DERAY MCKESSON

**Challenges to BLM**

Schisms

 -Reformists vs. revolutionaries

 Reformists: systemic change

 Revolutionaries: system is broken; make a new system

\*Both/and, not either/or

Ferguson was for immediate conviction of Darren Wilson, not a result in 300 years

 “Ideologically camping out to claim a sense of authenticity”

-Scaling for differences between neighborhoods and communities

 E.g.: Charter schools (gov’t schools not run solely by the gov’ts)

To open Black schools, need for charter schools – can challenge the details of the charter school but concept probably should hold

 “What does the solution look like at scale?”

Proximity to trauma as claim for authenticity: whoever knows poorest, most marginalized, or whoever is most intersectional

Figuring out space for people in mvmt regardless of proximity to trauma

 We should not be using proximity to trauma as capital for authority

“Myth of the founding”: that BLM was the call to action; actually BLM followed the call to action by citizens acting without any overarching organization

After Ferguson protests were ongoing, BLM came to Ferguson protests with signs carrying BLM slogans

BLM was extended to New York protests for Garner movement

Beauty of the founding: regular people came out to the streets

“Black Lives Matter” as a hashtag, phrase, and movement and these constitute 3 distinctly different things

Critical mass of people who understand that there is a problem of race in the U.S.

Civil rights movement: empowering new leadership

BLM: critical mass empowered, not necessarily new leadership class

 2 million actors, not group of leaders

 BLM should create ways for people to interact that open up new spaces of organizing

 Need to articulate more cohesively what is power; what does power look like

\*Trauma takes people’s power away or makes them feel powerless; the work is to help people reclaim their power or for systems to restore their power

 How can systems restore power?

Racism as ever-present trauma that makes people powerless or feel powerless

 Restorative justice: power in the name of justice; power as agency and impact

 Restoration and reclamation 🡪 reparations

Helping people understand how to talk about trauma 🡪 what to do now that we understand trauma better

 What do we do with white people?

 Black-only spaces? / We can’t win alone?

 What does it mean to ally?

White people have more resources and structural power, so it doesn’t make sense for them not to be a part of the movement

Not necessarily equal power, but articulating roles for people so that it is clear; this process is still opening and changing

Chapters, membership, 501 (c) (3) status should not be required to be seen as holding power; that is a dangerous idea

\*\*Nonprofit industrial complex? – *The Opening*

CLASS NOTES

-Ferguson uprising happened a year after creation of #BlackLivesMatter

 Ferguson protesters were not all necessarily connected to three hashtag founders

 Protesters vs. documenters/anything else

Movement policing “attendance” or participation in the protest

 -Perception of McKesson as someone who just went to Ferguson to tweet

 “I was a tweeter, some were the live streamers, some did the bail fund”

 “If I tweeted it, it was true [because I had the biggest platform”

 Media liaison

-Contests idea that organizing is the hard part and protesting is easy

 “Revisionism” of the protest-based movement

-Real tension inside the movement

 Who has money, who doesn’t? Who has visibility and who doesn’t?

Criticism of McKesson for “forgetting about Ferguson”

Civil rights movement as institution: churches, schools

BLM does not have same institutional foundation

 When conflict, little grace – no convener

 Farrakhan was first to assemble people in his house

Q&A

Q: Moving toward reimagination in movement. Theory of change taught in 3 ways: personal transformation, demanding change in institution, and then creating alternative spaces… Is BLM interested in creating alternative spaces?

A: There are people who are doing this who I’m not super close to… some people have totally set up a different way to think about Neighborhood Watch, different way to think about safety that doesn’t require involving the police...I don’t think they’re doing it to scale, and I’m addicted to the scale question. If the movement people who are doing work are the fringe, it could be a really cool thing that people study that dies out…when people’s grandmothers start caring, we have lost the movement. I think people are addicted to the fringe…but I’m not convinced that the conversation about alternatives has made it into public spaces that is really authentic…

It wasn’t hard to build [institution of slavery], it shouldn’t be hard to do the correction…I worry that people create the alternative because they think doing it in the system is too hard…but I will push scale

FR: I think it’s important for us to remember that the Civil Rights Movement was a decade-long movement. Even the American presidency is a four-year term which we usually give twice over; most US presidents get to have 8 years in office. The demands we place on a movement that is only 3 years old are outstanding to me…When people talk as if we can already talk about the success or the failure of the movement, we’re talking about a movement that is really only 2 years old…and has already outlasted its peers [more social/cultural transformation than Occupy].

It’s a movement that’s happening right now and it’s still in its early stages. It’s important for us to let it be in its early stages; transformation and growth will happen.

