

Factsheet:

Black Lives Matter & Anti-Racism in Bethlehem, NY

What is Black Lives Matter?

Black Lives Matter (BLM) calls attention to the unchecked killing and maiming of Black people, especially by certain members of law enforcement and white vigilantes. This indiscriminate violence has gone on for centuries - through slavery and the Jim Crow era's lynchings to the executions of today - and it must stop. BLM, like the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, is a movement that affirms the humanity of Black people, their contributions to society, and their resilience in the face of oppression. This movement is working to create a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted.

Who is in charge of Black Lives Matter? How does it operate?

BLM was originally founded by three women - Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi - as a social media hashtag and movement. They started the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who murdered the teenager Trayvon Martin in 2012, and to call attention to the disproportionate discrimination Black people have faced throughout history. Discrimination against Black people takes many forms in this country, and includes things that can happen anywhere, such as higher frequency of traffic stops, higher likelihood of death and injury at the hands of law enforcement, and higher likelihood for incarceration.

Everyone who wants to be part of the BLM movement can be an activist. BLM is decentralized, meaning that no one person is in charge of the wide range of BLM activism. There are more than 40 organized official chapters throughout the world, as well as millions of independent supporters.

Myths versus Facts

There are misunderstandings about BLM. As with any other movements, some people who are opposed to BLM deliberately distort the concept to mislead potential supporters. The movement is similar to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, which also experienced misinformation attacks.

We encourage people to look critically at the facts, see the kinds of misinformation being spread, and decide on their own the merits of BLM. BLM is a human rights issue, not an ideological issue.

 **Myth:** Some people may think that BLM is a terrorist group or an organization supporting violence.

 **Truth:** In fact, leaders of the FBI have testified before Congress that they do not consider movements like BLM to be a threat, and white supremacist groups are seen as far more dangerous ([see files from the Congressional hearing](#)). The danger of white supremacist groups was on display during the violent attack at the Capitol on January 6, 2021, as well as the violence of the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA. Meanwhile, violence was rare in the thousands of BLM protests that took place in summer 2020.

 **Myth:** Some have questioned whether the movement supports the Democratic National Committee, or is Marxist or communist.

 **Truth:** In truth, BLM does **not** finance any partisan organization. Like many activist organizations, BLM's global network of activists has received a great deal of support from individual donors since summer 2020 ([see here for an ABC News article on BLM's funding](#)).

 **Myth:** Some people may think that BLM hates police officers.

 **Truth:** The truth is that BLM is asking that police treat Black people the way they treat other groups. BLM is trying to put an end to an unequal system of justice that disproportionately harms Black people - this system includes police, district attorneys and prosecutors, judges, parole boards, and lawmakers. There are also examples of systemic racism that go beyond law enforcement, evidenced by injustices in banking, education, housing, and the environment. Among BLM supporters, there is a wide range of ideas about how society could reimagine policing and the justice system.

I thought racism ended a long time ago. Why are we still talking about this?

It has been decades since anti-discrimination laws were passed by U.S. Congress. The most sweeping legislation was the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed discrimination in voting activities, schools, and employment. But racism and other forms of discrimination are baked into our institutions and systems in ways that can seem invisible. These issues continue to harm people across the United States, from large cities to small towns. Here is a selection of information and resources:

Healthcare

In a country where world-class medical technology is always advancing, Black people receive less and poorer healthcare than other groups. In 2005, [a study by the National Academy of Medicine](#) found that "racial and ethnic minorities receive lower-quality health care than white people - even when insurance status, income, age, and severity of conditions are comparable." The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the disparities continue to this day ([this article explains the disproportionate impact on Black people](#)). Exploitation and mistrust are also a part of this story. For years, medical institutions exploited Black communities, which has affected people's ability to seek and receive healthcare (see [here for an article about the Tuskegee Syphilis Study](#)).

Mob Violence

Black communities and other communities of color have experienced violence that has been ignored by authorities or even perpetrated by authorities. The memory of these painful events lasts long after they take place, and the stress and fear surrounding mob violence lives on in many communities. Lynchings (extrajudicial killings) continued throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. For example, [this story explains how Black veterans returning from World War II were lynched](#). In the 20th century, white mobs massacred residents of prosperous Black business districts in Oklahoma and Florida, as well as other places ([read more about these massacres](#)). Mob violence continues today: Ahmaud Arbery was chased and murdered by three white men in Georgia in 2020 ([see this article for more Ahmaud Arbery's story](#)).

