's emphasis on valuing the lives of Black people to support aggressive or "pro-active" policing. Indeed, the message advocated by these critics is that those who want to uplift the Black community should stop focusing primarily on law enforcement officials that arguably use excessive force and unjustifiably target or kill Blacks (such as in the cases of Erich Garner, Freddy Gray, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, and others), and, instead, should pay more attention to intra-racial violent crime within the Black community, which is far more common. Yet expressing concern about police brutality is not synonymous with ignoring intra-community crime and violence. Furthermore, the idea that African-Americans do not feel as outraged when Blacks are killed by other Blacks ignores the fact that, for years, numerous protests against intra-community crime and violence have taken place in urban Black communities across the country—in Chicago, New York, Newark, Pittsburg, and many others (Bouie, 2014). Considering all this, it appears the claim that Blacks are somehow unconcerned about the issue of violence unless it is perpetrated by police officers is simply unfounded. Nonetheless, critics insist that BLMM should focus more on saving Black people's lives from other Black civilians, rather than from rogue police officers (e.g., Riley, 2014; Byrd, 2015; Rivera, 2015). This, of course, requires more, not less, aggressive policing.

Calls for more aggressive policing in the name of saving Black lives are not new and predate the emergence of BLMM. For example, former NYC Mayor, Rudy Giuliani, has repeatedly stated that by advocating for the pro-active policing approach associated with the NYPD's stop and frisk program, he "saved more Black Lives than anyone" (Campanile, 2014). Similarly, former NYC mayor Bloomberg, as well as former NYPD city commissioner Ray Kelly, have consistently supported NYPD's stop and frisk program by suggesting that eliminating or even reforming aggressive policing would disproportionately put Blacks and Hispanics at risk of being murder victims, as violent crime is concentrated in low income minority neighborhoods (Esposito & Romano, 2014).

More recent examples of how opponents of the BLMM are using the so-called "Ferguson effect" to co-opt the frame of "valuing" or "saving" Black/minority lives in order to discredit criticism of the police and support aggressive policing abound. Ted Cruz, for instance, told The Guardian that it is "minorities who suffer the most when the police are put on the spotlight" (Ted Cruz: Ferguson Effect is Absolutely Real, 2015); the current Governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, has emphasized the "irony" of BLMM's opposition to pro-active policing since African-Americans are the "most victimized" by crime and "need the most help from law enforcement" (Hanchett, 2015); and FBI director James Comey laments the divide between cops and minority communities that activists such as those associated with BLMM are presumably reinforcing since "the people who are dying as the result of violent crime in American cities are typically young men of color" and "we need [a pro-active] police in these neighborhoods to save those lives because those lives matter" (Gillispie, 2015). Furthermore, in her Wall Street Journal article previously cited, Heather McDonald, states:

> Contrary to the claims of the 'black lives matter movement,' no government policy in the past quarter century has done more urban reclamation than proactive policing. Data-driven enforcement, in conjunction with stricter penalties for criminals and 'broken windows' policing, has saved thousands of black lives, brought lawful commerce and jobs to once drug-infested neighborhoods, and allowed millions to go about their daily lives without fear (MacDonald, 2015, para. 23).

The sort of co-optation of the BLMM's central frame of valuing or "saving" Black lives noted in the examples above (and there are many others) are a clear illustration of benevolent racism. In all these examples, individuals do not necessarily deny the existence of racism or the fact that there might be structural conditions that promote disproportionately high rates of violent crime in minority communities. Indeed, they appear to lament these conditions and express the need to save the lives of low-income people of color, who are disproportionately victims of violent crime. However, they seek to do this by suspending (or at least minimizing) criticism against the police and supporting aggressive, pro-active policing and other punitive measures that, in the end, reinforce the existing racial status quo. Consistent with the utilitarian principle that is part of benevolent racism, the idea is that while pro-active policing might occasionally lead to regrettable instances of racial profiling or excessive force, Black communities as a whole will ultimately be safer. Also implied in these arguments is an accommodationist logic (also typical of benevolent

racism) which suggests that Black people should exercise more personal responsibility in terms of obeying the law and being more respectful of police officers as a way to avoid potentially tragic confrontations. In effect, the only way to stop the violence in Black communities is for Blacks to acquiesce to the necessary forms of punitive social control that ultimately ensures law and order.

