



CIT 370 - Global Concerns: Inequalities and Discrimination

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#BlackLivesMatter Movement

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to provide information about the experiences of black people who have been systematically exposed to racism from past to present. In the research also detailed information will also be given about #BlackLivesMatter, which started as a discourse and turned into a resistance movement. In the research, examples of racism against blacks from all over the world will be given.

Key Words: #BlackLivesMatter, Racism, Black Existentialism, Activism

Abbreviations:

MKL: Martin Luther King

BPP: Black Panther Party

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Introduction

“All human beings are created equal and have certain inalienable rights given to them by God, such as the right to life, freedom, and to seek happiness... If any state becomes such that it abolishes them, it is the human right to change or destroy it.”¹ This equality, as stated in the American Declaration of Independence announced in 1776, has not been achieved for blacks despite 255 years. Black people, who were forced to work as slaves for years and were killed when necessary, gained certain rights with their struggles in the past years. Although racism was legally abolished in the USA with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, it seems that it still continues in practice.² Blacks are resistant against this human rights crime for their rights and lives.

The History of Racism

Considering that even Thomas Jefferson, who prepared the American Declaration of Independence and who spoke about equality, owned slaves, we can say that the foundations of racism and discrimination that have been going on for years are quite old.³ In 1863, the American Civil War ended and Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery with the Declaration of Independence. With the declaration, nearly 4 million black US citizens were freed from slavery. Although slavery was legally abolished, there were problems in its adoption, internalization, and most importantly, enforcement by American society. In other words, slavery and racial discrimination were legally abolished, but racial discrimination in society continued. After the American Civil War, blacks were not slaves but were not normal citizens

¹ Declaration of Independence: A Transcription, National Archives, 1776, Retrieved from: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>. Accessed January 11, 2021.

² Civil Rights Act of 1964, History, January 4, 2010, Retrieved from: <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-act>. Accessed January 11, 2021.

³ Henry Wiencek, The Dark Side of Thomas Jefferson, Smithsonian Magazine, October 2012, Retrieved from: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-dark-side-of-thomas-jefferson-35976004/>. Accessed January 11, 2021.

either. In 1870, black men were given the right to vote.⁴ However, black people's achievement of these gains has been met with reaction, especially in the southern states. White supremacist racist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan emerged to deny black rights and resorted to violent acts. In those years, whites and blacks could not attend the same schools, blacks and whites could not take the same public transportation vehicles, or enter the same hotels and restaurants. Blacks who were already dealing with discrimination and exclusion were also subjected to the violence of racists who defended white supremacy.

Blacks have struggled to claim their rights for many years, but have not achieved significant gains. The year 1955 was a turning point for black people. The arrest of a black woman named Rosa Parks in Alabama for not staying in the front seat she was sitting on the bus revealed Martin Luther King.⁵ MLK, who was serving as a clergyman at that time, organized a boycott and started a struggle to seek justice. During the 382-day boycott, Martin Luther King's home was bombed and King was arrested.⁶ The Constitutional Court found Rosa Parks right. This was a turning point for the black people's struggle for rights. Racial discrimination in buses and other means of transport was declared a crime in the court decision. After this achievement, MLK became a leader for blacks. Although blacks were gaining certain rights, discrimination continued, especially in the education system. Under these circumstances, King made a speech watched by 250,000 people and his words went down in history. *I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character.*⁷ After

⁴ İşte (**?zenciler?**) için kilometre taşları, Cumhuriyet, January 19, 2009, Retrieved from: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/iste-zenciler-icin-kilometre-taslari-35864>. Accessed January 11, 2021.

⁵ Özlem Kaya, 1 Aralık 1955: Rosa Parks otobüste bir beyaza yer vermediği için tutuklandı, Çatlak Zemin, December 1, 2020, Retrieved from: <https://www.catlakzemin.com/1-aralik-1955-rosa-parks-otobuste-bir-beyaza-yer-vermedigi-icin-tutuklandi/>. Accessed January 11, 2021.

⁶ Montgomery Bus Boycott, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Retrieved from: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/montgomery-bus-boycott>. Accessed January 11, 2021.

⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr. : I Have a Dream Speech (1963), U.S. Embassy & Consulate in the Republic of Korea, Retrieved

this speech, support for black people's search for rights was increasing day by day. By 1965, the law on the protection of black people's right to vote was passed.⁸ Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was one of the first movements established to seek rights of black people.⁹ The purpose of the party was to prevent attacks by police and racists in the places where blacks live. The BPP is one of the first armed attempts to counter the racism and discrimination blacks experience. But this move did not fit into Martin Luther King's notion of nonviolent civil disobedience. Therefore, it could not get the expected support. Although MLK was not violent, the racists who defended the superiority of the white people were violent groups. In 1968, Martin Luther King was shot and killed by the racist attacker James Earl Ray.¹⁰ Nothing would be the same for blacks after King's murder. Protests were held across the country for days. After King, blacks would continue the struggle to seek justice more strictly.

