Black Lives Matter excerpt

The following text is excerpted from an article in The California Sunday Magazine. In it, Jamilah King talks about how three friends turned a simple Facebook post into a global movement.

1. Main Idea

Alicia Garza was on edge. She was with her husband and two organizer friends on a Saturday night in Oakland — July 13, 2013 — They’d been tracking the trial of George Zimmerman, who’d been charged with shooting and killing 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida; the jury had been deliberating for more than 16 hours. Garza and her friends were checking their phones compulsively, as were many others around them, and learned of the decision on Facebook. She’d been expecting a conviction, for manslaughter if not murder, but Zimmerman was acquitted. “It felt like a gut punch, you know?” Garza immediately began texting with friends and scrolling through Facebook. “Relatively quickly, people went back to their lives,” she says. “What I was seeing on social media were a lot of statements about ‘We knew he was never going to be convicted of killing a black child,’ and ‘What did you expect?’”

“I was sad, I was angry, I was rageful,” she says. “I have a brother who’s 25, and he’s 6 feet tall and lives in a majority-white community. It could have been him.” Garza posted what she describes as a “love letter to black folks” on Facebook. She wrote that their murder should always come as a shock. She ended with this: “Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.”

An anti-incarceration activist, Patrisse Cullors had also been watching Facebook for news of the Zimmerman verdict. When she learned of his acquittal, she says, “The first thing I did was literally drop my jaw. And then I felt intense amounts of heat in my chest.” She started crying and, like Garza, posting on Facebook. Cullors was moved by Garza’s post and, on a whim, decided to hashtag her sentiments “#blacklivesmatter.” She began hashtagging the phrase onto the walls of close friends and allies, some of whom also began using it. Before long, she and Garza were on the phone commiserating, and, by the next day, Cullors wrote on Garza’s wall with a proposition: “twin, #blacklivesmatter campaign? can we discuss this? i have ideas. i am thinking we can do a whole social media/all out in the streets organizing effort. let me know.”

Soon they’d looped in Opal Tometi, another organizer they knew, who works as executive director of an immigrant-rights group in New York called Black Alliance for Just Immigration. “Black Lives Matter was created out of a profound sense of black love,” says Tometi, who grew up the daughter of Nigerian immigrants in Phoenix. “We wanted to affirm to our people that we love one another, and that no matter how many times we hear about the extrajudicial killing of a community member, we would mourn, and affirm the value of their life.”

Garza, Cullors, and Tometi began by setting up Tumblr and Twitter accounts and encouraging supporters to share stories of why #blacklivesmatter. They also brought the slogan into their work as organizers.
Evidence:

She also used the hashtag to publicize a report her organization published with UCLA’s Law and Human Rights Project.

August 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, 18-year-old Michael Brown had been shot and killed by Darren Wilson, a police officer.

This was a turning point for #blacklivesmatter. In the following weeks, as the slogan trended on Twitter and Facebook, it became synonymous with the protests taking place across the country, as close as the disparate movement came to a clarion call. “In organizing, we talk a lot about social transformation and how it’s a long-term process,” Garza says. “It may not be something we see in our lifetimes. . . . But you never know when the balance will tip.”

When Garza, who was now working for the National Domestic Workers Alliance, showed up in Ferguson to help train local organizers. Cullors and Tometi soon joined her via a Black Lives Matter freedom ride that Cullors organized with Brooklyn-based activist Darnell L. Moore: 600 black people from more than 18 different cities, traveling via bus and van and car to join the protests in Ferguson.

Cullors and Garza spent the fall going back and forth between California and Missouri. On Black Friday, four days after a grand jury declined to charge Wilson in Brown’s death, protesters shut down the St. Louis Galleria with chants of “Black lives matter.” Kanye West eventually tweeted the phrase, and Hillary Clinton invoked it at a New York City human-rights gala. It popped up in an episode of Law and Order: SVU, and the American Dialect Society voted #blacklivesmatter its word of the year for 2014.


1 Select words and sections are omitted from the excerpt to allow text to be appropriate and suitable for grade 6 students.
Answer the following discussion questions in complete sentences

1. Do you see any similarities between the Black Lives Matter founders (Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi) and Lily Chin? Explain using at least one example from the text.

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2. What sensitive topics have Garza, Cullors, and Tometi helped create discussions around?

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