What is overlooked in these sorts of arguments is the substantial body of social scientific research which finds that police-force size and police expenditures have, for years, already tended to be higher in cities with higher proportions of Black residents, even when controlling for crime rates (e.g., Kent & Jacobs, 2005), or research that shows how the greater the proportion of minority residents in a city, the greater the use of aggressive policing and other coercive crime control tactics (e.g., Smith & Holmes, 2014). These trends might help explain why Black men make up 6 percent of the U.S. population and yet accounted for 40 percent of unarmed men shot to death by the police in 2015 (Somashekhar & Rich, 2016). In effect, calling for more aggressive policing in minority communities or for giving police officers a break so they can "do their job" in the name of saving Black lives ignores the fact that Black communities have, for decades, been aggressively policed and that African-Americans in particular have not always been the beneficiaries of punitive approaches to crime control.

As has been well documented, the "get tough on crime" measures that many see as requisites for saving Black lives has encouraged the current state of Black America, where one in every three Black men will eventually experience being incarcerated (while the number among White men is 1 in 17); and where close to 40 percent of all people banned from voting because of felon disenfranchisement laws are Black (Chung, 2016); and where Blacks constitute 65.4 percent of all inmates in the United States serving life in prison without the possibility of parole for non-violent offenses, mostly related to drugs (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014); and where one in every 15 African-American children has a parent in prison, compared with one in every 42 Hispanic children and one in every 111 non-Hispanic White children (Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012). In short, co-opting the frame of saving Black lives by supporting punitive policies (e.g., aggressive policing in Black communities) that support the aforementioned realities is a clear example of benevolent racism.

If Black Lives Matter, Why Does BLMM Ignore the Mass Murder of Unborn Black Babies?

The same sort of co-optation of the "Black lives matter" frame has been taken up by pro-life activists who argue that BLMM not only ignores Black on Black crime but also neglects the presumed "abortion epidemic" that plagues Black communities. As is well known, conspiracy theories about legalized abortion being a "genocidal scheme" to decimate the Black population have been around since at least the 1970s and have been previously endorsed by the Black Panthers and many current Black leaders, including Jesse Jackson, although the latter has since changed his position on this issue (Darity & Turner, 1972; Kumeh, 2010). Yet the view that pro-choice policies have encouraged "Black genocide" and that abortion clinics are disproportionately placed in Black communities as part of a deliberate effort to get rid of Black fetuses continues to have currency among various pro-life groups and individuals. (e.g., Heise, 2015). According to Kia Heise (2015), well-known contemporary conservatives such as Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, and Herman Cain have, even before the rise of BLMM, routinely co-opted a civil rights frame to condemn Planned Parenthood and other presumably "pro-abortion" organizations that provide health services in Black communities. In doing so, they seem to have abandoned the "color-blind" frame typical of the mainstream conservative movement and suggest that abortions in the Black community are part of a racist agenda. In effect, these pundits emphasize the relevance of race to support the pro-life cause while neglecting the existence of anti-Black racism in virtually every other social arena.

While it may be true that abortions are disproportionately more common within the Black community, the rise of BLMM has motivated many segments of the pro-life movement to co-opt the slogan "Black Lives Matter" as a rallying cry for an anti-abortion campaign that trivializes or sidetracks BLMM's condemnation of police brutality and its broader struggle for racial justice—all in the name of "saving Black lives" (particularly those still in the womb).

Indeed, author Tom Trinko, for example, suggests that "the leading cause of death among black Americans is abortion," yet "…[those] who say they are concerned about the tiny percentage of blacks killed by police not only don't care about the mass elimination of blacks in the womb, but they in fact work constantly to protect those who slaughter blacks" (Trinko, 2014). Former

GOP presidential candidate Ben Carson has stated that "Black Lives Matter should include those eradicated by abortion," and activist and former mayor of Cincinnati, Kenneth Blackwell, states that "abortion is the greatest threat to Black lives in America today. . . any civil rights leader who genuinely believes that 'Black lives matter' should be working to see that every Black baby is accorded the very first civil right—the right to life" (Blackwell, 2015).

As is well known, the United States is plagued by a history of reproductive injustices that have been disproportionately inflicted on African-Americans—these include slavery, eugenics programs, sterilization abuses, etc. The fact that most Blacks are aware of this history has enabled the White-dominated pro-life movement to mobilize significant numbers of African-Americans to become pro-life advocates (Heise, 2015). The larger point, however, is that by employing the frame that "Black lives matter," many current pro-life activists argue that BLMM and anyone who opposes or does not pay enough attention to the high abortion rates in the Black community are either active racists or complicit in the perpetuation of a racist system that devalues Black lives and and/or sees Blacks as a burden to society.

In a particularly stinging condemnation of BLMM, Ryan Bomberger, founder of the pro-life group The Radiance Foundation, suggests that:

> #BlackLivesMatter movement is a fraud. . . [and] the biggest fraud is their undying devotion to Big Abortion while decrying that black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. There is no more institutionalized racist system killing more black lives (which are equally as precious as any other lives) than the abortion industry, led by baby-parts-trafficking Planned Parenthood. Abortion is the number one killer in the black community (Bomberger, 2015).

