

Five news stories about BLM and elections

1. The New York Times

One Slogan, Many Methods: Black Lives Matter Enters Politics

By JOHN ELIGON NOV. 18, 2015

When the Democratic National Committee recently rejected adding a presidential debate focusing exclusively on issues affecting black people, it got divergent responses from two groups widely associated with the Black Lives Matter movement.

[Campaign Zero](#), whose agenda centers on ending police violence, quickly embraced the offer for a town hall forum instead and began working to arrange forums for Democratic and Republican candidates. But members of an organization named [Black Lives Matter](#), which first asked for the debates, asserted that only a debate would demonstrate the Democrats' commitment to their cause.

Black Lives Matter began as a hashtag and grew into a protest slogan — after prominent police killings of blacks over the past year — and became an Internet-driven civil rights movement. The phrase is as much a mantra as a particular organization, with the general public lumping numerous groups under the Black Lives Matter banner, even if they are not officially connected.

Yet amid the groups' different approaches has been a swirl of political activity. Local affiliates of the Black Lives Matter organization have disrupted numerous Democratic presidential campaign events, pushing the candidates to support policies to end mass incarceration and police brutality.

[What some of the presidential candidates have said about the Black Lives Matter movement.](#)

That organization now has 26 chapters, and one in Canada, that largely set their own direction. In Boston, that has meant protesting the city's short-lived Olympic bid, which activists said would have been harmful to black neighborhoods. The Grand Rapids, Mich., chapter has held workshops on nonviolent organizing and the prison industry. In St. Paul, Minn., organizers have held rallies to call for more minority vendors at the state fair and protested police shootings.

Yet as the rift over debates versus town halls underscores, the young and sometimes cacophonous movement is struggling to find its voice, as the activists who fly its banner wade into national politics.

Many of those activists and groups favor protest, distrust conventional politics and have no intention of supporting candidates. Others have begun lobbying candidates and elected officials on legislative issues. And still others are hoping to use money to make a difference in elections. Campaign Zero, whose founders gained prominence during protests in Ferguson, Mo., has issued a detailed policy platform on preventing police violence and increasing police accountability. It has also met with Hillary Rodham Clinton and Bernie Sanders to pressure them to embrace its racial justice platforms.

Two groups have started political action committees to back candidates who support ideas espoused by Black Lives Matter activists. One, Black Lives Matter Political Action Committee, started by a St. Louis radio host, plans to raise money for voter education in races for law enforcement-related offices, including for district attorney and judgeships. The second, Black Lives Matter [Super PAC](#), was started by New York activists who hope to raise large donations from celebrities to influence campaigns for a variety of offices.

“At this point, marching and protesting, it’s not going anywhere,” said Tarik Mohamed, treasurer and a founder of the [super PAC](#). “So we’re trying to find new avenues of engaging people for change.”

And, in a sign of its growing influence, the movement is attracting the attention of deep-pocketed Democratic donors, who met with activists in Washington this week to discuss how they can support the budding movement.

The diffuseness and decentralization of the movement is viewed by many activist leaders as a source of energy, with local organizations tailoring solutions to problems in their communities. The broader movement has also fomented a new brand of activism on college campuses, most notably at the University of Missouri. Reacting to what they saw as the administration’s tepid response to racism, activists at the university organized marches, one held a hunger strike and the football team threatened a boycott, forcing the [president and chancellor](#) to resign.

“There’s nothing wrong with being decentralized and dispersed,” said Allen Kwabena Frimpong, an organizer with the New York chapter. “The problem is being disconnected. If we are going to build political power, we have to build connections.”

Yet for all the movement’s impact, even some of its sympathizers question whether it needs a clearer organization and more concrete plan of action.

“There has to be a reckoning, I agree with that,” [Mrs. Clinton told a group](#) of Black Lives Matter activists after an August campaign event in New Hampshire. “But I also think there has to be some positive thing you can move people toward.”

The name Black Lives Matter was born when Alicia Garza, a California-based activist, used it in a Facebook post after George Zimmerman was acquitted two years ago in the killing of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager, in Florida. She then teamed with two fellow activists to create the Black Lives Matter hashtag and social media pages. But the movement gained prominence after a white police officer killed Michael Brown, an unarmed black 18-year-old, in Ferguson last year, and the Black Lives Matter founders arranged a national “freedom ride” to Ferguson.

