Chapter 6

Trans-National Advocacy and the Hashtag Black Lives Matter: Globalisation and Reception in the UK and France

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ABSTRACT

This chapter offers an insight into racial debates and equality advocacy in the 21st century and explores the emergence, the becoming and long-lasting effect of #BlackLivesMatter. The hashtag story is a traditional viral web content. Nevertheless, technologies allowed these initially local concerns, to become a world-wide plea. The first section summarises the past and current struggle for civil rights and equality in the USA. The second one focuses on the European reception of the hashtag in two structurally different countries. The last section discusses both outcomes and consequences in terms of social policies and international advocacy. A journalistic and critical analysis of the movement is here provided, with long term effects and reception case studies.

INTRODUCTION

For the majority of African-Americans, the reality is unemployment, barriers to education and health services and insufficient housing in poor urban areas highly militarized by the police. American statistics show that Black men are 31% more...
likely to be pulled over by the police than white men and 15 to 34-year-old black men are nine times more likely to be killed than any other person. American police killed around 1,100 black people in 2015 compared to three killed by police in the UK; it has one of the highest murder rates in the developed world and three million privately owned firearms (Murdoch, 2016). The ongoing war against police brutality in the United States persists for African-Americans.

From Malcolm X’s marking of the ‘movement’ in the sixties as a nightmare… to King’s dream attributed as a dream deferred, the killing of Michael Brown undoubtedly triggered the re-affirmation of the struggle for Blacks in America. The story of #blacklivesmatter is a lens through which both American and international racial inequalities can be analysed. This chapter offers an insight into racial debate and equality advocacy in the 21st century, based on journalistic and academic works.

The first section briefly summarises the past and current struggle for civil rights and equality in the USA documenting the birth and journey of BLM within the current social and political settings of America and identifying the political triggers contributing to a black uprising. It acts as a documentation of the timeline and adaptation of BLM, from hashtag, to movement, transcending to its recognition as a global network and describes how new technologies and social media offer new channels for advocacy, leading to potential new agencies.

The second one focuses on the European reception of the hashtag in two structurally different countries, the UK and France, exploring the transferability of an online movement born in the USA to other national contexts. The last section discusses both outcomes and consequences in terms of social policy, international advocacy and potential impact on people’s lives interrogating the internationalisation of BLM as a global movement and its proficiency to advocate for the poorest of Black people in an ever-increasing globalised world.

BIRTH AND RISE OF THE #BLACKLIVESMATTER (#BLM): AMERICAN HISTORY

From Slavery to Civil Rights: A Brief History of Black Rights Movements

American history is complex. The structure of society and the legality are organised according to several levels leading to diverse impact and consequences. Several dates and historical periods are important to recall regarding the topic of this chapter.
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