

**Title: A Critical Assessment of the Black Lives Matter Movement in **Britain**.**

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## Abstract

The death of George Floyd in May 2020 in the United States of America (USA) generated protests across the world, fronted by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The BLM movement cast the killing of Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin as emblematic of the criminal justice system's (CJS) long history of racism. Whilst the core message - that black lives matter - is indisputable, noble and a worthy rallying call, little scholarly attention has been given to the movement's underlying philosophy and aims, particularly in relation to the CJS in Britain.

This article explicates Britain's BLM movement by considering four core themes – (a) critical race theory and British social science, (b) the policing of black people in Britain, (c) the omission of social class from the analyses of BLM scholars and activists in Britain and, (d) the aims of Britain's BLM movement. It suggests that the BLM movement potentially offers a flawed understanding of racism within the CJS. The paper also critiques and problematizes BLM's use of the terms 'white privilege and 'whiteness'. It closes with a critical discussion of the movement's aims, including defunding and abolishing the police, suggesting that critical engagement with both CRT and BLM should form a core part of criminological debate.

**Key words:** BLM, CRT, Crime, Police, Racism, Class

## Introduction

BLM is a decentralized political movement that protests against racial injustice and discrimination against black people across the world. Founded in 2013 in the USA, the movement has gained traction as numerous incidents of black people dying during interactions with the police have been framed as indicators of systemic police racism; for instance, in 2014 unarmed, 18 year old black man Michael Brown was fatally shot by law enforcement in Ferguson, USA. Subsequently, protests and riots erupted in Ferguson, led by BLM activists, thrusting the movement headlong into the mainstream media's spotlight and political life, where it has remained to various degrees across different countries including within Britain (Ransby, 2018). Whilst 2020 was dominated by the global Covid-19 pandemic and the associated increase in mortalities, unemployment and mental distress (Briggs, et al 2021), it was also a significant year for the BLM movement and the British public's awareness of it. George Floyd, an African-American man who was living in Minneapolis, USA, was murdered at the hands of the police in May 2020, as officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd's back and neck for nearly 10 minutes. Floyd's last words – 'I can't breathe' – then became the rhetoric utilised by both protestors and those who engaged in riots, which spread to other cities across the West such as London (Cornelius, 2020). The phrase originates from the last words of Eric Garner, an unarmed man who was killed in 2014 after being put in a chokehold by a New York Police Officer. Many black people like Javier Ambler, Manuel Ellis and Elija McClain, who have died during similar encounters with US law enforcement officers and whereby criminal proceedings to charge officers are currently underway, also spoke the same phrase prior to their death.

Indeed, growing social and media connectivity allowed the BLM movement to move quickly around the globe. However, as it did so, its central narrative remained unchanged despite the fact that very few countries globally have anything like the forms of deep-rooted racial animus that can be found in the United States of America. Nonetheless, Britain's BLM protesters voiced their discontent at the racism present in British society in its core institutions like the CJS. Britain's BLM movement largely focusses on police brutality, racial violence and systemic racism, indicating that they want to end racism. Regarding diminishing racism within the CJS, a core policy proposal is defunding and abolishing the police who they view as systemically racist, directing more resources towards community support programmes (Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021). Perhaps the most notable form of political action taken by Britain's BLM supporters was the toppling of former slave trader Edward Colston's statue in Bristol in June 2020. Such methods of protest potentially intensified Britain's political, social and cultural divides. YouGov polling found that 40% of respondents believed the BLM protests had a negative impact on the UK (Nolsoe, 2020), perhaps in part because BLM insist that racism is rising in Britain, yet evidence indicates that it has fallen significantly since the 1980s, with the majority of the British population now being perfectly fine with their child marrying someone from a different ethnic background (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Goodhart, 2017). Opponents, however, have dismissed BLM as a neo-Marxist organization (Buckley, 2020). While some praised the movement for bringing racial prejudice to the attention of millions of people (Szetela, 2020), ex Labour Party Prime Minister Tony Blair noted that the BLM movement's aim to 'Defund the police' "may be the Left's most damaging political slogan since 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'" (Blair, 2021). Considering the above, we believe Criminology should join the conversation on BLM, since too little critical and scholarly attention has been given to BLM's underlying philosophy, and the movement's aims for the British CJS.

This has played out in a political climate characterised by division and the reductionist slandering of people who hold different worldviews as bigots, xenophobes and racists (Telford & Wistow, 2020; Winlow, et al 2017), stifling critical discussion on the BLM movement. However, as Raymen & Kuldova (2021: 244) outline:

“Ongoing critique and reconstruction are integral to all academic disciplines. The absence of informed critique and continuous adherence to dominant theoretical models leads our disciplines to ossify and stagnate”.

