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BLACK LIVES MATTER AND THE THIRD WAVE OF BLACK LIBERATION IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Abstract

Paper analyses black movement in the USA through the landscape of three waves of “black liberation”, starting from the period of civil war 1861-1865 and following Reconstruction, through the period of segregation and the struggle to end it (which marked the beginning of the second wave) and especially the third wave which began in 2013 with the organization “Black Lives Matter” being formed. It emphasizes their role in the social movement in the last eight years in the America and points out the significance and social, political, cultural and every other influence their work has had on the American state and society. Special place and attention is given to the events that began in late May of 2020 with death of George Floyd and following riots, their importance for the November presidential elections, continuation of the “cultural wars” etc. In the end a brief summary and prognosis for future is given as a conclusion.

Keywords: *racially motivated unrests, African Americans, George Floyd, white supremacy, cultural wars, systemic racism*

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INTRODUCTION

Racially motivated unrests that shocked and rocked the US during the pandemic year of 2020 were, on one side, a response to the accumulated dissatisfaction and frustration of the African American community with the pandemic and the way it was being handled by the government, and on the other side, a result of racial, social, societal, economic, political and every other crisis in the country. These events indeed are an indicator of the future tendencies in the American state and society, due to the fact that they are still active to this day and their end is not visible in the foreseeable future. Priority in this period, in the technical and organizational sense, had the organization called “Black Lives Matter” (hereinafter BLM), a broad and heterogeneous coalition of various associations and influential individuals, which is primarily a symbol, trend, thought and the guiding idea, and only then all that is exponential and clearly visible in concrete action, primarily on the streets of American cities. This organization came at the dawn of the third era, the third wave of black liberation in the United States, which is a long-term process that has been going on since the Civil War of 1861-1865, and even before that event occurred.

The first wave was during and after this intra-American conflict, the second wave was during the 1960s and the third wave began, conditionally speaking, in 2013 with the emergence of BLM and the return of the racial (black) issue to the center and focus attention of the American and world public. Between these waves, which are difficult to fit into concrete time determinants, the processes of stabilization of newly created circumstances lasted and they reflect the “revolutionary” nature of these changes, which often, almost always, begin with great social tensions and conflicts and gradually climbed from those lowest levels to the highest and most powerful; legislative, i.e. political.

This paper will briefly describe the first two waves and give a more detailed description and analysis of the third and current wave, with all its specifics and significance for the present time and future of the United States, and thus largely the world, taking into account the fact that America continues to be the most influential and powerful country in the world.

THE FIRST WAVE - HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The first period that we will look at is the one during and after the civil war, during the so-called “Reconstruction”, when African Americans were formally freed from slavery but remained deprived of most human and civil rights. The first period begins during the American Civil War (1861-1865). The most notable was the engagement of Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), considered by many (along with W.E.B. Du Bois, who will be discussed later) to be the greatest thinker, intellectual, social worker and freedom fighter (in every sense) of African Americans. Even during the civil war, he used the opportunity to spread the voice of oppressed blacks in this conflict, which essentially concerned the issue of slavery and whose outcome would result in the improvement or deterioration of enslaved African Americans, and he struggled for them to be actively involved in gaining their freedom.

“Although not as a soldier, Douglas... in a direct way - by speaking, writing and what would be called lobbying in modern-day terms - participated in the American Civil War of 1861-1865 and, perhaps more importantly, directly helped in the ideological shaping of the meaning of this conflict as a war whose basic goal was the emancipation of slaves. Lincoln's Final Emancipation Proclamation, at the height of the war, was one of Douglas' great victories.”¹ In the same year when Lincoln declared his famous proclamation, in August Douglas met with him in the White House and arranged for black soldiers to be included in the Union Army. Douglas then addressed his people in a proclamation called, “Men of Color, To Arms!” This was not a small and insignificant help in the war because of the fact that the number of blacks in this army grew to 200,000 soldiers by the end of the war, which made up 10% of the total forces of the Union.²

The aftermath of the war was followed by the previously mentioned period of Reconstruction, which lasted until 1877. “This term implies the federal appeasement of the South, its economic recovery, and its gradual involvement

¹ Gajic S. (2020). *From Slave to Citizen: The Fight of African Americans for the Recognition of Humanity*, Belgrade: Catena Mundi, p. 27.

² <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1863-frederick-douglass-men-color-arms/> (5.3.2021)

The aftermath of the war was followed by the previously mentioned period of Reconstruction, which lasted until 1877. “This term implies the federal appeasement of the South, its economic recovery, and its gradual involvement in the political life of the United States.”³ This period saw a trend among the Southern states of building monuments to honor their generals and heroes from the war, those same controversial monuments that are being torn down and defended across America today; “Reconstruction to this day remains one of the periods in American history about which there is no generally accepted consensus. The experience of reconstruction as an occupation is a sentiment that has persisted even today in the collective memory of a large number of descendants of southern whites. This is evidenced by the erection of monuments to southern heroes from the civil war decades after the end of the war. Over time, these monuments themselves have become a point of controversy and fierce social conflict.”⁴

In the following period, the leading baton from Douglas was taken over by William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (hereinafter Du Bois), which he will hold until his death. He became the editor-in-chief of *The Crisis* magazine, which was the main newspaper of his organization NAACP (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People⁵). He takes on a different approach to African-American liberation and places emphasis on politics, art, and culture. That is when the “Harlem Renaissance” began, when this part of New York, inhabited mostly by blacks, became the center of the explosion and expansion of African-American art. At the same time, his movement and newspapers are making significant progress; “*The Crisis*” became the main magazine for African-American issues, despite the fact that Du Bois initially thought that this magazine would attract the attention of only „talented tenth”⁶, but by 1920 the circulation of that monthly reached an incredible 100,000 copies. At the same time, the number of NAACP members grew to 90,000, which became the main

³ Stevan Gajic (2020), *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ <https://naacp.org/>, available on 5.3.2021.

