Silencing the Voices? The Reactionary Rhetoric of #AllLivesMatter

Josie E. Richards

With multiple videos surfacing on social media of police officers killing unarmed black individuals, racial tensions in the USA have once again peaked. Black individuals trying to bring mainstream attention to this problem banded together to create the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which is known as the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on social media. This social movement was created initially by three women of colour to protest the killing of unarmed black individuals by police. It has since multiplied into chapters worldwide, many of which have extended their mission to include systemic violence of all kinds against all people of colour and other visible minorities. These killings impinge upon the basic human rights of the victims and are arguably more accurately described as racially motivated murder by a publicly funded institution whose supposed purpose is to protect the lives of all American citizens—including the people of colour it is now killing in disproportionate numbers. BLM is, thus, a movement that aims to bring endemic racism, specifically that which is occurring at the hand of certain police forces, to the attention of the public. The goal of BLM resonates with that of Hardt and Negri in their book Multitude and later in Hardt’s interview “15 Years After the Empire.” In particular, the “love of difference” that lies at the heart of Hardt and Negri’s concept of multitude—a concept that sees difference and plurality as something that can bring us together rather than divide us—and the expectation of white America to embrace rather than reject difference among all people can be found at the foundation of the BLM movement.

In response to BLM, another social media movement started: All Lives Matter (ALM), which is known as #AllLivesMatter on social media. On the surface, this movement may sound as though it espouses the same values of “multitude” just mentioned. I argue below, however, that this is false; #AllLivesMatter in fact constitutes a reactionary position—a position that wants to go back to a certain divisiveness, rather than forward towards the “multitude” of Hardt and Negri—the proclaimers of which are largely white Americans. While followers of #AllLivesMatter may or may not be in the majority, their voices are loud and powerful (i.e. Tomi Lahren, Donald Trump) and, I argue, work to delegitimize the concerns of black America and specifically the BLM movement.

Using Hardt and Negri’s concept of multitude, and further appealing to agnotology, a branch in contemporary epistemology that explores ignorance and how one does not know, as a theoretical framework, I ask three general questions in this paper. (1) How can we conceptualize the ideas espoused by ALM rhetoric? (2) What effect has the rhetoric of #AllLivesMatter had on BLM rhetoric? And (3), for what kind of society does each rhetorical position advocate? Before diving into the questions, however, let us get a stable footing in our framework.

1. Theoretical Framework

Recently, epistemologists have increasingly been focusing on ignorance, moving their questioning away from why we know what we do know to what we do not know what we do not know. This field is known as the epistemology of ignorance, or agnotology.

Scholars of agnotology do not all agree on how to define the subject of their study: ignorance. Below, I mention two authors from the literature, Robert Proctor and Linda Alcoff, whose accounts, when taken together, situate us in the complex kind of ignorance that I will argue is at work in ALM.

In the collection Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance, Historian of science and agnotologist Robert Proctor authors a taxonomy of several ways in which he sees human beings answer the question: What is ignorance? The taxonomy has three major categories: ignorance as a native state, a selective choice, or a strategic ploy.
Proctor defines native state ignorance as one that “implies a kind of deficit caused by the naïveté of youth or the faults of an improper education” (Proctor, 2008, 4). This kind of ignorance is the most innocent—that is, the least willful—of the three he posits. It can be overcome simply by continuing to attend to reality, gaining experiences, and learning new things. Ignorance in this first sense can in fact be viewed as a positive thing because it becomes a challenge or prompt that motivates one to keep gaining knowledge.

Proctor’s second category, ignorance as selective choice, is defined as “a product of inattention” (Proctor, 2008, 7). Because we cannot attend to everything simultaneously, attention—and thus what we learn from attention—is always selective: by choosing to study X, we are inadvertently ignoring Y. Unlike native state ignorance, selective choice ignorance may involve a knowledge of what it is one does not know, as well as the conscious choice not to learn more about the one unknown in the interest of learning about another unknown.

