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#BlackLivesMatter – So Keep the Conversation Going

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#BlackLivesMatter – So Keep the Conversation Going

By Vanessa Lopez-Littleton
UCF Forum columnist
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#BlackLivesMatter has become part of a symbolic movement with a powerful message. First tweeted on April 11, 2012, following the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, #BlackLivesMatter began trending heavily during protests after the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. Three years later, it remains relevant.

For me, the hashtag conjures up images of black men, women and children who have died due to senseless violence. I mourn daily for the black lives – all lives – lost because of these tragic events.

People are not racist for thinking the lives of black people should matter to everyone. I think the lives of all people are important. But in light of recent high-profile deaths of black men and the racial unrest in Baltimore, many in society need to be reminded that black lives do indeed matter.

But why focus on deaths, if black *lives* matter?

As a little girl growing up in Shreveport, La., during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, I had no idea what was happening in the world around me. I had two parents – a seamstress and a mechanic – who were my providers and protectors. I felt safe in a black community. A year after high school, I joined the military and was stationed in Germany. I lived in a small military town where I continued to feel safe and protected.

One day my mother phoned with panic in her voice. She told me there was a riot in our neighborhood and she was afraid. She said people were throwing bottles, breaking into stores and burning down buildings. I did my best to calm her down but I can clearly recall her saying, “Somebody ought to do something.” That was 27 years ago.

I later learned the violence erupted after a white woman killed a young black man, an innocent bystander in a park, after a drug deal had gone awry. Earlier that day, there was a hearing on a case of the death of a 17-year-old who was killed leaving a diner by a white man. Although both were later convicted, I could only imagine what the people in that community were feeling.

Today I'm excited to see young people getting involved to peacefully drive social change. Yet I'm concerned about our society's inability to sustain the conversation beyond the immediate aftermath of a crisis, or address seemingly entrenched inequalities in health, education, employment, housing, policing and sentencing.

I'm afraid #BlackLivesMatter may stop trending, and if it does, will black lives still matter? As a whole society, we need to sustain the movement as a focal point to eliminate the inequalities faced by blacks in America.

Although #BlackLivesMatter reminds me of tragic deaths, I believe the focus is also about the conditions faced by blacks in communities across the country. When I see what is happening in Baltimore and I think about what happened in my own childhood neighborhood, I am uncomfortable knowing this could happen anywhere in America.

And surely, "Somebody ought to do something."

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