

BLACK LIVES DO MATTER...COMPANIES SHOULD THINK SO TOO:  
THE POSSIBILITY OF INFLUENCE, CORRECTION, AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN  
POLICING WHEN CORPORATIONS GET INVOLVED

By

KYRA IMANI MORRIS

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Approved by:

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Dr. Vlad Tarko  
Department of Political Economy and Moral Science

## Abstract

Police brutality in the United States has been an institutional injustice that has plagued the country for decades. More alarmingly, police violence has disproportionately affected the Black community throughout history—this trend continues to be the case today. With this acknowledged as a problem, my thesis points to the start of a contemporary solution. My thesis examines the relationship between corporations, social media, and institutions in a way that illuminates the possibility of coordination among the three seemingly distinct domains, in an effort to bring about an end to police brutality against the Black community. I will consider the role that corporate social activism plays, specifically with the presence of social media, in starting the conversation that inspires the kind of institutional reform that sets to condemn police brutality and violence against the Black community in the United States.

Examining social media responses from companies and brands such as NIKE, Ben & Jerry's, and L'Oréal, I argue that social media and corporate social activism taken together confirm the possibility of institutional reform through influence, correction, and accountability. Institutional reform in the realm of policing is not a lost cause. This reform requires the kind of activism and commitment that firms, through social media, have been able to realize. Through firms holding themselves accountable to promoting change, even the most rigid of institutions—in this case, policing—can find promise in doing the same. Considering the substantial impact that corporate social activism on social media has on inspiring direct action to end police brutality in the Black community, I assert that there is adequate room for Black lives to matter in society, and companies should think so too.

## Introduction

It was the end of May 2020, and I, already overwhelmed by the world of uncertainty that the pandemic had caused, looked to social media to alleviate my stress. Not even two minutes into my scrolling through Facebook, I felt worse than distressed—I was enraged. Many of my friends had reposted the disheartening video of an unarmed Black man, George Floyd, being arrested by Minneapolis police. George Floyd, like several other unarmed Black individuals, did not make it out of police custody with his life. George Floyd, like several other unarmed Black individuals, was murdered at the hands of—in this case, the knee of—police.

After viewing the viral video of George Floyd's last moments, I found myself unfriending and unfollowing anyone in my circle who saw nothing wrong with the reprehensible incident. Of course, the death of Breonna Taylor earlier that year warranted the same personal response from me. But seeing the graphic video of a man pleading for his life, knowing that life-saving measures could have been performed within the nine minutes that Derek Chauvin's knee was planted on Floyd's neck, I felt that a line had been crossed and there was no going back.

Interestingly enough, people were not the only entities boycotted out of my life for staying silent about this chain of unjust events. Every company or brand that chose to stay silent about the death of George Floyd was no longer a company or brand that I supported. To me, companies had a platform to speak up and condemn police brutality in the Black community. With this privilege, companies could hold both themselves and the justice system accountable. In the era of social media, the actions that brands and companies choose to take are transparent. With social media, it is clear to see the companies that remain silent. By the same token, individuals can now observe the companies that choose to call out injustice and demand change. The question then becomes, what *will* companies do? The better question is, what *should* companies do?

My thesis uses a conceptual approach to answer the question of what companies *should* do in the wake of this contemporary social issue. More precisely, my thesis will focus on corporate responses to the Black Lives Matter movement, a social movement established in response to widespread police brutality and violence against the Black community in the United States. I argue that corporations can and should take a public stance against injustice on social media platforms. That is, through corporate social activism on social media, society can begin to work toward a solution that promotes the interests of the Black community in two main ways. First, the corporate activist solution allows for and facilitates influence, correction, and accountability wherever unjust public institutions exist. Second, corporate social activism promotes the public interest by requiring these corporations to live up to their stance on social media through their practices and commitments as a company, so as to create a culture of accountability.

As aforementioned, my thesis proceeds through a conceptual lens in which I survey works from scholars who have made remarkable observations with respect to institutions, firms, and social media. I will first provide a brief layout of what these scholars maintain in these subjects and critically examine the ways in which the findings in these works could and should apply to the relationship between corporations and institutional reform. After this review of literature, I will provide context and outline the patterns of police brutality and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States.

Once the background for my thesis discussion is set, I will introduce the root of the problem that needs to be addressed in police reform: harmful ideologies that lead to individual behaviors that are ultimately built into institutional practices. After this, I will analyze corporate social activism through this framework to illustrate why the actions of corporations set the example that

then inspires change in the very ideologies of individuals that have the power to make the movement meaningful. To do this, I will examine three pairs of competitive brands: NIKE and Adidas; Ben & Jerry's and Dreyer's; and L'Oréal and Glossier. I will take a closer look at the corporate responses that each of these companies and brands have had in the wake of police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement. By the end of my thesis, I will consider the sufficiency of corporate social activism through social media and contend that it is a categorically necessary foundation for institutional reform.

Before beginning the substantive sections of my thesis, it is important to make a brief comment about the purpose of this work. Put simply, this paper is not for all audiences. This paper is not for those who refuse to view police brutality as a deadly epidemic in the Black community. Instead, this work is for those who were just as outraged as I was viewing the preventable death of George Floyd, those who are not thinking about *us* and *them* but instead *right* and *wrong*. This paper is not meant to advance a biased political agenda but is instead meant to acknowledge the systemic and institutional failure in policing as a problem in the Black community.

My thesis offers the beginning of a solution to this problem by considering studies on the nature of institutions, firms, and social media. This solution involves the promotion of the public interest of Black individuals with respect to police reform which will, in turn, lead to the advancement of institutional and social change. If I have proven that corporations, using their platforms to lift voices within the Black community, demonstrate a commitment to organized action that advances the conversation that inspires change in the flawed institution of policing in the Black community—I shall consider my thesis successful.

## **Institutions, Firms, and Social Media: A Review of Literature**

In this section, I will discuss the scholarly contributions to the three themes that will be at work for the remainder of this paper: institutions, firms, and social media. After providing a summary of the main issues present in each piece, I shall critically examine the relevance and applicability of each piece to the subject of police brutality, Black Lives Matter and corporate social activism. Beginning with Elinor Ostrom's theory of institutions with respect to policing, I will discuss how her contribution remains relevant with the issue at hand. I will then move on to introduce corporate social responsibility with respect to firms and define its distinction from corporate social activism. The last portion of this review will be dedicated to Clay Shirky's theory of social media, in which I will survey its advantage over centralized organization.

### **Institutions and Polycentrism**

Elinor Ostrom, a well-regarded political economist, was a leading figure in the branch of institutional economics and interaction. To begin my research, I took a closer look at Vlad Tarko's *Elinor Ostrom: An Intellectual Biography* (2017) with special attention given to the first chapter of the book. In this work, Tarko gives an account of Ostrom's study of institutions in public economies. In the introduction, Tarko describes institutions as "complex networks of such rules- in-use," where rules-in-use can be defined as "those rules that are actually monitored and enforced in one way or another" (6). Rules-in-use, in other words, are the rules that are actually followed and regulated, not just established, by those in public economies. Institutions, then, are involved systems of these rules in practice. One example of an institution that Ostrom recognizes and that I will employ throughout this paper is the establishment of police forces.

With a definition of an institution in mind, Ostrom examines the effectiveness of policing on a local scale. Ostrom makes one observation clear: distant, centralized policing does not get

the job done efficiently in local communities. Instead, she candidly maintains that when it comes to policing, “if you don’t know the neighborhood, you can’t spot the early signs of problems, and if you have five or six layers of supervision, the police chief doesn’t know what’s occurring on the street,” (19). Ostrom instead believes that the institution of policing must demonstrate a commitment to the public locally. Where it concerns local public services, a hierarchy appears to be unpromising because, as those in power become more distant from the local public service, the needs of those directly affected by the institution are largely ignored or unmet. On this note, Ostrom believes that polycentrism is the better approach to local public goods or services.

Polycentrism is best understood as a system of governance that involves many independent decision-makers that act in both competitive and cooperative ways (23). Through several studies involving police departments and crime labs, Ostrom found that a centralized, all-in-one approach to policing does not get the job done. Tarko writes that despite the ill-informed view that centralizing all duties to one department is more efficient and fosters coordination, the studies have found that separating and dividing tasks facilitate coordination and effective communication (30). Ostrom’s studies on policing, then, were at odds with a conventional, consolidationist way of thinking about policing services. On a more practical note, polycentrism in policing allows for smaller police departments that are better equipped to change and adjust to community needs.

Elinor Ostrom’s findings on policing through her institutional economic framework leaves one to critically consider the kind of governance needed for policing services with respect to contemporary police brutality. Recall Ostrom’s claim that the police chief who does not know the neighborhood or its problems would be ill-informed about what is taking place on the streets. I believe that police brutality in the Black community is an instance that confirms Ostrom’s

statement. The practical solution, then, would be to govern policing in a way that keeps those at the top of the policing hierarchy well-informed. However, informing police department heads about local communities is simply not enough. In order to provide a quality police force that works for all, we must be open to listening to the grievances and needs of those on the receiving end of policing.