⁶ His concept, referring to the fact that he thought that for the uplifting of the African American community it is required to have at least 10% of their number with higher education and talents in arts etc.

organization of African Americans in the country.⁷ It is necessary to draw a parallel with the current problem of cultural content, whether of the current type or from the past, which in a controversial way represents the African American community and which a certain number of people want to remove from the “mainstream” culture. One of the first cases of mass opposition to this type of content was seen in the work of Du Boyce; “This was most clearly shown (in a movie very successful at the box office) by the 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*, which portrayed blacks as raw and lustful.” Du Boyce's biographer Levering Lewis claims that President Wilson was delighted with “*The Birth of a Nation*”, while at the same time “*The Crisis*” magazine, NAACP and Du Boyce campaigned for the film to be banned.”⁸

Du Bois's undisputed first place in the leadership of the African American community was briefly “shaken” by a newcomer; Marcus Garvey came to Harlem from Jamaica in 1916, and he was a “colorful” man who shook the African-American community with his tumultuous but short-lived actions, and made the headquarters of his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA⁹) in Harlem. Garvey is also portrayed in the popular television series “*Boardwalk Empire*” as the charming doctor Valentin Narcisse. “He was the leader of “black nationalism” and had a vision to become “Black Moses” and move blacks from American slavery back to the African homeland (the “promised land”). Enthusiastic about his desire, he went to the extremes and even signed an agreement with the Ku Klux Klan, since they nominally had the same goal - the emigration of blacks from America to Africa. This move buried him politically and with the financial embezzlement of his company “Black Star Line” (for which he was imprisoned) made his influence disappear and confirmed Du Boys' dominance.”¹⁰

It should be noted on this occasion that from the beginning (until today) there was disagreement in African American movement about the future of African Americans after their liberation, and there were two conflicting streams of

⁷ Gajic S. (2020) (2020), *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 62.

⁹ <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1922-marcus-garvey-principles-universal-negro-improvement-association/> (5.3.2021).

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 64.

thought, where one stream advocated for the integration of blacks into the American state and society, and the other was for either their emigration to Africa (in earlier times) or gathering in one part of the United States which would then become an independent and purely black state (today's tendencies). This debate dates back to the period of abolitionism when there was a division between integrationists and separatists. "Integrationists saw the future of African Americans within the United States as a political community, and separatists advocated for the territorial encirclement and separation of the 'black nation' or its emigration and the formation of a new nation in Africa, the Caribbean or elsewhere."¹¹

In certain aspects of Du Bois's work, one can understand and explain, and find the "root cause" of a certain complementarity of black organization and action today with Marxist theory and "liberation theology". "In the novel 'The Search for the Silver Fleece', Du Bois indicated that he was beginning to be attracted to the socialist idea. He connects the position of African Americans with the position of the Russian peasant and considers the socialist struggle to be an emancipatory struggle of the masses of all humanity. The idea of socialism only grew in him over time."¹² In the same way, he interpreted the church and the faith, very contrary to Douglas's position; "From the age of 30, I increasingly saw the church as an institution that defended evils such as slavery, discrimination based on skin color, exploitation of labor and war. I think the greatest gift of the Soviet Union to modern civilization was the dethronement of the clergy and the ban on preaching religion in public schools."¹³ His support and visits to the Soviet Union and Mao's China cost him his freedom; he was imprisoned, his passport was taken from him several times and at the end of his life he demonstratively joined the Communist Party USA. He spent the rest of his life in Ghana, where he died in Accra on August 27, 1963, writing the "Encyclopedia of Africa" at the request of his friend and host, President Kwame Nkrumah.¹⁴

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹² *Ibid.*, 62.

¹³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*, New York: International Publishers, 1968, 286.

¹⁴ Gajic S. (2020), *Op. cit.*, p. 68.

SECOND WAVE- EQUALITY AND/OR EQUITY?

After a ten-year period of reconstruction (1867-1877) and “calming of the South”, segregation was introduced in a large number of states in the American South, which meant legislative and practical separation of whites and blacks in almost all aspects of public life. Black Americans, in addition to being denied numerous political, human, and civil rights, were discriminated in everyday life and victims of frequent lynching and persecutions by racists and white supremacists gathered in and around the KKK (Ku Klux Klan¹⁵). The announcement of the fight against segregation until its abolition came quite unexpectedly from a person unknown until then. When Rosa Parks refused to stand up for a white man on a bus on December 1, 1955 in the city of Montgomery (state Alabama in the American South), she probably had no idea what the long-term consequences of that act are going to be. According to the “rules“ of segregation, there were separate places in buses for blacks and whites, where whites sat in the front and blacks in the back. Parks violated this rule by sitting in a “white man’s place” and then refused to stand up and give the seat away to a white man. Although she did this because there was no space in the back and because she was tired from work, the police arrested her for violating Art. 6, section 11 of the City Rules of Montgomery. She was released from custody only later in the evening after paying the bail. On the day of her trial on December 5, African Americans boycotted public transportation and continued to do so for 381 days, walking for miles from home to work and back, until the US Supreme Court said that segregation in public transportation was unconstitutional. The following year, the “Jim Crow” laws were overturned, which started the general fight against segregation at the level of the entire United States.¹⁶

The fight against segregation was continued by Martin Luther King, Malcolm Ex and many others who found inspiration in their predecessors that we mentioned earlier, and in social liberation movements around the world, communist ideology etc. In terms of ideas and principles, the direct successor of Frederick Douglas was Martin Luther King (1929-1968), probably the most

¹⁵ <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/kkk-series>, available on 5.3.2021.

