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# Tweets and Doorknocks. Differentiation and Cooperation between Black Lives Matter and Community Organizing

Clément Petitjean and Julien Talpin

Because of its genealogy and a shared commitment to racial justice, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement might be expected to have strong cooperative links with community organizing groups. Close, localized study of the interactions between these two approaches to social change reveals, however, something quite different. Far from being harmonious, the relations between BLM and community organizing prove to be marked by distrust, sometimes competition, and, more sporadically, cooperation. This article, based on ethnographic surveys in Los Angeles and Chicago, investigates how the BLM movement deployed and took root at the local level and how it interacted with community organizing groups in both cities. Emphasizing the importance of blending a meso-sociological level of analysis with a micro-sociological approach, we argue that the relations of competition and distinction, embodied in distinct group styles, repertoires of action, and organizational forms, can be explained by taking into account the actors' resources, social properties, socializations, and trajectories. The article's comparative perspective also shows that forms of cooperation may exist despite competition, and that cooperation is made possible in particular by younger people playing a bridging role.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement sprang from the community organizing tradition. It emerged in 2013 through the initiative of three Black women—Patisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi. The first two had prior experience as community organizers, having worked for nonprofits in California. Garza had been director of the POWER (People

Organized to Win Employment Rights) organization in Oakland, which mobilizes domestic employees, often of foreign origin, and Cullors had run an organization fighting mass incarceration. She defines herself as an organizer: “I identify as an organizer versus an activist because I believe an organizer is the smallest unit that you build your team around.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Garza writes: “Organizing has been part of who I am ever since I can remember, even though for a long time I didn’t call it by that name” (Garza 2020, 47). Other BLM leaders—notably in the organizations Dream Defenders and Hands Up United—came from the ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) federation.<sup>2</sup> Beyond personal trajectories, community organizing infuses the practices of BLM and is explicitly presented as one of the movement’s tactical orientations. Thus, at its first annual convention, in the summer of 2015, a training session was devoted to methods of community organizing, which were intended to help structure a movement that aimed to be very flexible. The tension between fluidity and organization runs through the entire movement: on the one hand it aims to be a decentralized, horizontal, democratic movement; on the other it seeks to perpetuate itself by creating local structures.<sup>3</sup>

In view of this genealogy, BLM might be expected to have strong cooperative links with nonprofit organizations

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**Clément Petitjean** is Assistant Professor in American studies at the Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne (Clement.Petitjean@univ-paris1.fr; France). He is affiliated with the Centre de recherche de l’Institut de démographie de l’Université Paris 1 (Cridup). A specialist on social movements and political sociology, he is completing a book on the history of community organizing practices in Chicago (Haymarket Books, 2023).

**Julien Talpin** (France) is a permanent Research Fellow in Political Science at the French National Center for Scientific Research (Julien.talpin@univ-lille.fr; France). His research deals with racial minorities civic engagement in France and the United States. He has recently published: “Why French Racial Minorities Don’t Mobilize More Often? Disempowerment, Tactical Repertoires and Soft Repression of Antiracist Movements,” in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2022.

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belonging to the community organizing tradition. We define this tradition as the institutionalized practice of fostering the active participation of groups that are marginalized or excluded from civic life through carefully planned campaigns to improve their living conditions. Campaign issues can include demanding increased resources for schools or healthcare facilities in poor neighborhoods, fighting against gentrification, or standing up against mass incarceration. Usually located in the impoverished and racialized neighborhoods of large urban areas, the community-based organizations using these practices often build up on residents' everyday community ties (Warren 2001; Marwell 2007). While they belong to a broader milieu of community-based organizations operating at the local level in urban areas (Sites, Chaskin, and Parks 2007), community organizing groups focus less on social service provision or institutional advocacy than on improving people's living conditions through contentious tactics. They practice a form of "blended social action," a combination of civic participation and contentious collective claims-making (Sampson et al. 2005). Although community organizing overlaps with the space of social movements (Mathieu 2021), it exists as a semi-autonomous social entity. One characteristic feature of the approach is the pivotal role played by professional organizers: as paid staff, they develop campaigns and train volunteer leaders to empower themselves while remaining in the background and refusing to speak for the groups they mobilize. Although the organizer's role draws from Saul Alinsky's legacy, which refused to address racial domination head on, since the 1980s commitments to fighting for racial justice have been incorporated as core components of organizers' concerns and worldviews (Sen 2003). BLM and community organizing share the same aspiration to racial justice and seek to challenge the "school-to-prison pipeline" and the mass incarceration experienced by Black people in the United States. Even if some sectors of BLM tend to push for a politics of recognition rather than the type of redistribution advocated by many community organizations (Johnson 2017), a rapid analysis of claims and frames shows that both approaches share the same definition of the problem and belong to the same racial justice "social movement industry" (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

Close, localized study of the interactions between these two approaches to social change reveals, however, something quite different. Far from taking over the practices and tactics of the community organizing tradition from which the movement partially arose, BLM activists opt for street demonstrations, direct action, and online mobilization as their main repertoires of contention. These tactical divergences give rise to divisions and tensions. Given the genealogy of the BLM movement, its historical and

personal links with community organizing, and the objectives that they seem to share, how does one then explain the differences we observed in the field in both Los Angeles and Chicago? While they do sometimes cooperate, their relations are mainly characterized by distrust, competition, or at least by strategies of distinction and differentiation. The enigma is all the greater since it has been shown for other movements that repression, the perception of a threat, or the closure of political opportunities favor dynamics of alliance, movements having an interest in grouping together in the face of adversity (Gamson 1975; Staggenborg 1986). Although BLM has suffered both strong police repression and frequent disqualification in the media and in public debate (Soss and Weaver 2017), this does not seem to have naturally led to stable alliances with other sectors of the movement for racial justice. These issues are all the more important as cooperation among movements and the capacity to construct broad coalitions are conditions for the success of mobilizations (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010; Van Dyke and Amos 2017).

While the interactions between antiracist organizations cannot be reduced to conflict, such tensions must be taken into account to grasp how these mobilizations develop and what their potential effects are. Based on ethnographic studies in Los Angeles and Chicago focusing on community organizing practices and antiracist mobilizations, we aim to investigate how the BLM movement deployed and took root at the local level. Although both BLM and community organizing are critical of what they see as the institutional fringe of antiracism or "Black establishment" (Taylor 2016)—in particular the NAACP or the National Action Network—these distinctions do not seem to lead them to extensive cooperation. To what extent does the organizational ecology of Chicago and Los Angeles shed light on this observation? Are notable differences to be found between the two cities? We start by discussing the blind spots in the existing literature on the BLM movement and presenting an alternative conceptual framework. After presenting the surveys conducted in Chicago and Los Angeles, we argue that these differences can be understood by taking into account the sociology of the actors involved and their professional and political socializations, as well as differences in "group styles" (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003) and organizational cultures. Small class differences between BLM and community organizing leaders generate different group styles and tactical repertoires that make cooperation challenging. We also show that division of labor and cooperation among activists nonetheless remain possible, mostly due to the bridging role of activists belonging to the same generation. In so doing, we illustrate how an intersectional approach to collective action—in this case taking into account class, race, and age—is crucial to understand mobilization dynamics.