But the ubiquity of the name itself — and the fact that anyone can use it — has caused complications. At some protests, for instance, marchers’ chants have called for violence against police officers. Critics, including several Republican presidential candidates, then equated Black Lives Matter to promoting attacks against the police.

“I don’t believe that that movement should be justified when they’re calling for the murder of police officers,” Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey said recently on CBS’s “Face the Nation.” He repeated the charge in the fourth Republican debate last week.

But leaders within the movement said that they reject violence and that anti-police chants are the acts of individuals, not the movement.

“It’s like saying, ‘Because the Ku Klux Klan calls themselves Christian, Christianity has a problem and needs to answer for the Ku Klux Klan,’ ” said Kenneth Murdock, who hosts a political radio show in St. Louis.

Mr. Murdock, who has worked for politicians in Missouri, started the political action committee over the summer. He declined to disclose how much money he had raised, saying he hoped to endorse candidates in local races across the country.

The Black Lives Matter Super PAC, in addition to contributing to campaigns next year, hopes to capitalize on new technology, such as virtual reality software, to help people understand experiences like solitary confinement, Mr. Mohamed said.

Members of the Democracy Alliance, an influential club of liberal donors, met on Tuesday with groups allied under the Black Lives Matters banner — including ColorOfChange.org, Black Youth Project 100 and the Black Civic Engagement Fund — to discuss possibly directing funds to the movement, said Leah Hunt-Hendrix, an alliance member. The organizations represented only a sample of the groups that donors wanted to shed light on, she said.

“It was just a really real conversation about the complexities of funding movements and the need for more infrastructure, especially black-led infrastructure,” said Ms. Hunt-Hendrix, who has inherited wealth from an oil company her grandfather started.

Specific funding commitments were not made, she said, and it would be up to individual donors to follow up with organizations they want to support.

“We don’t want to raise expectations that this is a secretive group of donors hoping to raise tons of money,” she said.

DeRay Mckesson, a founder of Campaign Zero, has been focusing much of his energy on trying to organize Black Lives Matter-themed forums for Democratic and Republican presidential candidates. Town hall forums are more in line with the spirit of the movement, Mr. Mckesson argued, because they allow ordinary people to ask questions. He said he has been in negotiations with television networks to broadcast the forums.

Mr. Mckesson got support for the town halls from an unexpected source recently when Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, who is running for the Republican presidential nomination, said on [NewsOne](#) that Republicans would participate “if we were smart.”

“They are drawing attention to issues that need to be drawn to,” Mr. Paul said.

Some activists have criticized Campaign Zero as being too focused on legislative remedies for police violence, and were concerned the public would think of them as “a silver bullet” for injustices against blacks, Mr. Frimpong said.

Mr. McKesson has responded by saying, “We acknowledge that this isn’t the radical change required to rethink the system, but we can’t discount or devalue the immediate, practical benefit this can have on people’s lives.”

While Campaign Zero has, among other things, called for investing in better police training and body cameras, other Black Lives Matter activists are demanding that public funds be used for anti-poverty programs that could drive down crime.

When New York City officials sought to add 1,000 new [police officers](#) to the force this year, local Black Lives Matter members and other activists argued those funds would be better spent on youth summer jobs, transit access for low-income people, school social workers and teachers. Such programs would address the root causes of crime, the activists argued, but the City Council voted for adding more officers.

Many members of the Black Lives Matter organization also continue to promote protests of presidential candidates in addition to more conventional political activities, such as voter registration or education. The tactic has proved effective with Democrats.

Activists disrupted a [Clinton campaign](#) event in Cleveland in August, calling for her to stop accepting contributions from groups affiliated with private prisons and investing in causes that help black transgender women. Months later, Mrs. Clinton said she would stop accepting those contributions. In August, activists took over a stage [in Seattle](#) when Mr. Sanders tried to speak, and the senator promptly released a racial justice platform.

“I think that it’s not just about changing hearts and minds, it’s not just about changing laws, it’s about actually changing action,” said Elle Hearn, a strategic adviser to the Black Lives Matter organization who is based in Ohio.

Khalil Gibran Muhammad, the director of the [Schomburg Center](#) for Research in Black Culture in New York and an observer of the movement, said that many Black Lives Matter activists seemed to be advocating change beyond laws, which they say are unfairly applied to blacks. But history, he said, suggested that activists might have to work within the traditional political system.