Proctor’s third category, ignorance as a strategic ploy, is defined as “ignorance, doubt or uncertainty that is made, maintained and manipulated” (Proctor, 2008, 8). Ignorance of this sort is systemically, economically, or politically created in order to actively produce misinformation as a way of controlling the knowledge of a group of people.

While Proctor works on the concept of ignorance and the ways in which ignorance is actively, even if unknowingly, perpetuated, Linda Alcoff, in her essay entitled the Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types focuses on how it works in societies. Like Proctor, Alcoff also uses a tripartite divide. For her, ignorance operates within the sociopolitical system as situational ignorance, ignorance stemming from the limits of group identity, and the willful ignorance of the dominant group. Alcoff’s categories, while distinct from Proctor’s, share some commonalities. Like Proctor’s native state ignorance, Alcoff’s first category, situational ignorance depends on one’s uniqueness as a knower. Individuals asknowers are limited in what they know based on the specificities of their location, their experiences, their styles of reasoning and their interests (Alcoff, 2007, 42). An individual’s unique situation in life will always contribute to what they know and of what they are ignorant, but this ignorance can be rectified by continually learning more, and challenging one’s own perspective.

“Ignorance stemming from group identity” can be understood as ignorance that has a group-contextual basis: certain patterns of ignorance are prevalent within certain social and group identities, but not among others (Alcoff, 2007, 47). This kind of ignorance is more difficult to overcome than situational ignorance because the epistemic principles or the beliefs with which one begins an inquiry into the unknown—that is, the principles and beliefs of one’s social or group identity—will already affect how answers are heard, judgments are made, and beliefs are formed.

Alcoff’s third category of ignorance, which is similar to Proctor’s concept of strategic ploy, is the willful ignorance of the dominant group. This concept maintains that ignorance is perpetuated by a dominant group that sees their deeply ingrained knowing practices as solely correct, and uses this view as a means of control (Alcoff, 2007, 42). Applied to Western society, this means that the individuals in the dominant group—white people—have a vested interest in seeing the world from their own narrow point of view and not acknowledging different viewpoints that may challenge that view.

The upshot of this final category of ignorance is that those in the dominant group tend to view the world and society through rose-coloured glasses. The willfully ignorant see their society as a fair and just one in which the many violations that occur—particularly violations to those with marginalized viewpoints—are seen to occur for justifiable reasons. The dominant group has an interest in this kind of justification. To challenge the society, a person from the dominant group in this society will have to question the way in which their belonging to this group constitutes unequal privilege, and they must be ready to have this unequal privilege taken away. Because of this, those in the dominant group may avoid pursuing all the consequences of social injustice or questioning their own inherent
privilege within the system at work so that they do not have to acknowledge the injustice and equality on which their society stands, and their own involvement in its perpetuation.

With all six conceptions of ignorance defined, I will now give a more detailed explanation of how ALM came to be in response to BLM. I will then move on to argue that the kind of response that ALM offers to BLM constitutes rhetoric that is ignorant, and use the definitions just given to specify how.

2. Whose Lives Matter?

BLM was created in reaction to the disproportionate number of black victims of police violence and murder, which seemed to be undeniable evidence of a systemic devaluation of black lives. As Alicia Garza writes, it “is an ideological and political intervention in a world where black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise” (Garza, 2014, 23). But it has more specific roots. As journalist Tyler Huckabee reported, “following the death of Trayvon Martin [a 17-year-old fatally shot by a neighborhood watch volunteer in Florida], three women named Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi began tweeting #BlackLivesMatter” (2015) in response to the tragedy. Use of the hashtag grew very quickly, becoming a rallying cry for a national and now international movement, transcending Twitter into other realms of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Reddit etc.), and into protests both violent and peaceful in the non-digital world.

The #AllLivesMatter hashtag was first used shortly after #BlackLivesMatter took off on twitter, its users objecting to #BlackLivesMatter on the grounds that they, mostly white Americans, felt that the value of other lives, mostly white lives, were undermined and undervalued by the hashtag. For example, a tweet by Twitter user Nicola Beardmore reads “So #blacklivesmatter which I wholeheartedly agree to, but #whitelivesmatter too, actually #alllivesmatter, stop basing on silly things” (2017). A second tweet by Twitter user Charming reads “I still don’t think [people] understand the #BlackLivesMatter concept. In no way is it [saying] that other don’t matter, but #BlackLivesMattertoo” (2017). These two examples sought to highlight the undervaluation white America felt once #BLM began trending.