## Digital Activism, Framing Processes, and Academic Blind Spots

Numerous research articles on BLM have been published in recent years. Most of them focus on the uses of social media, whether seeking to identify the main characteristics of this protean movement (Tillery 2019), to understand the social media-fueled construction of a social balance of power (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark 2018), or to map the uses of the different hashtags associated with the movement (Ince, Rojas, and Davis 2017). They also focus on a campaign to make visible the police violence targeting cis and trans Black women (Brown et al. 2017), observe the transnational circulations between the United States, the UK, Spain, and France (Harlow 2019), or study the “interaction rituals” specific to digital activist practices (van Haperen, Uitermark, and van der Zeeuw 2020).

In these works, one of the main lines of inquiry concerns collective action frames, one of the dominant theoretical models since the 1990s in social movements studies (Snow and Benford 1988). Bonilla and Tillery (2020), for example, use experimental devices to determine which “identity frames” (Black nationalism, feminism, or LGBTQ+ rights) are most likely to trigger support for the movement. Other articles have examined the framing activities of the movement undertaken by external actors, in particular TV channels and newspapers (Fabregat and Beck 2019). The question of the media treatment of BLM is sometimes linked to the study of the repertoires of contention, digital or not, mobilized by celebrities, especially sports professionals (Towler, Crawford, and Bennett 2020).

Some aspects of the movement, however, remain less studied. First, few articles examine the social factors of engagement in the BLM movement (see, however, Williamson, Trump, and Einstein 2018). Next, from a methodological standpoint, almost all these works are based on quantitative analysis of digital data collected from Twitter or Instagram, or content and discourse analysis. The use of qualitative methods is relatively rare, except for a few works on white people’s “digital allyship praxis” (Clark 2019), hashtag ethnography (Bonilla and Rosa 2015), or the different ways Black Catholics identified with the movement (Winstead 2017). Finally, while some articles have studied the solidarity practices of other racial minorities, especially Asian Americans (Arora and Stout 2019), very few works have tried to examine the movement at the local level—the relations between social movement organizations beyond the antiracist cause alone (see, however, Maharawal 2017). The concrete relations between BLM and more institutionalized community organizing practices, although occupying an important organizational and symbolic place in contemporary forms of collective action, seem absent from the existing literature. As BLM becomes structured and institutionalized,

with the recent creation of the BLM Global Network Foundation and BLM Grassroots, which aims to coordinate the twenty or so existing local chapters, there is still a lack of research that would help to understand the forms taken by the mobilization at the local level and its articulations with the local ecology of social movements. For this purpose, studying the movement’s frames and online practices is not sufficient: one has to enter into the everyday life of these organizations.

From this perspective, studies in the sociology of collective action that have examined interorganizational cooperation may prove useful for understanding the dynamics of the local structuring of the movement for racial justice in the contemporary United States. Even when organizations have a common objective, they find themselves competing for financial resources or members, which frequently leads to tensions (Soule and King 2008; Zald and McCarthy 1980). This does not seem to be the central element here, since until a recent date and at the time of our surveys BLM was mainly based on voluntary, non-professionalized participation, in contrast to community organizing, which generally takes the form of a tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization. Based on different economic models and positions within the broader U.S. political economy, they are not playing on quite the same field. Therefore, the explanation of competition for resources does not seem very convincing.

To account for the competition and divisions that we observed on the ground over the legitimate ways to wage the fight for racial justice, we argue that it is important to look at who BLM activists and community organizers are and what they do, to embed their practices and worldviews into the larger social spaces and structures that shape them. To do so, we draw from two different theoretical frameworks. First, we argue that it is in particular the activist cultures (Polletta and Jasper 2001) and the two movements’ group styles (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003) that very often differ, because of their members’ distinct political and professional socializations. The notion of “group style” is particularly useful, focusing on the way internal discursive norms and bonds of solidarity (defining a “us”) and the boundary work (identifying a “them,” or adversaries) structure interactions within an organization (Lamont et al. 2016). Secondly, we articulate this micro-level, interactionist framework with the conceptual apparatus of field theory and dispositional analysis. From this perspective, the types of practical and symbolic struggles that BLM activists and community organizers engage in are shaped by their social backgrounds, their primary and secondary socializations, the various types of resources and capitals they have accumulated through their trajectories, and the positions they hold within different social spaces as well as the particular structures of these spaces (Bourdieu 1984; Mathieu 2021; Nicholls 2003).



## Ethnographic Studies in the Racial Justice Fields of Chicago and Los Angeles

Our theoretical focus is grounded in rigorous, self-reflexive ethnography, a method better equipped than any other to study fields, “boundary work” between groups and individuals, processes, and conflicts (Desmond 2014; Pattillo 2007). Initially, our field work focused on local community organizing ecologies and practices. The survey in Chicago was carried out between 2015 and 2018. Chicago is a particularly fertile ground for investigating community organizing practices: often seen as its historic birthplace, there are some forty organizations dotted over the city territory who employ almost two hundred community organizers. The material was constructed through participant observation techniques (observation of public meetings and organizers’ working days, participation in collective actions and training workshops) mainly in two organizations in Black neighborhoods on the city’s South Side—Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP) and Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO). Eighty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted, mostly with community organizers and leaders from STOP, KOCO, and other local organizations, but also with actors in areas connected to community organizing: trade-union organizers, political activists, academics, journalists, and staff from philanthropic foundations. Three interviews were conducted with antiracist activists in local groups (Black Youth Project 100, We Charge Genocide).

In Los Angeles, the survey took place between 2012 and 2017 through participant observation in two main organizations: LA Voice (a member of the national network Faith in Action) and Community Coalition (CoCo). They represent two distinct styles of community organizing. LA Voice belongs to the tradition of faith-based organizing (Warren 2001) inspired by Saul Alinsky. It is an umbrella organization grouping some thirty religious congregations—Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim. CoCo, by contrast, embodies neighborhood organizing based on mobilizing the “unorganized” through intensive outreach work in South LA. These organizations frequently cooperate with other actors, in particular trade unions and community centers (Milkman 2006; Milkman, Bloom, and Narro 2010). Los Angeles is thus characterized by strong organizational cooperation (Nicholls 2003; Pastor, Benner, and Matsuoka 2009), which extends across California, community organizations having invested in the mechanisms of direct democracy and initiatives to promote their agenda of social and racial justice. The survey thus unfolded over a long period through ethnographic monitoring of these campaigns, participant observation of training sessions, door-to-door canvassing, internal staff meetings and members’ assemblies. Forty biographical

interviews were also conducted with community organizers and leaders; four interviews were conducted with participants of the BLM movement.

