

### SPORTS

## The Black Lives Matter Movement Is Heading To The Rio Olympics

The trip will highlight the "globalization of police brutality," activists say.

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SILVIA IZQUIERDO/ASSOCIATED PRESS

A man protesting in Rio de Janeiro in April holds a sign featuring the images of people killed during police operations in favelas. The sign reads: "Rio, Olympic champion of killing Indians and black people for 450 years."

As protests continue throughout the country over the police killings of <u>Alton Sterling</u> and <u>Philando Castile</u>, the latest African-American men to die at the hands of police, a coalition of <u>Black Lives Matter</u> activists will take their movement to a new place next week: Rio de Janeiro.

It's the latest effort to expand the Black Lives Matter message across the globe, and it comes at an important time. With less than a month to go before <u>Rio hosts the 2016 Olympic Games</u>, the activists hope they can take advantage of the spectacle to highlight the city's rising levels of police violence and connect with Brazilian activists who are fighting a similar struggle.

"Police brutality is global. And Brazil has its own form of ruthlessness," Daunasia Yancey, the

founder of Black Lives Matter's Boston chapter, told The Huffington Post. "The movement that came before and during and after Ferguson has been really intentional about a global struggle and understanding that our freedoms are all tied to each other."

Yancey, one of the organizers who met with presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton in October, is part of a <u>coalition of activists</u> that plans to meet with organizations fighting police violence in Rio. The group will also include Rev. John L. Selders Jr. and Pamela Selders, who together led <u>Moral Monday protests</u> against police violence in Connecticut, and other activists who have worked with the Black Lives Matter movement.

Their trip to Rio is the work of Elizabeth Martin, the founder of <u>Brazil Police Watch</u>, a Boston-based organization that has sought to draw American attention to police brutality issues in Brazil.

Martin formed the organization after Rio police shot and killed her nephew in 2007. She has since <u>organized petition drives</u> that call on the International Olympic Committee and soccer governing body FIFA to work with the Brazilian government to reduce the number of police killings in the country.

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-Daunasia Yancey, Black Lives Matter

Last week, Sterling and Castile became <u>the 122nd and 123rd African-American men</u> shot and killed by police officers in the U.S. this year, <u>according to data compiled by The Washington</u> <u>Post</u>. Police also shot and killed 258 black men in 2015, the Post found. A similar survey from The Guardian found that African-American men are <u>nine times more likely to die</u> at the hands of police than members of any other demographic group.

But the Black Lives Matter activists who travel to Brazil this month will encounter a comparable and perhaps even more widespread problem in Rio. Brazil is home to some of the world's deadliest police forces, and escalating violence in the years before the Olympics has only worsened the situation.

Police in Rio de Janeiro state have killed more than 2,500 people since the International Olympic Committee chose Rio as the 2016 host in 2009, according to Amnesty International. Police-related shooting deaths increased 40 percent in the state from 2013 to 2014, the year Brazil hosted the FIFA World Cup, according to Amnesty's numbers. They rose yet again in 2015, when police in the state killed 645 people.

Seventy-nine percent of the victims of <u>police killings in Rio state</u> between 2010 and 2014 were black men, and 75 percent were between the ages of 15 and 30, according to Amnesty's figures. <u>More than half of Brazilians claim African heritage</u>, with 7.6 identifying as black and 43.1 as mixed race.

"We're about all black lives," Yancey said. "For no police violence, for no state murders, of anyone under any circumstance."



CHRISTOPHE SIMON/GETTY IMAGES

A young Brazilian boy with the word "peace" written on his forehead protests in Rio's Alemao favela, where police shot and killed a 10-year-old while fighting drug gangs last year. A United Nations group has linked Brazilian police to "an elevated number of summary executions of children" ahead of the Olympics.

## 'They're killing for you.'

Violence in Rio has recently escalated amid government efforts to regain control of many of the city's favelas — the low-income and long-neglected neighborhoods that dot Rio's landscape and are sometimes controlled by drug gangs. The program, launched just before Rio learned it would become the host of the 2016 Olympics, established Pacifying Police Units — or UPPs, their acronym in Portuguese — in neighborhoods like Rocinha, the city's largest favela.

The takeovers often led to violent military and police occupations of many favelas. And though the "pacification" process was initially supposed to include programs that brought basic social services to neighborhoods that had long lacked them, Brazil's ongoing economic crisis and other factors have gutted the social elements of the UPP program, often leaving occupation and violent interactions with police as their most visible legacy.

"The youth don't walk around here anymore because <u>they know they will be harassed [by the police]</u> anywhere they go," said Monique Cruz, a resident of Manguinhos favela, where a UPP was installed in 2013, according to news site RioOnWatch.org. "If there are boys who, by some chance, have a police record, they are already stalked by the police and are always accused of committing crimes, besides being black and young."

Black children have overwhelmingly been the victims of the escalation of violence between police and local gangs. A black Brazilian child is <u>the victim of homicide every 23 minutes</u>, according to figures commonly cited by activists, and the number of <u>children and adolescents</u> <u>murdered in Brazil</u> — the majority of them black — has doubled in the last 20 years, UNICEF reported last summer.