Those who attack Planned Parenthood in particular typically emphasize how Margaret Sanger, an early birth control advocate who is widely regarded as the founder of this organization, was a racist and eugenicist who had an agenda to sterilize what she considered to be "inferior races." This claim, however, is contested, as many have argued that Sanger's primary motivation was to liberate women from "compulsory motherhood," an objective that had nothing to do with racial genocide (O'Brien, 2013). Indeed, even Edwin Black (2003), who wrote a comprehensive history of the U.S. Eugenics Movement and is no supporter of Margaret Sanger, admits there is no evidence that Sanger was motivated by a desire to eliminate the Black race.

While the details surrounding Margaret Sanger's controversial legacy is beyond the scope of this discussion, there should be little doubt that Planned Parenthood and other Title X funded clinics contribute significantly to women's healthcare in Black communities. In fact, 20% of people who use Title X clinics/services identify as Black (Fowler et. al., 2013). The Title X Family Planning Program was enacted under Richard Nixon in the 1970s as part of the Public Health Care Act. Title X clinics are designed to provide low-income individuals with family planning and related healthcare services, particularly those who do not have health insurance and might not qualify for Medicaid. Planned Parenthood is granted about 25% of all Title X funding. According to Willie Oglesby (2014), these Title X facilities continue to play an important role in terms of reducing class and racial disparities in health outcomes, even after the full implementation of the Affordable Healthcare Act.

While the focus of its critics is on abortions, Planned Parenthood and other Title X clinics offer a full array of sexual and reproductive healthcare services that are crucial for low-income Black women's health—these include breast and cervical cancer screening, HIV testing, screening and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, and many others. Without access to these services, the health outcomes of low-income Black women would be further compromised, while the number of abortions in the country would be far higher. As an example, it is well known that African-American women have the highest breast cancer death rates of all racial and ethnic groups. This has a lot to do with being diagnosed at a later stage, a pattern that is itself related to disproportionate poverty and insufficient access to healthcare services such as those provided by Planned Parenthood and other Title X clinics (Oglesby, 2014). As an indicator of how Title X clinics/programs prevent deaths from cancer within vulnerable communities (notably low income Black women), in 2010, publicly funded family planning clinic visits "related to cervical cancer prevention, including Pap and HPV testing and the HPV vaccine, prevented 3,700 cases of cervical cancer and 2,100 cervical cancer deaths" (Frost, Frohwirth, & Zolna, 2015). Clearly, Title X clinics and services are saving women's lives, notably low-income women of color who disproportionately rely on these services.

With respect to abortions, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Black women make

up about a third of all women who get an abortion in United States, despite the fact that Blacks comprise about 13 percent of the U.S. population (Curtin et. al., 2013). Many public health scholars attribute this disparity to various social-structural factors, including disproportionate poverty and disparities in access to healthcare insurance and contraception (e.g., Kim, Dagher, & Chen, 2016). Yet it is precisely the clinics that offer these contraceptive services that critics who want to "save Black babies/fetuses" are attacking. Indeed, according to the Guttmacher Institute, in 2013, publicly funded family planning services "helped women prevent two million unintended pregnancies; of those, one million would have resulted in an unplanned birth and 693,000 in an abortion." The report goes on to suggest that without Title X family planning services, the "U.S. rates of unintended pregnancy, unplanned birth, and abortion each would have been 60% higher" (Frost et. al., 2014).

When the data above is carefully considered, pro-life activists who condemn BLMM for ignoring the so-called "abortion epidemic" in the Black community that is presumably encouraged by Planned Parenthood and other Title X Clinics overlook the fact that, without the services provided by these clinics, more unintended pregnancies (and hence abortions) would likely result, while more Black women would die from various forms of cancers and other ailments. In effect, consistent with the sort of utilitarianism that underpins benevolent racism, these critics call for the elimination of Title X clinics and their services as a way to save the Black community from what many pro-life activists regard as a "genocidal scheme" against Blacks. In doing so, however, they are denying services that have been shown to benefit the health outcomes of low income Black communities in the name of "saving Black lives." Furthermore, by focusing almost exclusively on saving the lives of Black fetuses, pro-life critics tend to ignore and/or downplay the wider structural challenges that Black babies face when they actually come into the world. In effect, the accommodationist logic that underlies benevolent racism is also clearly operative, as calling to save Black lives in the womb does little to promote a better, safer society for Black people, which is what BLMM emphasizes.

