

Black Lives Matter, the Ford Foundation, and the Black Movement Oligarchy

Part Two:

Black Lives Matter July 2013 to July 2020

William Walter Kay

“Black Lives Matter” is the main slogan, and touchstone affirmation, of the Black Movement-led police reform campaign.

“Black Lives Matters” also appears in the names of dozens of newly minted non-profit societies and other corporations.

While ownership of “Black Lives Matters” remains contested, a clique attached to the Oakland-based non-profit, [Thousand Currents](#), have effectively monopolized the brand.

The July 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman for the Trayvon Martin shooting sparked protests in several cities; with some escalating into mini-riots. Soon after, [Alicia Garza](#) used “Black lives matter” in a Facebook post. [Patrisse Cullors](#) created the hashtag. [Opal Tometi](#) registered the domain name.

All three members of this BLM Troika were Black Movement professionals. As of July 2013:

Cullors was a 30-year-old, Queer, prison abolitionist touring California with a one-woman play retelling her brother’s deterioration during bouts of incarceration.

Tometi was a 28-year-old employee of the foundation-funded, [Black Alliance for Just Immigration \(BAJI\)](#). She had been employed non-stop by non-profits since attaining her M.A. (Advocacy).

The 34-year-old Garza (B.A. Sociology) had 10 years’ experience as a professional organizer/activist with San Francisco/Oakland groups agitating around: LGBT issues, gentrification and police brutality against Blacks.

In July 2014 New York’s BLM milieu rallied 2,500 people to protest the killing of Eric Garner.

In August 2014 buses and caravans transported up to 500 BLM/Freedom Riders to the Ferguson/St. Louis area during the Michael Brown riots. Many Freedom Riders formed BLM Chapters upon returning home.

By July 2016 thirty-two BLM chapters had blossomed. Local protests publicised police wrongdoing but none set off riots nor attracted sustained media attention.

During this time the Black Movement Oligarchy staked its claim on the BLM brand and fully co-opted the BLM Troika. The [Ford Foundation](#), in December 2014, launched the [Movement for Black Lives \(M4BL\)](#) “Coalition” comprised from forty loyal grantees.

Meanwhile back on the streets, in mid-July 2016:

a) Baton Rouge BLM-affiliates responded to the killing of Alton Sterling by blocking a highway near a police station. During the ensuing riot a gun-store was looted, allegedly by the NBPP;

b) In Dallas a Black man steeped in BLM discourse (albeit inclined toward the NBPP) went on a cop-shooting spree, killing five wounding eleven;

c) Minneapolis BLM incited a riot in retaliation for the killing of Philando Castile. A busy highway was blocked at nightfall. Masked protestors openly drank alcohol. Speakers lionised those willing to get arrested. Projectiles, including improvised firecrackers, were thrown at police and motorists;

d) In Baton Rouge another Black Separatist went on a cop-shooting spree, killing three, wounding seven.

On July 19, 2016 the **Ford Foundation** and several other philanthropies kicked-off the [Black-led Movement Fund](#) with a collective multi-year pledge to give **M4BL** \$100 million.

[On September 7, 2016](#), the BLM Troika surrendered the BLM brand to the international aid charity, [Thousand Currents](#) (TC, est. in 1984 as IDEX, changed name in 2016). [Under this agreement](#):

“...IDEX provides fiduciary oversight, financial management, and other administrative services to Black Lives Matter. As a 501 c 3 public charity IDEX can receive grants and tax deductible donations on behalf of BLM.”

TC had not hitherto been an important Black Movement actor; [even its’ Black-led creds are debatable](#). Previously, TC had promoted eco-agriculture in Africa and Asia. (Little money ever left Oakland.)

TC’s budgets doubled post-2016. TC’s overall operations raised \$5.9 million in 2019 from scores of foundations (Packard, MacArthur, and UBS). The 2016 Agreement lifted TC’s Black board members up to the Black Movement’s Mount Olympus; albeit on the tailfins of the BLM Troika.