The basic premise behind All Lives Matter is that “we should not highlight that black lives matter because all lives matter” writes Jesse Damiani (2016). The implication of this claim is, then, that the value of all lives should be equally advocated for; it is wrong to emphasize the value of the lives of black people among those of everyone else. Proponents of this position maintain that by stating “all” instead of “black” they are being more inclusive and hence are the better position. ALM puts similarity first, and attempts to establish a common identity that belongs to everyone: what is most important is that we are all human. Differences among individuals (such as race, gender, or (dis)ability) are contingencies that are of secondary importance.

Both ALM and BLM appear to advocate for equality, and yet to do not see eye to eye. Each group interprets the rhetoric of the other from the outside, according to the logic of their own group identity; each thus feels misunderstood by the other. This, of course, sounds like an instance of ignorance on the part of both groups—the ignorance stemming from group identity that we found in Alcoff’s work. But we must still see which other categories of ignorance may apply to approaches of both ALM and BLM. In the following section, using Hardt and Negri’s “multitude” as my guide, I will analyze the goals of both movements in order to understand how each group sees their goals as a means of bettering society, and to see where their goals diverge.
3. The Multitude

Hardt and Negri envision the multitude as a force of resistance that will oppose empire. Thomas Hale and Anne-Marie Slaughter, who write on Hardt and Negri’s works define empire as “a placeless, faceless network of transnational corporations, international organizations, and the nation-states that benefit from them” (Hale & Slaughter, 2005), and the multitude as “a heterogeneous web of workers, migrants, social movements, and non-governmental organizations…that reflect all the diverse figures of social production” (Hale & Slaughter, 2005). In Hardt and Negri’s book, these two concepts are developed in the context of socioeconomics, but they can in some ways—specifically in the case of the concept of the multitude—still be applied to sociopolitical issues today, such ALM and BLM.

The multitude expresses the desire for a world of equality and freedom and demands an open and inclusive democratic global society. Hardt and Negri write “political action aimed at transformation and liberation today can only be conducted on the basis of the multitude” (Hardt & Negri, 2006, 99). For them, the only way to see radical changes in the social, political or economic sphere is for individuals to come together as a multitude and demand change. The heterogeneity central to the multitude engender its democratic potential—a potential that cannot be reached by a homogenous society precisely because of the homogeneity of option that exists, or is made to exist, in such a society—and give it its power to realize social, economic or political change.

It is important to understand that the homogeneity of the multitude is not synonymous with plural collectives such as ‘the people’, ‘the masses’, or ‘the rabble’. These plural collectives are compositions of individuals that come together, share a common identity and fight for a cause on the basis of that unity. In contrast, the multitude is a composition of individuals who remain different, as social subjects, while discovering commonalities that enables them to communicate and act together. In fact, the multitude respects and encourages differences; the people and the other mentioned collectives, on the other hand, encourages assimilation and unity. As Ceren Özselçuk has neatly summarized, “Multitude as a concept is appealing because it reflects the diversity that is eclipsed by a unified people” (Özselçuk, 2016, 128).

The concept of love is evoked by Hardt and Negri as a way of thinking through how, in social settings, commonalities can transcend differences without eliminating them. Without love, the singularities that make up the multitude would not be able to subsist together. Hardt, in a discussion with Özselçuk, calls this concept a “love of differences, or a love of multiplicity” (2016, 131). This kind of love is important for the multitude because it ensures that people who are incredibly different from each other can work together, respect each other and fight alongside one another for various causes.