Conclusion

As discussed by various contemporary race scholars and activists such as Bonilla-Silva (2006), Tim Wise (2010), and various others, the more challenging and widespread forms of racisms facing the United States today are not the blatant variety that the mainstream media is obsessed with, but rather the more sophisticated, subtle varieties that operate behind a facade of racial neutrality. Yet while the post-civil rights era strategies of maintaining the prevailing system of U.S. White supremacy through de-racialization and advocacy for so-called color-blind policies and practices continues, what we have described as "benevolent racism" is becoming increasingly prevalent. Far from simply encouraging a denial or trivialization of racial differences, benevolent racism is particularly insidious in that it bolsters the existing racial status quo through ostensibly anti-racist language.

We contend that it is this form of racism that is at the center of the current co-optation of the Black Lives Matter Movement that we must now be vigilant against. While the BLMM has already been successful in terms of raising awareness about the reality of police brutality to a mainstream audience and encouraging some politicians to address the issue of racial injustice, the transformative potential of this movement requires that those who support racial justice defend BLMM's message of valuing Blacks lives from those who are currently co-opting the same, color-conscious frame to support attitudes, policies, and practices that are ultimately detrimental (or, at best, inconsequential) to the plight of millions of Black Americans.

The fact that a significant segment of the U.S. public has, within the past year, been receptive to blatantly racist/nativist comments made by major public figures—most notably Donald Trump—has further reinforced the need to honestly assess and critique the current state of U.S. race relations. Many commentators have made the argument that the sort of public support Trump has gathered through his remarks about deporting all undocumented immigrants, building a wall protect to U.S. borders against Mexican "criminals" and "rapists," and prohibiting all Muslims from entering the country, are clear indications that Trump's success is, to a large extent, predicated on a White racial backlash in the United States that, although by no means new, was reenergized with the election of an African-American president (e.g., Bouie 2016). In effect, from the perspective of many White Americans, Trump will restore the racial hierarchy that has been supposedly compromised by Barack Obama's presidency and further challenged by the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Yet addressing his largely non-White and/or anti-racist Facebook friends, renowned sociologist Eduardo

Bonilla-Silva (2016) stated the following in a passionate post:

> We should not forget that the dominant type of racism responsible for our collective standing in America is not Trumpism. Whether in jobs, banks, housing, stores, or schools, in the Post-Civil Rights era, we experience subtle, institutional, seemingly non-racial discrimination… and the ideology that co-constitutes the 'new racism"—color-blind racism—is as suave as its practices. So every time you hear Trumpists spewing their clear racist venom, you must watch for the low intensity poison of color-blinders. . ."

We agree with Bonilla-Silva that the more challenging and widespread forms of racisms facing the United States today are not the blatant, Trump-like bigoted rhetoric that the mainstream media is obsessed with but rather the more sophisticated, seemingly non-racial varieties. At the time of this writing however, even Trump is shifting his campaign message from one of overt racial antagonism, to one that is more consistent with benevolent racism. For example, Trump has repeatedly emphasized that things have never been worse for African-Americans. Accordingly, far from embracing color-blindness, Trump has attempted courting Black voters (and racially sympathetic Whites), by utilizing a color-conscious frame that emphasizes the need to tackle the unique problems facing the Black community.

Yet consistent with benevolent racism, even a cursory review of his political platform and public statements reveals how many of his policy proposals can actually hurt Black communities in the name of "helping" or "uplifting" them. For instance, Trump calls for creating good jobs in Black communities by re-negotiating trade deals, cracking down on illegal immigrants who allegedly take jobs from Americans, and, perhaps most significantly, repealing The Affordable Care Act, which presumably "kills jobs." In taking this latter measure, however, Trump would compromise the healthcare coverage for millions of African-Americans who benefitted from this law (Quealy and Sanger-Katz, 2014). Likewise, his recent praise at the first presidential debate against Hillary Clinton for "stop and frisk" policies as a way to promote safety and "law and order" in Black inner cities is another prime example of benevolent racism. Much like Giuliani, Bloomberg, and other advocates of stop and frisk, Trump advocates a policy that has been found to be racist and unconstitutional as a way to stop violence and save Black lives.

In these and various other remarks, Trump implicitly uses the BLMM frame of valuing the lives of Black people to support policies or agendas that are ultimately anathema to racial equity and Black empowerment. We believe it is precisely this form of benevolent racism—typified by advocates of the Ferguson effect, pro-life activists, and now Donald Trump—that is at the heart of the current co-optation of the Black Lives Matter Movement described in this paper. It is our hope that our analysis will lead to further research and discussion on how to discern and neutralize the use of benevolent racism in efforts to oppose BLMM and other projects that seek to promote racial justice.

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