The grievance that must be heard in this case is police abuse and violence in Black communities across the United States. Police brutality is not a problem that will be solved solely by a police chief telling his subordinates to stop using excessive force. If there is one major takeaway from Elinor Ostrom's study on polycentrism, it is that we must hold police officers accountable in a decentralized manner. That is, whether through defunding the police or holding police officers accountable to the public through activism, it takes a village to correct the institution of policing. One way that we can put Ostrom's findings to use is by considering how corporations can contribute to this collective solution. The question is, what responsibility do corporations have to the public?

#### Firms, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Activism

In *Public Governance and the Classical-Liberal Perspective* (2019), Aligica et al. discuss a potential answer to the question of corporate responsibility. In Chapter 9, corporate social responsibility is considered through a polycentric framework. In other words, this source aims to define private sector responsibilities in the public domain (189). The chapter provides a fundamental definition of corporate social responsibility from Keith Davis: “[s]ocial responsibility begins where the law ends. A firm is not socially responsible if it merely complies with the minimum required of the law,” (190). Aligica et al. assume that corporate social

responsibility is both voluntary and that it is driven by motives other than profit-maximization (190). For the remainder of the paper, I shall abbreviate corporate social responsibility as CSR.

With the definition and assumptions about CSR laid out, the chapter proceeds by outlining the ways in which CSR is carried out by firms. I shall define a firm as a company or corporation that produces goods or services for profit; later when I critically evaluate the corporate responses of companies and brands, I will assume these entities to be firms. Firms engage in CSR for several reasons including (1) reduction of risk of public relations scandals, (2) to maintain a good reputation that establishes the trust needed for engaging employees and potential consumers, and (3) to create even more opportunities for profit and leverage as the firm expands (191). Firms as stakeholders, or entities that have concern for a particular cause or causes, have incentive to engage in CSR not only for the coordination of their own values, but for the sake of competition.

On that note, my lasting critique for this polycentric stakeholder analysis is that it is difficult to determine whether firms choose to engage in CSR as a voluntary venture or as a simple means to profit-maximization. That is, a firm's engagement in CSR in the realm of social justice, for instance, could actually emerge from that firm's commitment to their values to the public yet still maximize profits. Perhaps the polycentric stakeholder analysis could have made one more point clear: philanthropy and profit-maximization are not mutually exclusive. In reality, both motives are able to coexist. I maintain that this is not a problem for CSR and the denouncement of police brutality as long as the end goal promotes the public interest of those affected by this issue. In this case, firms being motivated by profit is just as successful as firms being motivated by their philanthropy on one condition: regardless of the motivating factors for engagement in CSR, firms should live up to their social responsibility on the issue at hand.

Finally, the chapter poses an interesting and relevant question: how can firms, in our case companies and brands, align social investments with their comparative advantages in providing goods and services (197)? Of course firms can choose to provide financial assistance to public causes, but is that the only solution in all cases? My thesis will give a thorough answer to this question by demonstrating that corporations and brands can use their own accounts on social media as a solution. This solution, as we shall see later, involves lower transaction costs for firms all while keeping firms accountable to their responsibility.

With the implications of CSR in mind, I continued my research by exploring Meike Eilert's "The Activist Company" (2020) in order to understand the relationship between CSR and corporate social activism. Eilert opens the beginning of her discussion with a table that points to key differences between CSR and corporate social activism. Though the two seem closely related, Table 1 shows that the differences between the two are stark.

Table 1. Examining the differences between CSR and corporate activism from "The Activist Company"

**Table 1.** Comparing Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Activism.

	Corporate Social Responsibility	Corporate Activism
Supported issue	Widely adopted and/or accepted in institutional environment	Not widely adopted and/or controversial in institutional environment
Likelihood of negative feedback	Low unless mismanaged	Moderate to high
Motivation	To support	To create change
Use of influence strategies	Low	Moderate to high

(Eilert 2020, 463)

A major takeaway here is that corporate social activism is an extension of CSR that involves taking on more risk on the corporation's part. With that being said, the intention of corporate activism is to bring about change or reform—not just support for it. Eilert points out that CSR is motivated by "isomorphic influences stemming from the company's various

stakeholder groups" and generally elicits a positive response unless the company in question is "hypocritical and insincere in its support" (463). On the other hand, corporate activism "reflects a strong, public stance on an issue that the company defends even in the wake of criticism" and is typically met with negative criticism by the media or public (463). Eilert even alludes to a company that will be discussed in a later section, Ben & Jerry's, and the controversy surrounding their stance on denouncing white supremacy. Concisely, corporate activism differs from CSR because it entails a company taking a public stance, leaving little room for ambiguity about the company's position on a given social issue.

Given the inherent risk that corporate activism involves, it is not very difficult to see why companies would seriously consider refraining from taking a public stance on controversial issues. Put simply, risk averse companies view potential negative pushback from the media and consumers as a substantial risk—a risk that could cost them some of their own consumers, a number of potential consumers, and even part of their labor force. Still, time and time again, one may observe that companies choose to take on the risk and share their positions with the world. Why does this phenomenon occur? The simple answer is influence. Eilert contends that there are three forms of influence involving corporate social activism: (1) normative influence, (2) mimetic influence, and (3) coercive influence (465). While Eilert describes these influences as ways that companies push institutions to change policies, these influences can also work between companies.

I contend that mimetic influence, a case in which actors "feel pressure to adopt a certain behavior to stay competitive" (465), is the driving force that causes companies to follow suit when their competitors choose to engage in corporate activism. As more companies mimic corporate activism as displayed by their competitors, it becomes a norm for corporate activism to

be a means for companies to bring about positive change for the public. The presence of social media, as we shall see, makes it both faster and easier for companies to be nudged by mimetic influence. We will take a closer look at why this is when we consider the responses of both NIKE and Adidas in the wake of George Floyd's death and the Black Lives Matter protests. Before applying the literature on institutions, firms, CSR, and corporate activism to the discussion of remedying police violence against the Black community in the United States, we must consider the literature in our last relevant theme: social media.

### Organization through Social Media

Social media has been and continues to be a remarkable point of interaction for large, complex groups. Social media can be understood as a marketplace for exchanging ideas, experiences, information, and opinions with the public. In *Here Comes Everybody* (2009), Clay Shirky gives his account of the impact that social media has had on large-scale organization. Like Elinor Ostrom, Shirky has reason to believe that centralized institutions are at a grave disadvantage when attempting to fulfill their purposes effectively. Consider the passage from the first chapter that explains the alarming paradox of institutions:

In a way, every institution lives in a kind of contradiction: it exists to take advantage of group effort, but some of its resources are drained away by directing that effort. Call this the institutional dilemma—because an institution expends resources to manage resources, there is a gap between what those institutions are capable of in theory and in practice, and the larger the institution, the greater those costs.  
(Shirky 2009, 19-20)

The institutional dilemma is two-fold. On one hand, there is a Coasean ceiling, which is the point where an institution cannot grow any larger for the simple reason that “the cost of managing the business will destroy any profit margin” (44). Put more clearly, the transaction costs grow as the institution grows and, after a while, the institution will no longer be able to manage those costs. On the other hand, institutions are operating with a Coasean floor which can be defined as a

constraint by which institutional activities are “valuable to someone but too expensive to be taken on in any institutional way,” (45). In a word, Shirky maintains that institutions succumb to the strain of transaction costs. Shirky, once again similar to Ostrom, seems to suggest that polycentric organization would help to avoid these issues.

What type of organization would take a polycentric form with low transaction costs? Shirky believes that the answer is social media. Shirky asserts that organization through social media provides a viable alternative to centralized institutions: “action by loosely structured groups, operating without managerial direction and outside the profit motive,” so as to make the transaction costs of group activity fall (47). What does group activity through social media involve? Shirky contends that there are three types of group activity that is able to take place on social media. The first activity, sharing, involves making a resource or resources available to the community (49). For the purpose of my discussion, I will understand sharing to involve raising awareness of a social issue at a given time in society. The second activity, cooperation, is understood as “changing your behavior to synchronize with people who are changing their behavior to synchronize with you,” (49-50). In this sense, social media can and does spark a behavior that we all are familiar with: conversation. We are able to hear the opinions of others and adjust accordingly. The third and final activity worth mentioning is collective action. Collective action “requires a group of people to commit themselves to undertaking a particular effort together, and to do so in a way that makes the decision of the group binding on the individual members,” (51). Of course, an example of this could be a group effort to call for police reform after awareness is raised about widespread police brutality.

In Chapter 6, Shirky illustrates why organization through social media is a strong contender for bringing about social change. Shirky does so by using an empirical example that

shows how social media can, with low transaction costs, foster group activities that ultimately demonstrate the result of collective action. Shirky describes the case of Father John Geoghan, a priest who had sexually abused more than one hundred young boys in his career with the Catholic church (143). Geoghan's misconduct dated back to the 1960's, yet Geoghan was not removed from the priesthood until 1998 (143-144). The church had always responded to Geoghan's sexual misconduct allegations by relocating him to a different church so as to keep the scandal under wraps. By 2002, an interesting turn of events took place—the *Boston Globe* released a story about Geoghan that detailed his history of sexual abuse and the church's failure to properly address the situation (144). This sparked controversy amongst concerned citizens and led them to form an activist group known as Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) that spoke out against sexual misconduct in the Catholic Church (144). This led the church to handle these misconduct allegations more seriously and aggressively (146).

