

# Black Lives Matter in Sonoma County: An Oral History Project

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# Faculty Mentor and Student Researchers

## Faculty Mentor

Dr. Steve Estes, Professor and Chair of History

## Student Researchers

Daisy Cabot, History

Christina Gomez, History and Chicano and Latino Studies

Ashley Jimenez, American Multicultural Studies and Women and Gender Studies

Paulina Lopez, History and Political Science

Madison Tinsley, Anthropology

# Project Overview

This project documented the experiences of participants in the local Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement as well as law enforcement officers in Sonoma County. Because many of the student researchers were active in the BLM movement themselves, they were connected to the network of activists they interviewed and are sympathetic to their goals. However, this project was not a work of advocacy for any particular government policy or social reform. It was a scholarly inquiry into the history of the BLM movement and the evolving relationship between race and policing in Sonoma County.

# Interviewee Demographics

- Interviewees:  
Activists (14)  
Law enforcement officers (2)
- Race / Ethnicity:  
Black (8)  
Latinx (4)  
White (4)
- Gender:  
Women (11)  
Men (5)

# Sample Interview Questions

1. When and where were you born?
2. Where did you go to school?
3. If you didn't grow up in Sonoma County, when did you move here? Why?
4. What was your first interaction with law enforcement?
5. How has your view of law enforcement changed over time?
6. How would you describe race relations in Sonoma Co.?
7. When did you first become aware of the Black Lives Matter movement?
8. Have any police department policies changed due to the BLM? How so?
9. What does "defund the police" mean to you?
10. How does your race/ethnicity affect your activism or law enforcement work?

# Conclusions

Race and ethnicity have historically created tension between Sonoma County law enforcement officials and communities of color. These tensions have escalated in recent years due to local events (the killing of Andy Lopez in Santa Rosa by a Sonoma County sheriff's deputy in 2013) and national ones (the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers in 2020). Activists in the local Black Lives Matter movement have worked with local nonprofits and the Sonoma County Commission on Human Rights to advocate for criminal justice reform. While there have been some reforms in regards to race and policing, Sonoma County activists believe that the sheriff's department and local police departments need more civilian oversight, transparency, and policy changes to begin to address the history of racial injustice and policing.