¹⁶ <https://www.biography.com/activist/rosa-parks>, available on 5.3.2021.

famous African American of all time. Du Bois' anti-church tone was not pleasant to him, and he did not see anything controversial or restrictive about the founding documents of the USA (Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution, as well as Lincoln's Proclamation) for African Americans to fight for a better and fairer status in American society. He was "...much closer to Douglas, because, just like him, he was a firmly rooted Christian believer. Like Douglas, King saw nothing in the original principles of Christianity that could hinder the realization of black dreams of equality. In his most famous speech, 'I Have a Dream,' delivered in front of more than 200,000 people in Washington DC on August 28, 1963, King, just as Douglas would have done, referred to Lincoln's Proclamation of Final Emancipation, the United States Constitution, and the Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, which he called 'glorious'.¹⁷ A year later, the 1964 Civil Rights Act was passed, prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, introducing equal access to public goods and employment, abolishing segregation in schools and increasing voting rights. That did not end discrimination, but a big step forward was made.¹⁸ The following year, the "Voting Rights Act" was passed, which enabled African Americans to vote.¹⁹

King's assassination led to large-scale demonstrations and riots in Washington in March and April of 1968. Both before and after that, mass riots and violence accompanied the struggle for further empowerment and legal equalization of African Americans, so the situation from that period is very similar to the one today; "The Baltimore riot of 1968 was but one of many serious urban disturbances in the United States during the mid-and-late 1960s. The worst of them occurred in New York City in 1964, in Los Angeles in 1965, and in Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit in 1967. In 1967 alone, disorders occurred in 164 cities, large and small, across the country. Although the visible effects in many cases were not extensive, the aggregate costs of the riots were disturbingly high: eighty-three deaths, 1,897 injuries, and property damage

¹⁷ Gajic S. (2020), *Op.cit.*, p. 187.

¹⁸ <https://www.nps.gov/Art.s/civil-rights-act.htm>, available on 5.3.2021.

¹⁹ <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/voting-rights-act>, available 5.3.2021.

that ran into the tens of millions of dollars.”²⁰ In response to King's assassination, riots raged in the capital for days. The situation there was more catastrophic than anything seen in other cities. Especially on the day of his commemoration, the violence reached unprecedented proportions. Entire streets were on fire, shops were looted, there were clashes with the police, the army guarded vital state buildings and structures, and the violence did not subside for days. The violence lasted until April 12, with dozens dead, thousands wounded and arrested. It was also used for political purposes, of course. Then the Republican candidate for president and future president of the United States (Richard Nixon) said about the violence that the United States is a “society of lawlessness” that can turn into a military camp for 200 million Americans living in fear, and stressed that unrest and violence are more than national shame; they are a major national problem.²¹ The end result of these riots was the signing of the “Civil Rights Act” of 1968, which expanded the rights and supplemented the 1964 document of the same name. This 1968 act, better known as the Fair Housing Act, prohibited discrimination on the basis of sale, rent, financing, or settlement (housing) based on race, religion, ethnicity, or gender.²²

Unlike King, someone who deepened and radicalized his teaching in the footsteps of Du Bois's work, and someone whose approach to this problem largely corresponds to today's activities of the black movement in the United States, is Malcolm X (1925-1965). He not only rejected Christianity altogether, seeing it as a religion of slaves that kept black American in subjection, but he also converted to Islam, took the name El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, and joined the “Nation of Islam” (an African American Islamic religious movement that was founded on 4. July 1930 by Wallace Fard Muhammad and at the time of X's involvement led by Elijah Muhammad) and began his activism. Malcolm X was a black nationalist (even a black racist) and believed that armed struggle and nationalism is the path for African Americans to liberation. He criticized other black leaders like King

²⁰ Walker S.J. (2018). *Most of 14th Street Is Gone: The Washington, DC Riots of 1968*, Oxford University Press, p. 2.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 119.

²² <https://www.thestoryoftexas.com/discover/artifacts/civil-rights-act-1968-spotlight-102414>, (5.3.2021)

for his Christianity and nonviolence. Disappointed even with the “Nation of Islam”, he left it and founded the Organization of African-American Unity.²³ His speech of April 3, 1964 is kind of his political credo, and the part we will single out is especially indicative for understanding today's situation, because today's actors on this issue (consciously or not) identify in many ways with him and his words and manner.

In that speech, entitled “The Ballot or the Bullet”, Malcolm X said, among other things: “No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy. So, I'm not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag-saluter, or a flag-waver -- no, not I. I'm speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare.”²⁴ Members of the “Nation of Islam” killed Malcolm in New York on February 19, 1965, and there are serious indications that he planned to start an armed uprising soon, which he talked about all his political life, which brought many people to wonder whether his murder is done by somebody „from the system” (within the security structures), who estimated that he went too far and that X must be removed.

A year after Malcolm's assassination came a movement that was in many ways the organizational (and ideological) forerunner of the “Black Lives Matter” movement; The Black Panther Party. It was founded in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seal to combat police brutality and lynching of blacks, typical of the time in the end of segregation. This was primarily a militant organization, because they created self-defense guards in Oakland (California) and other US cities, but over time it grew and began to deal with social, political and other issues of importance to the African American community. They were much closer to Malcolm X than Martin Luther King, and because of police brutality against members of the civil rights movement, they opted for a more radical approach. They associated their liberation with the liberation movements of Africa and Southeast Asia. Although they had only about 2,000 members at the peak, their activities were disproportionately

²³ Gajić S. (2020), *Op. cit.*, p. 188.