The Struggle After Martin Luther King

King is not the only important figure in the struggle for rights and life of black people. Malcolm X human rights defender has also become one of the leaders of the movement that fought against racism. But Malcolm was killed by a racist aggressor like King.¹¹ King and Malcolm were just two of the names killed in this struggle. The killing of these leaders would make the struggle even stricter and was create new leaders. Jesse Jackson was the prominent activist in the 1980s. Jackson was twice the Democratic Party presidential candidate in the

from: <https://kr.usembassy.gov/education-culture/infopedia-usa/living-documents-american-history-democracy/martin-luther-king-jr-dream-speech-1963/>. Accessed January 11, 2021.

⁸ Nihayet Özgürüz: ABD Sivil Haklar Hareketi, US Embassy Ankara, February, 2008, Retrieved from: http://www.usemb-ankara.org.tr/civil_rights_movement/equality.htm. Accessed January 12, 2021.

⁹ The Black Panther Party: Challenging Police and Promoting Social Change, National Museum of African American History and Culture, Retrieved from: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/black-panther-party-challenging-police-and-promoting-social-change>. Accessed January 12, 2021.

¹⁰ Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Retrieved from: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/assassination-martin-luther-king-jr>. Accessed January 12, 2021.

¹¹ Josiah Bates, The Enduring Mystery of Malcolm X's Assassination, Time, February 20, 2020, Retrieved from: <https://time.com/5778688/malcolm-x-assassination/>. Accessed January 12, 2021.

1984 and 1988 elections, but did not win the elections.¹² It was the first time that a black man ran for president in the United States. This was a very important development in the struggle for black people to seek justice. In the 1990s, there were conflicts between the police and black people in particular. From time to time there were riots and looting.

In 1992, in Los Angeles, 4 police officers used violence against Black Rodney King, but were not punished. After this decision, a great revolt that will last 6 days took place in Los Angeles.¹³ Incidents such as looting, assault, arson and murder took place in the rebellion and 53 people in total died. According to the press, the cause of the events was the police who battered Rodney King. But the main reasons for the events were high poverty, unemployment and racism in the region. Blacks, who had been discriminated against for years, were now showing their reactions in this way. Blacks' demands for a decent life and equality often ended with police violence. In 1989, Colin Powell became the country's first black Chief of Staff of the United States Army.¹⁴ Powell was also to become America's first black foreign minister in 2001.

Transformation of Struggle Into Movement

The biggest turning point in the struggle of blacks against racism was Barack Obama's election as the 44th president of America in 2008. Because of Obama's statements and attitudes, blacks thought they would not be exposed to surplus discrimination. But it did not happen as thought and the incidence of racism in the country increased under the Obama

¹² Steve Kornacki, 1984: Jesse Jackson's run for the White House and the rise of the black voter, NBC News, July 29, 2019, Retrieved from: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/elections/1984-jesse-jackson-s-run-white-house-rise-black-voter-n1029596>. Accessed January 12, 2021.

¹³ Karen Grigsby Bates & Anjuli Sastry, When LA Erupted In Anger: A Look Back At The Rodney King Riots, April 26, 2017, Retrieved from: <https://www.npr.org/2017/04/26/524744989/when-la-erupted-in-anger-a-look-back-at-the-rodney-king-riots>. Accessed January 12, 2021.

¹⁴ Colin Powell, Britannica, Jul 07, 2006, Retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Colin-Powell/additional-info#history>. Accessed January 12, 2021.

administration.¹⁵ Blacks' struggle against racism turned into a movement during this period. In 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was shot and killed even though he was unarmed.¹⁶ After Martin's murder, a woman named Alicia Garza used the word #Blacklivesmatters on her Facebook account. This statement explained very well the discrimination and marginalization that blacks have been experiencing for years. In 2014, Eric Garner was brutally killed while in police custody.¹⁷ Garner died of breathlessness and his last words were "I can't breathe". In 2020, George Floyd was killed by the police just like Eric Garner. Floyd's last words before he died, too, were "I can't breathe".¹⁸ Following Floyd's murder, a rebellion broke out in almost every city in the country. Blacks no longer wanted to be killed by the police and were saying #Blacklivesmatters. The racist Donald Trump administration tried to suppress the struggle for justice by force. The racist and separating attitude of the Trump administration may have affected the outcome of the election held on November 3, 2020, which the racists lost.