Criminology and sociology, for instance, are more conformist than they have ever been, with both disciplines having already ossified and stagnated (Hall & Winlow, 2015). New and bold ideas are increasingly difficult to find, with most criminologists and sociologists content to reproduce old conceptual tools that may have once possessed some currency, but are no longer able to adequately explain the core issues that clutter neoliberal society (Winlow, 2021). This conformity has become so ubiquitous and rigorously enforced that even those who disagree with key criminological themes – like systemic racism in the British police – are forced to keep quiet or else be denounced as racists. Indeed, MacIntyre’s (2011) work outlines this descent into emotivism. He highlighted how Western societies have abandoned a commitment to the telos; a consensus on what constitutes the ‘good life’ whereby universal morality has disappeared from our world (also see: Raymen, 2019). Debates no longer have a set of moral or ethical criteria to measure the veracity of an argument. Instead, opponents endlessly talk past one another, with debates being ethically and morally unsolvable. As emotivism indicates that all arguments and feelings are mere ‘expressions of preference’ (MacIntyre, 2011: 12), we often try to undermine our opponent rather than their argument. This is designed to have a silencing effect, and to force the will of one to align to that of another (MacIntyre, 2011). MacIntyre also outlines how our emotivist culture means that the force of one’s belief should indicate the veracity of one’s argument. Therefore, getting angry, frustrated and shouting can assist in triumphing over one’s opponent. This is clear to the BLM movement, with some activists clearly believing that their account of reality is true, and the only possible explanation for disagreement is racism.

However, if we are to move forward intellectually we must be committed to challenging core societal ideas, and discerning partial truths. It is in the spirit of intellectual advancement that this article asks scholars to consider a nuanced interpretation of the British BLM movement. Therefore, this paper is structured into four core themes, including (a) *critical race theory and British Social Science*, (b) *The policing of black people in Britain*, (c) *The omission of social class from the analyses of BLM scholars and activists in Britain*, and (d) *the aims of Britain’s BLM movement*. In the first section, we critically explore CRT’s assertion that Britain’s CJS continues to be shaped by the transatlantic colonial project. Next, we discuss how the movement omits historical and geographical differences in the policing of black people. The article then critiques Britain’s BLM movement’s focus on ‘white privilege’ rather than social class and neoliberal political economy. The paper closes by discussing several of the BLM movement’s aims regarding the CJS, particularly calls to defund and abolish the police.

### ***Critical race theory and British social science***

We are **not** denying that structural disadvantage or racism exist in both the UK and the USA. Rather, very few criminological accounts have considered CRT and its development from USA legal scholarship and how this influences Britain’s BLM movement’s philosophy. While the BLM movement have been circumspect in being associated with CRT, the overlap between BLM, CRT and its associated activists and scholars studying the relationship

between race, racism, and power in society is difficult to ignore. CRT is a perspective that was formulated within US legal studies in the 1980s (Warmington, 2020). Many CRT scholars including Richard Delgado and Alan Freeman believed the gains made by the civil rights movement were being reversed (Cole, 2009), while US legal scholar Derrick Bell criticised the illusion of social progress toward racial equality, suggesting that:

“Black people will never gain full equality in this country [USA]. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary —peaks of progress, short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance”. (Bell, 1992: 12)

CRT first emerged in Britain through educational research (Cole, 2009; Parker & Gillborn, 2020), with the first international CRT seminar taking place in Britain in November 2006 at Manchester Metropolitan University. The theoretical framework has seeped into other disciplines like geography (Price, 2009), sociology (Meghji, 2021) and criminology (Ross, 2017). Since 2013, it has been central to the Centre for Research on Race and Education at the University of Birmingham, while Birmingham City University have embedded CRT in their ‘Black Studies’ degrees at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Therefore, CRT is a perspective that is ‘growing in popularity in Britain’ (Meghji, 2021: 374). In criminology, it finds structural conditions favourable to its adoption, since it is concerned with the injustice and harms of racial subordination, prejudice, and accentuates the socially constructed nature of race (Andrews, 2018, 2021; Meghji, 2021). Methodologically, it advocates qualitative approaches, activism and analyses concerned with the intersections of race, sex, class and critical pedagogy (Warmington, 2020). Many of those supporting the perspective have often positioned it as maligned and misinterpreted, such as claims on the University of Birmingham’s website that it is “frequently attacked by detractors who over-simplify and caricature the approach”.