“They may have to accept that some people are going to have to sit at the table,” he said, “and work this stuff out.”

2. Associated Press September 20, 2015. Interview with Alicia Garza

Black Lives Matter group won't endorse a 2016 presidential candidate

'Sometimes you have to put a wrench in the gears'

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The Black Lives Matter network will skip a presidential endorsement but keep up its political activism by confronting candidates about the treatment of African-Americans in the United States, one of the group's founders says.

In an Associated Press interview, Alicia Garza discussed the organization's refusal to settle on a preferred candidate in the 2016 race to succeed President Barack Obama and pledged to press ahead with protests and interruptions during the campaign.

"Sometimes you have to put a wrench in the gears to get people to listen," said Garza, who spoke at the 7th Annual Black Women's Roundtable Policy Forum last week.

The Black Lives Matter movement traces its roots to the fatal shooting of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2012, and gained national ground after 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, last summer. Since then, deaths of other unarmed black males at the hands of law enforcement officers have inspired protests under the "Black Lives Matter" moniker.

Some are affiliated with the original network founded by Opal Tometi, Patrisse Cullors, Garza and their allies. Some are not, although they use the slogan.

Black Lives Matter activists grabbed headlines when they disrupted a Seattle rally last month right before Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Democratic presidential candidate, was about to speak. Others claiming to represent Black Lives Matter have met with Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton and Republican presidential hopeful Jeb Bush.

The Congressional Black Caucus, a group of African-American lawmakers in the House and Senate, also was focusing on criminal justice and police reforms during its annual legislative conference this weekend.

The Democratic National Committee acknowledged the Black Lives Matter movement at its Aug. 1 meeting in Minneapolis with a resolution saying it "joins with Americans across the country in affirming 'Black lives matter' and the 'say her name' efforts to make visible the pain of our fellow and sister Americans as they condemn extrajudicial killings of unarmed African-American men, women and children."

The network said the resolution would not get its endorsement, and Garza reaffirmed that the official Black Lives Matter organization will not endorse any political party or candidate this election cycle.

"Black Lives Matter as a network will not, does not, has not, ain't going to endorse any candidates," Garza said. "Now if there are activists within the movement that want to do that independently, they should feel free and if that's what makes sense for their local conditions, that's fantastic. But as a network, that's not work we're engaged in yet."

In the future, the organization may become more involved with candidates and parties, and even run candidates, she said, but added that "we're not there yet."

"It's too early in the development of the network and it's too early in the genesis of the movement to rally around anyone in particular who hasn't demonstrated that they feel accountable to the Black Lives Matter movement or network," said Garza, who also works with the National Domestic Worker Alliance.

"What we've seen is an attempt by mainstream politics and politicians to co-opt movements that galvanize people in order for them to move closer to their own goals and objectives," she said. "We don't think that playing a corrupt game is going to bring change and make black lives matter."

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3. Business Insider reports on We The Protestors' Demands.

Black Lives Matter has a plan to radically change America's police

By Matthew Speiser

August 24, 2015

Black Lives Matter, the grassroots organization formed in the fallout of the 2012 Trayvon Martin killing, has unveiled a detailed policy platform aimed at ending police violence.

The platform, dubbed "[Campaign Zero](#)", is a 10-pronged plan that hopes to end police killings by limiting police interventions, improving community interactions, and ensuring accountability.

The organization has grown considerably since its inception in 2012, growing in influence as the group responded to police-related deaths to 18-year-old Michael Brown, 43-year-old Eric Garner, and others over the last year.