²⁴ http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/malcolm_x_ballot.html (5.3.2021).

noticed and represented, despite their numbers. They organized free food programs for over 20,000 people, helped schools, hospitals, provided legal aid and the like, resulting in great support for them within the African American community. Their activism also led to a campaign to reform the prison system, held training courses for people to vote, opened free clinics, and created “Schools of Freedom” in cities across the United States to educate and politically emancipate people.²⁵

The more “controversial” part of their engagement is related to their ideology and violent manifestation of the same. The founders of the Black Panthers, Newton and Seal, were inspired by Marxist ideology in creating a political platform for their movement/party, called The Ten-Point Program. The Panthers were part of the broader Black Power Movement, an unconnected alliance of several larger and smaller black organizations formed on the basis of criticism of King's peaceful work by Malcolm X. The violent aspect of Panther's actions was ultimately the reason (or excuse?) for their systematic suppression and eventually extinction. According to the police, their founder Newton killed police officer John Frey in 1967, for which he was convicted in 1968, but the appellate court subsequently revoked the verdict. Eldridge Cleaver, editor-in-chief of the Black Panthers newspaper, and Bobby Hutton, the organization's treasurer, took part in a shooting with the police, which resulted in Hutton's death and the wounding of two police officers. “Hutton's death - just days after Martin Luther King - put the Panthers at the forefront of not only the Black Movement but also the New Left and the Anti-War Movement.”²⁶ Next year, due to suspicion that he is a police informant, Panther member Alex Reckley was tortured and eventually killed by his comrades. Five years later, Betty Van Peter, the organization's accountant, was found beaten and dead, for which the party leadership was also accused. Because of all this, the FBI launched an intense and secret campaign against them. The first director of the FBI, John Edgar Hoover, called them „one of the greatest threats to our internal security” in 1968, and the following year, 1969, the organization was marked as communist

²⁵ <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/black-panther-party-challenging-police-and-promoting-social-change> (5.3.2021).

²⁶ Meister F. (2017). *Racism And Resistance: How The Black Panthers Challenged White Supremacy*, Transcript Verlag, p. 13.

and placed on the list of enemies of the government. After several years of monitoring, undermining of their work, arrests, raids, the “Black Panthers” party was shut down in 1982.²⁷

A New Black Panther Party in was formed in Dallas, Texas, in 1989, which both former Panthers and the New Panthers themselves say has nothing to do with the original movement and goals, except in certain respects. This new party lives and works to this day. One of her sympathizers is Micah Xavier Johnson, African-American and former member of the U.S. Armed Forces who killed 7 and wounded 5 police officers with a sniper in 2016, taking revenge for the murders of African-Americans by the police. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a government agency that monitors extremist groups and movements, among others things, the new Black Panthers Party is a violent racist and anti-Semitic organization whose leaders have encouraged violence against whites, Jews and police officers.²⁸

THE THIRD WAVE - BLM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The third wave of African American “awakening” and the struggle for equal- ization is the one we are currently attending and which we can nominally mark that it began in 2013 with the creation of the organization “Black Lives Matter” and that it is going on without ending in site, as well as the ultimate goal and aspirations of the people gathered in and around this organization. Unlike the previous two cases, taking into account all the specifics of today's situation, it is difficult to create a hierarchy of significance, power and influence within the African American community and to determine who the bearers of the movement for change are.

The most important event in the United States when it comes to the racial issues in 2013 is the creation of the organization “Black Lives Matter”. The assassination of Trayvon Martin had a decisive influence on the creation of this movement. “We knew we wanted to create something. We knew we wanted

²⁷ https://www.history.com/topics/civil-rights-movement/black-panthers#section_3 (5.3.2021).

²⁸ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/new-black-panther-party>, available 5.3.2021.

whatever we created to have global significance. Alicia invited her friend Opal Tometi, a dedicated organizer who leads the Black Alliance for Fair Immigration, based in Brooklyn, New York. Opal is a great communicator and has developed all the necessary digital components that we needed for people to start saying “Black lives matter“, because for many, even those closest to us, those words were seen as separatist, as if it would isolate us. Opal created the architecture for our first website and Twitter profile, as well as for Facebook and Tumblr. We were determined to create a public and basic concept: that our lives mean something. That black lives mean. After a few days, I return to Facebook and start posting. I am writing to start organizing. I write: “I hope it will have more effect than we can imagine.”²⁹ This is what two of the three women who founded this movement write in their memoirs; Opal Tometi, Patrisse Cullors and Alicia Garza. As they state for themselves, the organization was created as an ideological and political intervention on the state of affairs in which black lives were systematically and intentionally humiliated. They advocate for the affirmation of humanity within the black community, the contribution to the development of this society and the resistance to the deadly repression they suffer.³⁰ However, unlike other black movements, whose leadership is mostly male and heterosexual, they base their leadership on the empowerment of women, queers and transgender people and others, and want to move them from the margins to the center.³¹ The movement especially strengthened in 2014, after the murder of Mike Brown by (white) police officer Darren Wilson in the city of Ferguson, Missouri. On that occasion, according to the organizers of the protest, an 18-year-old young man raised his hands in the air and told the policeman: “Don't shoot!” a few moments before he was killed. This encouraged mass protests in this and other cities, as well as a slogan that has since become one of the symbols of the organization; “Hands up, don't shoot!”, where at the protests this is said loudly and in chorus with raised hands in front of the police officers who secure the protests. In 18 cities across the United States, a network of BLM boards has been established, called the

²⁹ Asha B., Cullors P. (2018). *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*, Canongate Books.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

Black Lives Matter Global Network Infrastructure.³²

In addition to their “old” opponents, who are the government's negligence and disinterest in black communities and the police's brutality towards them, the three founders of this movement said that they now have a new opponent, white supremacy; “Now we have to deal with the new elements that are the vigilantes and the violence of white supremacists.”³³ They states so in their interview for BBC, talking about their movement from 2013 to present day. They said they had a big role in the last US presidential election and the victory of Joe Biden, and that they see Kamala Harris as a great choice for vice president, as she is the first woman, black woman and person of Asian-American descent in that position.³⁴ In the meantime, the organization was registered in the United States under the name Black Lives Matter Global Network as a non-profit, and its support increased especially in 2020 in May, after the death of George Floyd, and since then received large donations and grants from various foundations and corporations, also becoming kind of pop-cultural phenomenon and symbol, which many around the world follow.³⁵