CRT asserts that race should be the core optic to understand social inequalities in society (Cole, 2009), since racism is systemic and exists at a fundamental level. Essentially, it structures all social institutions as it started in the age of Empire (Dunham & Peterson, 2017; Parker & Gillborn, 2020; Warmington, 2020), meaning all forms of racial discrimination ‘are often rooted in slavery and colonialism’ (Cornelius, 2020: 15). However, it continues to manifest through racialized rhetoric, conscious and unconscious bias, and the unnecessary and discriminatory use of police force (Andrews, 2019, 2021; Dunham & Peterson, 2017). CRT also focuses on institutional power and discourse in favour of a materialist focus on neoliberal political economy and social class, preferring to *deconstruct* what society regards as fundamental truths. As we will see, this fails to challenge neoliberalism and thus a core cause of today’s racism, potentially aiding its hegemony. Indeed, this also means that CRT focuses principally on race rather than class, utilizing terms like whiteness and white privilege. Such logic is underpinned by social constructivism, suggesting this is important in seeing how racism manifests both overtly and discreetly. Therefore, the idea that society has witnessed what Goodhart (2017) casts as a great liberalization throughout neoliberalism, whereby people are more tolerant and accepting of the BAME community, is a myth. Rather, CRT claims that racism is everywhere (Andrews 2019, 2021), and that whites often only give rights to black people as it is in their interest to do so (for an overview, see: Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Moreover, it suggests that structural inequalities are reducible to racism and that capitalism embodies racism (for example: Andrews, 2018, 2021).

Whilst we recognise that **some CRT scholars may dismiss our argument because** we are three white, male academics explicating CRT ideas, **we assert that our ethnic background is irrelevant.** For us, this is the central thrust of anti-racism, as it was with the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, embodied through Martin Luther King's assertion that we ought to focus on the content of one's character and not the colour of their skin. However, CRT does the opposite. It makes skin colour central, and the value of an argument is judged by the colour of the person making it. As the recent report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities **also** claimed:

*“We no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities. The impediments and disparities do exist, they are varied, and ironically very few of them are directly to do with racism. Too often ‘racism’ is the catch-all explanation, and can be simply implicitly accepted rather than explicitly examined. The evidence shows that geography, family influence, socio-economic background, culture and religion have more significant impact on life chances than the existence of racism”.* (Sewell, 2021: 8)

Therefore, more critical engagement with **CRT, the BLM movement and** race within the CJS is of fundamental importance. **While racism exists in British society and the CJS, other evidence indicates that it is not the only issue** that structures social relations and interactions. This is an issue we now turn to.

### ***The policing of black people in Britain***

**In Britain,** civil rights laws and the criminalization of segregation began in the 1960s (Ross, 2017). The UK's Race Relations Act 1965, **for instance,** was the country's first legislative attempt to outlaw discrimination based on ethnicity, **though it was criticized for failing to address racism in employment relations, leading to the passing of the 1968 Race Relations Act.** The act was modified in 2000 in order to place duty upon public authorities to promote racial equality. **As Waddington (1999) outlined, though, since the (1999) MacPherson inquiry into the racially motivated murder of 18 year old, black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993 by two white individuals, whereby the report found evidence of institutionalised racism in the Metropolitan Police,** the routine actions of police officers have [frequently] been branded as racist. **Waddington warned that there was a** “danger that racism comes to be seen as a parochial problem for the London Metropolitan Police in particular, and the British police in general. It in no way mitigates responsibility for racism at either level to note the obvious and well-established fact that racism is endemic in policing across a broad spectrum of jurisdictions” (Waddington, 1999). However, in today's CJS the issue is not the failure to see racism; but a **universal view** of racism that disregards the specifics of **both history and place.**

**As noted,** according to CRT, the CJS and policing originate from the days of Empire and colonialism (**for instance:** Cornelius, 2020; McCoy, 2020). **This is when the transatlantic slave trade was hegemonic, whereby white Europeans captured African people and sold them as slaves mainly to the USA.** Therefore, the colonial project lives on in the CJS, shaping policing practices and thereby whites 'maintenance of racial and economic supremacy' (Castle, 2020: 2). Some argue that the **US** police were formed to protect imperialists' quests to conquer new lands, suppressing native populations (Castle, 2020). Imperialists therefore socially constructed the category of race to justify a racialized hierarchy and slavery, thereby maintaining white supremacy which is thus intimately connected to capitalism's **historical development** (Andrews, 2019, 2021). Accordingly, law enforcement's role was to police this arbitrary social order (Castle, 2020), whereby black people were cast as savages and inferior

(Horne, 2018). Long (2018) applied much of this CRT to the British CJS, arguing that the creation of the police force in Britain originated in the imperial age where the police served the interests of the colonisers and white property owners, while suppressing and criminalizing the 'racialized Other'.

Whilst most criminologists would not disagree that black males in Britain are disproportionately stopped and searched by the police, often face harsher punishment in the CJS, and are at higher risk of dying at the hands of police (Webster, 2012), there are potential deficiencies in CRT's explanations outlined above. Firstly, it could be argued that the creation of the British police does not match what CRT argues as shaped through colonial policing. Scholarship on policing history in Britain, focusing largely on England and Wales (for an overview, see: Reiner, 2010), highlights that the formation of the British police in the early nineteenth century can be viewed as a class instrument formed by the state to ensure the ruling class's hegemony. This is because poverty, socio-economic deprivation, slum like conditions and economic inequality in the Georgian era generated criminal gangs and a sizable increase in property crime, particularly in London, engendering public anxiety and distress (see also: Emsley, 1983; Storch, 1975). Thereafter, the modern police were formed in London in 1829, and most police headquarters were situated in locales where the propertyless classes resided to monitor, regulate and police those who were cast as rebellious and deviant (Reiner, 2010). In effect, the British police emerged to protect the financial assets of the middle and ruling classes (Emsley, 1983; Reiner, 2010; Storch, 1975).