Real Estate: Redlining

Redlining is the practice of denying loans and mortgages to people based on the color of their skin and the neighborhood in which they live. This was outlawed in 1968, but discriminatory practices still continue in different forms that have lasting effects on wealth that people can accumulate, issues with health, and employment. [This article by CBS News tells the story](#). [This platform](#) and [this article](#) explain how redlining was historically used in the Albany area, and the effects of that legacy. [This short film explains how redlining and other racist housing practices were used at the federal, state, and local levels](#).

Policing & Incarceration

In the United States, Black people and people of color are disproportionately more likely to be stopped by police, arrested, convicted, and receive longer sentences than other groups - even though crime rates for other groups are similar. Even when Black people's interactions with police do not end in violence, the experiences are damaging. The news covers incidents like these that involve celebrities (see for example, [this article about Jay Pharoah](#), or [this article about Henry Louis Gates Jr.](#)), but they happen to regular people too. [Read more about how people of color are incarcerated at higher rates](#). [This article shows how young Black women are harmed by unequal law enforcement](#).

Environment

The term environmental racism was first coined as a term in 1982 by Civil Rights advocate Benjamin Chavis. This has been used subsequently to describe the disproportionate impact of environmental and public health hazards on Black people, people of color, and Indigenous people. This happens not just in the United States but around the world, often due to policies and practices that force people to live in close proximity to industrial sites, landfills, mines, power stations, bus stations, and other sources of toxic and chemical waste and pollution. These environmental harms also impact low-income communities. The environmental justice movement, and more recently, the climate justice movement, aims to eliminate environmental harms not only for people of color but for all people. [This article explains more about environmental justice](#).

What about White Lives or All Lives? Don't they matter too?

BLM recognizes the distinct types of racism and violence that Black people have experienced for centuries. The negative effects of this discrimination continue to this day. In other words, the lives of Black people have not mattered as much as others' lives, in the eyes of the law, in housing, in education, in political representation, and in other spheres of life. Black Lives Matter is a way of saying that our society needs to do a better job of supporting the people who have been historically harmed. When Black lives matter, then all lives will matter. BLM is not meant to say that other lives don't matter.

What does Black Lives Matter have to do with Bethlehem?

Racism exists everywhere in the United States, and Bethlehem is no different. For instance, the practice of redlining was used in Delmar and the wider Capital District in the 20th century. While racism in Bethlehem is not as visible as it was decades ago, history has also shown that society can regress to the racist policies and customs of yesteryear if we are not vigilant. These issues will persist if they are not acknowledged, and they must be recognized in order to find solutions.

Residents and leaders of Bethlehem have taken steps to address the harms of racism in this community. In 2020, there was a broadly attended vigil and a march to recognize the need for justice, and the Town of Bethlehem Board adopted the [Resolution for Black Lives](#). There are group efforts to develop better policies and practices, including the Police Reform & Reinvention Collaborative Advisory Committee and an Ad Hoc Working Group on Racial Equity and Justice, both formed in 2020. Through the Police Reform & Reinvention Collaborative Advisory Committee, the Bethlehem Police Department and many community members have shown that they are invested in making this town a better place for all people. The Town Board adopted [the Police Reform and Reinvention Plan](#) in 2021. Activist groups across the town are facilitating dialogue and taking action. There is still a long way to go, but there is hope that this community can be a place where everyone thrives.

How can I help?

There is a lot you can do to dismantle racism. Here are a few options:

Anti-Racism Trainings

Interested in working against racism, but not sure about all of the terms and ideas? An anti-racism training might be a good place to start. There are free courses, and paid courses that can be found online. With a few minutes of internet searching, you can find a training that fits your needs and interests. Here are several options:

- **21-Day Equity Challenge** – The United Way of the Greater Capital Region created a series of daily activities for people who live in this area, though it is relevant to those who live anywhere.
- **Anti-Racism I** - This training is offered on Coursera by the University of Colorado at Boulder.
- **A Selection** – This article points to a selection of courses – some free, some paid – that offer lessons about white privilege and anti-racism.

Get Involved in Local Groups

There are many local groups working on anti-racism in Bethlehem and the surrounding areas.

- **Bethlehem Public Library** hosts an Antiracist Book Group. Learn more and join!
- **Bridging the Divide** - Students, recent alumni, and district families in Bethlehem Central School District are invited to a four-part workshop designed to bring about an understanding of racial and cultural equity and support effective cultural responsiveness in our school community.
- **Interested in learning more?** There are more groups and activities focusing on equity in Bethlehem. Email equity@townofbethlehem.org to get more information.