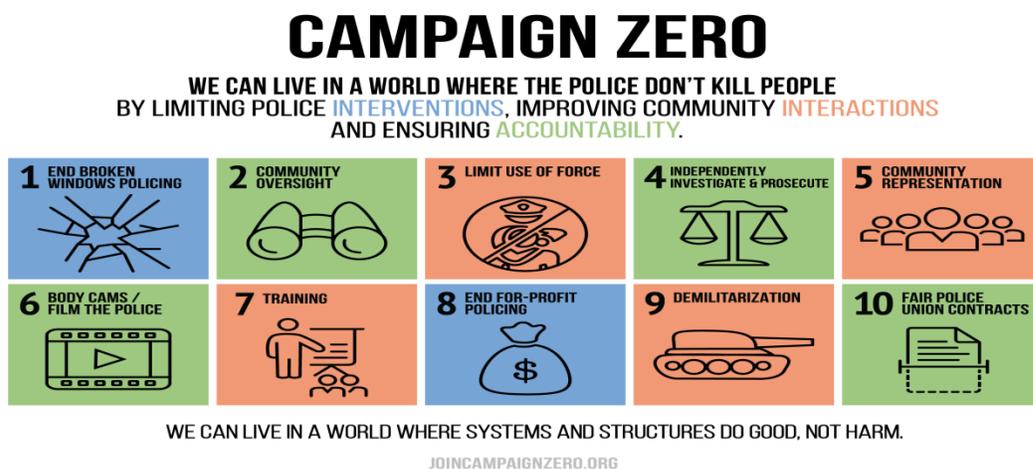
In recent months, the group has begun to impact the 2016 presidential campaign, [meeting with candidates](#) and [disrupting others](#).

The new platform comes just weeks after Black Lives Matter activists held a tense meeting with presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in which she challenged the group to lay out specific policy proposals

"You're going to have to come together as a movement and say, 'Here's what we want done about it,'" [Clinton said](#).

The policies were put forward by [We the Protesters](#), which [the Guardian describes as](#) "a prominent section of a wider protest movement that is frequently referred to, in general terms, as Black Lives Matter."

Here are the proposals:



Campaign Zero

1. [End broken-windows policing](#)

Broken windows policing refers to the theory that if you don't go after minor crimes (i.e. broken windows), then it sends the community a message that they can get away with more serious crimes. Campaign Zero says this form of policing disproportionately affects minorities.

2. [Community oversight](#)

Campaign Zero suggests establishing a civilian-run commission that can make recommendations for discipline following a civilian complaint of police misconduct. They say this is better than relying on fellow officers to punish their own colleague.

3. [Limit use of force](#)

Campaign Zero wants officers only to be allowed to use deadly force when there is an imminent threat to the officer's life or the life of another person. Currently, officers can use deadly force when they perceive a deadly threat. The group also calls for stricter standards for reporting the use of deadly force.

4. Independently investigate and prosecute

To avoid conflicts of interest, Campaign Zero calls for state governments to establish independent prosecutors who will investigate instances of police violence and killings. The group also wants to reduce the standard of proof for federal civil rights investigations of police officers.

5. Community representation

The campaign calls for police departments to be more representative of the communities they police by having proportional amounts of women and people of color on staff.

6. Body cameras & filming the police

Campaign Zero wants all police officers to be equipped with body cameras and for police to be banned from taking recording devices from civilians without their consent.

7. Training

Campaign Zero suggests that police officers be required to undergo training four times a year on a variety of issues including racial bias or prejudice, community interaction, crisis intervention, and de-escalation of situations.

8. End for-profit policing

Campaign Zero recommends police departments do away with quotas for tickets and arrests as well as limit fines and fees for low-income people and have stricter standards for civil forfeiture (seizing of civilian property).

9. Demilitarization

Campaign Zero suggests ending the federal government's 1033 program that provides military weapons to local police departments. The group also says there should be greater restrictions on police departments attempting to purchase and use military grade equipment.

10. Fair police contracts

Campaign Zero believes police union contracts have given police unions too much influence and give officers too much protection in the instances of misconduct. Campaign Zero wants to eliminate barriers put in place by the union contracts and make officers' disciplinary history accessible to the public. In addition, they suggest that officers' shouldn't be paid if they are being investigated for seriously injuring or killing a civilian.

On their website, the group also offers [policy agendas](#) for how to implement their reforms on the local, state, and federal level. The group also published a [fact sheet](#) detailing where each presidential candidate stands on these proposals.

4. The New York Times

Board for Ferguson Schools Is Accused of Racial Bias

By JOHN ELIGON JAN. 12, 2016

ST. LOUIS — In a suburban school district that includes most of Ferguson and 10 other towns in northern St. Louis County, three of four students are black. Yet there have never been more than two black members on the seven-person school board at the same time. Does that mean the system of electing the board is racially biased?

In a lawsuit that went to trial in federal court here this week, the [American Civil Liberties Union](#) asserts that it is, raising questions relevant to elections in many other places that use the same sort of at-large voting process as the Ferguson-Florissant School District.