## **11** The notion is that the police are keeping

# people safe. Well, which people? And safe from who?

-Elizabeth Martin, Brazil Police Watch

Those deaths are not all the result of police killings. But <u>police were responsible for 1 in 5</u> <u>homicides</u> in the city of Rio in 2015, according to Human Rights Watch.

In October, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child directly linked Rio's military police to an "<u>elevated number of summary executions of children</u>." The motivation, the UN body alleged, was an effort to "clean the streets" of street children in order to "present a problem-free city to the world" during the Olympics.

Local organizations and activists held protests in Rio last week to remember and draw attention to some of the children who were recently killed. One demonstration dramatically re-enacted <u>the</u> <u>2015 deaths of five black and mixed-race youths</u>, all between the ages of 16 and 25, who were driving home from a party in Rio's Morro da Lagartixa neighborhood when police sprayed their car with up to 30 shots (four police officers were arrested, three of them charged with murder).



Another recalled the shooting of Eduardo de Jesus, a 10-year-old boy killed by police while he sat on his front stoop in the Complexo do Alemão favela in April 2015.



But those demonstrations were overshadowed by a group of Rio police officers who staged their own protest in the city's main airport. The officers, angry that Rio state's crunched budget has left them unpaid for weeks, stood behind a sign that welcomed incoming travelers with the message, "<u>Welcome to hell!</u>" Another noted that 52 police officers had died in shootouts this year.

The message was clear. A month before hundreds of thousands of international tourists would swarm Rio, police officers in one of the world's most violent cities were warning them: "<u>Whoever</u> <u>comes to Rio de Janeiro will not be safe</u>."

The <u>security concerns</u> are real. Olympic athletes have been assaulted. Attacks on public buses have increased. In Rio's North Zone last weekend, angry crowds stormed the streets and stole cars.

But activists, human rights groups and security experts worry that the segment of Rio's population most vulnerable to police crackdowns has been left out of the "security for all" mantra that once defined the city's regeneration efforts.



Activists like Martin and Yancey see similarities in the attitudes that underlie police brutality in Brazil and the United States. In the name of overall public safety, police in both countries have disproportionately targeted a group of people that they, and society as whole, have deemed undesirable and a threat to that security. And those people — primarily black, many of them poor and thus easily written off as gangsters, thugs, "bandidos" — in turn become *less* safe.

"The notion is that the police are keeping people safe," Martin said. "Well, which people? And safe from who?"

Martin wants Rio's Olympic tourists, especially those from a nation in the midst of its own conversations about police killings, to understand that Rio's desire to ensure their security has an ugly cost.

"If the police are cleaning up — if they're killing people — so that you can go to the Olympics, they're killing on your behalf," Martin said. "They're killing for you, so you can be a spectator at the Olympics."



CHRISTOPHE SIMON VIA GETTY IMAGES

Protesters in Rio de Janeiro hold a Brazilian flag littered with holes to mark the number of shots fired at a group of young men killed by police in 2015. Police killed 645 people in Rio de Janeiro state last year, according to human rights groups.

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## 'Everywhere the Olympics goes, state terror follows.'

Facing protests from community organizations and scrutiny from human rights groups, Brazil's federal and state governments have <u>instituted some reforms</u> to reduce the number of police killings and tackle what human rights groups have called a "culture of impunity" for law enforcement officers who use lethal force.

Brazil has increased community policing training, installed cameras on law enforcement vehicles

and reduced the use of rifles. Sao Paulo state, which will host Olympic soccer matches, passed <u>laws prohibiting police from driving injured individuals to the hospital</u> so officers would not interfere with a crime scene or even murder the person in transit to cover up a crime.

Rio state officials say the number of police-related killings has declined over the last decade, though many admit that there is still work to do.

"<u>We need much more training</u> to prepare the police for territories where we still have a lot of difficulty working," Col. Robson Rodrigues, a retired member of the Rio state police, told The New York Times last year. "Policing activities still need some correcting."

But if the number of police killings in Rio and across Brazil are any indication, reform efforts thus far have fallen short.

"This is not a problem that is ignored in Brazil," said Paulo Sotero, the director of the Brazil Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington. "It's just very, very hard to tackle, as the recent and recurring experience in the United States is highlighting."

The Olympics may only make it harder, leaving behind a legacy of violent "pacification" efforts once the three-week party ends and tourists go home.

## I think it will increase impunity, reduce accountability and foster an acceptability of an exceptional level of security."

-Pete Fussey, criminologist at University of Essex

In Rio, 85,000 members of the police and military will be tasked with securing the city during the Olympic Games, and the government has invested heavily in new surveillance and security infrastructure to help.

This could all be useful for protecting tourists and athletes. But it might also have demonstrably negative effects on Rio's poorest residents, who already endure the most scrutiny from law enforcement, especially because that infrastructure tends to remain in place once the Olympics end.

