

## All Lives Matter - But...

Considerable ink (or pixels) has been spilled and hands wrung and voices raised over the #Blacklivesmatter movement. It's everywhere in the news and has been for many months now.

If you're unfamiliar with "Black Lives Matter," it is a campaign mostly by black activists and arising out of the series of shootings of unarmed black Americans by police. In one instance, the person shot and killed was a child asleep on her sofa when the police burst through the door in a no-knock raid. They got the wrong address. No charges were brought against the police.

Activists created the campaign largely consisting of posters that read #Blacklivesmatter. These posters were carried at several protest rallies and then posted onto the internet - as all things must be. It went viral.

And then came the counter attack.

Before long, a new message was hitting the Facebook, Twitter, Instagram circuit: #Alllivesmatter.

On the face of it, this is remarkably UNobjectionable. After all, I'm not black, and I think my life matters. My latino friends are not black, yet their lives matter. My Asian friends are not black, but their lives also matter. This simply widens the circle to say that we are all human beings, and as such, we ALL matter.

And yet, there is something deceptive about this counter campaign. It removes the message of the moment - that black Americans are disproportionately targeted by police for infractions most of us never have to even think about. That black Americans are arrested for the most minor of infractions - often when no crime has been committed. That black Americans are imprisoned at a much higher rate than white Americans and given longer sentences for the same crimes. That black Americans are killed by police (and I'm talking unarmed people) at a disproportionately high rate.

Remember the man who was cleaning his own car in his own driveway, and the cops pulled up because they refused to believe it was his? They told him to present his registration, and when he reached into the car to get it, one cop shot him because he thought the man was reaching for a gun. Fortunately, he survived.

This happens here, too. I had a meeting with a professor from Pace University last week. He happens to be black, and as we got onto the topic of police, he matter-of-factly said, "Oh sure, I've been stopped twice recently by the police. They were looking for someone else each time but said I fit the description."

The point of a campaign like #Blacklivesmatter is to point out a discrepancy. The point of #Alllivesmatter is to say that no such discrepancy exists.

Think of it in these terms: Did you ever watch one of those charity commercials where they show starving kids in Africa or South America or Asia? Sure you have. Each of these groups generally has a name like, "Food for the Poor" (a real group), and they pull at the heart strings, not to mention getting you to pull out your wallet.

But what if somebody decided this was a one-sided campaign? What if they decided that rich people should have food, too? After all, they're people, too. So they start a counter-campaign, "Food for All." Sure, everyone ought to be able to eat, but the campaign is there to bring to our attention the people who don't have food.

Campaigns point out disparities. Rich people have food, so they don't need a campaign. White people know that their lives matter, as indicated by the relative safety we enjoy. But black people in America face a battle we neither understand nor appreciate. Ergo, the #Blacklivesmatter campaign.

Now, before I go on, let me dispel a myth or two. Many people have said, "Hey, if Black lives matter so much, why are they all killing each other. Most of the black murders are by black people." This is true.

However, about the same percentage of white on white murders occurs - largely because most murders happen between people of the same family or neighborhood. That black-on-black and white-on-white crimes are so high simply points to the fact that blacks and whites in America really don't have that much to do with each other.

Except when it comes to the police. In Ferguson, Missouri where the current campaign started about a year ago with the death of Michael Brown, one of the biggest complaints of residents was that while the community is, I believe, 70% black, the police were 90% white. With a ratio like that, and with the police using traffic stops as a means of revenue (according to the Justice Department), is it any wonder that there is mistrust?

So the #Blacklivesmatter campaign does not mean that black lives matter more than anyone else. Nor does it mean that black-on-black crime doesn't exist (not that the existence of black-on-black crime should ever justify disproportionate treatment by police).

What the #Blacklivesmatter campaign really means is that Black Lives Matter Just as Much as Other Lives. And it will be a cause for celebration in heaven when we as a society begin to treat them as such.