Some scholars identify how the formation of the British police involved the construction of new police instructions, outlining how their raison d'être was to prevent criminal activity; secure property; and preserve public order against the criminality of the lower classes (Lentz & Chaires, 2007). Others highlight how the formation of the British police was a natural response to the social dislocation generated by the industrial revolution, which local government could not adequately deal with, in part because of the speed and scale of structural change (Emsley, 1983). Relatedly, Storch (1975) suggested that the introduction of a modern, bureaucratized professional police force was a tool of social control, and that their introduction into Northern, industrialised working class England was resisted by working class people (Storch, 1975). Accordingly, ordinary people understood the police as interlopers sent by the ruling class to discipline them and ensure a stable social order. Although this view increasingly drew criticism that police-public relations were more complex, and that encounters with the police were contingent and contradictory (for example, see: Klein, 2010), there is little evidence that the British model was, or is, colonialist (Cole, 1999; Emsley, 1983; Klein, 2010).

However, other countries' police forces including the USA's emerged from slavery and colonialism (Castle, 2020). In the USA, which became a global superpower in the nineteenth century in part because of its enormous slave labour force and abundance of cotton which was exported globally (Beckert, 2014), 'slave patrols' regularly occurred in parts of the south like Virginia to monitor those that were enslaved. Although this culminated in the Fugitive Slave Act (1850) whereby police powers were extended to also police poor whites (Castle, 2020). BLM's proponents argue that this historical legacy has remained with the police forces in America, especially in the South, where police have continued to view black people as more criminal than whites and in need of more surveillance, criminalization and imprisonment (Castle, 2020). However, 'slave patrols' were absent from the formation of the police in Britain; therefore, the British police was not founded on the same principles of the USA's policeforce including ensuring racial division and slavery's hegemony (Webster, 2007).

It is important to note that BLM's account of racist history only goes back to the transatlantic slave trade. However, slavery dates as far back as 4000 years ago and has occurred in most societies throughout history (Davis, 2003; Webb, 2020). Most civilizations, though, believed that it was wrong to enslave an individual from one's own nation, compelling captors to venture beyond their nation's borders and enslave people from different countries. Indeed, according to Webb (2020), ancient societies regarded slavery as a convenient way to order society, with kings at the top of the social structure and slaves at the bottom. Starting in the seventh and eighth century AD, white Europeans were taken to Africa to be sold as slaves, with the Vikings often capturing and selling them to African countries. The Ottoman Empire routinely enslaved its white European enemies, while the Barbary coast corsairs also enslaved white Europeans to sell in slave markets in the Middle East (Davis, 2003). However, the 'European experience of slavery has been almost entirely forgotten today' (Webb, 2020: xii).

Returning to policing, though, the above highlights an issue with CRT and Britain's BLM movement: the Americanization of some of Britain's criminological issues and a lack of awareness of different historical contexts. It is important to bear in mind that the development of the CJS differs across the world (see: Cole, 1999). While America has historically formed its policing in a colonial model and is largely influenced by the transatlantic slave trade, with myriad racism and discrimination persisting into the post-war era (1945-1979), the UK's post-war policing culture regarding racial perception, particularly in England and Wales, was largely shaped by the Windrush generation. As large scale immigration occurred in post-war Britain from the British colonies for the first time (Webster, 2007), often to fill gaps in industrialised labour markets in areas like Middlesbrough (Lloyd, et al 2021), some argued that it resulted in a lack of integration often because neither the public or police were willing 'to accept what were regarded as alien cultures' (Whitfield, 2006: 3). As the native population's cultural environment significantly changed, also in part because of material advances brought by stable industrial work, the development of the welfare state and unprecedented gains in the working class's living standards (Hall, 2012; Telford 2021), immigrant populations experienced racism from parts of the white working classes who believed in the myth of *imagined superiority* (Winlow, et al 2017). Although immigrants often turned to the police for help with racial discrimination from the local community (Whitfield, 2006), most police officers were drawn from these communities. Therefore, they reproduced negative stereotypes of black people, including that they were more likely to commit crime, severely damaging relations between law enforcement and some local communities.