Why is this example of the Catholic Church important? The answer is clear: the awareness raised about sexual misconduct in the church led to an institutional restructuring of how the church went about handling the problem. Shirky writes that there were three reasons why institutional change became an imperative, “the abuse had become too extensive to ignore, the existence of abusive priests had become public in a court of law, and a particularly horrific case was getting serious media coverage,” (146). I believe that with the extensive technology and social media at our disposal today, we could see the remodeling of the practices of institutions such as the police force. Sharing information, starting the conversation—no matter how uncomfortable it may be, and taking collective action that challenges the practices of institutions are activities that social media allows us to carry out. Through social media, we are indeed able to organize without organizations.

Shirky's analysis shows that social media offers promise where institutions fall short. It is no secret that with social media, change can happen much more quickly, as we have seen in the case of the Catholic Church and priest misconduct. But is social media a one-size-fits-all solution? What is there to say, for instance, about those individuals who do not use social media? Perhaps they might be older individuals who are accustomed to traditional forms of activism through community council meetings, for instance. Will these individuals still be able to take part in fueling institutional change as society demands it? I maintain that social media is a channel by which change takes place. That is, social media organizes the change that promotes the interests of its users. Those who do not use social media still stand to benefit from this organization since, as we have seen, organization through social media should lead to collective action. This endpoint of collective action can involve all individuals irrespective of their presence on social media.

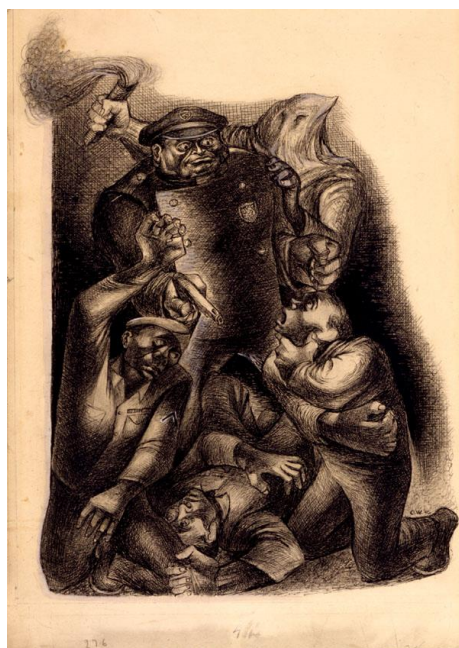
Having completed the review of literature, it is now time to turn to the institutional failure at hand: police brutality in the Black community. In the following section, I will outline the history and patterns of police brutality in the United States to demonstrate, for the purposes of this paper, that it has been and remains an institutional problem that disproportionately affects members of the Black community. By the end of the section, I will have shown why the overwhelming occurrence of police brutality renders police reform an imperative.

### **A Brief Survey of Racial Bias in Police Brutality in the United States**

Police brutality can be defined as “a civil rights violation where officers exercise undue or excessive force against a civilian. This includes, but is not limited to, physical or verbal harassment, physical or mental injury, property damage, and death,” (Brooks 2020, 239). I do not deny that police brutality is an injustice that appears in all communities regardless of the racial

makeup of that community. With that being said, police brutality in the Black community has had a worrying track record. Police brutality is a problem that has been weaved into the fabric of the United States. While the names George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Freddie Gray, and Tamir Rice are some of the many names of individuals whose legacies will inevitably be associated with their haunting deaths, police brutality has been an issue for the Black community before the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Figure 1. A 1946 cartoon by Charles White titled “The Return of the Soldier” depicting a collusion between a police officer and a member of the Ku Klux Klan from “Policing the Police”

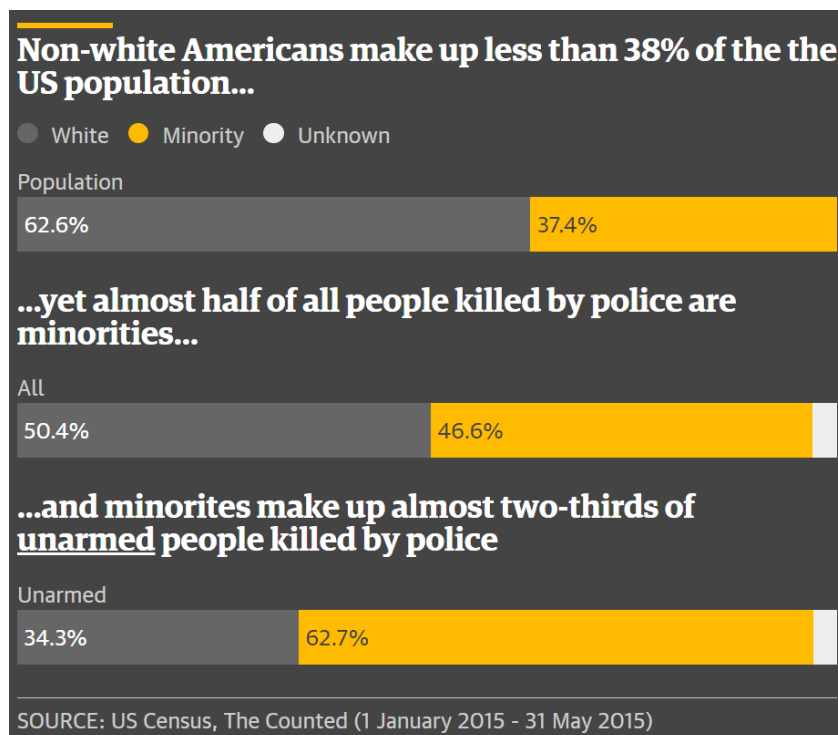


(Siff 2016)

The 20<sup>th</sup> century cartoon above shows that police misconduct was a prevalent and perpetual issue grounded in the history of the United States; the names of the Black civilians mentioned above do not establish that police brutality exists—they only confirm its existence. On January 30, 1943, a Georgia sheriff by the name of Claude Screws used a fabricated arrest

warrant to beat a handcuffed, unarmed Black auto mechanic to death (Siff 2016). The murder of this unarmed Black man, Robert Hall, eventually went on to the Supreme Court where Sheriff Screws was acquitted of all charges since he was acting under the “color of law” and was justified in his use of excessive force (Siff 2016). Does this outcome sound familiar? Well, it should.

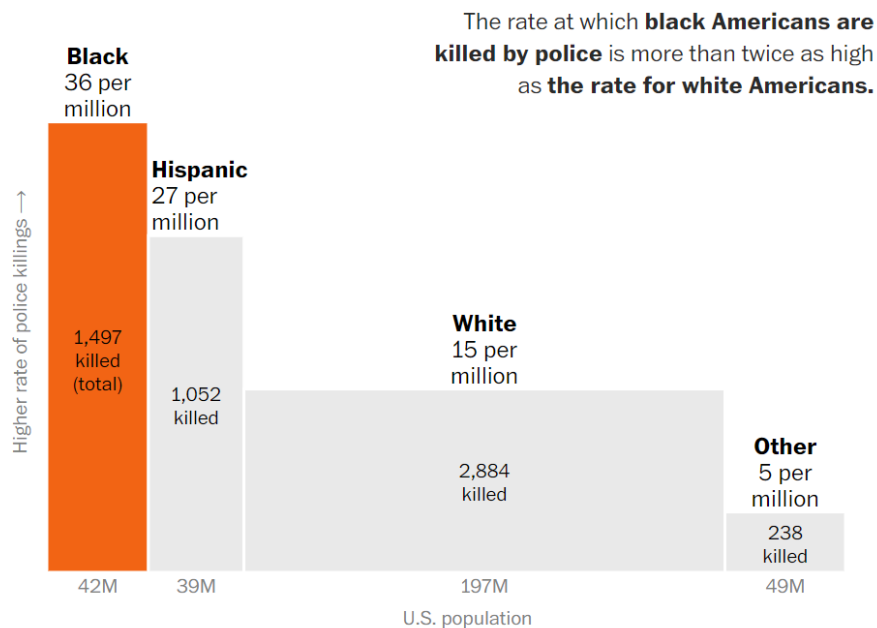
Figure 2. The percentage of non-white Americans in the U.S. population compared to the percentages of non-white American deaths at the hands of police in 2015



(Swaine et al. 2015)

The figure above underscores the disparity between the low ratio of minorities in the United States and the high rate of police brutality against minorities in the United States. Also consider the figure below from *The Washington Post* that shows the rate of police killings in the United States by race:

Figure 3. The rates at which Americans are killed by police by race from 2015-2021



(Fallis et al. 2020)

By definition, police brutality does not just involve police killings. It also includes undue harassment or injury, whether it be mental or physical. In “Police Brutality and Blacks” (2020), Oliver Brooks discusses the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, Missouri, and contends that the police department in Ferguson had a record of racial bias (239). According to Brooks, the police department in Ferguson “argued that it is typically an effort to ticket as many low-income Black residents as possible in an attempt to raise local budget revenue through fines and court fees,” (239). Here, we can see that in Ferguson, Missouri, police misconduct is deeply rooted in both the institution of policing and the functions of the local government.

