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## **No, Black Lives Matter Isn't About Hurting Cops**

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Remember when the media punditry swore the Tea Party was driven by secret racism? Remember how people reported racist signs at Tea Party rallies and protests? Remember how the punditry tried to connect the Tea Party with Jared Lee Loughner when he shot Rep. Gabrielle Giffords and killed six people?

Now we hear that the Black Lives Matter movement is also racist, “promotes the execution of police officers,” as one commentator put it, and has racist or violent signage. Bill O’Reilly boldly declared it a “hate group.” Now some in the media have also implied the Black Lives Matter movement may be to blame for the murder of a Texas police officer, Darren Goforth. Pundits on the Left who tried to dismiss the Tea Party as a mere racist Republican reaction to a black president were misguided. Those on the Right who chalk up the growing momentum behind Black Lives Matter to racism or a desire to hurt cops are making the same mistake. Black Lives Matter’s main point is to draw attention to police misconduct and the lack of police accountability—particularly as it disproportionately affects black Americans. This is a goal that libertarians, conservatives, liberals, and progressives should care about.

### This Is Called the Part to Whole Fallacy

BLM activists’ proposed policy reforms include curbing the excessive use of police force, demilitarization, use of police body cameras, ending racial profiling and “stop and frisk” tactics, addressing over-criminalization, and improving training for police officers. Can reasonable people quibble over the particulars of BLM’s policy platform? Sure. But you don’t have to agree with every policy idea some activists propose to appreciate the main goal of the movement. You don’t have to agree with every policy idea some activists propose to appreciate the main goal of the movement.

Instead of focusing on BLM’s primary purpose, many in the media have applied the words of *some* activists to the entire movement or erroneously connected unrelated violent events to BLM—just like some news organizations did with the Tea Party.

For instance, commentators often point to some Minneapolis BLM activists who chanted “pigs in a blanket, fry em’ like bacon” as evidence that the entire movement wants to harm cops. Also,

although no evidence connects the tragic killing of Goforth to the BLM movement, pundits have blamed it nonetheless.

In reaction to this labeling of BLM as racist and violent, Fox News contributor and talk radio host Richard Fowler told Fox's Megyn Kelly: "I don't think we're watching the same Black Lives Matter movement. I think if you talk to any of the organizers on the ground, both in Ferguson, in Baltimore, and New York, they will tell you they're a nonviolent movement. That all they want to do is end the disparities."

### Decentralized Movements Represent a Spectrum

What many fail to realize is that social movements are decentralized heterogeneous coalitions—meaning that different types of people can be drawn to the same movement, sometimes for different reasons. One shouldn't label an entire movement by the comments and actions of just a few activists—as Fox News contributor Mary Katherine Ham rightfully pointed out. The key is identifying the glue that holds the movement together. In my dissertation on the Tea Party movement, I found several distinct clusters of Tea Partiers, with racial anxieties motivating only a minority slice. But by and large, the overwhelming majority really was about small government.

Different types of people can be drawn to the same movement, sometimes for different reasons. The same applies to Black Lives Matter: it's a decentralized movement in which the central thrust focuses on police abuse in the United States, particularly as it disproportionately affects African-Americans.

We—all Americans—should listen to Black Lives Matter. Reform is needed. Surely, this is not just about racial prejudice. Police abuse and lack of accountability affect people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, as white Michigan resident Deven Guilford would tell you if he hadn't been killed by a cop after flashing his high beams at a police vehicle. At the same time, we should be capable of recognizing that justice in this country is not yet applied without regard to race (i.e., see here), and we should applaud efforts to move society in the right direction.

Conservative pundits balked when some of their colleagues on the Left smeared the Tea Party as a racist movement instead of recognizing it as an effort to reign in big government. They would now do well to take a long, hard look in the mirror with respect to their own coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement and recognize it as an opportunity to make change for the better.

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