The suit argues that the district's system of using at-large voting — where people across the district choose among the same group of candidates — discriminates against minority voters. A fairer process, the A.C.L.U. says, would be to create seven subdistricts, with candidates running in the areas where they live. Some of those subdistricts would be so overwhelmingly black in population that more blacks would be elected, the group contends.

“Black residents of the district continue to suffer from a host of socioeconomic disparities, which hinders their ability to participate fully and equally in the political process,” Julie Ebenstein, a lawyer for the A.C.L.U., said in opening remarks Monday. “Whether the African-American voting age population makes up 49 percent or 51 percent is functionally irrelevant.”

The district asserts that black voters are better served by an at-large system because they represent about half of the area's voting-age population. The district also notes that at-large voting is mandated by state law.

“African-Americans presently possess an opportunity to elect candidates of their choice,” Angela Gabel, a lawyer for the district, said in her opening statement before Judge Rodney W. Sippel of the federal Eastern District Court of Missouri on Monday.

The legality of at-large voting systems is being challenged in other cities, including Pasadena, Tex., and Yakima, Wash. The suits contend that at-large systems violate Section 2 of the [Voting Rights Act](#), which prohibits voting practices or procedures that discriminate on various factors, including race.

Many challenges of at-large voting have come in places where whites are the clear majority. But in the Ferguson-Florissant district, the population is almost evenly divided, according to the most recent census data. Courts have not definitively ruled whether a violation of Section 2 is possible in places where blacks might not be in the minority, said Richard L. Hasen, a professor of law and political science at the University of California, Irvine.

The case “raises legal questions over whether, if it's true that African-Americans make up a majority of the relevant population, whether a Section 2 remedy is possible,” he said.

Whether blacks outnumber whites in the district is in dispute. The A.C.L.U., using 2010 census data, contends blacks make up 48.19 percent of the voting-age population in the district, which is less than whites. The district, using 2013 American Community Survey data, asserts that blacks, at 48.94 percent, represent a slightly higher share of the voting-age population than whites.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, municipalities sprouted across the suburbs north of St. Louis with the purpose of creating racially segregated communities, historians say. Berkeley, for instance, was incorporated in part so white residents could establish a school system separate from the district attended by the mostly black children in neighboring Kinloch, according to Colin Gordon, a University of Iowa historian who testified for the A.C.L.U. on Monday.

The courts ordered the Berkeley school district and others to desegregate in 1975, and the result was the creation of the Ferguson-Florissant district.

Like much of north St. Louis County, the Ferguson-Florissant district had a vast demographic shift in subsequent years. From 1990 to 2010, the white population in the district declined by nearly 60 percent and the black population increased by more than 81 percent, according to the school district's trial brief.

Despite the rise in the black population, some communities in north St. Louis County have remained under primarily white control, an issue that became prominent after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson by a white police officer.

Decades of past racist policies have hampered blacks' access to the ballot box, the A.C.L.U. has argued, and weakened their strength in political organizing.

The A.C.L.U. has asserted that the predominantly white school board has not worked aggressively enough to address concerns of black residents, including the achievement gap between white and black students and the disproportionate disciplining of black students. The group says that some of the board members have been insensitive to the problems of black students, blaming family structure for the achievement gap, for instance.

In another dispute, residents loudly objected three years ago when the board, then all white, suspended the district's first black superintendent, Art McCoy, without a detailed public explanation. Mr. McCoy later resigned.

Over the past 16 years, 24 black candidates have run for the Ferguson-Florissant school board in 12 elections, and only five, nearly 25 percent, have won seats, according to the A.C.L.U. During that time, 22 of 37 white candidates, about 60 percent, have won election to the school board.

But the school board argued that voters in the district had chosen black candidates in other elections such as the presidential and county executive races. They also point to the nearby Hazelwood school district, which is demographically similar to Ferguson-Florissant and also uses an at-large system. Four of the seven Hazelwood board members are black. The Ferguson-Florissant board has also hired a black superintendent, Joseph S. Davis, who started last year.

"The district does not dispute the racial history of the St. Louis region," its lawyers wrote in the trial brief. "However, a distant and indelible past cannot taint the present forever."