What causes this institutional failure we have come to know as police brutality? Brooks thinks that the factors that cause the failures in policing should be understood in a systemic lens rather than looking at individual traits (240). Brooks outlines three systemic factors that foster

and sustain police brutality in the Black community. First, Brooks maintains that there is a pressure to adopt a “we-they” attitude and promote a culture of silence when police counterparts violate the law (240). Second, the rigid hierarchical foundation of policing hinders the practice of ethical decision-making by police officers (240). Third and finally, there are “deficiencies in internal accountability mechanisms” (240). In other words, an issue arises when the people who break the law are the same ones who have to investigate those violations. These factors that incite police brutality are difficult to subdue without a commitment to a restructuring of the institution of policing. On that note, we will move to examine one of the most pronounced movements of our time that demands this institutional reform in policing: the Black Lives Matter movement.

### **The Emergence and Evolution of the Black Lives Matter Movement**

A can of Arizona watermelon fruit juice, a bag of skittles, and a Black hoodie. Hearing this list of items would make many people recall the premature death of 17-year old Trayvon Martin in 2012. I remember being in the seventh grade when my history teacher canceled the scheduled lesson to take a moment to discuss the stakes of violence against unarmed Black individuals. Of course I knew my Black history and what being a Black individual used to mean in America, but I did not know what being Black in America meant today: it meant being a threat.

George Zimmerman, an armed Neighborhood Watch volunteer, was the man who shot Trayvon Martin to death as he was walking home from the store in Sanford, Florida (Tilly et al 2020, 241). After George Zimmerman’s acquittal of the murder in 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement was born. In July 2013, the same month of Zimmerman’s acquittal, a woman by the name of Alicia Garza posted a message on Facebook that sparked the movement and its name. In

the now archived post, Garza wrote, “Black people, I love you, I love us, Our lives Matter,” (Tilly et al 2020, 241). Notice that the Black Lives Matter movement did not start in response to an officer-involved killing of a Black individual. Instead, the Black Lives Matter movement was sparked by the killing of an unarmed Black teenager by an armed white individual. Thus, one point should be made clear: the Black Lives Matter movement is not solely focused on the violence and killing of Black individuals by police officers, but the aggregate, disproportionate, racially-motivated killings, and violence against Black individuals.

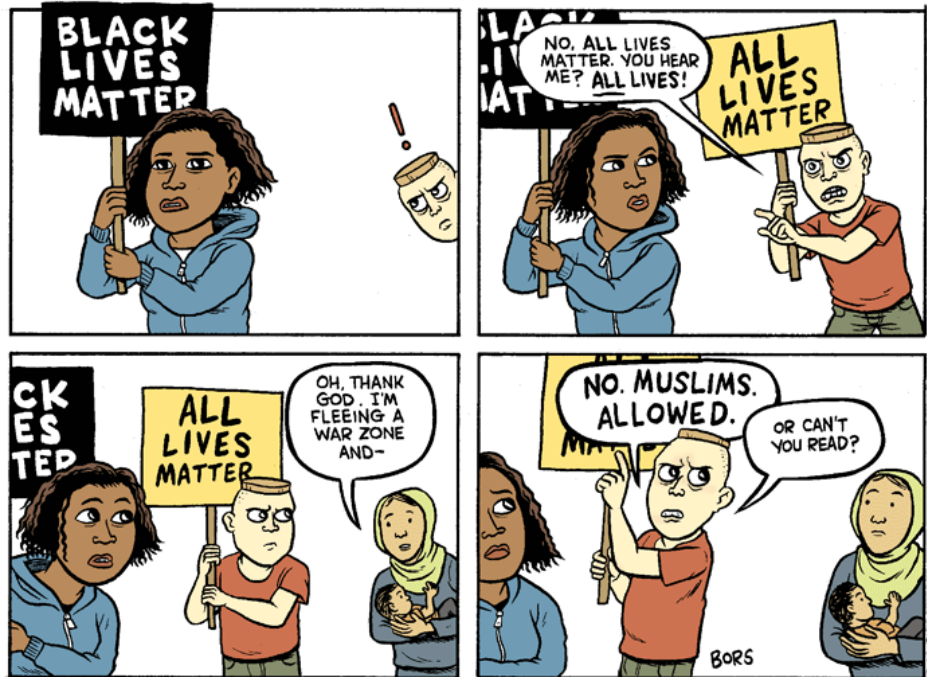
With its foundation set, the Black Lives Matter movement advanced to become associated with officer-involved shootings and killings of Black people over the past decade. One of the nation’s earliest Black Lives Matter protests came after the death of 18-year old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri after a police officer, Darren Wilson, opened fire on Brown for walking around in his own neighborhood. Busloads of individuals from all over the United States arrived in Missouri to protest the wrongful death of Brown. At the protests, “police used tanks, tear gas, and other violent means to repress the people in the streets,” and this police response to the protests furthered racial tensions even more (Tilly et al 2020, 242). While some fires and looting did take place at the protests (Tilly et al 2020, 242), these kinds of activities do not define what the Black Lives Matter movement represents. I shall now move on to define what the Black Lives Matter movement *is* and what it *is not*.

In Chapter 9 of *Social Movements 1768-2018* (2020), Tilly et al. contend that while the Black Lives Matter movement did find its start on social media as a hashtag, it is a movement that transcends beyond social media platforms (243). As we have observed, the simple hashtag, #BLM, drew crowds from across the nation in an effort to protest the racially motivated violence against the Black community. Black Lives Matter as a hashtag that transformed into an

organized movement appears to confirm Shirky's argument that organizing is possible without a direct organization. The Black Lives Matter movement, which has seen a record of 3.5 million tweets per day, can be defined as "a motto, symbol, and name for a social movement against police brutality, but also functioned to express demands for dignity and social justice for all Blacks," as Tilly et al describe (243). While the Black Lives Matter movement had, at first, seemed to focus primarily on violence against and the deaths of unarmed Black men, one point should be made clear: Black Lives Matter is inclusive of all identities within the Black community. The #SayHerName campaign was launched as a movement within Black Lives Matter in order to raise awareness "not only about police brutality against Black men, but about violence that hurts Black bodies, regardless of their gender and sexual orientation or identity," (245).

I will make clear one definition that the Black Lives Matter movement is not: a racist movement that aims to devalue the importance of the lives of other races. It is no secret that Black Lives Matter (BLM) has been met with sharp criticism and backlash for being a movement that calls out injustice for one specific race of individuals. Many opponents to the Black Lives Matter movement have started a counterstatement known as "All Lives Matter." Consider the political cartoon below that shows both a BLM protester and an "All Lives Matter" counter protester:

Figure 4. Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter as shown in a tweet posted by Cru Inner City



(Cru Inner City 2015)

I call “All Lives Matter” a counterstatement instead of a countermovement because “All Lives Matter” seems to be less about inclusivity and more about dismissing the grievances of the Black community. Thus, I find it difficult to label “All Lives Matter” as a movement with a substantive cause. Put directly, the emergence of “All Lives Matter” appears to be a vengeful tit-for-tat response to the more genuine BLM movement against racial injustice. Besides the “All Lives Matter” pushback, BLM is negatively associated with anarchy or lawlessness. This misconception comes from widespread calls to defund the police. Rayshawn Ray defines what defunding the police means and what it does not mean: “[defunding] the police” means reallocating or redirecting funding away from the police department to other government agencies funded by the local municipality...[defunding] does not mean [abolishing] policing,” (Ray 2020). Demonizing a movement by distorting the meanings of its demands prevents the

very support that the movement needs to inspire change. We must turn our collective attention to the harmful ideologies, behaviors, and institutional practices that prevent police reform.

### **Ideologies, Individual Behaviors, and Institutional Practices: Three I's of Oppression**

In this section, I will describe the three forms of systemic oppression at work when police brutality occurs. I will first define what each of the three I's—ideologies, individual behaviors, and institutional practices—should be understood as in theory, then I will apply each of the three I's to the case of police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement. This discussion will set the foundation for the next section in which I will argue the ways in which corporations can use influence, correction, and accountability against the three I's framework to turn the tables and foster the conversation about reform in policing—a strategy that will promote the interests of the victims of police brutality.

To begin, we shall consider the definition of an ideology. In “Ideology: A Definitional Analysis” (1997), John Gerring opens by considering several definitions of an ideology. One definition that fits the discussion here is that from Theodore Adorno: “‘An organization of opinions, attitudes, and values—a way of thinking about man and society. We may speak of an individual's total ideology or of his ideology with respect to different areas of social life; politics, economics, religion, minority groups, and so forth’ (Adorno et al. 1950: 2)” (958). An ideology, in other words, is the attitude or set of values that an individual or group of individuals may have on a particular issue or subject. The issue or subject can be related to politics, race, culture, or religion, to name a few. Ideologies are not the same for every individual person. However, a given society may have prevalent ideologies that can, at times, be polarizing or divisive. One may hold these ideologies or beliefs about specific groups or practices. Ideologies can and do inform the behavior of individuals in society.