In the interview with Özselçuk, Hardt states that this kind of love “is a transformational experience. It is not just recognizing solidarity with others. In love… you become something different” (Özselçuk 132). The love of difference experienced by those in the multitude does more than just make them part of a larger group; it changes the way they perceive the world. One can metaphorically say it enables individuals to try on other individual’s glasses. Hardt’s point—that you “become something different”—is to suggest that, in the love of difference, a person is able to see and perhaps begin to understand the world from the point of view of another. While I do not contend that one can ever take on the exact point of view of that which is other to them, the love of difference at least allows us to avoid giving up on understanding those around us; it is an empathetic step towards individuals with identities different to our own.

With this conception of the multitude in mind, we can now ask: Does BLM espouse the values of Multitude? I contend that it does. Like the concept of multitude, BLM advocates for a love of
difference. Indeed, this can be seen in their call for action: as a movement, it does not limit its members and participants to exclusively black communities. Rather, it highlights a problem within the black community and asks all individuals—especially individuals outside of the community—to be moved by their call, to recognize in it something that resonates with their own lives even though they live in different immediate contexts, and to join them in advocating for change.

ALM activists commonly misunderstand BLM in this regard. They take the rally cry of #BlackLivesMatter to in fact promote a love of sameness; for them, the hashtag reads “only black lives matter.” But when we read BLM against Hardt and Negri’s multitude, the movement in fact espouses the love of difference that we find in Hardt and Negri’s work: love me even though I am not like you. #BlackLivesMatter should, then, be read not as “only black lives matter,” but rather “black lives matter, too.” It points out that this difference (blackness) in the dominant (white) culture is one that, at the moment, is largely not loved; it simply asks that it become a difference that matters, that counts, that is loved.

#BlackLivesMatter also reflects a multiplicity of individuals because it does not require the individuals who take up the call to action to abandon their individuality. Rather, it attempts to pluralize the singularities by trying to find the commonality they can all relate to. That commonality appears to be oppression and injustice. Individuals who support BLM share a desire to combat oppression and injustice in their also shared society, but as individuals it recognizes that the oppressions and injustices being fought are not uniform. The mission statement of BLM Toronto, for instance, demonstrates the way in which these differences are respected:

[our mission is to] forge critical connections and to work in solidarity with black communities, black-centric networks, solidarity movements, and allies in order to dismantle all forms of state-sanctioned oppression, violence, and brutality committed against African, Caribbean, and Black cis, queer, trans, and disabled populations in Toronto.

It is because BLM retains the unique individuality of all its members and espouses a love of difference that, I contend it, reflects the multitude that Hardt and Negri write about.

4. All Lives Matter: A Distorted Vision

At face value, ALM rhetoric also seem to demonstrate some of their proposed goals of the multitude. Their rhetoric, just like the multitude, aims to use democracy as its political foundation to fuel its desires to create “a world where race and gender exist but do not determine hierarchies of power” (Hardt & Negri, 2006, 101). Both BLM and ALM, then, in their insistence on autonomy and refusal of centralized hierarchy, resemble the multitude (Hardt & Negri, 2006, 86). Both also claim to purport equality. I will show, however, that in the case of the latter that this is not the case. Black Lives Matter rhetoric refutes and counters All Lives Matter rhetoric because of the latter’s tendency to “impose unity, and deny differences” (Hardt & Negri, 2006, 86).

Where the multitude embraces the unique differences that constitute its many individuals, ALM and its corresponding rhetoric, in fact, functions more like the masses. ALM attempts to simmer individuals down into an organic unity; it wants to gather many unique individuals into one homogenous concept: human. The problem here is that humanity is not and has not always been recognized in others of different races. As Clara Chan writes, “All Lives Matter fails to acknowledge that society doesn’t consider black lives to fall under the same umbrella as all lives” (Chan, 2016). It does not consider that historical, this supposedly universal point of recognition—humanity—is far less than universal. Until very recently, this putative shared humanity was not recognized in black individuals by the dominant white culture—a point that is obvious when we remember that this white society was one into which black individuals were forcibly introduced and enslaved.
The essence of #AllLivesMatter rhetoric is not respect for difference, but rather for similitude: “all differences are submerged and drowned in the masses. All the colors of the population turn to gray” (Hardt & Negri, xiv, 2006). While at face value, ALM may pass for a manifestation of the concept of multitude, upon close examination we see that it is not. Rather than reflecting a multitude of different individuals rallying together, it reflects a distorted vision thereof. ALM claims to put democracy first by ignoring difference as a means of achieving democratic equality, but in doing so it ignores the truth of these differences: that they affect the way in which people live their lives, the opportunities available to them, and the dangers that they face every day.

