

## **Black Lives Matter? Embracing the Proclamation or the Organization**

**By Dr. Kelvin J. Cochran**

“Black lives matter!” is a statement of proclamation—a declaration and a decree—emerging from centuries of anguish born of America’s history of injustices stemming from the African slave trade. “Black Lives Matter” is an organization—a body of people with a particular mission—emerging from the proclamation following a series of police brutality and vigilante deaths of black men. The proclamation existed before the organization. The message of the proclamation and the message of the organization are not the same.

There are many who embrace the proclamation, yet are not aligned with the message of the organization. In their hearts they are convicted that black lives do matter and are advocates for change, but believe the organization’s message, methods and values are antithetical to redemption and reconciliation. There are also many who embrace the organization, not realizing its message, methods and values are divergent to those of the proclamation.

Choose whatever side you wish, but it is important to know and articulate the difference between the two.

### **The Proclamation**

The justification for slavery in America was rooted in an ideology that black lives do not matter. Subsequently, the culture established to dehumanize and oppress blacks following the Emancipation Proclamation which made it impossible to achieve economic freedom was propagated in the ideology that black lives do not matter. Of this ideology, systems of inequality and injustice were established resulting in mass incarcerations, inmate labor camps and lynching, resulting in oppressions just as heinous as slavery.

These original forms of racial injustice expanded through the creation of “Jim Crow Laws” where government sanctioned violent acts were committed on non-violent protesters in marches, boycotts, lunch counter sit-ins, and even during African American worship services on Sunday. The brutal murders of Emmett Till, Medgar Evers, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and so many more were all rooted in the ideology—black lives do not matter.

After the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it became illegal to discriminate in employment practices based on race and other inalienable rights. However, many government agencies continued to deny blacks equal employment opportunities. My beloved profession, the American Fire Service was one of the most resistant. Law suits were filed in many cities to force local governments to comply, creating affirmative action laws. As a rookie firefighter in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1981, racism and discrimination was rampant. This ill-treatment was rooted in the centuries old ideology deeply ingrained in American culture, even the fire service—black lives do not matter.

In recent years, police brutality and vigilante killings of African-Americans without accountability due to flawed criminal justice systems and laws have allowed discrimination where blacks have been targeted. The murders of Travon Martin and Michael Brown brought these historical atrocities to a tipping point and gave rise to the origin of the proclamation: “Black lives matter!”

The proclamation’s intent was not to suggest that other lives do not matter, but rather declares the historical, systemic and institutionalized wrongs that have persisted toward blacks for over four hundred years must come to an end. This proclamation erupted out of generations of humiliation expressed with utter frustration and righteous indignation. “Black lives matter!”

As an American patriot, I agree with those who profess "all lives matter". “All lives matter!” is a proclamation established in the US Constitution.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal and that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

However, the generational evidence of black lives in America juxtaposed to the generational evidence of our white brothers and sisters is self-evident, all men have been created equal, but all men have not been treated equal. Black lives have been intentionally and systematically deprived of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is from this constitutional and historical backdrop this righteous proclamation has been decreed. “Black lives matter!”

### **The Organization**

Subsequently, the message of the proclamation has been adopted as the name of an organization, “Black Lives Matter”.

By its own description, the organization, “Black Lives Matter”, has a message that subtracts from the fervent and righteous message of the proclamation. The message of the organization and the message of the proclamation are not the same. The message of the organization is about black lives, however, it is not inclusive of all matters contributing to the plight of black people. The organization’s message also includes matters and methods not aligned with the proclamation.

The message of the organization is rooted in feelings and emotions that affirm preferences and agendas that have redefined the original pure message of the proclamation. The organization values the ideologies of moral relativism and pluralism. There is no absolute truth. Truth is defined only by that which supports its cause. It values the premise that each person is an authority unto themselves. There is no acknowledgement of the Sovereign God, moral authority or respect for civic authority, even if the authorities are black. The authority and counsel of black mayors, black police officers, black pastors and black politicians don’t matter.

The only authorities that matter are those who endorse their cause. Anyone who does not embrace their ideology is an enemy.

The propaganda of the organization has reached the point whereas public opinion and popular culture asserts: to reject the organization is to reject the proclamation. As such, those who are true to the proclamation are being forced to embrace the ideology of the organization due to the threat of cancel culture. People are losing their livelihoods because they do not embrace the organization though they are committed to the proclamation. People who embrace the proclamation are afraid to say, "Black lives matter" because they don't want to be mistakenly identified with the organization.

Here's the point: You do not have to affirm and embellish the organization to champion the cause of the proclamation. The proclamation, "Black lives matter!" must be distinguished apart from the messaging, methods and values imposed by the organization.

### **Distinguishing Divergent Messages**

"Black lives matter!" as a proclamation is a clarion call to address centuries-long injustices and inequality leveled against the descendants of African slaves. Roots of inequities that have run deep and wide for generations. The proclamation is a message that seeks to lift up a standard of justice and equity and to repair the breaches caused by racism that continues to foster deprivation in black families and black communities.

Though every person has a right to choose between the message of the proclamation and the message of the organization, it is vitally important for Christians to distinguish between the two.

- The message of the proclamation is a message of non-violence and domestic tranquility. The message of the organization includes violence, lawlessness and autonomous zones achieved by any means necessary and a declaration of "No Justice. No Peace!"
- The message behind the proclamation is one of reconciliation and conviction embraced by all people who have a heart for unity. The message behind the organization is one of retaliation and condemnation that segregates and divides, even people of color.
- The message behind the proclamation is one of bipartisan transformation. The message behind the organization is one of political transaction.
- The message of the proclamation extends beyond the just cause of addressing innocent black lives taken by police brutality, vigilantes and unjust incarcerations. It also includes black lives murdered by other blacks, the black lives of babies taken in abortion, and the black lives of children abandon by their fathers. The message of the organization does not include these matters of black lives which matter just as much.

### **Call to Action: Embrace the Proclamation**

Don't be ashamed or afraid to stand against racial injustice. "Black lives matter!" in its original meaning resonates with all African Americans and has captured the hearts of many non-African Americans. Black lives should not be deprived of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The just and righteous flames of the proclamation are sufficient to burn down the mountain of racism in the United States. Embrace the proclamation. It expresses what we have been decrying for centuries. Black lives matter!