With the definition of ideology described, it is not as difficult to see the ways in which ideologies can be oppressive. If individuals hold certain prejudiced beliefs or attitudes about groups that they themselves do not belong to, these ideologies can easily be transferred onto their children, families, friends, co-workers, etc. Often times, ideologies are rooted in normative beliefs about groups; these normative beliefs do not always represent an accurate, fact-based account of who people are. Thus, ideology finds its oppressive nature in the way that it leaves room for toxic, biased beliefs and attitudes about certain groups which could underscore differences amongst people creating an “us” and “them” way of thinking.

How do ideologies take shape with contemporary police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement? Ideologies are at the core of police misconduct. Recall the earlier point made about the factors that cause police brutality put forth by Brooks: that there is a prevalence of a “we-they” attitude in policing. As mentioned above, one of the systemically oppressive consequences of ideologies are that widely-shared, ill-informed attitudes incite division. In the case of police, it only takes one “bad apple” who holds the belief that Black individuals represent “threats” to start a collective ideology about the Black community as a whole. As far as the Black Lives Matter movement is concerned, we have examined an instance in which ideologies become oppressive: they distort the message that another group tries to convey. The “All Lives Matter” supporters show how an ideology—that the unjust taking of Black lives by police is not an urgent issue that needs addressing—contributes to the Black erasure that Black Lives Matter is standing up against.

Individual behavior is the next component of systemic oppression that deserves attention. I shall use my own definition of individual behaviors: individual behaviors are the ways in which people behave or act in society based on their learned or developed ideologies. The definition of

individual behavior is a rather straightforward one. Individual behavior tends to be the component of systemic oppression that has the strongest influence. That is, it connects ideologies to institutional practices. How does this connection happen? Just as we have seen how an ideology of an individual can become a collective ideology, an individual behavior can be mimicked by others in a group or community with some common relation. If an individual holds harmful ideologies or attitudes that are oppressive, their behaviors would simply be taking action on those oppressive attitudes and beliefs. These behaviors can include hate speech, violence, and harassment.

Police brutality, then, clearly provides us with an empirical example of how oppressive individual behaviors can work. A police officer who chooses to keep his knee on an unarmed Black man's neck for over nine minutes despite the man pleading for his life is a haunting illustration of the ways that ideologies can hijack a person's behavior. Officer Chauvin could have moved his knee from George Floyd's neck, however, if he adopted the attitude that unarmed Black men are threats, then it becomes a little clearer to see why Chauvin's misguidance led him to take a man's life. That, by no means, makes Chauvin's actions justifiable—it just shows that two components of systemic oppression can come together to create an unwarranted, inequitable tragedy. What about individual behaviors in the Black Lives Matter movement? One can observe that in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement, there has been sweeping harassment that has taken place as the movement has drawn national attention. It seems as though there is this tendency of people, who hold ideologies that demonize BLM, to publicly harass and threaten to call the police on Black individuals knowing what is at stake for Black individuals during a police encounter. Some label these kinds of individuals as

“Karens.” No matter what anyone calls them on social media, these individuals also show the extensive reach that ideologies and individual behaviors have on fostering oppression.

Finally, we shall turn to institutional practices. One way to understand an institutional practice is as a commonly exercised behavior informed by collections of ideologies and individual behaviors. When all is said and done, what lies beneath every institution is a group of individuals. Institutional practices can be understood as a universalization of behaviors into rules or norms for a particular community or organization. These institutional practices contribute to systemic oppression because they reinforce discrimination and put those that do not follow the norm or formal rule at a disadvantage when it comes to belonging. Because institutions are at the top of the pyramid of systemic oppression, institutional practices are the most difficult to change. Change would require both a reformation of ideologies and a modification of the behaviors that encourage institutions to ingrain those attitudes and practices within the institution.

What do oppressive institutional practices look like with police brutality against Black people? The culture of police brutality itself represents an oppressive institutional practice. The character of police brutality, as shown in the figures throughout the paper, is that of a targeted, biased practice. To make matters worse, the officers who see the wrongness in police brutality fear speaking out against it because it would violate the code of silence amongst police officers. Moreover, oppressive institutional practices with respect to the Black Lives Matter movement can be found in the criminal justice system. Recall the case of the Georgia Sheriff Screws who killed an unarmed Black man after a false arrest in 1943. Sadly, a case with an outcome like this comes as no surprise to most. It has become a shame to expect no justice for the families of victims of police brutality. As if the institution of policing was not enough of a failure, the criminal justice system adds salt to the wound of racially motivated injustice. Thus, the Black

Lives Matter movement will persist until institutional practices mirror the message that Black lives actually do matter and are deserving of justice.

### **Corporate Social Activism on Social Media: A Remedy of Influence, Correction, and Accountability**

Consider this statement from Angela Russell, Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at CUNA Mutual Group, an insurance company: “If we stand by our Black Lives Matter statements, it must go beyond the brand. It needs to be doing the actual work of listening to, acknowledging and centering Black lives. If our statements regarding Black lives and diversity, equity and inclusion are merely brand statements, they will be justifiably seen as hollow at best and manipulative at worst,” (Angela Russell 2020). In the same statement, Russell asserts that “[while] we are making courageous public statements honoring the fact that Black lives matter, let us also recommit ourselves to taking action to create a place where Black lives actually matter.” Russell’s message on extending the Black Lives Matter movement beyond mere brand statements points to the boundless influence that corporations are capable of having when it comes to institutional reform. Put simply, companies and brands can make their words mean something important for social change. Policing is not a doomed institution—it is an institution in need of both preventative and remedial change.

The last section outlined the ways in which ideologies, individual behaviors, and institutional practices work together to create the framework for systemic oppression. With this framework in mind, we shall start the conversation about a solution to the oppressive institutional practice of police brutality. The last section ended with the point that BLM will persist until institutional practices reflect the notion that Black lives actually do matter and are worthy of justice. How do we move toward ensuring that this happens? Corporate social activism

on social media is the start of that answer. That is, corporations can help bring about the start of a solution by using the three elements of systemic oppression as a guide for directing their activism against police brutality and violence against Black persons.

In this section, I will argue that companies and brands can and should use social media as a site for corporate social activism against racially motivated police brutality for three reasons: (1) such activism is contagious and can influence other companies and brands to do the same, (2) such activism pushes corporations to examine the histories of their brands and correct historic wrongdoings that, in turn, call other companies and brands to action to follow their lead, and most importantly, (3) such activism fosters accountability on the part of corporations that forces those corporations to ensure that their practices match their stances on racial justice.

To many, these three reasons in support of social media-based corporate social activism seem to show early promise in how such activism benefits corporations, but one may be left wondering how this relates to institutional reform with respect to ending police brutality. I argue that the mimetic influence, historical correction, and accountability in practice that firms are pushed to encounter highlight the fact that firms, too, are institutions. If firms are institutions and can raise awareness of injustice, undergo corrective measures, and be held accountable for their actions, then so can police departments. The fact of the matter is, once companies and brands demonstrate a commitment against police brutality and racial injustice on social media, it becomes a critical command for other institutions to act in a manner likewise.

The rest of this section will be dedicated to describing how this domino effect of institutional reform starts. The main focus here will be on brands and companies that most of us have some familiarity with. There are three different case studies that I will discuss in the section partly because they have been among some of the most controversial social media responses by

corporations in the public eye. Moreover, these cases demonstrate the lasting impact that social media-driven corporate social activism has on the public interest with respect to denouncing police brutality in the Black community. There will be three pairs of brands or companies in my discussion of social media and corporate activism. I will begin with sportswear companies NIKE and Adidas; I will follow that case with ice cream brands Ben & Jerry's and Dreyer's; the last case study will be that of cosmetic companies L'Oréal and Glossier.

#### NIKE and Adidas: Corporate Social Activism on Social Media is Contagious

Beginning with NIKE and Adidas, it is important to note that this case illustrates one of the best outcomes of corporate social activism on social media: it can create a bandwagon effect that causes other companies to raise awareness about the same cause. This bandwagon effect is synonymous with Eilert's mimetic influence. Recall that Eilert defines mimetic influence as the type of pressure that entities face in order to stay competitive with others (Eilert 2020, 465).

With mimetic influence, a particular corporate social activist cause can gain traction.