The Role of Social Media in the Movement

Social media, which is an effective communication and news source of the 21st century, affects large masses and enables us to do this much easier and faster than other methods we encounter in history. Today, media organizations are losing their influence and the influence of social media continues to increase in every field. Therefore, globally accessible and accurate news coverage demonstrates the unique value of social media as a news source. The #BlackLivesMatter movement was first launched on social media in 2013

¹⁵ Obamadan sonra ırkçılık arttı, Cumhuriyet, November 19, 2008, Retrieved from: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/obamadan-sonra-irkcilik-artti-23028>. Accessed January 14, 2021.

¹⁶ Trayvon Martin Shooting Fast Facts, CNN, October 19, 2020 Retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/05/us/trayvon-martin-shooting-fast-facts/index.html>. Accessed January 14, 2021.

¹⁷ 'I can't breathe': Eric Garner put in chokehold by NYPD officer – video, The Guardian, December 4, 2014, Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2014/dec/04/i-cant-breathe-eric-garner-chokehold-death-video>. Accessed January 14, 2021.

¹⁸ George Floyd: What happened in the final moments of his life, BBC, 16 July, 2020, Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52861726>. Accessed January 14, 2021.

with the murder of a 17-year-old named Trayvon Martin. The organizers of the movement are 3 black women named Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors-Brignac and Opal Tometi.¹⁹ It is very meaningful that the people who started this struggle against black racism were made by women who are one of the most discriminated in the world. The #BlackLivesMatter movement has used social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to react and gain support. The movement has become a global human rights movement organized in all states of America and more than 20 countries today. The movement has increased its impact with the images taken and broadcast with technological developments. The published images gained huge support on social media platforms and increased the reaction against racism and support for the movement. While younger generations prefer social media as their news sources, those aged 40 and over tend to prefer traditional media sources.²⁰ However, in the world where racism is still a very common humanitarian problem in most countries of the world, it is important to accept that prejudice against it can only be portrayed by those who are exposed to racism. That's why freedom in social media is the most effective source of racism in the world. For example, if there was no social media, we wouldn't know what would happen to George Floyd's memory. Presumably the incident would be announced by several local news outlets, then interest would rapidly decline. As a result, George Floyd would probably be on the list of forgotten blacks who were wrongfully killed in America. Black Americans are 2.5 times more likely to be killed by the police than white Americans.²¹

¹⁹ Rebecca Greenfield, Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi, Activists Against Racial Injustice, December 3, 2020, Retrieved from: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-12-03/blm-activists-patrisse-cullors-alicia-garza-and-opal-tometi-bloomberg-50-2020>. Accessed January 14, 2021.

²⁰ Antonis Kalogeropoulos, How Younger Generations Consume News Differently, 2019, Retrieved from: <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/how-younger-generations-consume-news-differently/>. Accessed January 14, 2021.

²¹ Willem Roper, Black Americans 2.5X More Likely Than Whites to Be Killed By Police, Jun 2, 2020, Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/chart/21872/map-of-police-violence-against-black-americans/>. Accessed January 14, 2021.

Images of George Floyd's murder went viral when they were captured by an audience and uploaded to Facebook. Thanks to the increased awareness in social media, it has also attracted the attention of people who think that racism is now off the world agenda. With the use of social media as a means of response, people, especially whites, have helped educate themselves that racism is a human rights violation. The simplest example of this is the increase in sales of anti-racist books on the e-commerce site named Amazon.²²

Social media has played a critical role not only as a news source but also in organizing protests. The Instagram account 'teens.4.equality', which 6 young girls living in Nashville, USA, used to organize protests by making plans on Twitter, gathered more than 14 thousand followers and more than 10 thousand people participated in the protest.²³

Violence Against Black People in the World

When we talk about the BLM movement, America is the country that most people think of. We think that the main reason for this is the news reflected on us in the media. So do black people live very well in the rest of the world? The answer to this question is no like discrimination against every group. Almost everywhere in the world, black people are exposed to racism. According to Centennial College data, the unemployment rate of Black individuals with a graduation degree in Canada is higher than the non-Black high school drop-out rate (12%).²⁴ The statements of a black boy who gave an interview to the HuffPost Canada news page show how deplorable the situation is. Omar Mahamoud scored a goal while playing ball with a friend in the garden in 4th grade, and his friend called him a

²² Alison Flood, Anti-racist book sales surge in US and Britain after George Floyd killing, Jun 3, 2020, Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jun/03/anti-racist-book-sales-surge-us-uk-george-floyd-killing-robin-diangelo-white-fragility>. Accessed January 14, 2021.