Whilst race riots have been frequent throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the USA, racialized public disorder in Britain has been relatively infrequent. In 1919, in Cardiff, Wales, riots emerged as white dockers took exception to the presence of black African workers and their contact with white women (Scobie, 1972), while in 1958 in Notting Hill, London, race riots occurred for eight days (Fryer, 1984). Relatedly, in Middlesbrough in the 1950s, migrants arrived from Pakistan, settling in different areas of the town to white residents and thereby resulting in a lack of integration (Taylor, 1993). As a young white resident was fatally stabbed in August 1961, which was linked to the immigrant community, race riots occurred across four days, involving white residents vandalising immigrants' local businesses and homes (Taylor, 1993). Similarly, disturbances in the inner cities in the neoliberal era, particularly in the 1980s, were aimed at immigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the form of what antagonizers termed 'Paki bashing' (see: Treadwell and Garland, 2019).

BLM's assertion that the CJS in Britain is a mere imported version of the USA from the age of colonialism also neglects how police practices have changed throughout Britain's history. There are similarities between the more militarized police that emerged in Britain with the shift to neoliberalism, particularly after Margaret Thatcher utilized the police in the 1984-1985 miners strike to diminish the miners' solidarity, break the strike and cement political economic change (Cole, 1999), and concerns about a more militarized US police under neoliberalism (Kraska, 1997). Relatedly, as Wacquant (2009) outlined, law enforcement in both the UK and the USA have stepped into areas of permanent recession throughout neoliberalism to deal with cultural problems generated by deindustrialisation, unemployment and the emergence of a reserve army of labour. However, historical, social and cultural awareness from Britain's BLM movement would be useful here, particularly as they recently listed Fred West among those 'murdered by the state'. However, they may not have bestowed such sympathy had they known he was a serial killer who killed at least 12 young women between the 1960s and 1980s, eventually taking his own life in HMP Birmingham in 1995:



Image 1 – Tweet from BLM, the name of serial killer Fred West appears in the top left hand corner and appears with others adapted from a list of all those who have died in prison in England and Wales. It should also be noted that West was white.

This section has explored how the British BLM movement's view on the CJS and policing practices is underpinned by CRT, which hinges upon a potentially problematic assumption that a colonialist, imperialist age lives on in the CJS of England and Wales. The next section turns to another potential deficiency with CRT and the BLM movement and its explanation of issues within the CJS - namely, the refusal to acknowledge the importance of social class (Cole, 2009; 2019).

### *The omission of social class from the analyses of BLM scholars and activists*

Indeed, CRT's and the BLM movement's emphasis on the imperial age living on in the CJS, and therefore that black people are victimized and criminalized to maintain the hegemony of white people, possibly neglects social class and how it shapes the subjugation of black people. Whilst BLM have endorsed the importance of gender and the LGBTQ+ community in shaping experiences of the CJS (Lindsey, 2018), they have largely neglected the structural conditions of neoliberal capitalism and social class. While there has been some discussion from BLM and its supporting movements on economics, such as the call for economic justice through restructuring the tax system, an increase in the living wage, and dwindling the power of the main banks (MB4L, 2021), they tend to focus solely on black people rather than impoverished whites and blacks. Both groups have lost out under neoliberal capitalism through deindustrialization, the ascent of non-unionized and insecure employment and the retrenchment of the welfare state, which sometimes propels them into various forms of crime to forge a livelihood (Treadwell, et al 2013; Winlow, et al 2019). However, this universal experience is not considered. Instead, the issue is often framed as 'black communities', suggesting that all black people are oppressed regardless of their class and financial position (McCoy, 2020). Such an approach to tackling racial discrimination has been cast as politically exclusionary (Szetela, 2020); therefore, perhaps it is BLM and CRT that analyses 'race' and particularly the experience of being black in rather monolithic terms (Cole, 2009; 2019).

As the Sewell (2021) report highlighted, perhaps racial segregation in Britain no longer exists in any significant way, though it might be argued that social class is the main segregating feature of neoliberal Britain (Telford, 2021; Treadwell, et al 2013; Webster, 2012; Winlow, et al 2017). Many of the multi-ethnic working class's localities that were once at the forefront of capitalism's post-war industrial age's relative prosperity, are locales of permanent recession under neoliberalism (Hall, 2012; Telford, 2021). Economically destitute and politically abandoned, these places are home to high levels of crime, particularly acquisitive crime, illicit drug dealing and problematic drug use (Ancrum & Treadwell, 2017; Hall, 2012; Webster, 2012). Some have suggested that the only viable form of stable and potentially remunerative work in these areas is involvement in criminal markets (Ancrum & Treadwell, 2017). Such a constitutive context often means that law enforcement over-police the populations of these areas, regardless of the color of their skin (Webster, 2012; Rowe, 2012); yet, BLM omit these conditions from their analysis of racial discrimination within the CJS.