Before looking at the way that mimetic influence, with respect to corporate social activism, inspired unity between NIKE and Adidas in the wake of police brutality and BLM, we shall first examine the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) present in this case. Recall that engaging in CSR is a way for firms to support a particular cause or value that they intend to uphold in their practices as a business. Also recall that Eilert characterizes CSR as a softer alternative to corporate social activism because the causes that firms support through CSR tend to be less controversial and more widely accepted (Eilert 2020, 463). For corporations NIKE and Adidas and many others, CSR is simply not enough for inspiring significant change in the way that society views the failure of policing in the Black community. One place that we tend to see CSR is within a corporation's annual report. In NIKE's 2020 report, the phrases *police brutality*

and *Black Lives Matter* are nowhere to be found. NIKE’s annual report does feature sections that describe generic commitments to racial equality and diversity. For example, NIKE writes that “[addressing] systemic racism and supremacy will require more than a few actions. NIKE is committed to doing the long-term work in making a positive impact locally and globally,” (NIKE, Inc. 2020, 9). As far as actions, NIKE has committed \$140 million to advance a “more just and equal society for Black Americans” (NIKE, Inc. 2020, 9). Besides financial commitment, NIKE has made a commitment to diversity in the workplace. Table 2 below shows the change in employee diversity from 2015-2020.

Table 2. NIKE Inc. Employee Total by Race/Ethnicity in the U.S. 2015-2020

NIKE, Inc. Totals by Race/Ethnicity (U.S.)														
	CY15		CY16		CY17		CY18		CY19		CY20		Change from CY15-20	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	% pts
<i>All Employees</i>														
U.S. Racial and Ethnic Minorities	17,688	52.9%	19,249	54.5%	20,513	56.5%	18,331	55.3%	19,418	56.7%	<b>19,345</b>	<b>58.1%</b>	1,657	5.16 p.p.
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>														
American Indian or Alaskan Native (Not Hispanic/Latino)	137	0.4%	124	0.4%	121	0.3%	123	0.4%	143	0.4%	<b>128</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	-9	-0.03 p.p.
Asian (Not Hispanic/Latino)	2,566	7.7%	2,817	8.0%	2,949	8.1%	2,825	8.5%	3,079	9.0%	<b>3,097</b>	<b>9.3%</b>	531	1.62 p.p.
Black or African American (Not Hispanic/Latino)	7,267	21.7%	7,963	22.6%	8,530	23.5%	7,175	21.7%	7,425	21.7%	<b>7,953</b>	<b>23.9%</b>	686	2.14 p.p.
Hispanic/Latino	5,992	17.9%	6,399	18.1%	6,911	19.0%	6,151	18.6%	6,572	19.2%	<b>6,055</b>	<b>18.2%</b>	63	0.25 p.p.
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Not Hispanic/Latino)	264	0.8%	253	0.7%	275	0.8%	240	0.7%	239	0.7%	<b>213</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	-51	-0.15 p.p.
Two or More Races (Not Hispanic/Latino)	1,462	4.4%	1,693	4.8%	1,727	4.8%	1,817	5.5%	1,960	5.7%	<b>1,899</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	437	1.33 p.p.
Unknown	94	0.3%	15	0.0%	141	0.4%	209	0.6%	228	0.7%	<b>306</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	212	0.64 p.p.
White (Not Hispanic/Latino)	15,643	46.8%	16,029	45.4%	15,661	43.1%	14,595	44.0%	14,597	42.6%	<b>13,655</b>	<b>41.0%</b>	-1,988	-5.80 p.p.
<b>Total</b>	<b>33,425</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>35,293</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>36,315</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>33,135</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>34,243</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>33,306</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	-119	0.00 p.p.

(NIKE, Inc. 2020, 18)

As shown above, diversity in the workplace has increased by about five percentage points for NIKE. While NIKE’s statements, commitments, and data on race and diversity seem to show that the corporation’s CSR values racial equality and inclusion, one is left to wonder about

NIKE's true stance on the height of racial tensions as a result of police brutality and the BLM movement in 2020.

For Adidas, the CSR story is much the same. Adidas also made commitments to ending racism by “investing \$120 million in the US toward ending racism and supporting Black communities through 2025, and funding 50 university scholarships in the US each year for Black and LatinX students” (Adidas 2020). Similar to NIKE, Adidas set goals to increase diversity in its workforce; Adidas aims to “fill at least 30% of all new positions in the US with Black and LatinX people” (Adidas 2020). In addition to these commitments, Adidas introduced its “Creating a Culture of Inclusion (CCI) Team Workout” which is a mandatory employee training program that focuses on “topics such as diversity dimensions, privilege, and inclusive team behaviors” (Adidas 2020). Also similar to its competitor, the terms *police brutality* and *Black Lives Matter* are not mentioned anywhere in the corporation's report.

The significance of NIKE and Adidas' annual reports with respect to CSR brings us to one major realization: CSR is simply not enough for an issue like police brutality against the Black community. In the annual reports, both NIKE and Adidas appeared to tiptoe around the subject. Thus, CSR, as we have seen present in the reports, is not the adequate channel for the conversations that inspire an institutional reform in policing or even a change in the views of individuals that make up that institution. This issue would require a more aggressive approach—an approach that does not just support Black Americans, but one that sparks change for those Black Americans. This approach involves corporate social activism on social media—not CSR through modes such as annual reports. While annual reports are useful for stakeholders and individuals who have incentive to conduct deep research on a particular company or brand, annual reports do not have the same ease of access as social media does. Besides, I do not know

many people who search for annual reports to find out about a company's stance on an issue as pressing as police brutality in the Black community. Instead, I have observed that the majority turn to social media to locate this information. Thus, the focus should not be on the CSR aspect of firms—the focus should instead be directed to corporate social activism on social media.

Returning to the idea of mimetic influence, it is clear that the commitments of both NIKE and Adidas resembled each other in the CSR-driven annual reports. But what about corporate social activism from both NIKE and Adidas on social media? In “Just Don’t” (2020), Eve Young discusses the effect of mimetic influence on social media when NIKE and Adidas took a clear stance on racial injustice with respect to police brutality. In the article, Young focuses on a memorable Twitter video posted by NIKE in which the brand went against its slogan “Just Do It.” Young notes that NIKE was among the first to speak out in support of the Black Lives Matter movement after the death of George Floyd in May 2020 (Young 2020). NIKE’s post was not just memorable for NIKE’s defiance of its own slogan—the post was momentous because it was retweeted by NIKE’s biggest competitor, Adidas.

Figure 5. Adidas’ retweet of NIKE’s video against police brutality in the Black community



(Adidas 2020)

Young writes that the act of Adidas sharing NIKE's post was "a rare display of solidarity between rival brands that appeared to [symbolize] joining forces against a common enemy" (Young 2020). This rare occurrence shows the power of mimetic influence: Adidas indeed felt the pressure to stand with its transparent, vocal competitor for a reason deeper than good publicity. Both NIKE and Adidas share a similar demographic of consumers: Black individuals under 35 who are "more likely to be passionate about activism," (Young 2020). Mimetic influence in the case of NIKE and Adidas is a tactic that can and should continue to be used by more firms. In this case, both brands speaking out against police brutality and standing up for the Black community gave their consumers a sense of solidarity. The point is, on social media, corporate social activism is contagious. It inspires competing firms to use their platforms to raise awareness about systemic issues. If almost every firm uses social media to speak out against police brutality and its effect on Black lives, many social media users would not be able to ignore the issue so easily. Sure, there may be some social media users who boycott those brands or companies but before those users do so, they might leave a comment expressing their dissenting opinion on the matter at hand. Like Black lives, these comments matter. These comments allow for individuals to have open discussions about police brutality. These comments allow for individuals to be educated about the experiences that Black individuals have in the presence of police. This discord and education that takes place on social media is the result of corporate social activism's contagious character—it unveils police brutality against the Black community as a problem and brings forth a discussion that can expose the toxic attitudes that prevent us from reaching a solution.

What can corporate social activism as contagious or mimetic teach us about combatting the three I's of systemic oppression in order to achieve institutional reform? Starting with ideology, reform in the institution of policing can begin by normalizing the idea of having conversations about police brutality. If we as a society can put politics aside and allow conversations between police departments and BLM advocacy groups to take place, there is a promising possibility of reversing oppressive ideologies. When we develop a receptive attitude or ideology about open conversation, police officers can begin to let go of the oppressive belief that Black individuals are threatening people who need to be manhandled. Individual behaviors of police officers could be changed for the better when police officers chose words instead of violence. Perhaps regular community conversations between the members of the police department and community members can become a possibility. These conversations should not be incorporated into generic council meetings—conversations between community members of color and police officers are deserving of their own meetings apart from other community initiatives. This way, police officers could start to get to know the community members, especially Black community members, in a way that would allow for the figurative disarmament of police officers when they encounter Black persons. Finally, where institutional practices are concerned, the contagious activist framework can point police departments to making commitments. That is, just like NIKE and Adidas made a commitment to solidarity, police departments can make commitments to the public locally. This institutional feature can involve starting community programs led by police officers to help prevent at-risk Black youth from entering the world of street crime. These types of reform from the angle of contagious activism would allow for more familiarity and mutual respect between Black community members and police officers and can make both sides view the other as less of a threat to their well-being.