The popularity of the movement is also reflected in the fact that “subcommittees” are formed and composed (sometimes exclusively) of whites who join this struggle and contribute to it in their own way. That the movement has outgrown its primary frameworks and goals is an opinion of one of the creators of several songs for the movement that are performed at all their protests, trumpet player from the band Day Dream Sessions, Eric Jackson: “It was really about police brutality and the effects of that on black people. But I think now it's a multilayered thing with feminism and LGBTQ and all these different things kind of coupled into it. I think there needs to be a little bit of refocusing. But Black Lives Matter as a message is one I still stand behind,” he said.³⁶ Among the new goals of the organization, by Professor Melina Abdullah, who teaches Pan-African Studies in Los Angeles and is one

³² *Ibid.*

³³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55106268> (5.3.2021).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

of the founders of the movement, includes the deconstruction of the current police system and its replacement with something new, which is widely criticized in the American public sphere.³⁷

In many ways, it is clear that BLM is a continuation and deepener of the „Du Bois” tradition of thought and action, to a certain extent even that of Malcolm X, which is quite clear when comparing his past and their current rhetoric. “Today, 'Black Lives Matter' has become a force to be reckoned with in America. Ignoring traditional hierarchical models of leadership, the movement cannot be identified with a single leader or group of leaders, despite the role of the Cullors, Tometi, and Garza in promoting this hash tag that will define our generation.

“Black lives matter” is rather an ideal that motivates, mobilizes, and informs about the actions and programs of many local branches of the organization. Much like the way corporate franchises work, only without income and profits, “Black Lives Matter” is an open brand of social organization that can be adopted and used by any interest group that speaks and works against racial injustices.”³⁸ This organization primarily requires reform of the police and judicial system, but as we have seen, the „list of demands“ that they turn out is expanding and growing almost constantly, and in a way becoming endless, so the question is what does BLM want?

What is clear is the fact that the African American activist side today is acting from the obvious position of a victim. Elwood Watson of the University of East Tennessee writes: “In essence, according to the white majority society, you are guilty if you are poor, economically disadvantaged, a product of poor education, have limited, if any, employment opportunities and are routinely targeted by law, as opposed to systematic and institutional racism. This practice of inserting guilt is a strategy that has long been used by many groups historically hostile to blacks and other non-whites. In essence, it is an accepted and common practice among conservatives and the political right.”³⁹

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Christopher J. Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea*, Oxford University Press, 2017, Introduction.

³⁹ Weissinger S.E., Mack D.A., Watson E. (eds.) (2017). *Violence Against Black Bodies: An Intersectional Analysis of How Black Lives Continue to Matter*-Routledge, p. 27.

Thus, the main enemy has been identified: systematic racism embodied in white supremacy and white privilege. And the methods of this struggle and the most important thinkers and actors are described in the collection of papers and interviews called “How we fight against white supremacy; manual for black resistance”. The preface clearly emphasizes that the book is in a sense “exclusive” and that it is not intended for “black conservatives”. It is a book of the greatest current thinkers and activists in the modern American black movement. As stated in the preface: “We are fascinated by those who resist and create despite the obstacles created by white supremacy and its lackeys: sexism, homophobia, disenfranchisement, transphobia, colorism, ableism and others.”⁴⁰ From this it is clear that they do not follow at all the tradition of African American conservatives, which includes Douglas and King, even rejects their legacy and heirs today, which clearly shows to which “stream” they belong to; the one of Du Bois, Malcolm Ex, and the Black Panthers.

This may be because Douglas, unlike Du Bois and especially Malcolm Ex, emphasized the importance of patriotism even for African Americans in his 1894 text, *The Folly of Colonization*: “It is all nonsense to talk about the removal of eight millions of the American people from their homes in America to Africa. The expense and hardships, to say nothing of the cruelty attending such a measure, would make success impossible. The American people are wicked, but they are not fools; they will hardly be disposed to incur the expense, to say nothing of the injustice which this measure demands. Nevertheless, this colonizing scheme, unworthy as it is of American statesmanship, and American honor, and though full of mischief to the colored people, seems to have a strong hold on the public mind, and at times has shown much life and vigor.”⁴¹

That is the root cause of his idea that black Americans have to have a sense of patriotism; “In order to be a fully developed human being, Douglas held, someone must have a home, and in order to have a home, someone must have a state. Having a state in turn requires someone to cultivate a spirit of patriotism, specific identifications with one's country... For Douglas, nationalism

⁴⁰ Akiba Solomon and Kenrya Rankin - *How We Fight White Supremacy: A Field Guide to Black Resistance*-Bold Type Books, 2019, Introduction.

⁴¹ <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-foolly-of-colonization/> (5.3.2021).

is a natural human feeling and a characteristic of free people.”⁴²

Contrary to his position, we saw what BLM thinks about this issue. For example, the black paramilitary organization The Not Fucking Around Coalition (NFAC) goes even further; they have a proclaimed goal of seceding a part of the United States and creating an independent state from which it would settle all African-Americans from the United States. This organization goes a step further than the BLM and considers them too “soft” and corrupt because they have a large number of white, radical-left activists in their ranks. On Independence Day, July 4, at the same time when Trump was speaking at Mount Rushmore, NFAC leader John Fitzgerald Johnson (better known as Grandmaster Jay) gave a speech at the first line-up and public presentation of armed NFAC members. On that occasion, he said: “Black Lives Matter does not represent the feelings of the black community. We distance ourselves completely from them. BLM does not believe in violence, we do. We chose American Independence Day to send the message that we were slaves when it happened; we were not members of this country. We tried to be here for 247 years, we had a reconstruction and they burned our cities, we got Jim Crow, they fed the dogs to us and told us that we couldn't sit next to them (whites) - we tried that with affirmative action and they reversed it. It's obvious they don't want us here.”⁴³

On that occasion, the leader of this organization stated the goal: “The solution is very simple. We follow the Declaration of Liberation, declaring that every African American who is a descendant of slavery is a political prisoner here in the United States ... We will take Texas and let us do our thing or don't stop us when we... go somewhere to take our own land to build our own nation ... We are all ex-soldiers. We are all much disciplined. We are all trained shooters. We don't want to talk anymore. We don't want to negotiate anymore. We don't want to sing songs. We do not bring slogans to armed confrontation. We are an eye for an eye organization.”⁴⁴

⁴² Gajic S. (2020), p. 82.

