

Racing Emotions: The Effect of the 2020 Black Lives Matter Protests on Legislative Reform in Canada and the United States

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THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

The 2020 Black Lives Matter (“BLM”) protests were instigated by the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He was suffocated to death following the use of a chokehold, despite making the officer aware of his inability to breathe.

Following the murder of George Floyd, awareness was brought to the inequalities that people of colour face in the justice and policing system. Protests began to take place around the world.

This movement, however, is not limited to fighting racial inequalities alone. It is starkly intersectional in nature. It stands up for the substantive equality of Black Lives, trans folks, people with disabilities, individuals of all sexual orientation, and those with criminal records.

INTRODUCTION TO LAW AND EMOTION

Emotion is inseparable from the law. It informs judicial decision-making and plays an important role in legislative reform. It is important to note that emotional decision-making in law does not detract from rationality.

The theoretical basis for the analysis herein relies on an *emotion-theory approach*. This means that a particular emotional theory will be used to draw conclusions on how an issue affects the law. In this case, the focus is largely on theories of affective and reactive emotional expressions as being core vectors of legislative reform.

The analysis of the *emotion-theory approach* is also acted upon by the role of protests within the BLM movement. Protests are particularly effective at disseminating and amplifying emotional reactions. These emotions can span over many different categories depending on the individual. They may include expressions of anger, Black Love, sympathy, rage, shame, and fear.

Thus, the approach hereinafter will illustrate that :

1. Emotions are expressed in both reactive and affective categories;
2. Emotions are exacerbated by the BLM protests; and
3. These emotions affect the law.

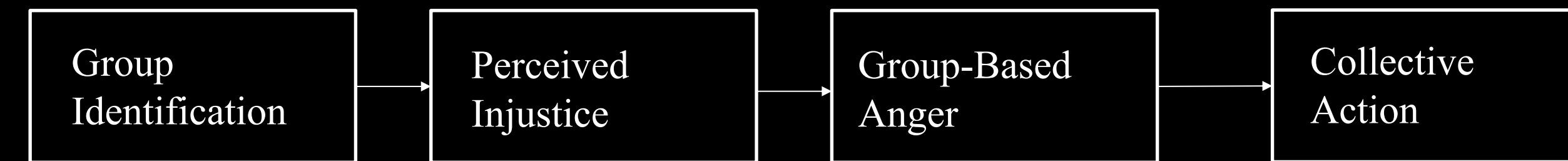
THESIS STATEMENT

The emotions which are central to BLM protests have had an effect on the implementation of legislation addressing the central issues of the BLM movement in both Canada and the United States.

I will undertake an analysis in the following order: (1) the role of emotion in protests; (2) the effect of the BLM protests on American legislation; and (3) the effect the BLM protests on Canadian legislation.

COLLECTIVE ACTION MODELS AND SIMULTANEOUS EXPRESSIONS OF EMOTION

The Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) is rooted in anger.



However, the BLM protests are rooted in simultaneous expressions of juxtaposed emotions. These emotions include both affective and reactive emotional expressions, which are particularly identifiable in the relationship between anger and Black Love.

The emotional strength of the BLM movement is enhanced by the presence of both gruesome visual evidence and visual expressions of emotion through art. These visual mediums may lead the general public and protest participants to react similarly to a jury on a criminal trial who is required to consider visual evidence of a crime.

CATHARSIS

Onto whom does the BLM movement place the blame?



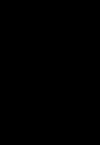
Legislative reform following BLM protests was recommended by the Black Parliamentary Caucus in 44 anti-racism calls to action.

- The two areas of reform examined herein concern:
- (1) disaggregated data collection; and
 - (2) justice reform.

DISAGGREGATED DATA

Calls for the reform of employment equity legislation.

✗ Bill C-468, *An Act to amend the Employment Equity Act* (2019)



✓ \$6.6 million CAD to Task Force reviewing the *Employment Equity Act* (2020)



✓ Bill C-30, *An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 19, 2021 and other measures*

JUSTICE REFORM

Calls for the reform of conditional, mandatory minimum and diversion-based sentencing.

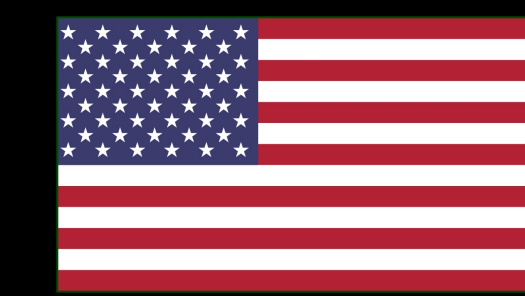
✗ C-22, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* (February 2021)



✓ Federal election with a Liberal campaign promise to retable the amendment



? C-5, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* (December 2021)



Legislative reform in the United States follows a unique path, as federal law-making trends towards stalemates. It also illustrates the non-linear legislative implementation that stems from emotional vectors of change.

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Legislative reform is unsuccessful at the federal level due to legislative gridlock between the Houses of Congress.

✗ Bill HR 7120, *George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020*



✗ Bill HR 1280, *George Floyd Justice in Policing Act 2021*

STATE LEGISLATIVE REFORM

State legislative reform is effective but is non-linear due to the emotional counter-productivity critique.

✓ AB 1196, *An act to add Section 7286.5 to the Government Code, relating to officers* (California)



✓ HF 1, *Minnesota Police Accountability Act* (Minnesota)



✓ HB 1674, *An Act relating to crimes and punishments; amending 21 O.S. 2011, Section 1312, which relates to penalties for rioting; updating language; making certain acts unlawful; providing penalties; providing liability provision for certain damages; defining term; providing exemption from criminal or civil liability for motor vehicle operators under certain circumstances; providing penalties for certain organizations; providing for codification; and providing an effective date* (Oklahoma)

CONCLUSIONS

Emotional protests stemming from the BLM movement did have an effect on legislative development in the United States and in Canada.

Three sub-conclusions can be extracted:

1. Protests are overtly emotional through both an affective and reactive lens;
2. Both Canada and the United States have undergone legislative reform resulting from the BLM protests at either the Federal or State level; and
3. The progress towards legislative reform resulting from emotional protests is not linear and is acted upon—but not negated by—the counter-productivity critique.

Overall, relative catharsis has been experienced as a result of the legislative reform stemming from the BLM protests, but further legislative implementation remains on the horizon.

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