## Ben & Jerry's and Dreyer's Ice Cream: Corporate Social Activism on Social Media Calls Back History

It is no secret that Ben & Jerry's is an ice cream brand that has a culture of social activism. That is, the history of Ben & Jerry's has been painted by the ice cream brand taking firm stances on controversial social issues from LGBTQIA+ rights, to marijuana legalization, and of course, police brutality against Black individuals. Like me, the executives of Ben & Jerry's understand that CSR has not been and will never be enough to break the chain of systemic racism built into the institution of policing and consequent racial violence. The actions and values of Ben & Jerry's embody the true character of the limitlessness of corporate social activism.

Like NIKE, Ben & Jerry's has never been a brand that waits for its competitors to make a statement. Since the death of George Floyd in 2020, many companies and brands have spoken out and finally proclaimed that Black lives matter. But for Ben & Jerry's, it did not take the death of George Floyd to know that. Ben & Jerry's support for the Black Lives Matter movement can be traced back to as early as 2016.

Figure 6. A BLM tweet posted by Ben & Jerry's in 2016



(Ben & Jerry's 2016)

Ben and Jerry's continues to make its mark as a brand that makes history in its exercise of corporate social activism because of the brand's straightforward, unabashed attitude and commitment to the Black Lives Matter movement against racial violence. The brand has even made history by creating an ice cream flavor, "Justice Remix'd" dedicated to racial justice (Ben & Jerry's n.d., "Together, We Can Reimagine Criminal Justice"). Ben & Jerry's is a brand that not only makes history—it considers history as well. On Ben & Jerry's website, one can find elaboration on the values that the brand posts about on social media. One of the most famous articles on the brand's website is its statement denouncing white supremacy. The team at Ben & Jerry's writes that "[the] murder of George Floyd was the result of inhumane police brutality that is perpetuated by a culture of white supremacy" (Ben & Jerry's n.d., "Silence Is NOT an Option"). The brand goes on to state that the untimely death of George Floyd "is the fruit borne of toxic seeds planted on the shores of our country in Jamestown in 1619, when the first enslaved men and women arrived on this continent" (Ben & Jerry's n.d., "Silence Is NOT an Option"). Ben & Jerry's makes it clear that police brutality against the Black community is a part of the legacy of the inherently racist system in the United States. In the same article, Ben and Jerry's goes on to make demands that call the President, Congress, and the Department of Justice to action to remedy the effects of a white supremacy in the institution of policing (Ben & Jerry's n.d., "Silence Is NOT an Option"). Here, calling back history for Ben & Jerry's is a way to address institutional flaws and demand restorative justice.

Unfortunately, corporate social activism with respect to history does not always look as great as Ben & Jerry's case. One of Ben & Jerry's competitors, Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream, has not been as socially conscious on racial issues throughout history. After Floyd's death last year,

Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream was forced to look back on their company's history from a critical and corrective lens. Instead of introducing a new flavor of ice cream, Dreyer's was pushed to retire the name of one of its ice cream products. Historically known as an "Eskimo Pie," for almost a century, the name of the ice cream treat had come under fire in June 2020 due to a "growing pressure to remove or rethink brands that have long been considered racist or culturally insensitive" (Cramer 2020). Part of this pressure stemmed from the widespread civil unrest over the summer of 2020 in which other firms, too, began to realign their brands with their core values. In any event, Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream shows the importance of history in corporate social activism. That is, corporate social activism means nothing if it only involves words. In the case of Ben & Jerry's, a new ice cream flavor was made in support of justice; for Dreyer's an ice cream product's name was removed for the sake of racial justice. Either way, both brands took action to change or start the change to correct racial injustice.

What lessons can we learn from Ben & Jerry's and Dreyer's corporate social activism that may inspire police reform in the Black community? Here, we should understand institutional reform as examining history and making corrections. Using the three I's framework once again, we begin to see how police reform can be corrected in the Black community. First, instead of police officers adopting the "we-they" ideology which could lead to a false sense of superiority, police officers should instead correct their ideology so that they understand that they are just as respectable as their track record. Second, the individual behaviors of police officers should be assessed more regularly—this may include reviewing complaints about individual police officers on the same day and even encouraging Black individuals to complete satisfaction surveys after an encounter with the police. Finally, police reform in institutional practices may involve police departments collecting all complaint data and looking for common patterns in problematic

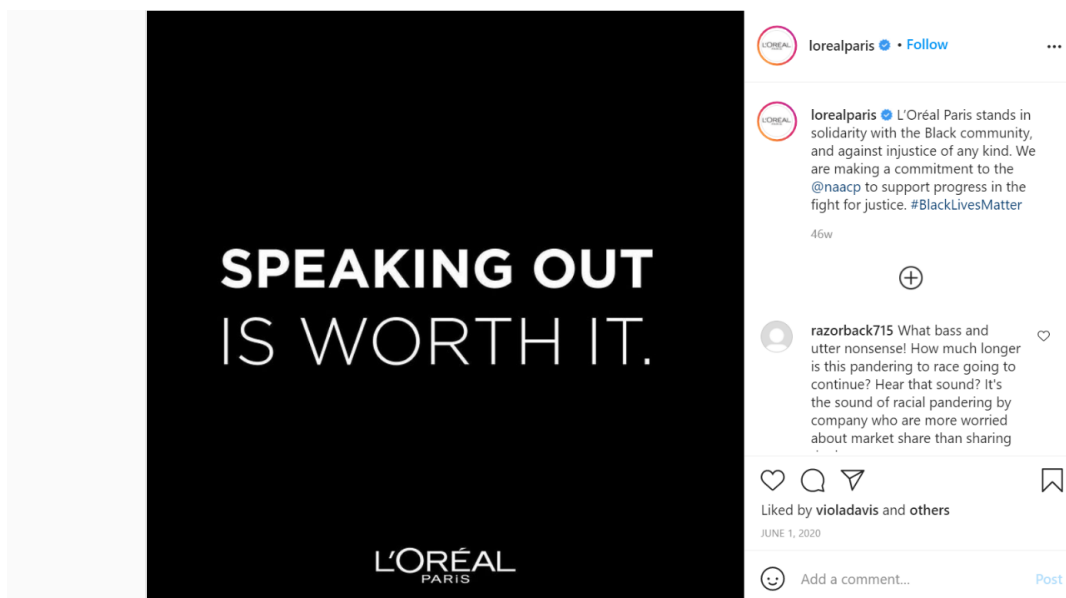
policing. If complaints and opinions of those affected by police brutality are taken seriously on a regular basis, there would not be a need to wait for incidents similar to what we have seen with George Floyd in order to examine the history of misconduct of certain police officers. Waiting around would only fuel racial tensions and create further divide, which would inevitably entail a larger police presence.

### L'Oréal and Glossier: Corporate Social Activism on Social Media Promotes Accountability

The final corporate social activism case that we will consider involves cosmetic companies L'Oréal and Glossier. Both of these big names have faced backlash for expressing public support for the Black Lives Matter movement even though these companies' practices did not match their sentiments. While this is indeed a case where both companies are using mere words instead of taking action, I contend that both cases represent opportunities for corporate social activism to take place. These opportunities for corporate social activism are made possible by one driving factor: accountability.

Consider the Instagram post made by L'Oréal in solidarity with the BLM movement:

Figure 7. L'Oréal "Speaking Out is Worth It" Instagram post in support of BLM



(L'Oréal Paris 2020)

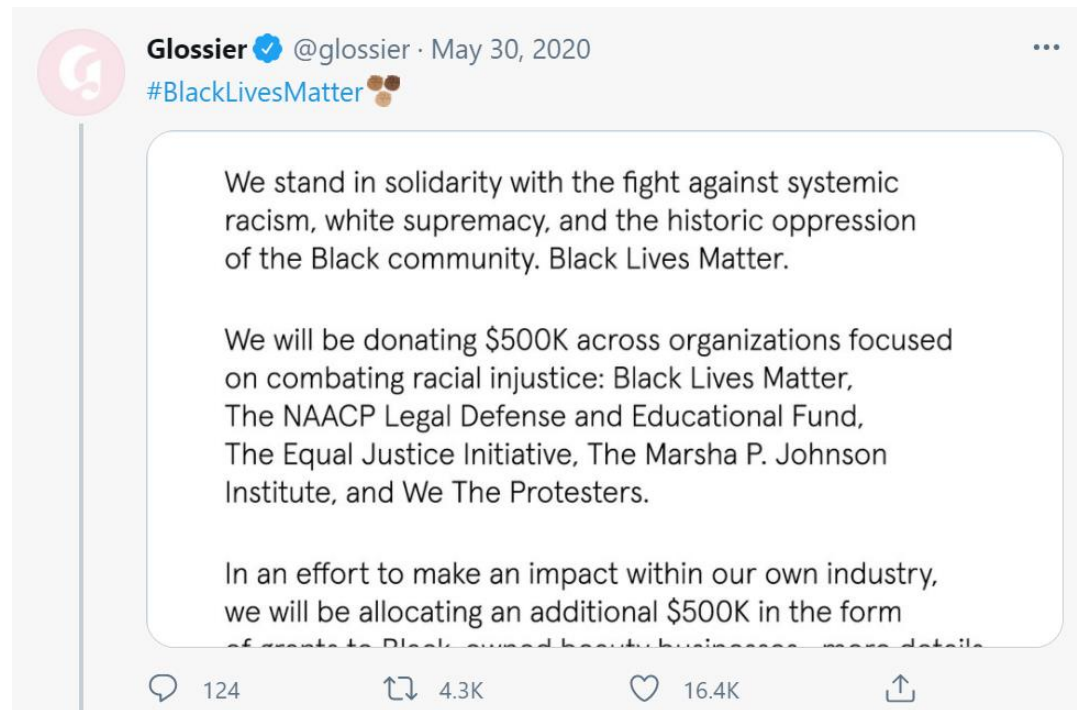
While L'Oréal took a firm stance on the Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of police brutality, as a company, it is not so evident that the company actually believed that Black Lives Matter. In the caption of the post, L'Oréal claimed that they would make a commitment to the NAACP, yet that commitment appeared to be vague. Moreover, former brand ambassador Munroe Bergdorf, a Black transgender model, was forced to part ways with L'Oréal after she spoke out against the 2017 Unite the Right rally, a white supremacist rally, in Charlottesville (McGonagle 2020). In 2017, "L'Oréal claimed that Bergdorf's views were 'at odds' with its values" (McGonagle 2020). This was only three years before L'Oréal's Instagram post.