Placed in this context, BLM and CRT prefer to utilize the terms whiteness or privilege rather than class (Cole, 2009; 2019), highlighting that being white is a privilege in Western society since white people are awarded more structural advantages to prosper (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020; Warmington, 2019). White supremacy, therefore, is inherent in white societies including within the CJS (Warmington, 2019). Utilising this term to describe those living in high crime zones of permanent recession, though, bears little relation to their experiential reality of struggling to ascertain remunerative and stable work (Ancrum & Treadwell, 2017), as well as often enduring profound mental distress like anxiety and depression. Moreover, focusing on white privilege serves to individualise social inequalities rather than focusing on neoliberal political economy and where real privilege and power lies (Zalloua, 2020), that is, with both the nation state and the richest members of society, who have now accumulated more wealth than capitalists during the brutal years of the Gilded Age (Winlow, et al 2019). Therefore, CRT and proponents of BLM are not concerned with privilege within a profoundly unequal socio-economic system, they just want individuals to have earned it. As we will see, this ensures the reproduction of neoliberal ideology (Zalloua, 2020).

Accordingly, Zalloua (2020) suggests that proponents of BLM offer a potentially futile approach to solving racism. They know that slandering white people who espouse racist language as privileged is not enough to solve racism. Yet, they engage in a psychosocial act of *fetishistic disavowal* – they suppress this unpalatable knowledge from the conscious to the unconscious in part to feel morally superior. However, some have argued that to solve racism under neoliberalism a fundamental **politico economic restructuring** is required (Winlow, et al 2017, 2019). Recent research demonstrated how racism in locales of permanent recession is not attached to the **transatlantic slave trade and** white privilege but generated through industrial job loss and the ascent of precarious employment (Winlow, et al 2017, 2019). When combined with the absence of a universal political narrative that explains the cause of the multi-ethnic working class's plight in these crime-ridden areas, people **often** search for somebody else to blame. Therefore, racism exists as a timeless narrative to explain their structural position. Considering this, it might be argued that a moralistic stance on racism is a politically safe position, failing to challenge the conditions that engender racist sentiments. Ultimately, we might ask:

“What sense does it make to suggest that a white man queuing at a food bank is privileged when the top 0.1% of the population are worth as much as the bottom 90%? What sense does it make to talk of ‘white people’ as if they possess shared interests, cultures, aspirations and dispositions? What sense does it make to connect a white homeless man asleep in a shop doorway with a white super-rich investment banker? (Winlow, et al 2019: 33).

This failure to **emphasise** the importance of social class leads to more issues – namely, the movement's demands for the police to dispense with stop and search, end the war on gangs and defund and abolish the police. It is our contention that these policies would cause further damage to the multi-ethnic working class in Britain's most deprived locales.

### ***The aims of Britain's BLM movement***

Britain's policing policy of stop and search has been highlighted by Britain's BLM activists as an example of racial discrimination and bias in the police (Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021). In comparison with the US, where the picture is often one that regards Britain favourably, BLM scholars claim that ‘the UK is not innocent’ (Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021: 22) as stop and search is utilized as a *racial tool* to suppress, control, and criminalize black people. Black people are more likely to be stopped and searched, accounting for 8% of deaths in police custody over a ten-year period, despite only accounting for 3% of the British population (Afzal, 2020). These structural trends potentially indicate that Britain's BLM movement is correct to highlight the disproportionate rate at which black men face the CJS when compared to whites, a fact that seems apparent in a range of stages of the justice process (Lammy, 2017). However, as mentioned, proponents of BLM suggest that disproportionate policing practices are symptomatic of systemic racism, which engenders racist sentiments, behaviors, and outcomes (Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021).

However, policing largely takes place in high crime, impoverished areas in big cities, involving a high number of incidents of interpersonal violence especially with a bladed implement (Ellis, 2019). Black people tend to cluster in the lower socio-economic categories and are therefore actively policed, with young black men constituting the ‘available population’ and are stopped and searched. In high crime neighbourhoods populated mostly by white British men and women, there is often less use of bladed implements, meaning they are less likely to be stopped and searched (Andell, 2019). Further, in large metropolitan areas stop and search is used far more than in smaller towns in rural areas. Considering this, race

plays some part with BAME people more likely to be associated with factors that subject them to over-policing including being younger, more likely to be jobless and live in locales characterized by higher than national average levels of poverty and crime (Webster, 2012). Therefore, black people in certain areas are more involved in crime than white people (Rowe, 2012). Others point to the potential role of high levels of marital breakdown in the British African community, when compared to whites, and the often associated social problems like their children being more likely to be involved in crime and therefore stopped and searched (Webster, 2007). However, social class is a key contributing factor as localities characterized by poverty and socio-economic deprivation often possess higher levels of relationship breakdown, family friction and divorce rates (Webster, 2007).