As of June 30, 2017 TC had \$2.4 million in its [BLM fund](#); and, had by that time released \$2 million from said fund. Over the next year they released another \$1.9 million from this fund, yet raised enough to end with \$2.6 million. Another \$1.8 million was released in 2019. On the eve of the George Floyd riots TC’s BLM fund stood at \$3.6 million. [Monies disbursed from TC’s BLM fund went 83% to head office salaries and consultants etc. Only 6% went to BLM Chapters](#).

On February 2018 TC hired [Kailee Scales](#) to run their BLM operations at \$140,000 per year. (Scales still lists herself as Senior Managing Director at Teach America – another \$100,000 per year.)

In the 1990s Scales was a Brooklyn-based Democratic Party fundraiser. From 2000 to 2020 she worked in senior capacities at 8 different non-profits including one led by Swedish Royalty. As a former professional climate activist, Scales dreams of *“paving the way for sustainable legacy building”* at BLM. Scales launched a BLM-funded Fine Arts program. She uses the word “global” a lot.

Scales is Managing Director of: **Black Lives Matter Network Action Fund** and **Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation Inc.** Both entities were incorporated in Delaware after the 2016 Agreement with Thousand Currents; the latter at the curiously late date of [October 16, 2017](#). Neither has tax exempt charitable status.

Between February 2018 and May 2020 (under Scales’ command) functioning BLM Chapters shrank from 32 to 10. Los Angeles, Detroit, Minneapolis and Philadelphia remained stalwarts although the latter was all-volunteer. BLM New York, BLM St. Louis and BLM Cincinnati quit in protest of Head Office manipulations and appropriations. The closest a BLM demo came to a riot during this period was the March 2018 Stephon Clark protest in Sacramento where a highway was blocked and fighting broke out after a vehicle hit a protestor.

Then after a two-year abeyance, in May 2020 BLM demos spiked in ferocity and number; and, relocated to retail districts. Protests over the killings of Ahmaud Arbery (d. February 23) and Breonna Taylor (d. March 13) were muted by the pandemic but then popped like flash-mobs *prior* to May 26. On that date, the George Floyd video ignited a nation-wide riot wave featuring much organised looting of retail shops.

[Between May and July 2020 TC/BLM raked-in over \\$20 million. Details remain sketchy](#) in part because the reportage often conflates donations to the overall Black Movement's "Racial Justice" campaign with donations made specifically to the TC/BLM partnership. Apple, Google, Microsoft and Walmart et al have collectively made hundreds of millions of dollars in pledges but established Movement orgs like NAACP and EJI will reap most of this money; not TC/BLM. On the hand TC/BLM is harvesting millions in small donations. As well, the Korean boyband, BTS, and their fan army, have given them over \$2 million.

On June 11, BLM Head Office offered [\\$500,000 grants to each of thirteen BLM Chapters](#). [On June 17](#) they unveiled a \$12 million fund (apparently incorporating the \$500,000 grants announced earlier in the week).

As for the BLM Troika:

Cullors and Garza are now both millionaires; Tometi can't be far behind. Post-July 2013:

Cullors assumed prominent Movement roles mainly in and around [BLM Los Angeles](#) – an organization tutored by the **Ford Foundation**. Her 2017 memoir was a media-stoked instant bestseller.

Tometi became **BAJI's** Executive Director under shower of awards. Post-Floyd she stepped away from BAJI to write and to serve as a BLM spokeswoman.

Garza's writings have been published in leading news outlets. She founded the seven-employee [Black Futures Lab](#) which in 2019 completed: "[an online and direct outreach survey of 30,000 of the most politically engaged Black people in the United States.](#)"

Garza is also now Special Projects Coordinator for Ai-jen Poo's National Domestic Workers Association. In 2019 Garza, along with Poo and Cecile Richards, co-founded Supermajority - a massive womanist get-out-the-vote group. Poo and Richards are **Ford Foundation** Trustees.