²³ Kerri Bartlett & Brinley Hineman, 'Do not be silent': Meet Nashville teens who launched a movement for social change, July 2, 2020, Retrieved from: <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/local/williamson/franklin/2020/07/02/meet-nashville-teens-who-launched-movement-social-change/5349352002/>. Accessed January 14, 2021.

²⁴ Anti-Black Racism, Centennial College, Retrieved from: <https://www.centennialcollege.ca/centres-institutes/centre-for-global-citizenship-education-and-inclusion/social-action-cards/anti-black-racism/>. Accessed January 14, 2021.

trickster. When Mahamoud said it wasn't true, his friend replied, "Thank God, God didn't make me Black like you." Mahamoud, who is now 19 years old, said for his life the phrase "I was experiencing racism before I even understood the concept of race." He has heard statements like this not only from his friends but also from his teacher. When he was sitting in the classroom wearing the hat of his cardigan, his teacher insulted him, "This is not a basketball court, I know you want to be there right now; Maybe if I say 'Yo yo yo' you will understand ".²⁵ When we evaluate the process, we can all guess that Omar Mahamoud is not the only black person exposed to racism in Canada. When we continue to look at the world, we come across the "Black Peter" tradition made in the Netherlands. According to the belief of the people of the region, St. Nicholas is a benevolent who lives in Spain and devotes himself to charity, especially helping children. The Dutch believe that St. Nicholas arrived in Amsterdam on December 5th and they start events 3 weeks in advance to celebrate this. In different cities of the country, the arrival of Santa Claus to the city is being revived respectively. However, many human rights organizations believe that one of the characters, Zwarte Piet (Black Peter) is racist and portrayed in a way that offends blacks. Black Peter is one of Santa's helpers. However, this character is played against a white actor, not a black actor. With his face painted black and his lips red, the character is described as a mischievous, misbehaving, clumsy, and distributing candy to children. It is thought that the character of Black Peter is from the colonialist times, that he belongs to the racist, white supremacist mentality of those times, and he likened blacks to monkeys with his character traits, makeup and costumes. Human rights associations have been trying to change this situation, stating that this character has been representing black people negatively and thus offended the black

²⁵ Sherina Harris, Black Students Still Face 'Toxic' Racism Despite Decades Of 'Solutions' In Ontario, February 9, 2020, Retrieved from: https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/ontario-schools-racism_ca_5ef0cad1c5b685770a16b072?utm_hp_ref=ca-anti-black-racism. Accessed January 14, 2021.

community for many years, but still continues to use the Black Peter character in the town of Dokkum.²⁶

Discrimination against black individuals stands out in a study that is generally evaluated by Europe. The study titled "Being Black in Europe", prepared by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), deals with the racist and discriminatory attacks that black-skinned people are exposed to in many areas such as daily life, workplaces and finding a rental house.²⁷ FRA President Michael O'Flaherty said in a statement regarding the report that although laws prohibiting discrimination in the EU were enacted nearly 20 years ago, black citizens in many countries of Europe face severe exclusion and racist harassment. The report, prepared in the light of the information obtained as a result of the interviews made with approximately 6 thousand blacks living in 12 EU member countries, it is noted that 30 percent of black-skinned people in the EU have been subjected to verbal racist harassment, and 5 percent have been physically attacked in the last 5 years. In the report, it was stated that one third of the black citizens in Europe were exposed to serious racist and segregation approaches in the business field. In the report, where the hate speech and racist treatment faced by people of African descent living in countries such as Austria, Denmark and Germany in different areas of social life were discussed, it was stated that 15 percent of blacks could not find a house for rent in the private real estate market and only 15 percent of black people owned their own property.²⁸

²⁶ Ayanna Thompson & Coen Heijes, In a year of Black Lives Matter protests, Dutch wrestle (again) with the tradition of Black Pete, December 3, 2020, Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/in-a-year-of-black-lives-matter-protests-dutch-wrestle-again-with-the-tradition-of-black-pete-150592>. Accessed January 14, 2021.

²⁷ Being Black in the EU, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, 2018, Retrieved from: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-being-black-in-the-eu_en.pdf. Accessed January 14, 2021.

²⁸ Being Black in the EU, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, p.57.

Conclusion

The history of racism against blacks begins quite a long time ago. Black people, who started their lives as slaves, struggled to become a free individual. Black people, who had been working as slaves for years and had no value in their lives, gained their rights today by fighting. Blacks killed by racist whites 100 years ago are now being killed by police. Now it is a much bigger problem that states security forces are doing racism. It is a shame that while states should fight against this racism, murderer policemen become partners in this crime of humanity by ensuring that they are not punished. The #BlackLivesMatter movement, which advocates that every person's life is precious, is a movement that needs support. Both individuals and states should take measures to remove racism, which is one of the crimes of human rights, from the world's agenda.

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