⁴³ <https://orinocotribune.com/leader-of-radical-black-only-militia-nfac-believes-in-violence-wants-a-real-life-wakanda-for-every-black-person-in-america> (5.3.2021).

⁴⁴ <https://caldronpool.com/heavily-armed-black-militia-call-for-black-ethnostate-well-take-tex-> as (5.3.2021).

The attitude towards Christianity and the church is something that also greatly distinguishes today's actors from the former ones. Not even Du Bois and Malcolm X attacked Christianity and the Christian heritage of the United States in their actions as much as the new actors did during the protests under the auspices of the BLM from the end of May 2020 onwards. "What distinguishes the BLM from previous protests against police brutality and racism is the whole package of new, mostly radical feminist ideas. The character of the protest is, in addition to anti-white and anti-male, also anti-Christian. During the spring and summer of 2020, in addition to demolishing a large number of monuments, protesters burned, demolished and graphitized dozens of Roman Catholic and Protestant churches across the United States and Canada, be-headed statues of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary and otherwise desecrated Christian shrines..."⁴⁵ All this, along with the propagation of LGBT+ ideology, motivates their opponents to say that it is not a fight for black rights at all, but that this fight is being abused for a "final liquidation" of American values and a radical deconstruction of American identity, followed by the construction of a new one, and creating a different state and society.

This organization confirmed its leading role and became a planetary phenomenon at the end of May 2020, after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The event that set America on fire came on May 25th. From that day, the name and surname that reached the center of the world public was George Floyd. He is a 46-year-old African American, originally from Houston, Texas, who was arrested on May 25 on the report of an employee in whose shop he allegedly used a counterfeit banknote to buy cigarettes. During the call to the police, the employee said that it seemed to him that the customer (Floyd) was under the influence of alcohol and that he could not control himself. Responding to the call, the police came to the parking lot in front of the store where Floyd was with two friends. As they approached the car in which Floyd was one of the officers pulled out a gun. After a short discussion, he managed to get Floyd out of the car. Then Floyd became aggressive, resisting handcuffing and arrest. Police officer Derek Chauvin soon arrived, whose name will become notorious

⁴⁵ Gajic S. (2020), p. 269.

and infamous at the end of the day. After Floyd was handcuffed, they waited for him to be taken to the police station, and then officer Chauvin put his left knee on his neck while Floyd was lying on the ground. Over 7 minutes, the knee was on Floyd's neck, who shouted to the policeman several times during those 7 minutes: "I can't breathe"; "You're going to kill me, man." and finally he said, "I can't believe it, man. Mom I love you. I love you. Tell my kids I love them. I'm dead." He died soon after.⁴⁶

Almost a year later, the police officer Chauvin was sentenced with 40 years in prison for second-degree murder, up to 25 years for third-degree murder and up to 10 years for second-degree manslaughter. His legal team requested a new trial.⁴⁷

But more important, this event began a process that would bring America to a state similar to one of 1968. The video of the incident made by the witnesses present soon became „viral”, traveled the world and began the largest and longest protests in the history of the United States. Floyd was pronounced dead an hour later, after his body arrived at the hospital. The next day, protests began in Minneapolis. Four police officers involved in the murder of Floyd were fired. Thousands of protesters in the streets vandalized police stations and police vehicles, writing graffiti around the city along the way. On the second day of the protest, the protests expanded to Memphis, Los Angeles, Portland and other cities. The gathered masses shouted: "I can't breathe!" which became a kind of regular slogan and the main feature of these protests. The Minneapolis police station was set on fire and police officers had to evacuate. By the sixth day of the protest, they had spread to over 75 cities, with over 5 dead and more than 4,000 arrested. Curfew and a state of emergency were being introduced to combat violence, looting and destruction of property. Floyd was buried on June 4, and those gathered held their „minute of silence“ for over 7 minutes, as long as the knee was on Floyd's neck before he died. Until June 7, the protests spread to other countries and continents, so they were seen in Australia (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane), France, Spain, Germany, Great Britain ... A monument to the 17th century slave owner was demolished in Bristol and

⁴⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52861726> (5.3.2021).

⁴⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56989757> (5.3.2021).

thrown into the river.⁴⁸

The main consequences of the May riots are: the creation of autonomous zones in American cities; increased demands for police defunding; the expansion of riots to the entire United States and their continuity almost to this day; the impact of these events on the presidential elections of November 3, 2020, and the continuation of „cultural wars”. We will briefly analyze each of these phenomena and then in the conclusion give the final word and summarize everything presented.

1. Autonomous zones and police defunding: One of the more serious consequences of the murder of George Floyd is the creation of the so-called “Autonomous zones”, organized by protesters gathered in the streets for weeks and months, with the aim of creating a „free zone“ in the cities and a kind of „self-government“ in them, similar to the former Paris communes and „free“ insurgent territories in the cities, common for socio-economic protests in 19th century Europe. The most famous and largest zones of this type have been seen in Seattle⁴⁹, Portland⁵⁰, Washington⁵¹, Minneapolis⁵², Nashville⁵³ and other cities. In addition, the demand went hand in hand, which soon became an almost general trend; action to defund the police. Under the same name as the motto, groups, organizations, politicians and influential individuals across the country advocated for defunding the police, deconstructing the police administration in a particular city or nationwide, and adequately replacing it with a different legislative force, as existing police are often seen as inherently and irreparably racist and oppressive, and in the service of „systematic racism” and the regime embodied in then-President Donald Trump. Thus, e.g. in Minneapolis, the city where Floyd was

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53218448> (5.3.2021).