The Black Lives Matter movement irrupted into our research fields and forced the organizations and individuals we studied to respond to the movement, its claims, and its frames. Research has shown that the most Democratic cities, with a history of mobilization of the African American community, strong organizational density, and also frequent deaths at the hands of the police, are the places of strongest BLM mobilization (Williamson, Trump, and Einstein 2018). Indeed, Los Angeles and Chicago became important loci for the structuring of the BLM movement. Following the acquittal in 2013 of George Zimmerman, charged with the murder of Trayvon Martin the previous year, which marked the start of BLM, a meeting was organized at the Community Coalition headquarters in Los Angeles to enable members to vent their anger and sadness. They also expressed a sense of great familiarity, several parents saying it could have been their son.<sup>4</sup> When the first BLM street demonstrations took place, some members of the organizations we studied eagerly joined them.<sup>5</sup> In the months that followed, Los Angeles saw the birth of one of the first local chapters of Black Lives Matter. In Chicago, Zimmerman’s acquittal triggered the founding of the Black Youth Project 100 (BYP 100), which became a major organizational actor in the movement (Taylor 2016). A few months later, antiracist activists campaigning for the abolition of the prison system created the organization We Charge Genocide to alert the United Nations to the crimes of Chicago police against the Black population. In Los Angeles, this led us to observe and participate to five monthly BLM assemblies, ten meetings of the ally group White People for Black Lives, and several demonstrations at the police commission or opposing the District Attorney. In Chicago, we observed two monthly meetings of the Chicago police board disrupted by activists and participated to various rallies around the Fight for \$15 or against a Trump campaign meeting.

Although we developed privileged ethnographic ties with the community-organizing world, we contend that BLM’s bursting onto the scene upset and reorganized local organizational ecologies in ways that can be accounted for from our own particular standpoint. As white sociologists, our immersion within multi-racial community organizations was easier than in the BLM movement, where we could only access the spaces open to non-Black allies (see the next section). In both cases, we presented ourselves as empathetic to the cause of racial justice, arguing that our research could contribute to its diffusion, including outside of the United States. Besides, as French researchers we were seen as external to the U.S. racial dynamics. Our foreign status also offered us a form of privilege of exoticism, facilitating access to the field.

## Distinct Group Styles

Ethnographic exploration of the worlds of BLM and community organizing quickly reveals to the observer the practical and symbolic differences between them; interactions are not governed by the same norms. We shall return later to the modes of action, but the description of the “assemblies” and meetings of these two groups reveals very different styles of activism.

Los Angeles, December 2016: The monthly meeting of the Los Angeles Black Lives Matter group takes place in the premises of a friendly community organization, Youth Justice Coalition. As always, the person running the meeting, Melina Abdullah, a professor of pan-African studies at California State University, Los Angeles, and a local movement figure, asks the participants to form a circle and introduce themselves. Each one is asked to give their first name, their reason for being there, and their “preferred gendered pronoun” (PGP)—“he/him; she/her; they/them”—indicating sensitivity to the social construction of gender identities. This ritual sometimes arouses surprise and protest from those least socialized into activist norms, who are rare in these circles; Melina then explains: “It is important for us to remember that ‘all Black lives matter,’” an implicit reference to the movement’s intersectional approach, which has particularly mobilized for the recognition of the murders of LGBTQI+ Black women, who are well represented in this gathering.

When all the introductions have been made, the meeting moves to the customary ceremony of homage to those who have died at the hands of the police. Today it is conducted by Melina’s sister, who stands barefoot wearing a colorful African tunic. She asks us to make ourselves comfortable—“Plant your feet in the ground, as if they were roots, and remember our ancestors”—closing our eyes if it helps. Then, in a strong, inspired voice, she asks us to breathe deeply, in and out. This is meant to “root” us, “to give us strength and power.” The participants follow the instructions, some adopting a yoga posture. Then she asks us to say out loud the name of a person who led us to come here this evening, who inspired us. Several people give the name of a family member. Then, like every month, the leader stands in the middle of the circle, where an empty chair has been placed, symbolizing the absence of those who have died at the hands of the police, and invites the participants to declaim with her the names of the dead of recent months (“Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice ...”). In a ritual infused with pan-Africanism, after pronouncing each name she pours a little water on the floor and everyone says together “*ashe*,” which means power or force in Yoruba and has been commonly adopted as a substitute for “amen.”

At the end of the ceremony, various activists take the floor to make announcements and give information about

the various campaigns or actions of the previous month. Charles, from the “legal committee,” talks about the trial he faces for “insulting behavior” and “assault” against a police officer in a spontaneous demonstration some months earlier at the time of a meeting of the “Police Commission” (a body supposed to assess local police practices and possible incidents). He calls it a “political trial” aimed at discouraging mobilization.

Then the circle quickly divides into four groups, according to a principle of temporary and chosen racial non-mixing: Blacks; Blacks participating for the first time; other people of color; and whites, to which one of us belong. Attendance to one or the other group is self-defined, which shows the constructivist concept of race enacted in this circle. As a matter of fact, some participants in the Black group could appear of relatively pale complexion to an external observer not fully socialized to race as a particular sociohistorical formation or ideology (Fields and Fields 2014; Omi and Winant 2014). It is clearly indicated that Blacks are the decision-making group, leading the struggle, and that the others are there to support them. There are fifteen or so of us in the group identifying as white, half being members of the ally organization White People for Black Lives. The discussion this evening—as often—is essentially about what it means for whites to support the struggles of African Americans. One issue is how to sensitize more whites to these questions, now that Donald Trump has just been elected and a sense of “white backlash” is running across the country. At the end of this sequence, the whole group reassembles. The circle is re-formed and the participants recite several times, louder and louder, the group’s anthem: “It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains,” a *Communist-Manifesto*-inspired quote from Assata Shakur, one of the historical figures of the Black liberation movement in the United States; BLM frequently valorizes this history and tries to set itself in its lineage.<sup>6</sup>

Just a few miles away, still in South Central Los Angeles, in the premises of the Community Coalition, the norms and practices of the meeting are quite different: no temporary non-mixing—the group being racially mixed—no bare feet or African chants, no PGPs. This does not mean that this organization’s meetings are not also ritualized in their own way, also marked by spirituality and the desire to make the group a “safe space,” protected against the external aggressions experienced by minorities in American society. Entry into this world shows, however, that the strategies and the participants are rather different from those just described.