Q: FR has said that BLM rather than being a civil rights org is a human rights org. Implicit in that statement is radical expansion of what we imagine as the scope of the BLM movement, pushing it beyond our own national boundaries. What are your thoughts on the movement for a BLM policy platform that condemns Israel for genocide of Palestinian people?

A: No public, official statements as BLM Platform. I get that this is not just a matter of policing; but the only thing that has gotten people in the streets is the police. At every city/protest, the only thing that has gotten regular people to come out of their homes has been somebody being killed by the police. There’s something about that we can’t lose… Take the charter school thing for example…the NAACP released something about charter schools but it was all about Black people leading

I’m not interested in the rhetorical flourish…there are a lot of things that sound great but they’re not… We have a responsibility to put out the really concrete things, even if they’re really crazy and imaginative [e.g. baby bonds for every Black kid]…that would be huge, and that to me seems like something we could pressure…I worry about some of the things we’ve seen that are rhetorically amazing, then you’re like, how can we scale this?

FR: One of the things we always say about the abolition debate is that there’s a profound irony in a movement that is calling for the abolition of prisons that really began over outrage about someone not being sent to jail [George Zimmerman not going to jail]. It’s difficult to have a conversation about an investment in prison abolitionism when you have a movement whose origin point really is a concern about someone not being sent to prison…to underscore what Deray is saying about this balance between vision, long term goals, short term goals, that which is pragmatic, that which is prophetic, etc.

DM: I’m just trying to figure out what [the movement] looks like in the end; it’s easy in the moment to get caught up in rhetorical flourishes [e.g. human rights vs. civil rights]… people who say human rights say they are doing it in service of the most impact; but they don’t know. You can call it whatever you want; c

Q: on surveillance on social media by police and fed gov’t

A: I do try to think about my safety but not be afraid… If anything, I think that trolls on Twitter are really organized… I have gotten no money from George Soros, but the way that the trolls have organized this conversation about Soros is incredible. They’ve done it in a very effective way, and I think that the way they’ve mastered the misinformation is more dangerous than the surveillance. The guy who was killed in St. Louis who was shot in the head; he was a protester…the things he hated me for were things the trolls told him. He was convinced that Soros gave me a couple million dollars…and that is really crazy, and now that he’s been killed the trolls are saying that I got him killed…The trolls have done an amazing job of creating even more tension in the movement about things that actually aren’t true.

Q: How have you observed algorithmic functions of social media affecting the movement? Would you say that there are certain social media platforms where it’s easier to communicate the message of BLM? (FB has been accused of decreasing visibility of BLM)

A: I love Twitter. Jack doesn’t do a lot of interviews… but Twitter bought Periscope because of BLM…they get it. The functions are really different... now Facebook, people having conversations [is a recent development]…Snapchat, around the time the Dallas PD got killed (which I’m being sued for contributing to), Snapchat did their first Snapchat story around a protest, and they haven’t done it again. They actually curated this fascinating, all these Snaps of people barricading themselves in Dallas, and they had all these amazing snaps of people hiding, so that’s been interesting… I think the algorithm on Instagram is interesting…Baltimore is an Instagram city…the reason it started was a threat that originated on Instagram. I think Twitter…I’m nervous about Twitter, I think that there’s no voice of Twitter right now [compared to Facebook safety checks and donation pages, Google Doodles]…they just rely on the users [to make the impact] and I struggle with that. But I think they’re the most important

Q: How do you see a solution in restructuring the system? The police themselves are a system within a greater system, almost 400 years of policing have been oppressing us…

A: Good push, fair push. There are people who we never think would want to be a part of this space who want to do something. I think that what it means to organize is that…when people talk about organizing what they mean is whoever their version of the most marginalized or most impacted is. I believe we need to organize everybody, the lawyers, the artists, the singers…and I think we actually can do that and I think that we can target people to some concrete thing.

We created the first police union contracts in the country… the celebrities didn’t know.

When Beyonce, or Common, or Rashida Jones say they are ready to put their whatever on the line, then what? Beyonce’s Beyonce, a video is powerful and important, but I’m sure we could think of something else for her to do that leverages her influence in a different way.

The Civil rights movement was still training a cadre of leaders to mobilize against structures; I think we can train everybody [e.g. the Black middle class in Baltimore]. I’m the first person to say that no one is freer because I got an honorary doctorate from the New School. We have to use our resources to create a different kind of power, I think there’s a real way to do it [that’s not just membership in a chapter].