⁵⁰ <https://www.wweek.com/news/city/2020/06/18/videos-portland-protesters-establish-patrick-kimmons-autonomous-zone-in-pearl-district-but-police-clear-the-streets-at-dawn/> (5.3.2021).

⁵¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2020/06/23/bhaz-trump-dc-protests-police/>, available (5.3.2021).

⁵² <https://kstp.com/news/minneapolis-survey-shows-strong-desire-to-reopen-so-called-autonomous-zone-in-minneapolis-october-28-2020/5908712/> (5.3.2021).

⁵³ <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/politics/2020/06/12/nashville-capitol-hill-autonomous-zone-not-tolerated-gov-bill-lee/3176168001/> (5.3.2021).

killed, city council members demanded the deconstruction and abolition of the Minneapolis city police and its replacement by community-led policing. Nine of the thirteen city council members advocated for this, despite opposition from Mayor Jacob L. Frey. The proponents of this initiative did not specify how the city would function without regular police. They said that they are still working out the plan and that they would like the money that went to the police, to go to help and empower local communities, social work and treatment of addiction.⁵⁴

2. Some other “basic type” events, in relation to the murder of an African American and followed by protests and riots as a consequence, which occurred in the second half of 2020 in America, were further emphasized due to the catalyst of violence and riots in the shadow of the May events. All events of this type since then (since Floyd's murder) have received far more media and public attention, which of course contributes to the increase in violence on the streets of American cities. So it was e.g. in the case of Rayshard Brooks, a 27-year-old black man killed by Atlanta police in early June⁵⁵; in the town of Kenosha, Wisconsin, where police intervened on a report of domestic violence, and there was the murder of Jacob Blake, a 29-year-old African American, and then the great riots that culminated when young Kyle Rittenhouse shot three men (all three were white, it must be noted) two of whom succumbed to injuries. While the three shot were at protests organized under the auspices of the “Black Lives Matter” movement, Rittenhouse was reportedly a member of the “Blue Lives Matter” initiative, which was created in 2014 to counter media defamation of police and the unpunished killing of police officers in the United States, as they say.⁵⁶ Let us also mention the situation from Floyd's Minneapolis, which shows how inflammable the situation is and how little is enough to stir up passions on the streets and turn them into violence and destruction. In that city on August 26, when, after the rumor that a local African American was killed while fleeing from the police,

⁵⁴ <https://www.fox9.com/news/defunding-the-minneapolis-police-department-would-likely-require-public-vote-to-change-charter> (5.3.2021).

⁵⁵ <https://www.newsweek.com/atlanta-wendys-burns-demonstrators-block-interstates-after-police-kill-another-black-man-1510731> (5.3.2021).

⁵⁶ <https://www.wsj.com/Art.s/jacob-blake-shooting-what-happened-in-kenosha-wiscon-sin-11598368824> (5.3.2021).

there were street riots and chaos. As the police later stated, the published video shows that the man committed suicide, but that was not too important then, since the ghost had already been released from the bottle and could not be returned. A curfew was imposed, over 100 people were arrested and more than 1,000 police officers were needed to quell the riots and disperse the protesters.⁵⁷

3. The racial unrest, which gained new momentum and intensity at the end of May, certainly affected the presidential elections in the United States. Let's start with the commemoration of George Floyd and speeches given by many celebrities, of which we will single out two in particular. The first was held by then the presidential candidate Joseph Biden, who told the audience via a video link that there is absolutely “systematic racism“ when it comes to the police, but also when it comes to housing, education and everything else, and that it must be opposed, it must end. During his speech, which came after Biden's, priest Al Sharpton condemned Donald Trump and his policy, thus clearly implying when African Americans should vote in the upcoming elections.⁵⁸ The campaign was openly joined by the brothers of the murdered Floyd, who joined the Democratic National Convention on August 17 via video link, talking about the need for police reform and justice for the murdered African Americans.⁵⁹

Of course, the often mentioned movement “Black Lives Matter” gave its part of support to the Democratic Party in the elections, by publishing on their website content dedicated to the elections. They then emphasized to their sympathizers the importance of the election, and called on them to register and vote, so that the “black liberation” could continue in the right way. Back in January 2020, they helped Biden get a nomination by winning in Georgia, and with their (almost direct) actions in the second half of the year, they made it known who their chosen candidate for elections was.⁶⁰ Despite that, they felt forgotten and betrayed because the new administration refused for a long time to call them for a meeting in White House and fulfill the given pre-election promises, because

⁵⁷ <https://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2020/08/27/were-prepared-law-enforcement-lay-out-plans-to-protect-minneapolis-after-night-of-lawlessness> (5.3.2021).

⁵⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/06/09/george-floyd-funeral-protests-updates> (5.3.2021).

⁵⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tC6986uYXHk&ab_channel=PBSNewsHour (5.3.2021).

⁶⁰ <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-matters-2020/> (5.3.2021).

of which they received support.⁶¹

4. Let us mention in the end the impact of racial unrest on the continuation of “cultural wars” in the United States. Cultural war can be defined as a conflict or struggle for domination between groups within or outside society, whose different views of the world, philosophy, ideology, religion and the like do not agree and, moreover, are opposed to each other.