It is a usual evening, a few days after Donald Trump’s election to the White House, and many people are still in a state of shock. The aim of the meeting of the youth organization, South Central Youth Empowerment

through Action (SCYEA), is to let teenagers express their feelings. About forty of them are present on this occasion, offering a good reflection of the organization's multicultural character of the organization: Blacks and Latinos are in the majority; there are also some white high-school students. The discussion is run by three paid organizers. They first ask: "What have you been feeling since Trump was elected? We're all a bit shaken, it's important to be able to express ourselves, say how we feel at this moment, and show love for one another." An African American teenager talks about his fear of new riots breaking out: "If you want to riot, don't do it here, in the Black community." A young Latina then talks about her parents, with sobs in her voice. They are undocumented immigrants from Mexico; she fears that they—and maybe she too—will be deported. Not all the participants express such openly political considerations. Another Latina teen describes how she went to bed early on election night, before the results came in. She only heard the news from a teacher at school the next day, "and that scared me."

As well as their fear, several participants mention the walkouts that took place in several high schools on the day after the election. They had triggered large mobilizations in the whole city, involving members of these nonprofits and activists from BLM or other liberal Angeleno movements. One teenager describes how he suffered racist insults from a white woman on that occasion, and some high-school students threw water bottles back at her. "But violence isn't the answer," he adds. The discussion progressively turns to how to respond to this unexpected result. A Latina employee, aged about 25, speaks, with fighting words: "This election shows the real face of this country. The whites couldn't accept that a Black president was elected eight years ago. But it's also an opportunity to build a multi-racial organization. We have to build on this anger, with Blacks, Latinos and even progressive whites. I'm ready to fight." A younger colleague seems less optimistic: "I feel powerless. If I didn't work here I think I would be lost . . ." One of the organizers tries to rally the troops: "Ready to roll?" But morale seems to be at rock-bottom and the responses are more ritual than eager: "We'll carry on doing what we do. We'll carry on being CoCo." To restart the discussion, one of the employees asks about the difference between a tactic and a strategy, referring to a training session given some weeks earlier. The responses are hesitant and he quickly gives the answer: "A demo is a tactic, but we want to develop a long-term plan and work out strategically the change we are seeking to shift public policies. A demo or a riot isn't the objective, it may be a means." The questions become more specific: "And what victories have we won in terms of policies?" The high-school students answer all together, mentioning the organization's past campaigns on school funding in poor neighborhoods, access to psychologists and teaching assistants, the fight against racial discrimination in school

discipline or guidance, etc. More than ever, when morale is low, the message has to be hammered home that struggle pays off, that collective organization can change the future of marginalized groups.

The organizer asks again: "What were the three stages that brought us these victories?"

A high-school girl answers, mechanically: "Organize, outreach, mobilize."

Organizer: "What do you mean by 'mobilize'?"

Girl: "We went toward the people in the high school, we didn't wait for them to come to us."

Another girl helps her: "We challenged our classmates, we reached out to them, we also organized an assembly with the school principal."

It is almost 7:00 p.m. and the meeting is coming to an end. Participants form a circle, hold hands, and close their eyes. A young participant says solemnly: "Let those who feel weak and vulnerable step forward into the middle." Three girls move there, followed by an organizer. They take each other's arms, then all sing the anthem of the organization.<sup>7</sup>

Comparing these two meetings reveals "group styles" and norms that are rather different, although all the actors relate their mobilizations to the cause of racial justice. While the community organizing tradition aims at building interracial struggles and therefore focuses on causes addressing people's material living conditions (schools, housing, etc.), BLM considers that Black liberation requires Black people's self-organization to fight institutional racism, other actors being perceived as allies rather than members of the movement. Although overlaps do exist, the collective entities on whose behalf community organizers and BLM activists act (the "us") are therefore slightly distinct. Same goes for the "them": impersonal structures like law enforcement and the criminal justice system in the case of BLM, more local targets for community organizing groups (city hall, school boards, transport authorities, etc.).

How are these distinct orientations and styles to be explained? Before exploring the actors' respective social profiles and socializations, we show that these divergences are not just disagreements over the analysis of social inequality and racism; rather, they display different strategic orientations, reflected in heterogeneous practices of collective action.

## Heterogeneous Repertoires of Contention and Strategies for Distinction

In the eyes of the people we interviewed, these distinct orientations and styles can be parsed into three main elements: tactical repertoires, strategic orientations, and organizational format.

During the two surveys, the modes of action associated with Black Lives Matter included civil disobedience,

high-impact operations designed to capture media attention, and use of social media (mainly Twitter and Facebook) to make the cause visible and mobilize as widely as possible (see Taylor 2016; Maharawal 2017). By contrast, the community organizations favor campaigns financed upstream and unfolding over the medium term, organized around a strategic plan, with graduated use of disruptive tactics. For Jim, an organizer at LA Voice, it is the opposition between “structure” and “spontaneity,” between “strategy” and “uprising.”

To expand popular support for the cause, community organizations resort less to digital mobilization and street demonstrations than to door-to-door canvassing and direct interactions. For Louise, an organizing director at Action Now, one of the main community organizations in Chicago, the decisive criterion that legitimates claims to speak on behalf of the people is whether there is “door-knocking,” a practice that symbolizes crossing social barriers beyond the social spaces one belongs to. She criticizes BLM activists’ overreliance on social media to mobilize people without trying to win them over in person. As with other community organizers, she sees face-to-face relationships as a necessary precondition to build long-lasting commitments. “Go and do some door-knocking!” she said in an informal conversation after a day devoted to electoral canvassing. It is also in this framework that the statement “I’m a door-knocker,” which she repeats with pride several times, takes on its full meaning.<sup>8</sup>

Next, these differences in practices are combined with distinct, even divergent, strategies, which crystallize around the formulation or not of concrete demands. Contrary to a general critique of systemic racism, these demands are meant to be transposable into policy language and concrete policy proposals. This is clear from an interview with Sara, a senior organizer for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, one of the more established community organizing groups in the city. As she explains the differences between those who do organizing and those who think they do it but “maybe they’re doing mixed model, or they aren’t really doing organizing at all,” the interviewer invites her opinion on a collective action of organized disobedience a few days earlier. On that day, a dozen activists from an immigrant defense group, anti-racist groups participating in BLM, and STOP’s youth branch, Fearless Leadership by the Youth (FLY), blocked traffic in the middle of the Loop by chaining themselves to stepladders to protest the deportation of undocumented immigrants and police violence.

