

SOCI 360 SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

IDENTITY RIGHTS: THE 4TH WAVE - BLM AND #METOO

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1

I. Identity Rights: BLM and #MeToo

1. Identity is the crucible of social movements in the modern period.

In his seminal 1998 book *The Power of Identity*, Manuel Castells suggests that identity rather than social role should be the lens we use to see how and why people are organizing into social movements in the post-WWII period.

Such identity construction lends to group affiliation along different lines than in previous periods - **whereas the social role of employee or citizen might have helped organize the worker rights or voter rights movements** of the pre-WWII era, **today it is more likely to be** our sense of self as it relates to important social categories of identity: **racial identity, sexual identity, gender identity, national identity, etc.**

2

I. BLM - Racial Identity Movement

2. Black Lives Matter - more than a civil rights movement - is a *racial identity* movement

a. Three founders:

i. **Alicia Garza - A Love Letter to Black People:** "black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter." July 13, 2013

ii. **Patricia Cullors - #blacklivesmatter:** "declaration: black bodies will no longer be sacrificed for the rest of the world's enlightenment. i am done. i am so done. trayvon, you are loved infinitely. #blacklivesmatter."

iii. **Opal Tomati - Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr:** "Within days after the Zimmerman verdict, Garza, Cullors, and Tomati had created a small but powerful cohesion in #BlackLivesMatter as a means to bring the community, and the nation, together to directly address what racism meant in the new millennium."

3

I. BLM – Racial Identity Movement

2. Black Lives Matter

b. These three founders were NOT the “leaders”; a decentralized, network organization. This extends to members’ identity groups:

‘Unlike the Civil Rights movement’s emphasis on the politics of respectability, Black Lives Matter has a populist, come-as-you-are vibe that doesn’t police people’s sexuality, religion, age, race, dress and speech[.]’ – Travis Gosa, Cornell

Identity can be “fluid” and “multiple”. We travel through identities, rather than being stuck in them. Racial and gender identity, however, come with physical realities that are not as easily made “fluid”.



4

I. BLM – Racial Identity Movement

c. BLM and symbolic interaction:

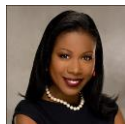
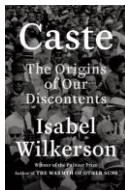
On “fluid” identities:

Although race, ethnicity, and gender are socially constructed categories, they nonetheless they have real repercussions.

Remember the words of sociologist W.I. Thomas: *“A situation defined as real is real in its consequences.”*

Author Isabel Wilkerson outlines exactly how problematic **racial construction** has been in American society in her book “**Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents**” (2020)

Listen to an interview [here](#).



5

I. BLM – #MeToo: 4th Wave Feminism

3. #MeToo and Sexual Violence

a. In 2006, the #MeToo slogan was created – unlike #BLM, however, it did not carry the same weight, until 2017.

“In 2017, the #metoo hashtag went viral and woke up the world to the magnitude of the problem of sexual violence. What had begun as local grassroots work had now become a global movement — seemingly overnight. Within a six-month span, our message reached a global community of survivors.” – metoomvmt.org



6

I. BLM – #MeToo: 4th Wave Feminism

3. #MeToo and Sexual Violence

b. Since going viral, the movement has created an emergent norm, destigmatizing occurrences of sexual violence and bringing accountability to some perpetrators.

“We’re galvanizing a broad base of survivors, and working to disrupt the systems that allow sexual violence to proliferate in our world. This includes insisting upon accountability on the part of perpetrators, along with the implementation of strategies to sustain long term, systemic change.”

- metoomvmt.org



7

I. BLM – #MeToo: 4th Wave Feminism

3. #MeToo and Sexual Violence

c. Contrary to some beliefs, the movement is not “anti-male”; in fact, it serves both men and women who experience sexual violence.

The fact that most sexual violence is male-on-female hints at the reason why the movement is sometimes perceived of as anti-male. However, accountability should not be a function of the equity of violence; rather, it should be a factor of justice for those aggrieved and open to the eyes of society that has had its eyes closed for too long.

The #metoo is reminiscent of the domestic violence movement of the 1980s which exposed the problems of domestic violence in ways that allowed society to recognize it.



8

I. Identity Rights: BLM and #MeToo

4. Identity, rather than social role, is at the root of these movements, in the sense that it is our personal and public recognition of selfhood and the variability that can exist between selves regarding such personal characteristics and **categories as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, politics, and others** which allow us to understand ourselves in the context of our cultures.

When inequities and injustices pervade these categories, social movements around them may arise. **This is what we mean by “identity rights.”**



9