"<u>I come to ask that the Olympics do not leave a legacy of tears and blood</u>. But rights and a dignified life," said Rio resident Ana Paula Oliveira, whose 19-year-old son was killed by police in 2014. Oliveira spoke at an event organized by Amnesty and other human rights organizations to denounce the violence, according to Brazilian news outlet Estadão.

"The middle-class and upper-middle-class people will continue to live behind security enclaves that they can afford," said Kim Schimmel, a Kent State University professor and expert in the security legacies of major sporting events. "The poorer people will be even more at risk."

Yancey shares these worries. She and Boston's Black Lives Matter chapter <u>organized their own</u> <u>Olympic protests in 2015</u>, when Boston launched a bid to host the 2024 Games. The Olympics could only worsen the problems the city's black residents are facing, they argued, particularly their relationship with law enforcement.

"Everywhere the Olympics goes, state terror follows," Yancey told HuffPost.

It is possible, too, that the Olympics could further limit Brazilians' ability to demonstrate against such violence.

Law enforcement officials violently cracked down on protests across Brazil before the 2014

World Cup, including demonstrations over the disappearance of Amarildo de Souza, a Rio man whose death at the hands of police later <u>led to the arrest of 10 officers</u>. But police could have even more power during the Olympics, thanks to new laws passed by Brazil's federal legislature in 2015: an "anti-terrorism" bill that activists believe could be used to criminalize public gatherings, and a "General Law of the Olympics" — essentially required by the IOC — that Amnesty says <u>puts rights of public assembly and expression even further at risk</u>.

Human rights groups' fears about a lasting reduction of basic rights "are pretty well-founded," said Pete Fussey, a criminologist at London's University of Essex who has closely examined the security legacies of that city's 2012 Olympics. "If you look at the history of Olympic security, that's pretty much exactly what happens."

"It's difficult to know what [policies] will remain in place," Fussey said, "but I think it will increase impunity, reduce accountability and foster an acceptability of an exceptional level of security."



CHRISTOPHE SIMON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A boy holds a sign that says "We deserve to live without fear of dying," during a 2015 protest against police violence in Rio. Activists fear that new laws passed to help secure the Olympics could limit public assembly and expression rights in Brazil.

"There isn't much one can say right now that's positive, other than, like in the United States, you have people confronting the issue," Sotero said. "I hope people use the opportunity of the Olympics to highlight the problem."

That is exactly what the group of activists heading to Rio next week plan to do. Their trip will end on July 23, the 24th anniversary of the <u>Candelaria massacre</u> — a mass execution of Rio street children that is one of the worst incidents of police violence in Brazilian history. The Olympics will begin in Rio just 13 days later.

"This is about the globalization of police brutality," Martin said. "There's a job we have as citizens of the world to pay attention to this."

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## CONVERSATIONS

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#### Arthur Pope

It is an argument in bad faith to argue that #blacklivesmatter somehow implies that other lives don't matter. The critics of #blacklivesmatter are feigning their ignorance of the real meaning: Black Lives Matter as much as White Lives.

In truth, critics of #blacklivesmatter have an ulterior motive, which is to impede the progress on social justice and preserve the status quo. They may not even be very aware of it; it subconsciously motivates them like a tribalistic impulse to impede the betterment of life for underprivileged people -reinforced by their buying into the zero-sum fallacy.

Dear critics of #blacklivesmatter: Disabuse yourselves of the tribalistic, fear-based distortions and/or the racism. White people will not lose anything by black people achieving equal security and treatment under the law. In fact, all lives -- including white lives, are made better by a movement for social justice.

Like · Reply · 🖒 33 · Jul 14, 2016 4:53pm



You sure are calling LeBron James a lot of names.

Like · Reply · 🖒 5 · Jul 14, 2016 5:05pm

**Arthur Pope** 

Ben Jeffries -- You're confused.

Like · Reply · 🐴 3 · Jul 14, 2016 5:50pm

#### **Hugh Murris**

if supporting black lives matter means i have to worship at the altar of robbers, rapists and renegades of society, i will pass.

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### **Chris King**

Do they realize Brazil was one of the largest importer of african slaves in the world? There will be no love for them over there, Brazil is a mess.

Like · Reply · 🖒 22 · Jul 14, 2016 6:51pm · Edited

#### **Robert Washington**

Unlike Europeans, Black people tend to like each other.

Like · Reply · 🖒 2 · Jul 14, 2016 8:40pm



Giordi Diodato · HACC - Lancaster Campus

Yeah until the 18th century Like · Reply · Jul 14, 2016 9:03pm

#### Steph Machado

Most Brazilians are black? I am married to one and guess what they are a diverse country.

Like · Reply · 🖞 2 · Jul 14, 2016 9:19pm

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#### Willie Louisiana

Members of BLM don't have the gonads to confront a real police state. If one or two members try, then the rest of us are in for some fine entertainment watching black boys hoppin' down the road.

Like · Reply · 🖞 22 · Jul 14, 2016 4:03pm



But they can spread the hate where it's safe to do so!

Like · Reply · 🖒 6 · Jul 14, 2016 6:34pm

#### Tasha Reyes-Murray

Black boys hoppin down the road....while white men continue to murder them, yet have the nerve to call others violent

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