“I feel that they could do better than that,” Sara claims. “I feel that that is a really amazing thing to do, civil disobedience. I feel glad for those people that are getting that experience of doing that, because it’s certainly like a radicalizing experience that they will have their whole lives. And hopefully will inspire them to keep doing stuff, right? But I feel like a lot of those groups are missing a key component, which is like ‘what do you want?’”

Sara stresses both the absence of clear demands and the fact that the too abstract objectives led to no immediately identifiable victory. To build “people power” and win concrete improvements, the only method that really “works” is organizing. While BLM activists also aim at transforming the collective representations sustaining the domination of Black lives—Alicia Garza (2020, 224) speaks of a “struggle for hegemony”—community organizers, nourished by an anti-intellectual ethos, often see on-line or symbolic activism as mere “blah-blah.”

Our interviews also indicate a form of mutual condescension. The professional organizers often consider that BLM shows a strategic deficit, even irrationality, driven as they are by their emotions and their anger. Conversely, the antiracist groups accuse the community organizations of too much playing an institutional game that has shown its limits in the past and of not being sufficiently “radical.” These are distinctions that have long structured collective action in the United States (Piven and Cloward 1977) and have been in a sense reactivated by BLM’s emergence. Behind these oppositions, the activists’ relation to time is also expressed: whereas the BLM activists manifest a kind of urgency in the face of the repeated deaths at the hands of the police, the community organizers consider that lasting social change can only be achieved by building powerful organizations capable of durably changing the political balance of power.

A third criterion distinguishing the orientations and group styles of BLM and community organizations, effectiveness is directly indexed on the existence of formal, long-lasting organizations. In the case of the community organizations, there is a clear division of labor between paid staff and volunteers. This institutionalization is materially symbolized in the use of premises, sometimes situated in commercial buildings, giving evidence of a respectability and established presence that are criticized in return by the BLM activists, who accuse these organizations of belonging to the “nonprofit industrial complex,” denunciation of which has been part of activist common sense in many milieus since the late 2000s (Incite! 2007). By contrast, the forms of collective organization that develop in the BLM movement seem to privilege more horizontal, reticular, and temporary forms (Célestine and Martin-Breteau 2016; Taylor 2016), in line with the defiance towards bureaucratic structures also expressed in recent social movements such as Occupy.

These differentiation criteria are used both in Chicago and Los Angeles. They are summed up in the following excerpt from an interview with Jack, a community organizer for CoCo:

“They look at us as like, ‘What’s going on? How come we’re the ones out here, protesting, shouting, where’s CoCo at?’ So they look at us like we’re not radical enough . . . . What they don’t understand is that we can’t really do that. First of all we’re a nonprofit, we’re mainly held together with grants. Which means



we can't really go out there and start shooting, we can't really do things like that. We are strategic. We are actually putting together a plan. Black Lives Matter is just like, 'Hey, there's a protest happening tonight, everybody be there.' We're like . . . man, let's try to get some more people there. Let's work to win more victories."<sup>10</sup>

To account for these differences, an emic distinction seems particularly pertinent—that between *organizing* and *mobilizing*, embodied in two distinct roles, the *organizer* and the *activist*. While academic works generally treat the terms *organizer* and *activist* as synonyms or consider the latter a generic term (Corrigall-Brown 2011; Teske 2009), for our informants there is a very strong qualitative difference between the two, the former connoting professionalism, self-effacement behind volunteer spokespersons, and proximity to the mobilized group, while the latter connotes social and cultural distance and forms of radical action disconnected from mass support.

### The Role of Actors' Sociological Profiles

Our two surveys bear witness to the fact that despite relatively similar framing and a shared commitment to racial justice, BLM and community organizing operate very differently, whether in their internal organization and the discursive norms that structure these groups, or in their tactical, strategic, and organizational choices. To understand what is at stake in the competitions between community organizations and antiracist collectives, the study of actors' sociological profiles seems particularly fertile.

#### Political and Professional Socializations

The trajectory of Catarina, a Chicago organizer, is telling. The daughter of Cuban immigrants who fled the Castro regime (her late father was an engineer, her mother a bank employee), her commitments are rooted in the experience of downward mobility and the weight of everyday racism when, in her teens, her parents moved to a well-off suburb in the north of the city. In high school, her Hispanic identity was constantly thrown at her by the other students, her grades declined, and her friendship circle led her to discover reputedly subversive authors like Malcolm X. After graduating in political science and Latino studies in 2009 from a public university in Illinois, followed by an internship in Washington for a national women's rights nonprofit, and a humanitarian experience in Ecuador, Catarina was hired as a community organizer by Action Now in 2010. Two years later, she resigned and wound up working for the Fight for \$15 campaign, first as lead organizer and then as director of strategic partnerships, in charge of liaising and creating alliances with other organizations. This brought her into contact with the activists of antiracist groups like BYP 100, who also took up the demand for an increased minimum wage since a large proportion of low-wage workers are people of color. But the attempt at collaboration petered out.

"When I was working with them, I was just like: 'You gotta turn out . . . ' and they would say they were gonna turn out 500 people. They turned out like 70 people, maybe. And I saw it happening. I knew they weren't turning . . . but yeah, that was so sad! (*She laughs*) And then, so it builds the narrative that . . . we don't really wanna give them money and we don't work with them because they're not good with turnout. But I would be like: 'You guys have to phonebank. And how many events are you doing beforehand to build excitement about [the \$15 minimum wage]? And what's your goal for that event?' Numbers, numbers. And they don't think about it like that . . . And we had a fight over it all (*She laughs*)."<sup>11</sup>

Although Catarina euphemizes the conflict, laughing twice and dismissing the idea that her status as a professional organizer was the cause of the "dispute," her example shows two divergent conceptions of what it means to take part in the Fight for \$15 campaign, and in contentious activity more generally. On the one hand, she defends the sense of a craft that she has learned and incorporated. She complains that her friends do not think in terms of quantified objectives to be achieved through a voluntarist strategy of recruitment and canvassing over the medium term. On the other hand, the BYP 100 activists do not put forward such a rationalized conception of campaigning and refuse to recognize that Catarina's is more legitimate than theirs: they implicitly remind her of the supposedly egalitarian framework of their interactions and testifies of the embedded belief that building a core of dedicated, politicized activists is more effective than trying to reach out to "unorganized" people.