5. The Ignorance at Work in All Lives Matter Rhetoric

ALM’s distorted view is symptomatic of varieties of ignorance at work within its rhetoric. To pinpoint the sort of ignorance that is at play with ALM rhetoric, I will situate it within the agnological concepts that were delineated at the outset of this paper.

Both Proctor’s taxonomy and Alcoff’s characterization of ignorance can be understood to function, in their own respects, like pyramids. The three categories each author denotes, build upon each other. Proctor’s native state ignorance can be conceived as the foundation of the pyramid, selective choice sits in the middle and strategic ploy is at the very top. Alcoff’s situational ignorance would be the base, ignorance stemming from group identity would reside in the middle and the willful ignorance of the dominant group would be the apex. By understanding these categorizations of ignorance as pyramids, we are more easily able to see how multiple ignorance-factors may be involved in a specific instant of ignorance. For example, if I situate an instant of ignorance in the strategic ploy category, it is because the ignorance at work features all three of the conceptions (because strategic ploy sits at the top), whereas if I situate ignorance in the native state category it would only feature ignorance stemming from naivety.

Also important to remember in this pyramidal structure is that both Proctor’s and Alcoff’s pyramids deal with ignorance in different ways. Proctor’s deals with the way in which we can conceive of the ignorance that is perpetuated (i.e. due to naivety or strategy) within society, while Alcoff deals more with how and by who ignorance is espoused within society (i.e. those in dominant group). With the conceptions of ignorance functioning in a pyramidal model rather than as discrete categories, let us turn to both Proctor’s and Alcoff’s foundations of ignorance to see if and how these concepts can help us understand the rhetoric of ALM.

We first turn to Proctor’s “native state” ignorance. It is likely not the case that everyone who uses ALM rhetoric is completely versed in the discrepancies of concepts of equality and inclusion discussed above; it therefore is very likely that what Proctor calls their “native state” is involved in their ignorance of the consequences of these differences. Alcoff’s concept of situatedness gives a similar explanation. But while one is privy to certain knowledge based on their uniqueness as a knower, there still seems to be no excuse for the continued ignorance of these consequences after witnessing an event of discriminatory violence or viewing video and other evidence of the events being protested by BLM. We cannot then think through ALM rhetoric solely according to these preliminary kinds of ignorance; there is more than naïveté going on.

Critics may interject here and claim that the video evidence can be interpreted in differing ways by different people and therefore is not a reason for an individual to be aware of the problem at hand. I contend that even if it is true that different interpretations are possible, these different interpretations—and insistence upon them as the true interpretation—are due to preexisting biases of the kind described in Proctor’s and Alcoff’s agnotologies. Falling back on the reality of multiple interpretations is not an answer to a problem, but a manner of shying away from it. It is a way of
refusing to learn about the severity and complexity of the problem at hand—and indeed, such a refusal seems to be a rejection of the possibility of learning something beyond one’s native state or immediate situatedness. We do not have the space here to go into detail regarding the evidence that shows this kind of learning is possible, but suffice it to say that we are able to learn beyond the confines of our unique situatedness. Hence, the foundational levels of ignorance do not adequately situate ALM rhetoric.

Moving to the middle levels of our pyramids, Proctor’s iteration of selective choice and Alcoff’s iteration of group identity acknowledge the refusal to learn, whether intentional or unintentional, that the first categories do not. They explain the refusal through individual interests. But Proctor’s concept of selective choice would only explain ALM rhetoric if ALM espousers chose not to pay any attention at all to the BLM protests and rhetoric that challenge their views. However, they are in fact attending to the different videos, and rhetoric being uttered by BLM proponents. It is, indeed, only by directing their attention to BLM rhetoric that they have developed their own opinions as responses to BLM.

