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## #BlackLivesMatter

DFP 2014

*Utah State University*

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**CANDIDATE 4: #BlackLivesMatter: Hashtag expressing concern about police killing young black men; includes the related #Ferguson, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, #NotOneMore, and citizen cell phone videos of police encounters**

The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter began following George Zimmerman's acquittal for the murder of Trayvon Martin in July of 2013. The hashtag saw a major resurgence in August of 2014 when Mike Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was shot by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Its popularity generated several additional hashtags, including #IfTheyGunnedMeDown which focused on the media's attempt to portray black male victims of similar violence as "thugs." While #BlackLivesMatter emerged as an online phenomenon, it has developed into a full-fledged offline movement with local meetings held in several major US cities. The hashtags were again intensely active in November 2014 in response to a grand jury deciding not to indict the officer involved in the Brown shooting. In early December, this and related hashtags once again became the biggest trenders on Twitter due to the New York grand jury refusing to indict the officer involved in the death of Eric Garner (the officer used a chokehold banned by the NYPD; the coroner had ruled Garner's death a homicide). On the same day that the NY grand jury's decision was announced, a funeral was held for 12-year-old Tamir Rice who was holding a pellet gun when shot by police.

**1. Dynamic variation.** The variant hashtags and the variant personal experience narratives that the hashtags capture show the African American community's efforts to express their grief, fear, and anger—and draw public attention to the deaths of young black men, who are 21 times more likely to be shot by the police than young white men in similar situations, according to ProPublica. In yet another folk variation, protestors across the nation continue to take the hashtag “offline” and incorporate it into their posters and chants.

**2. Folkloric.** Not only does the hashtag signal a folk conversation (complete with personal experience narratives) about an important social justice issue but it also led to the creation of variant hashtags and memes. For example, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown (what photo would the media use?) is a meme and a folk photography response to the media's use of “thuggish” images of Brown and Martin. It is also a takeoff on the selfie. Young black men and women show photos of themselves in high achieving roles and in everyday life where they could be seen as “thuggish.” Also, there are at least 17 #Ferguson-related urban legends, including one centered on a Photoshopped photo.

**3. Grassroots.** These hashtags blossomed in African American communities from the bottom-up and spread to a larger audience. Indeed, the voices of everyday black people on social media struck a nerve with the powers that be: the St. Louis County prosecuting attorney began his November press conference regarding the grand jury findings in the Brown case by criticizing “social media” for spreading “rumors.”

**4. Persistent over time.** This hashtag keeps coming up online and in protests; we could not even finish writing this ballot without it trending at the top of Twitter again. It will continue to trend as long this problem continues.

**5. Culturally significant.** Twitter became an important venue for the protests of African Americans about police brutality and racism in general. These social media conversations also garnered the attention of those in power. Hashtags were used to express culturally significant concerns about racism in American—including how it can lead to death for young black men.

Not The Rapper  
@black2016

#IfTheyGunnedMeDown I'm absolutely certain I know which pic they would use.



13 6  
9:54 AM - 11 Aug 2016

#### CANDIDATE 4: #BlackLivesMatter

	Poor Example	Below Average Example	Average Example	Above Average Example	Excellent Example
Dynamic variation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Folkloric	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grassroots, "bottom-up" cultural commentary	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Persistent over time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Culturally significant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is there anything else you would like to say about CANDIDATE 4?