I know people in the movement who say if Trump becomes President, it will force us to come to a productive apocalypse…the system has never come to a grinding halt. I don’t think the system is going anywhere. In a Trump world, I think that we are gonna get beat into mush. I don’t love Hillary, but I’d rather have her than Trump. The apocalypse isn’t coming the way people think it’s going to come. I think if we said that we’re gonna train 5k people in 5 months…the only person who has created an organization of just Black people to that scale would be [Marcus] Garvey, which was the single biggest organization of Black people that we’ve ever had. It wasn’t a civil rights movement, but we’ve seen that happen before, and I think that we could do it.

Why reject the idea of monolithic Blackness when you push for monolithic organizing?

Q: You said people are mad at you for Beyonce following you, what are your thoughts on when celebrities like Beyonce bring BLM to the mainstream and make it a part of their platform?

If the platform is about how we invite more people to the space, then that makes sense. Beyonce has done an incredible job of not overshadowing the work. I don’t know what else she could do artistically to say she gets it. She could do a lot of other things that could make it about her and not the work. One thing about celebrities is that… I know people who are nervous to talk about these issues because they’re afraid they’ll say the wrong thing and they’re afraid there’s going to be no grace…

I don’t really drag celebrities on Twitter anymore because…[they’ll do what they do anyway, so how can we get them into the fold?]

We have to figure out, we haven’t figured out yet, how to hold people accountable, but still have grace.

FR: When you spoke to Colin, what was that like?

A: People called me and said talk to Colin Kaepernick. When I talked to him, I asked if he wanted for people to know that we talked, and he wanted people to know that there’s a network of people how get it and have connections to each other. Colin is super woke, he super gets it, and so does his girlfriend. He reached out through a radio host who texted me and said Colin wanted to talk to me. The hard thing is he is…there’s a fine line between how does he keep his commitments but not become a distraction. Part of my support for Colin was linking him to other people…e.g. Jesse Williams…there’s that behind the scenes stuff that we do because people with a lot of power and influence are hungry to figure out what to do. People with money, the easiest thing for them to do is to give money, and it’s a much cooler ask to say, call the governor and say that you need to change that whatever.

What if we organized lawyers across the country to do pro bono expungement for people? I wanna believe that we have not lost the window to do that, I have a lot of worries…

BLM informed by the Dream Defenders in Florida, Feb-July 2013

Ferguson uprising 2014

Different set of organizers already in Ferguson, one of whom (Netta) meets Deray McKesson and together they start We the Protesters

 Both documenting on Twitter

Baltimore uprising 2015

 Death of Freddie Grey

Chicago October 2014-November 2015

Death of 17 year old Laquan McDonald (shot 16 times); dashcam video released in November 2015 and radically contradicts original police story

 Local groups (e.g. Assata’s Daughters, Black Youth Project)

-In each instance, case of police violence, and then local organizers who were already in place or organized extemporaneously who respond to police violence and rise up

 Who is BLM?

 Story of organization with 31 chapters

 Story of movement led by Black millennial organizers in these various affected cities

\*\*\*Distinction between BLM the organization, BLM the movement, and the Movement for Black Lives, which encompasses the NAACP, National Urban League, which are part of larger Black Freedom movement but not specifically part of BLM

blacklivesmattersyllabus.com/sampleresponse

READINGS DISCUSSION

-Black lives have always mattered for purposes of deaths and imprisonment; the question is not if Black lives matter, it is if Black lives are human lives

As late as early 20th century, still debates happening on whether or not Black people have souls (3/5ths constitutional rule)

-Struggle to humanize a historically dehumanized people. Underlining issue of systematic dehumanization of people in Black bodies

How do you start deconstructing what “American” is, given that the Constitution and Pledge of Allegiance were not made for Black people in their conception?

Limitation on qualifying things as constructions – America is still a place, race still leads to racism

 The American project depended on Black people

 Question of acknowledgment

Cornel West; common external foes. Communism 🡪 Islamic terrorism

Common internal foes – Black Lives Matter? Organizations to rally behind hating? Conservatives see BLM as terrorist, different aspects of common internal foes

Neoliberalism: system of economic governance that privileges free markets, privacy, and privatization of markets…deregulation

E.g.: Gentrification 🡪 reduce of public housing, capitalism/ NYC housing market which results from an unregulated market

ObamaCare, ACA 🡪 exchange system, Craigslist of health insurance. System provides consumers the opportunity to search for and compare different healthcare options

Mandates US citizens to have private insurance (versus public option, with one form of healthcare with set price). Abandoning public option forced 40 million people into private insurance market that was completely unregulated

Free market fundamentalism: everything becomes a commodity

 “I can’t breathe” T-shirts

Misconception of BLM as “resurgence” of a dead movement

Leader-fullness of movement is about protecting revolution foremost

**Respond to the Deray McKesson conversation as well as to the reading materials.**