Alcoff’s concept of group identity-based ignorance gives us a better way into ALM rhetoric because it helps to explain the phenomena of differing interpretations being given for the same piece of evidence, the problem just raised in response to situatedness as a form of ignorance: different group identities use different norms to think through their world. However, group identity-based ignorance still fails to capture why the individuals in these groups seem not to question their own assumptions and judgments about the world, even when faced with opposing group identities that challenge them. It thus appears that even including the mid-level of our two ignorance pyramids does not give us an adequate explanation of the ignorance involved with ALM.

This leaves us with the two pyramids apexes: Proctor’s conception of strategic ploy and Alcoff’s conception of willful ignorance of the dominant group. Can the ignorance surrounding ALM rhetoric fit here? Remembering that Proctor defines strategic ploy as “ignorance, doubt or uncertainty that is made, maintained and manipulated,” it appears to. ALM rhetoric creates a scenario that ignores the fact that all lives are not treated equally, and hence do not matter equally. Its rhetoric maintains that all lives matter, even when there is evidence to the contrary. ALM rhetoric manipulates the way in which people respond to BLM rhetoric and issues by deeming BLM as a movement to be non-inclusive, anti-patriotic, or racist (Peter, 2016).

When we look at who most often promotes #AllLivesMatter rhetoric (i.e. white America) we can see that this ignorance stems willfully from the dominant group, and thus fits into Alcoff’s conception of ignorance. The dominant group in America are those who would be classified as white; they make up 76.9% of the population in the USA and account for 88% of the population of those in congress, or high ranking political positions (Bialik, 2017). Since white America is the in the majority both in the general population and in the elected population whom decide and vote on laws that control the country, one can safely conclude that they are the dominant group in America. ALM rhetoric is uttered willfully by individuals in the dominant group.

Since these conceptions are at the apex of the pyramids they also include the other four characterizations of ignorance located in the mid-levels and the foundations. The rhetoric that is espoused by #AllLivesMatter can be conceptualized both as a strategic form of ignorance and as willful ignorance stemming from the dominant group. I would contend that we combine Alcoff’s and Proctor’s apex conceptions to ultimately categorize #AllLivesMatter rhetoric as a strategic form of willful ignorance that stems from the dominant group in society.

By combining Alcoff’s and Proctor’s conceptions of ignorance we get a more detailed classification of ignorance. Rather than explaining the type of ignorance (Proctor’s account), or the perpetration of ignorance (Alcoff’s account) by combing the two we can do both at the same time. The combination emphasizes the importance of the strategic nature of the ignorance which draw’s
attention away from a problem, it also explains the willfulness of its repetition by its espousers, and finally it also explains where this rhetoric is most common: within the dominant group of Western society.

Because of the way in which ALM rhetoric has developed and persists, it must in part stem from ignorance as a strategic ploy of willful ignorance of the dominant group. Its apparent ignorance of the severity of the situation must involve active attempts to ignore the various injustices that have been committed, and are still being committed against black individuals. But more than just willful, this ignorance is a means to maintaining the false idea that society is inherently just and fair towards individuals regardless of race because it “is an attempt to diminish the ongoing reality of white supremacy in America” (Huckabee, 2016). As Chapin has said, ALM rhetoric is not a “bridge that unites racial groups, it's a shield that protects white power and allows individuals to shield their own privilege” by denying the oppression of others (Chapin, 2016). The willful ignorance that ALM rhetoric puts forth in effect is a strategic attempt to silence the voices of BLM; it is a strategic attempt to maintain the racial hierarchy that is embedded into North American society.

Critics may say that this is a step too far: ALM is not a silencing technique, but a movement in itself, and one that really does advocate for the equality of all human lives. In reply, I ask: If ALM was meant for social change and the valuation of all lives, why was there no response from ALM when 19 disabled individuals were murdered in Japan (McKirdy & Grinberg, 2016)? Why no rallying cry from ALM when white teen Zachary Hammond was unjustly killed by the police (Wing, 2015)? Where was the call for equality when six Latin-Americans were gunned down by the police (Telesurtv, 2016)? ALM was silent. They are not a group that fights for equality, nor one that has an independent standpoint, but one that willfully ignore race-specific injustices, and to react to race-specific cries for help in ways that are strategically meant to disseminate this ignorance.