So what changed L'Oréal's values? Bergdorf believed that L'Oréal simply jumped on the bandwagon to join other corporate names taking a stance on social media (McGonagle 2020). Because of this scandal, many people believed that L'Oréal was ingenuine with its statement on social media. Some even boycotted the company's product. Why is corporate social activism still relevant here? The simple answer is accountability. After L'Oréal found itself in hot water for its social media post not exactly matching the company's prior stance and conduct, Bergdorf was rehired shortly after the Instagram post (Aviles 2020). This illustrates that when individuals or a group of individuals hold a company accountable to their statements or values, that company is pushed to make the necessary changes to make their company's practices match those statements. Since Black lives mattered to L'Oréal according to its Instagram post, Bergdorf's livelihood needed to matter as well.

Glossier, one of L'Oréal's competitors, also ran into a problem with making their BLM statement match their practices as a company. Just five days after the Black community lost George Floyd to police brutality, Glossier turned to Twitter to proclaim its stance about racial

injustice against the Black community. Glossier used the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter and included a description of what the company would do to support and bring about change for the Black community.

Figure 8. #BlackLivesMatter posted by Glossier on Twitter on May 30, 2020



(Glossier 2020)

It is clear that Glossier's statement, specifically regarding the company's financial commitment to Black advocacy organizations, was more substantive than their competitor. Despite this, Glossier did not escape accountability in its practices with respect to the company's employees. From the perspective of people of color, Glossier's company culture involves "constant [microaggressions], comments about one's skin color or appearance, making Black employees clearly feel as 'others,' and allowing white customers to treat Black and Brown employees shabbily," (Kaye 2020). Like L'Oréal, Glossier was forced to do some deep reflection on its

internal practices; Glossier's CEO issued an apology that many critics claim to contain "vague promises" (Kaye 2020). This led many of Glossier's former employees to form a group called "Outta the Gloss." This group is now urging its supporters to boycott Glossier in hopes of "pushing the company to be more transparent in their accountability to staff, as well as consumers, in improving discrimination concerns," (Liu 2020).

This action taken by former employees reflects Eilert's contention that change can be initiated by coercive influence. This coercive influence "often involves protests and boycotts and is geared toward withholding key resources that the institutional actor needs for its survival" (Eilert 2020, 465). The simple fact is, Glossier already lost some of the most important resources to its company: people. To make matters worse, Glossier's negligence in its practices within the company have added another consequence: they have lost some of their consumers. Glossier should not be content with being boycotted by its former employees. When it comes to change, a firm's corporate social activism should not surrender to cancel culture—a firm should commit itself to cultural awareness. If Glossier has any hopes of regaining these valuable resources, the company is left with one option: to take accountability for the poor actions on the part of management and commit to changing the company's operations. Once this is done, Black employees who work for Glossier will truly feel that they matter, and with that, Glossier's statement on social media would mean more. This would represent true corporate social activism with a commitment to genuine change.

The spirit of accountability in corporate social activism on social media provides insight for institutional reform with respect to policing. Using the three I's framework for a final time, activism from the angle of accountability teaches us that when looking at police reform, officers should be held accountable to uphold the ideology that their purpose is to protect and serve. I

would like to stress that point once more: the attitude that all police officers should have when encountering individuals, especially Black individuals, is that their job is to protect and serve, not attack and abuse. Once this standard is widely-accepted by all police officers, violence against the Black community would begin to fade since ideologies control the individual behaviors of those on the police force. Moreover, accountability in the realm of individual behavior must involve officers upholding their oath in everything they do, in every call that they respond to, in every neighborhood that they are serving—regardless of the racial makeup of that neighborhood.

Finally, the institutional practices of police departments must demonstrate a commitment to holding officers accountable if they abuse the badge and believe, for any reason, that they are above the law. It should not take the death of an unarmed Black individual in order to fire a police officer with a record of violent misconduct against Black individuals. Police departments should review bodycams regularly and foster an environment with positive reinforcement for police officers who carry out their duties with respect for all individuals—not just the ones who do not constitute a threat. By that same token, police departments must step up and speak out when a fellow police officer does their job in a racially-biased manner—to do so, police officers must be willing to collectively abandon the blue code of silence in its totality.

### **Conclusion: Is Corporate Social Activism through Social Media Enough?**

I write this conclusion section after the hearing the verdict of Derek Chauvin’s trial over the death of George Floyd. Derek Chauvin, the Minneapolis police officer who kept his knee on George Floyd’s neck for over nine minutes as Floyd repeatedly stated that he could not breathe, was found guilty of second-degree murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter. The outcome of the Chauvin trial shows that there is both a possibility and a sliver

of promise in the area of holding police officers accountable for their exercise of excessive force against members of the Black community. More importantly, the jury finding Derek Chauvin guilty shows that, finally, we have arrived at some milestone where Black lives do matter.

In the earlier sections, I have given careful consideration to the relationship between the nature of institutions, corporate social activism with respect to firms, and the impact that social media has on organization by examining the relevant literature on these subjects. While scholars in these three respective fields have provided their conceptual approaches to inspiring and facilitating institutional change, I took these scholarly findings a step further by extending the conversation to apply it to the central stake of my thesis: police brutality against Black individuals. I have examined the history of racially motivated police violence throughout history and then took a closer look at the emergence and nature of the Black Lives Matter response to this issue.

In the section immediately prior to this one, I outlined three significant reasons why firms should engage in corporate social activism: (1) it is contagious in character and compels other firms to do the same thus amplifying awareness and actions taken on ending police brutality against members of the Black community; (2) it fosters a culture of correction of historic and recurring injustice, leaving little room for the issue of police brutality to be left unaddressed; and (3) it allows for an atmosphere of accountability where practices can be compared against values and statements, thereby nudging a harmony between words and actions. I developed my argument by using empirical cases of firm activity on social media. I then created a blueprint for the start of police reform using the three reasons in support of corporate social activism. I established this blueprint for policing reform by directing activism toward the three I's of oppression with respect police brutality in the Black community.

While I have demonstrated the ways in which corporate social activism can inform the start of institutional reform in policing, my analysis may leave one question unanswered: is corporate social activism enough? The direct answer is no—but it is necessary. Successful reform in the institution of policing would require commitment and organization by individuals and groups besides firms. This is why many of the firms that we have examined made direct financial commitments to some of these organizations. While corporate social activism may not be enough to bring about the complete realization of a change in police conduct in the Black community, corporate social activism is a necessary start to this change. Firms should consider corporate social activism against police brutality in the Black community to be imperative. Police brutality against Black individuals is not an issue to deal with later. This issue is pressing and must be addressed before Black community members and police officers reach a state of irreparable division. As we have already observed, an approach like CSR is not nearly as aggressive or action-centered as our time demands—the corporate social activist approach is.

Put simply, corporate social activism is necessary because it is a kind of polycentric practice that continues to call out the institution of policing and the misconduct of its members. When firms engage in corporate social activism, they act as a voice for those whose grievances would otherwise be taken less seriously. Corporate social activism is necessary because it is one of the best ways that firms can connect to a complex and often misunderstood group—the Black community. Corporate social activism is necessary because it allows for police brutality to be denounced publicly when politicians find other issues to be more pressing, or when police complaint centers believe that Black individuals are just exaggerating the unfair treatment that they face in a given encounter with a police officer. Corporate social activism may not be enough to complete the task of ensuring racial justice for Black individuals during all encounters with

the police. Still, corporate social activism shows us where we can start to direct our efforts.

Above all, corporate social activism is imperative because it encourages individuals to challenge the oppressive nature of ideologies, individual behaviors, and institutional practices. Challenging the features of systemic oppression that threaten the Black community allows us to properly see that the experiences of Black people matter, and their lives do too.

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