The Ferguson-Florissant board contends that the A.C.L.U.'s proposed districts would not help black representation. Of the seven subdistricts the A.C.L.U. has proposed, four of them would have a solidly black population. But the two current black members on the board would be lumped into the same district, a lawyer for the school board said.

Judy-Ferguson Shaw, who works with a high school in the district, said getting more blacks on the board, especially black men, was important for black students, especially in racially charged issues like discipline. Ms. Shaw, 65, said that changing the voting system was important to give more say to the residents of the southern part of the district, which is mostly black.

"They vote," she said of those residents. "But they can't outvote the north end of the district."

5. Huffington Post.

Do We Care for the Black Women Who Care for Us?

By Alicia Garza 2/24/2016

Alicia Garza Special Projects Director for the National Domestic Workers Alliance and co-creator, #BlackLivesMatter. Organizer, writer & freedom dreamer

Black women who care are the backbone of the American economy, and yet little attention is given to the conditions that Black women who care face. If Black futures are to matter in our economy, we must, at minimum, ensure that the Black women who care for us are cared for in return.

The history of Black women in the economy is rooted in the legacy of slavery. Enslaved Black women were forced to provide care work, unpaid, for white families. While most worked in the fields alongside enslaved Black men, a portion worked inside the home--building and tending fires, hauling water, cooking, cleaning, serving, taking care of children and the elderly. For some Black women, care work even meant nursing white women's children from their own breasts.

They were particularly vulnerable because of the likelihood of sexual coercion and violence at the hands of male members of the household, and because their children were subject to sale. 32% of homecare workers are Black, and 91% are women.

Though home care is one of the fastest growing industries in today's economy, more than two million home care workers are subject to poverty wages, making an average annual salary of \$17,000, and lacking core social supports, like healthcare and childcare. This creates an untenable situation where the people we depend on to care for us don't have the supports they need to care for themselves and their families.

The gains of Black-led social movements created the conditions for Black women to have access to greater opportunity in the economy. The demands of the Civil Rights era weren't limited to voting rights--they strove for an end to segregation in all aspects of life, including housing, employment and public accommodations. Black women were able to both expand access to higher paying jobs, but also demand that the industry they were concentrated within improve conditions.

Black women in the care industry shaped the movement from the intersections. Dorothy Bolden, founder of the first Domestic Workers Union in 1968, approached Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., asserting that the plight of domestic workers was a critical part of the civil rights struggle. King replied that it sounded like the perfect job for her--so Bolden built one of the strongest national domestic worker unions in the country, with more than 20,000 domestic workers organized in ten cities around the nation.

Today, organized labor is under attack by some of the most powerful corporate forces, and Black women who care are caught in the crosshairs. Organizing at the intersections of the economy and our democracy, as Dorothy Bolden advocated for, is an imperative for the movement for Black lives.

The questions we must ask include "What will it take to make Black lives matter in our economy?" "What will it take to make Black women's lives matter in the fastest growing industry in the nation?" and "What kinds of organizations and movements are necessary for Black lives to matter?"

It is not a guarantee that a labor movement fighting to survive against corporate attacks and internal divisions will stay the course in the fight for Black lives, but there are signs of light on the horizon. Promising developments include public statements and public advocacy from labor

federations such as the AFL-CIO, and a newly released intersectional platform for investing in Black lives from BYP 100.

In 2014, AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka broke the uncomfortable silence about racism, and identified important contradictions within the labor movement that must be addressed. At its recent Civil and Human Rights conference in Washington, D.C., more than 1000 AFL-CIO members and affiliated organizations honored organizations and individuals that fight for self determination by and for the formerly incarcerated, and had difficult conversations about the implications of maintaining the presence of police unions within its ranks. These dialogues are an important first step towards an integration with the movement for Black lives.

In 2016, domestic workers are still excluded from most federal labor protections, the result of a compromise between organized labor and southern Democrats during the New Deal. We can make Black lives matter in the labor movement by building the kinds of movements that Black women need to shape a new economy and a new democracy that don't force them choose between making a living and being a part of a healthy democracy. It's time to care for the Black women that care for us.

Alicia Garza is the co-creator of #BlackLivesMatter--her work at NDWA cultivates the leadership of Black immigrant and Black American women who care so that their experiences in the care economy can establish a new set of standards and shape the future, bringing our full selves and our whole range of concerns into powerful social movement that believe that it all matters.