6. The Importance of Understanding Ignorance

ALM rhetoric is used to silence a cry for help. It claims neutrality and inclusivity while dismissing very important differences, namely the differences of priority and context. Its rhetoric dismisses the importance of the priority that ought to be given to the problem at hand and it dismisses the importance of the context in which the situations are occurring.

ALM rhetoric is used to suggest that all lives need to be respected equally, however, this also infers that all lives have been treated equally. Historically this has not been the case. For hundreds of years in the USA, black lives very obviously did not matter. Black people were treated as subhuman; they were slaves who had very few rights. Even after being emancipated under the Lincoln administration and liberated through amendments to the constitution, stemming from the civil rights movement, black-Americans, and their lives were still not equal to their white counterparts. ALM rhetoric does “not immediately mark or enable black lives because they have not been fully recognized as having lives that matter…it misses the fact that black people have not yet been included in the idea of all lives” (Yancy & Butler, 2015, 6).

From the many recent and highly-publicized police brutality videos, one can clearly conclude that “society does not consider black lives to fall under the same umbrella as all lives, or white lives” (Chan, 2016). ALM rhetoric ignores the context that BLM rhetoric is working within. It ignores the “centuries of slavery, the mass incarceration and the brutality” (Huckabee, 2016) and it does so in a strategic way. When all lives matter rhetoric is espoused it perpetuates “a level of white supremacist domination when we reproduce the tired trope that we are all the same, rather than acknowledging that non-black oppressed people in this country are impacted by racism and domination” (Grazia, 2014, 27).
ALM rhetoric ignores the history of black people in America because it picks and chooses the pieces it wants to remember, to the extent that we may say that #AllLivesMatter is actually a misunderstanding of our present situation: one that sees racism as a thing of the past, an attitude that belongs to a bygone era and that no longer exists. This, however, is patently not the case. Just like there was racial segregation in the past, there are still highly segregated communities in the USA. Just like interracial relationships were frowned upon, there is still the assumption that an individual will marry within their own race. Just like black individuals were limited in the career growth, still we see startling low numbers of black individuals in high ranking positions. The complexity of black history in America is lost in ALM rhetoric: it is ignored, and this ignorance permeates into an understanding of the present.

Understanding the ways in which ignorance operates is important for understanding potential ways to combat it. Proponents of ALM rhetoric do not see their statements as being racist, silencing, or dismissive. In fact, proponents of this rhetoric may believe that they are being more inclusive and attending better to the issues at hand by taking a colorblind, neutral stance. However, from the analysis, we can now conclude that this claim to neutrality is not only false, but harmful. To combat the ignorance that ALM rhetoric creates through its silencing effect, one needs to make oneself and others aware of the inherent problems stitched into the phrase, and willfully attend to the issues being promoted by BLM instead of retreating into one’s rose-colored world and silencing those who were not gifted glasses.

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With multiple videos surfacing on social media of police officers killing unarmed black individuals, racial tensions in the USA have once again peaked. In response to this, the Black Lives Matter movement was born as a way to try to bring mainstream attention to this problem. This social movement protests the killing of unarmed individuals by police, and the systemic racism that underlies it. In bringing attention to the racism endemic that was occurring at the hand of certain police forces, Black Lives Matter, much like Hardt and Negri’s love of difference expressed in their book *Multitude*, expected white-America to see past trivial differences, rally alongside those protesting as allies and demand change and racial equity. However, on social media Black Lives Matter was instead met by a reactionary position, All Lives Matter. This paper seeks to analyze, using Hardt and Negri’s concept of “the multitude,” the claims of equality espoused by both Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter. It further offers an understanding, through the theoretical framework of agnotology (a branch of epistemology dealing with ignorance) of the ways in which All Lives Matter rhetoric affects the communicative power of Black Lives Matter.