The mention of the money linked to the targets to which each group had initially committed itself (bringing 500 people to a gathering in the case of BYP 100) underscores the fact that the symbolic struggles over the legitimate ways of seeing and doing are directly connected to material stakes. This is a feature also found in Los Angeles: an interviewee emphasized that grants constrain the scope for maneuvering: nonprofits must aim to fulfill what they are financed for. However, these material incentives are not sufficient to transform ways of performing activist work. On the contrary, links with a trade union such as the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) are regarded by the BLM activists as further proof of cooptation mechanisms ultimately serving the interests of philanthropic reformers or Democratic politicians with no interest in opposing the status quo. Against organizations seen as "mainstream," fully embedded in the dominant institutional order, "activist" groups then assert their "grassroots" credentials.

The seemingly trivial dispute between Catarina and BYP 100 activists relates to larger symbolic struggles over the most effective and legitimate way to protest. Thus, for the community organizers, "activist" campaigners do not know how to go about representing the people, creating a power balance in its favor, and solving its problems. As Andrew Abbott's work (1988) shows, solving social

problems is one of the central aspects of professional work, because it is by performing these tasks that professions prove their capacity to respond to social disorders and build up their credibility.

What is at stake in these conflicts thus goes beyond the question of the salarization of campaigning activities, to which professionalization dynamics are often reduced. By asserting that their conception of the labor of representation “works” better than that of the activists, community organizers claim a form of cognitive superiority grounded in the distinction between professionals and the laity, which is at the core of any professional project (Sarfati Larson 1977). For community organizers, disqualifying the contenders as “activists” and asserting their own professional competence thus go hand in hand.

### *Different Demographic Characteristics*

Beyond the distinct political and professional socializations, the differences between community organizers and BLM activists could stem from the sociology of their members. The ethnographic survey in Chicago was complemented by a database compiling information on 164 paid community organizers, out of the two hundred or so who are active in the city. Data collection followed a method similar to Milkman’s (2017). Two-thirds of organizers are women (66%), whereas for a long time the occupation was seen as very male and overtly sexist. They are young: a majority of them were born in the 1980s and 1990s (57%). In terms of presumed racial identity, three-quarters belong to racial minorities, with Hispanics representing the largest group (39%). Although the individuals’ socio-occupational origins are hard to identify, works on the imbrication of relations of race and class and the overrepresentation of racial minorities in the urban working class suggest that this professional group does not only recruit the children of the middle and upper classes but also individuals with working-class origins who attained upward mobility through education. While from a racial point of view the organizers “look like” the populations they mobilize, the same is not entirely true when one looks at their level of education. Two-thirds of community organizers in Chicago (67%) have a bachelor’s degree or higher, twice the educational attainment for people over 25 in the city between 2013 and 2017 (37.5%). For the minorities and low-income people organizers work with, the figure is even lower. However, their salaries are below the median for a similar level of qualification (\$56,000 for a bachelor’s in Chicago in 2017), a grassroots organizer earning between \$38,000 and \$48,000. In this regard, the community organizers are not so different from those intellectuals who “may find in the structural homology between the relationship of the dominated classes to the dominant class and the relationship of the dominated fractions [of the dominant class] to the dominant fractions

the basis of felt and sometimes real solidarity with the dominated classes” (Bourdieu 1984, 316).

No equivalent database was constructed in Los Angeles but ethnographic observations uphold the trends identified in Chicago. The qualitative interviews in both cities also suggest that, in the case of organizers who grew up in working-class families and neighborhoods, this sense of solidarity feeds on upwardly mobile trajectories in which working-class origin further legitimates their position. Upwardly mobile organizers are often the first in their families attending college. While the gap created by this situation could lead to increased social and cultural distance, working as organizers allows them to maintain contact with the urban poor and “give back to the community,” as many of them stated during interviews.

Although local in scope, such findings are congruent with earlier studies conducted at the national level, either on faith-based community organizing or on the ACORN federation. Indeed, existing data indicate stark increases in the share of non-white organizers and organizers from working-class or lower-middle-class backgrounds, as well as an inversion of the gender imbalance (Warren and Wood 2001; Brooks 2007).

We have not gathered similar data concerning BLM activists, but can use the database on 278 “high-profile BLM activists” that Ruth Milkman (2017) set up. It therefore focuses on the leaders of the movement, i.e., those “who appeared at least five times in press coverage of BLM and/or on the websites of BLM local chapters”; 94% of them are black (the category includes “African, Caribbean, and biracial”), 85% are 35 or younger, 95% are college-educated, 64% are women, 32% men, and 4% define themselves as trans or non-binary. The leaders of the BLM movement thus appear as particularly young and well-educated—only 17.7% of persons identifying as Black had a bachelor’s degree or other higher qualification in the United States in 2010.<sup>12</sup> Although this figure is higher among African Americans under 35, it indicates that, among the leaders of the BLM movement, Blacks with strong cultural capital are overrepresented.<sup>13</sup>

Milkman’s study says nothing about the less visible “grassroots” BLM activists, such as the families of victims of police violence, about whom very little is known. But in keeping with the extant literature on social movements, it suggests a gap between the movement’s representatives in the media and the people they represent. Even if more systematic research is needed to confirm these figures, Milkman’s results still provide an interesting point of comparison insofar as the social and cultural gap seems less obvious in the case of community organizers. We therefore tentatively argue that the community organizers and BLM leadership as featured in the media constitute two slightly distinct groups, with BLM’s most visible activists maintaining greater proximity to the academic field, as indicated by the educational attainment

established by Milkman or the role played by the academic Melina Abdullah (2017) in the Los Angeles BLM chapter. The most visible BLM campaigners thus appear somewhat more educated than the community organizers, and especially more so than community organizations' bases, which in general include a majority of poor people (McCarthy and Walker 2004).

The combination of actors' sociological characteristics, their trajectories and socializations, and their professional activities shapes how community organizers and BLM activists view and interact with one another. Many community organizers see BLM's confrontational, intersectional approach as being disconnected from "where people are at," to use a popular phrasing in the field, a disconnect which is enabled by the educational attainment of many BLM leaders. But many BLM activists, conversely, view community organizations' tactical pragmatism not as the condition for building real power (as organizers believe) but as a form of cooptation and neutralization by the world of professionalized nonprofits fueled by organizers' interests as paid staff.

### When Organizations Bridge the Gap

So far we have stressed the differentiation practices observed in the field, but we also witnessed forms of ad hoc cooperation between organizations, where issues of redistribution and moral recognition came together. After presenting these moments of cooperation and forms of division of activist labor, we consider their social conditions of possibility, which are located both at the organizational level—and especially in the convergence of repertoires of contention—and at the individual level, where some actors, by virtue of social (and especially generational) properties that situate them at the intersection of the two worlds, play a bridging role.

