

# #BlackLivesMatter: Herstory

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## Lecture Notes

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### Introduction: What is #BlackLivesMatter? (3:21 explainer video from WaPo)

When did you first hear the phrase #BlackLivesMatter? *Call on three people.*

What does Alicia Garza, one of the co-creators of the hashtag say #BlackLivesMatter is?

“An ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.”

### Mini-lecture

This week and next week, we’re going to study #BlackLivesMatter, and more generally, online activism hashtags, as cultural artifacts. Digital cultural artifacts, to be specific. You’ve heard me talk about cultural artifacts before, but as a refresher, a cultural artifact is a *thing* that communicates information about both a culture and its creator. It is the embodiment of meaning-making.

How can we connect the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag to Black Feminist Thought? What features of Black Feminist Thought does it reflect?

The hashtag, as mentioned in the Noble reading two weeks ago, is an example of digital intersectionality at work. How so?

So in order for this hashtag to do work online, for it to serve a purpose, it has to have meaning. There is a process by which artifacts, cultural performances, and discourse take on shared meaning constructed within a cultural. That process is called encoding and decoding. And when we give symbols a particular meaning, and our minds use that meaning to make sense of the artifact and what it represents, we find that the artifact (or performance or discourse) has **cultural resonance**.

Here are some examples of analog and digital cultural artifacts that preceded #BlackLivesMatter, but communicate similar messages.

**Slide:** Black Power protest salute at 1968 Olympics. John Carlos and Tommie Smith; Australian Peter Norman gave them the gloves and was shunned upon his return to Australia. Story is linked.

**Slide:** Miami Heat hoodies protest photo on LeBron James' Instagram account, 2012.

**Slide:** How do you know, nearly 50 and 5 years later, respectively, what is being signified in each of these photos? Because there are artifacts and performances in them are **culturally resonant**. They remind us of a shared definition/meaning.

**Slide:** So, if we know #BlackLivesMatter means something, and it means something to most people who are exposed to it, what does it mean? What does it signify? What does #BlackLivesMatter tell us about this point in human history, specifically in American history?

Let's learn to read this hashtag as a cultural artifact. Let's interpret it via Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis. This analytical framework was introduced in the Brock article. There are six dimensions in the technocultural matrix that we have to consider when we want to read anything: an interface, a platform, a hashtag, from a CTDA perspective. They are...

**Slide:** Critical Discourse Analysis components

With a partner, I want you to think about how you will explain #BlackLivesMatter to your nieces and nephews, your children, your grandchildren. I'm going to warm-call on three pairs to share. *Give students 5 minutes to discuss, then report out.*

OK, so we've identified #BlackLivesMatter, the hashtag, as an artifact of digital culture. We've unpacked what that means, and how/why artifacts communicate culture. We've even come up with some ways to explain this to others.

*Group 4's questions in small groups.*

In the reading, Garza talks about some of the critiques of #BlackLivesMatter being co-opted by other people and groups, even disenfranchised groups. Although the hashtag's creation is an example of how Black women create strategies for resistance based on their situated knowledges, and Black Feminist Thought demands that the social justice work of Black feminists be part of collective, intersectional struggle, there's still potential for misuse.

Some of that happens intentionally, as Garza detailed in her article. Some of it happens unintentionally, some unintentionally. We're going to examine both next week as we dig into Beyond the Hashtags.