Moreover, there are other factors that may influence police forces usage of stop and search, with a large bulk of the stops by the Metropolitan Police being at the Notting Hill Carnival (Gov, 2019). 61% of the Metropolitan Police's stop and searches in 2018 occurred in August, the same month of the carnival (Gov, 2019). The carnival celebrates black British culture in Notting Hill, London, taking place across the August bank holiday. It is attended by around two million people, though it is only policed by 13,000 officers (Kilgallon, 2020). Police officers have spoken about the high levels of gang-related violence at the carnival, as well as tensions between law enforcement and attendees (Kilgallon, 2020). Indeed, the carnival has a history of serious crime; for instance, four knife attacks and 90 arrests were made for possession of weapons at 2016's event, while black people are statistically more likely to be both a victim and a prime suspect of serious violence (Gov, 2019). Therefore, it is possible that this may have influenced the use of the order and the high number of arrests rather than racial bias and discrimination. Moreover, the success of stop and search at this event suggests it may be too simplistic to abolish the practice when such a large quantity of weapons are often successfully recovered; weapons that may have been used in serious violence against racial minorities.

Relatedly, the war on gangs has been highlighted as racialized by Amnesty (2020), claiming that in 2020 there were 1,943 people classified as African/Caribbean out of 2,444 individuals on the Metropolitan Police's 'Gang Violence Matrix', a list that documents and monitors potential gang members in the nation's capital. Although criminology has been slow to address the problem of gangs on Britain's streets, their association with rising knife crime, violence and illicit drug markets means they have become too difficult to ignore (Andell, 2019). Whilst David Cameron's coalition government pledged to wage a war on gangs after the 2011 English riots (Andell, 2019), it is an agenda that has continued with ensuing governments. However, it has been criticized by Britain's BLM advocates for its criminalization of black youth culture, though some have claimed that this can be based on their interest in drill music as it is linked to violent crime (Andell, 2019).

Drill music has proliferated since 2010, particularly in London, and it is primarily associated with young black men in deprived localities where knife crime is prominent (Ilan, 2020; Kelly, et al 2020). However, it should not be viewed as directly attributable to rising knife crime; rather, Kelly et al (2020) claim drill music should be seen by those in power as an indicator of structural issues that young people face under neoliberalism including poverty, labour market insecurities and a sense of powerlessness. Others suggest that the police's view is street illiterate and is based on the assumption that young black men are violent, though this is a crude racist stereotype with the reality being more complex (Ilan, 2020). Whilst those involved in drill music often rap about selling drugs, being involved in knife crime and are hostile to the police and gang rivals (Ilan, 2020), interpreting the music as solely about violent crime omits how many of the rappers are not involved in crime and produce 'abstract

artistic expression and cultural complexity' (Ilan, 2020: 1003). Moreover, as mentioned, the racialization of gangs may be geographically variegated, with gang membership in Scotland being primarily linked to young white working-class men (Harding, et al 2019). This further reinforces Webster's (2012) view that the intersection between race, crime and policing is dependent on localized situations. **While** the racialization of gangs may be true for London, it may not be for police forces in locales home to primarily white working-class males, **providing further evidence that Britain's** BLM movement fail to consider specific **contextual conditions**.

The most controversial aim espoused by the BLM movement is defunding and abolishing the police. Largely imported from the USA in the summer of 2020 after Floyd's murder, the notion was popularized by the American academic Alex Vitale (2017), who believes policing is rooted in imperialism, racism and is an agent of social control and oppression, particularly of black people. Essentially, he suggests reform of the police force has persistently failed and we need to question the police's role in society, though he does not draw on the abolitionist politics movement in penology and prison scholarship in the USA **or Britain**. Vitale avers decriminalisation, harm reduction, economic development and community empowerment **in deprived locales** as alternatives to **controlling** crime **through** policing, regarding defunding as a means of stripping back increasing militarisation in the USA. Although the call for defunding the police was formulated in the USA – where, as mentioned, the CJS's development is different to **Britain** - it has its proponents amongst some of **Britain's** BLM/CRT practitioners (for instance: Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021) and associated groups such as the '4 Front Project' who have also called for the defunding of the police in exchange for increased investment in black communities, using social services to combat criminality.

Whilst **many** criminologists would agree that the police are not equipped to **prevent** criminal activity, defunding the **British** police has been ongoing since the 2008 global financial crisis. The decade that followed the 2008 crash witnessed unprecedented cuts to the public sector (Winlow, et al 2017), as the police lost nearly 17% of full time employees between 2010-2020 (Jackman, et al 2021), as well as a significant reduction in police community support officers and police forces' overall budgets. Recent research shows that this detrimentally impacted upon serving police employees, increasing anxiety, depression, stress, workloads and absenteeism (Jackman, et al 2021). Serious forms of crime have also increased, including lethal violence in locales of permanent recession, with cuts to the CJS being identified as a contributing factor (Ellis, 2019). The Home Office also highlighted that an increase in murder was directly linked to austerity police cuts, with black people being the most likely ethnic group to be killed (Dearden, 2020). Criminologist Elliott Currie suggests issues like these are often left out of the debates surrounding Black Lives Matter, not least the sizable volume of black men who die at the hands of other black men each year in the most impoverished cities (Currie, 2015). Considering this, it could be argued that defunding an already underfunded police force would generate further social problems in areas of permanent recession, including **lethal forms of** crime.