#### *How Resources and Repertoires Shape Cooperation*

In Los Angeles, the monthly meetings of the BLM chapter take place in the premises of a community organization, the Youth Justice Coalition, since BLM does not have the resources to finance premises of its own. Indeed, at the start of the movement, these meetings first took place outdoors, in particular in front of the police headquarters and city hall. Beyond these material conditions, cooperation can also take on a more strategic dimension. Thus, even more intermittently, some meetings may take place in the buildings of some community organizations, such as when BLM activists and representatives from the Nation of Islam met in CoCo's premises in September 2015. While this enabled the meeting to take place on neutral ground, and although the two movements operate in very different registers, it did lead to their joint participation in the demonstration for the twentieth anniversary of the

Million Man March, in a spirit of unity of all the forces working for racial justice.

Moreover, cooperation between BLM and community organizing is manifested in the course of some specific campaigns, notably those targeting the policing or judicial institutions. In this case, it seems that the repertoires of the two movements, whose heterogeneity has previously been highlighted, converge: they are campaigns with a precise objective—for example, the resignation of the police commissioner or the district attorney—in accordance with the precepts of pragmatically-oriented community organizing, but resorting to oppositional modes of action (sit-ins, demonstrations, civil disobedience, direct action) more in phase with the habitual repertoire of BLM. Thus both in Chicago and in Los Angeles, we observed forms of ad hoc convergence, where members of BLM and community organizations were involved in the same actions.

The fall of 2015 in Chicago was marked by a wave of protests centered on the question of institutional violence against Blacks. In November, the video of the murder of a Black teenager, Laquan McDonald, by a police officer in October 2014, was made public. The absence of charges against the officer provoked outrage. The scale of the scandal and of the popular protests, which were joined both by antiracist collectives and some community organizations, led to a crisis for the city authorities. In early December, the police superintendent resigned and a federal investigation was initiated into the racist practices of a police department notorious for its violence and corruption. The election in February 2016 for Cook County State's Attorney was the occasion for cooperation between community organizations, local racial justice collectives, and trade unions and other organizations from the progressive galaxy. The outgoing State's Attorney, Anita Alvarez, was defeated by the challenger Kim Foxx, supported by an alliance between unions, community organizations, and antiracist activist groups (BYP 100, Assata's Daughters<sup>14</sup>) around a common slogan: #ByeAnita. In return, the development of this wave of protest legitimated some campaigns run by community organizations. In mid-December 2015, contrary to all expectations, the University of Chicago Hospital announced that it would reopen the trauma center it had closed in the late 1980s, whose reopening STOP had been demanding for several years.

In Los Angeles, forms of convergence have also been observed on the ground in the district attorney campaigns or meetings of the LA Police Commission, with the members of different organizations coming together to disrupt its weekly meetings. For instance, in October 2016, on the initiative of Community Coalition, several community organizations and BLM LA signed a joint press release demanding transparent investigations of police shootings (and in particular, access to the videos); public access to the Police Commission; and

decriminalization of peaceful demonstrations—as many BLM activists had been fined and prosecuted.

This open letter illustrates the conditions of convergence among these varied organizations, and in particular the expression of concrete demands while adopting an activist perspective (denunciation of the criminalization of collective action). Alberto, CoCo's CEO, recognizes very reflexively a form of division of activist labor:

“We have a very close relationship with the LA BLM chapter. They're not willing to do things like work with the police. So I'm very clear with them, it's like when you have confrontations and you need to talk to the police, if you trust us, then let us play that role. Or you don't want to work with elected officials, but we do. CoCo is not going to go pitch a tent at the mayor's house, but they are, and they should.”<sup>15</sup>

While community organizations may give their support to BLM, their campaigns can also benefit from the structure of political opportunities shaped by the movement. The emergence of the BLM movement put the question of police violence and institutional racism on the national media and political agenda. Thus, in California, Proposition 47, backed by a coalition of community organizations, was passed in 2014, reclassifying some felonies as misdemeanors, which led to the freeing of thousands of prisoners sentenced for minor offenses. The jail population fell by 9% in 2015 (Bird et al. 2016). The money saved—almost \$68 million a year—was to be spent on developing prevention and reentry programs. In September 2015, after months of pressure, this coalition also secured the signing of the California Assembly Bill (AB) 953, ensuring the transparency and reporting of arrests and confrontations between police and population. This demand aimed in particular at documenting racial profiling, for which no official figures had previously been available. In this case the creation of a power relation came through the strong mobilization of a coalition of community organizations taking up a BLM-inspired framing, without BLM activists directly joining the campaign. For example, on September 2, 2015, a march was organized in Sacramento to put pressure on the Democratic lawmakers to pass AB 953. Angeleno organizations like LA Voice or the Youth Justice Coalition were present. This time, BLM slogans were chanted—such as “Hands up, don't shoot!” or “Black Lives Matter.” A die-in was also organized in the memory of Michael Brown. As with the trauma center campaign in Chicago, the circulation of the discursive frames of BLM helped to legitimize and give symbolic force to the demonstration. Still more recently, in March 2020, the LA chapter of BLM and Community Coalition, together with a coalition of community organizations, promoted a local ballot measure, Measure R, on the prison system.

Further research is needed to assess whether high-profile cases and upcoming elections are the only issues allowing for cooperation. What this study shows, however, is that

these forms of convergence do not just depend on the issue: they are also made possible by the presence of actors who play a bridging role between the BLM movement and the community organizing ecology.

### *The Bridging Role of Young Organizers*

The generational variable also plays a pivotal role in these convergences. It is in particular through youth organizations or youth organizers that the integration of the slogans and rhetoric of BLM into the world of community organizing takes place. Frame bridging is made possible through the brokerage role of some actors, especially in organizations like STOP in Chicago or CoCo in Los Angeles that are more remote from the institutional pole of the community organizing space and that are closer to social movements.

This is suggested for example by the case of Darlene, in Chicago. As an organizer for FLY, the youth branch of STOP, she played a decisive role in organizing the demonstration on November 24, 2015, in response to the public release of the video of the murder of Laquan McDonald. Although no direct interview was conducted with her, her trajectory can be reconstructed from the account given by Jon, STOP's director:

“Darlene, from FLY, convened a group that did some planning before the release of the video. So, once we knew that the video was coming, you know, she anticipated ... that there was gonna be a huge response, so started to pull together some people to start thinking about how to make the most of that. And so they planned the demonstration that happened that night the video was released, which got a lot of coverage and brought a lot of people together.”<sup>16</sup>

Darlene's role belongs to what other social movement scholars call “bridging roles” or “coalition brokers” (von Bülow 2011; Diani and McAdam 2003), who link previously disconnected spaces, encouraging the involvement of individuals hitherto external to the movements, and favoring the circulation of practices, discourses, and strategic framings (Robnett 1996). A young Black queer woman who grew up on the South Side of Chicago, she facilitated conversations and meetings between FLY and antiracist groups like Assata's Daughters or BYP 100 while importing some of the Black Lives Matter rhetoric about systemic anti-Black racism into STOP's own campaigns—particularly its trauma center campaign.