Accordingly, the events since the assassination of George Floyd have left great consequences on the already started “trends” of dethronement and removal of monuments throughout the United States, and “reckoning” with the Confederate heritage on every level, even the symbolic one. For example, one of the main issues for the US military in early June was the renaming of 10 bases and military institutions named after the famous figures from the Confederate army, which was intended by Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper. However, none of this came to be as President Trump vehemently opposed the proposal; “Our history as the largest nation in the world must not be touched. Respect our army!” he said and added that he would not even consider renaming the „disputed” bases and institutions named after the military commanders of the Confederation.⁶² However, Secretary of Defense Esper published a list of permitted flags for display in the US Army in front of the Pentagon on July 17, and the Confederate flag was not on that list, which practically means that it has been banned for use and display in the US Army ever since. “We must always remain focused on what unites us, on our oath to the Constitution and our common duty to defend this nation.” he said in the explanation of this decision.⁶³

NASCAR, a popular American organization of car racing, announced on June 10 that it would ban the display of the Confederate flag at all its events and buildings. Numerous fans did not agree with this decision, who proudly displayed the Confederate flag after being asked by the organizers not to do

⁶¹ <https://www.blackenterprise.com/black-lives-matter-accuses-joe-biden-of-ignoring-their-meeting-requests/> (5.3.2021).

⁶² <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/10/trump-says-army-bases-will-keep-confederate-names.html>, (5.3.2021).

⁶³ <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/507809-pentagon-effectively-bans-confederate-flag-display> (5.3.2021).

so even 5 years ago. Bubba Wallace, the only black driver in NASCAR with “full time” job, wore a T-shirt the same weekend that read: “I can't breathe / Black lives matter”, before the race in Atlanta. “My next step is to get rid of the Confederate flag. No one should feel uncomfortable when they come to the NASCAR race. So it starts with the Confederate flag. Remove them. They have no place here”, he said in an interview to CNN.⁶⁴

The list of controversial contents from modern, popular culture has become longer and longer. “For example, ‘Tom and Jerry’ got on the ‘black lists’ because of a black maid whose legs are only seen and her characteristic voice,” Dumbo “is unsuitable because of the crows that sing to the hung-over elephant with black voices, alluding to Jim Crow, that is, the Jim Crow stereotype, the most scandalous in that sense “Lazy town” because it openly shows prejudices related to African Americans, „The Jungle Book“ because in one scene the boy Mowgli dances and sings with monkeys to “swing” music (originally African American), and the monkey king sings in a black voice “I want to be like you”, or as a “man“, which will, implicitly, say like a white man.⁶⁵ “Aunt Jemima” and “Uncle Ben's” rice, as well as the famous classic of cinema “Gone with the wind” because their content allegedly supports racist stereotypes.

The government's response to the demolition of the monuments and the vandalizing of America's historical and cultural heritage was firm. On June 26, then-President Trump issued an executive order called the “Executive Order on the Protection of American Monuments, Memorials, and Statues and the Fight Against Recent Criminal Violence.” It clearly states that anyone who destroys or vandalizes a public monument, memorial or statue will be prosecuted to the full extent of federal law. Thus, such behavior and actions have become a criminal offense, punishable by money or imprisonment, not only for the perpetrators, but also for local governments and cities that do not adequately deal with this type of violence on the streets.⁶⁶ However, despite this, the

⁶⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/10/nascar-bans-confederate-flag-at-all-events-and-properties.html>, available 5.3.2021.

⁶⁵ Gajic S. (2020), p. 244.

⁶⁶ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-american-monuments-memorials-statues-combating-recent-criminal-violence/> (5.3.2021).

monuments continued to “suffer” and fall throughout the USA.

CONCLUSION

As can be read and seen from this paper, the struggle of African Americans for equalization and social affirmation is long and went in several stages, phases, where ideas, organizations, charismatic individuals, methods and ways of acting changed, whose “feedback” affected the American state and society in whole, taking into account the fact that these processes have always been only a small part of the general social trends and changes. The first wave was “in the shadow“ of the civil war and the „reconstruction” and reintegration of the South, the second wave “in the shadow” of great antiar, hippie and other movements, and the sexual revolution, the echo of the European 1968 and the creation of the “New Left”, and the ongoing third wave is marked by general social changes in the United States, which are characterized by a great social re-examination of the very essence of American identity, the American “heart and soul”, the so-called normative American values. Indicative in this sense is the book written by Andrew Hartman (*War for the Soul of America: A History of Cultural Wars*⁶⁷), which best describes these processes and can therefore serve as a starting point for a deeper study of this topic, which we did not deal with too strictly, but only describing one aspect of it, represented in and around African American organizations and the “third wave” of their liberation. Accumulated social ambivalences and unresolved internal issues of racial re- lations will not go away or be resolved “on their own”, so it is difficult to say that the processes that have begun will end in the foreseeable future. America is facing a period of deep “self-confrontation” and redefining its own internal role, which could potentially be followed by redefining its global position and strategy, which will of course have consequences for the whole world because, as stated in the introduction, despite all problems, flaws and shortcomings, the United States remains the number one planetary power whose global influence remains high and unparalleled.

⁶⁷ <https://journals.openedition.org/orda/2727?lang=en> (5.3.2021).

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**ЦРНИ ЖИВОТИ СУ ВАЖНИ
И ТРЕЋИ ТАЛАС ЦРНОГ ОСЛОБОЂЕЊА
У СЈЕДИЊЕНИМ АМЕРИЧКИМ ДРЖАВАМА**

Апстракт

У раду се анализира кретање афроамериканаца у САД кроз пејзаж три таласа „црног ослобођења“, почев од периода грађанског рата 1861-1865, период после Обнове, кроз период сегрегације и борбе за њено окончање (што је означило почетак другог таласа) и посебно трећи талас који је започео 2013. године формирањем организације “Black Lives Matter”. У чланку се анализира улога овога покрета у друштву у последњих осам година у Америци, а посебно се истиче социјални, политички, културни и сваки други значај који је њихов рад имао на америчку државу и друштво. Посебно место и пажња посвећују се догађајима који су започели крајем маја 2020. године смрћу Џорџа Флојда (George Floyd) и после нереди, њиховом значају за председничке изборе, наставку “културних ратова” итд.

На крају, кратак резиме и прогноза за будућност дају се као закључак.

Кључне речи: *расно мотивисани немири, Афроамериканци, Џорџи Флојд, супремација белаца, културни ратови, системски расизам*