As **BLM's aims** such as defunding and abolishing the police fails to challenge neoliberal capitalism, the BLM movement potentially aid its hegemony as the core political economy. It might be argued that they remain rooted to altering neoliberalism, **hopeful** that this will eventually **engender** more racial equality and justice. **Despite the movement's 'radical' self-image, it endorses neoliberal ideology. They are not against competition; they simply want competition to be fair. They are not against privilege; they just want privilege to be earned. They are not against a hierarchical society; they just want to remove racist barriers that are preventing talented black people from rising. And they are not against obscene wealth; they**

simply want black people to have a bigger share of it. As Cole (2019: 104) outlined, ‘Critical Race Theorists have no identifiable strategy to achieve social change, nor any concrete proposals for a more just future’. Moreover, their endorsement of neoliberal ideology is also reflected in their call to defund the police to fund other community initiatives (Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021). This potentially depends upon a problematic view of macro economics that suggests governments are like a household in their spending. Whilst local and state USA police forces are funded by tax bases and are therefore not federally funded, a third of the funding for British police forces’ budgets comes from localized council tax, with the remaining two-thirds coming directly from the central government (Gov, 2020). Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) suggests sovereign governments - such as the UK - are not constrained in their spending since they hold the monopoly on the printing of their currency (Kelton, 2020). In effect, they are potentially different from a household; they are the currency issuer and not the currency user. Rather than taxation being used to fund the CJS and community support programmes to tackle crime and its associated social problems, MMT indicates that the government must first spend into the economy before it takes money out through taxation, to both create demand for its currency and to prevent runaway inflation (Kelton, 2020).

Kelton (2020) provides a useful overview of how the modern monetary system operates by comparing it to the board game Monopoly, whereby the game cannot function without a currency issuer and players can accumulate monies or go bankrupt. However, the currency issuer can never go broke. It also suggests that balancing the economy is better for all individuals in society rather than balancing the deficit, since a deficit is required to put money into the economy, stimulating economic activity and growth. Therefore, it might be argued that MMT is not Conservative or Socialist; rather, it represents the economy as it stands. Countries who are not sovereign including those that have signed up to the Euro have less economic tools to utilize to solve issues of social and racial inequality within the CJS. The lack of mechanisms to address social problems has been demonstrated throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in 2020. While many EU states asked for a joint rescue package to address the biggest drop in economic output since World War Two, sovereign states have continually shook the magic money tree to finance vast sums of money for personal protective equipment for frontline workers like police officers, furlough schemes for workers, as well as the development of vaccines (Briggs, et al 2021). Perhaps money is not as scarce as neoliberal ideology suggests, meaning the British government potentially has the power to adequately fund the CJS and its agencies like the police to uphold the law, tackle criminality and try and protect people from the damaging impact of crime.

## Conclusion

Tackling racism within society and the CJS should be a core part of criminology. We welcome scholarship that adds evidence to how we conceive of structural inequalities, particularly within the CJS. However, we agree with Raymen & Kuldova’s (2021) assertion that a critical social science should not exist to reproduce social orthodoxies and conform to dominant theoretical models, expunged of critique and nuance. The murder of George Floyd by the US police force in 2020 intensified social anger and was rightfully a call for action against racial injustices. Such protest should form a core part of a vibrant democracy and civil society. Whilst we believe the movement’s core claim – that black lives matter – is indisputable and important, this article explicated how Britain’s BLM movement is not politically neutral but underpinned by CRT, problematizing its claims that the imperialist age lives on in today’s society and CJS. The movement’s homogenizing approach to tackling racial injustice means it omits context and localized histories, particularly in regards to the

**British** police who were perhaps not formed to maintain empire but to protect the ruling class's socio-economic interests against the threats posed by the lower orders (Elmsley, 1983; Reiner, 2010; Storch, 1975).

This **omission** of social class results in a potentially reductionist account (Cole, 2009; 2019), **implying** that all injustices and inequalities involving black people can be narrowed down to racism (Andrews, 2019, 2021; Castle, 2020; Joseph-Salisbury, et al 2021). Whilst we do not deny that racism exists, we have an intellectual duty to offer more potentially comprehensive perspectives on racial inequalities; one that is attuned to the specifics of history and place. The paper also explored how the call amongst some BLM advocates to defund and abolish the police force is deeply problematic, not least **as Britain's police forces have** been underfunded since 2010, **coinciding** with a rise in lethal knife crime **which reached** record levels in some of Britain's locales of permanent recession (Ellis, 2019). **Indeed, the BLM movement's reproduction of neoliberal ideology by not challenging structural competition, obscene wealth and the idea that the state is fiscally constrained,** means they may be inadvertently sustaining the underlying structural conditions that generate racial antagonisms in **neoliberal Britain**. **Ultimately, we must accept that the past is gone. We must turn the page and commit to reconciliation and forgiveness. And we must enact a politics of universality. Only then can we begin to move forward.**

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