Similarly, in Los Angeles, these convergences come through the bridging work of the youth organizations. The monthly meetings of the local BLM chapter are held in the premises of the Youth Justice Coalition, which essentially organizes youth of color. In CoCo, it is in the youth organizing branch—SCYEA—that BLM messages seem to be most widespread. High-school students have indeed played an active part in mobilizations for racial justice, modeled on the walk-outs organized all over the



country in March 2018, or the “March for Our Lives” organized in Washington after the Parkland massacre in Florida; SCYEA members spoke from the platform, taking over the slogans of Black Lives Matter. One of the most active participants in SCYEA, Adriana, seems to have integrated the discursive frame of the organization on the movement. The question is all the more sensitive since CoCo is an interracial organization, bringing together mainly African Americans and Latinos, and the focus on Black lives is a subject of debate. A high-school student aged 17, born in Mexico and arrived in California at the age of three with her mother—both still being undocumented—Adriana shows herself particularly sensitive to BLM:

“That’s what I think when people say, ‘Oh well, you guys are focusing too much on Black Lives Matter and not All Lives Matter.’ Well, all lives can’t matter until black lives do, that’s the piece that’s missing right now, you have everybody but them because they have a target on them.”<sup>17</sup>

The training work in SCYEA aims precisely to raise the political consciousness of its members through acquisition of the discursive frame of the organization, which seems to work well in this case. In the same period, in September 2016, CoCo also opened the columns of its monthly newsletter to the BLM movement, inviting the reactions of young members of the organization on their relation to the movement. It is a long way from the forms of disdain or differentiation expressed in particular by older organizers or by members who prefer more conventional modes of action. While we have emphasized the class differences between BLM activists and community organizers, age also proves decisive, with BLM activists (mostly under 35) belonging to the same generation as many community organizers.

Finally, the dialectic of cooperation between community organizing and BLM does not operate between homogeneous organizations: forms of hybridization are observed that blur the boundaries between the different “styles” we have identified. BYP 100 is an example of this. Founded after Zimmerman’s acquittal as an extension of a University of Chicago-based research project, BYP 100 is an antiracist organization exclusively made up of Black activists aged 18 to 35. With chapters all over the country, it brings together several hundred activists. While it espouses an intersectional, “Black queer feminist” analysis seldom seen in community organizations, in some respects the organization also draws on the more institutional repertoire of the nonprofits. On the one hand, its creation is closely linked to the field of social justice philanthropy (Jenkins and Halcli 1999) since it received a \$350,000 grant from the Open Society Foundation, enabling it to employ a full-time staffer who self-identifies as an organizer. On the other hand, in terms of contentious practices, BYP 100 resorts to forms of civil disobedience

and high-impact direct action, but it also adapts to expectations in terms of policy-making, of demands based on quantified data and able to give rise to equally quantifiable results, and it has produced a gray literature of reports and policy platforms. This hybridization is made possible by the sociological composition of BYP 100 and its strong links with academia but also the ambivalence of the nonprofit model: it provides tangible material resources (access to grants, hiring full-time staff) that are embedded within a broader neoliberal political economy that neutralizes or coopts radical protests (Incite! 2007; Johnson 2011).

## Conclusion

The ethnographic surveys in Los Angeles and Chicago show the complexity of the relationships between BLM and community organizing. Their relations of competition are embodied in distinct group styles, repertoires of contention, and organizational forms. These differences can be accounted for by the interplay between the actors’ social properties and trajectories, their political and professional socializations, and the distinct organizational cultures and group styles they are shaped by. BLM activists and professional community organizers do not use the same repertoires of contention or do not hold the same views on the course towards racial justice because they are not endowed with the same resources, have not been socialized into the same organizational cultures, and do not occupy the same positions in the worlds of contentious politics. Although some groups within the Black Lives Matter movement are drawn towards nonprofit organizational forms, divisions and cleavages remain. But competition is not the whole story here. In both cities we also found forms of cooperation, ones that are made possible in particular by younger people playing a bridging role.

When we started comparing our two field studies, we expected to find major differences between Chicago and Los Angeles, due to the demographic differences between the two cities or to the stronger, institutionalized presence of community organizing in Chicago. But these characteristics do not seem to come significantly into play in the way that the relationship between BLM and community organizing unfolds. We conclude that it is important to adopt a sociological approach that takes into account the role of the actors, always socially situated and unequally endowed with various forms of capital, in order to understand the dynamics of cooperation and conflict between movements. While the sociology of social movements, when examining the dynamics of alliances or competition among them, has mainly focused on interorganizational relations at a meso-sociological level, our study underscores the interest of a micro-sociological approach sensitive to the role of the actors, their socialization, and their normative expectations in analysis of the dynamics of coalition.

## Notes

1. <http://patrissecullors.com/bio/>
2. See also the continuity claimed on one of the movement's websites: "The conversations are on the table, largely because many of the folks doing on-the-ground organizing came to this work through their organizing work around other issues." <http://blacklivesmatter.com/11-major-misconceptions-about-the-black-lives-matter-movement/>
3. As the movement itself recognizes, for example, in its 2020 impact report. See <https://blacklivesmatter.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/blm-2020-impact-report.pdf>
4. Since then, the entrance hall of the organization's premises has been decorated with a vast fresco depicting Trayvon Martin.
5. Following Soule and King (2008) we may consider that participation in the same demonstration makes it possible to discern the frontiers of a social movement industry, here concerned with racial justice, to which BLM and community organizing therefore belong.
6. Field notes, Los Angeles, December 11, 2016.
7. Field notes, Los Angeles, November 9, 2016.
8. Interview with Louise, Chicago, February 20, 2016. All our informants' names have been changed for anonymity purposes.
9. Interview with Sara, Chicago, February 23, 2016.
10. Interview with Jack, Los Angeles, September 29, 2015.
11. Interview with Catarina, Chicago, February 21, 2017.
12. Source: 2010 US Census.
13. It is striking that while research has been conducted over the racial and generational makeup of BLM marches and rallies—stressing in particular their racial diversity (Fisher 2019)—no data exists concerning the protestors' class composition (level of education, income, or profession).
14. Named after Assata Shakur, the organization was founded in 2015 by activists from We Charge Genocide; it targets Black girls and young women in Chicago.
15. Interview with Alberto, Los Angeles, October 2, 2015.
16. Interview with Jon, Chicago, February 25, 2016.
17. Interview with Adriana, Los Angeles, October 31, 2016.

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