Cashing in on racialist politics: Black Lives Matter foundation raised $90 million in 2020

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The Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation (BLMGNF) last week released for the first time a report outlining its financial position. The so-called "2020 Impact Report" states that the organization collected over $90 million last year.

The BLMGNF was founded in 2013 by Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi in the wake of the killing of Trayvon Martin. It has since promoted and capitalized on the slogan "Black Lives Matter," raising substantial sums of money, including from large corporate donors and private foundations like the Ford Foundation.

According to the report, BLMGNF had approximately $8.4 million in expenses in 2020, which was distributed in the form of "staffing, operating and administrative expenses, civic engagement, programs and field expenses, rapid response, and crisis intervention." This includes about $2 million spent on a "get out the vote" campaign to support the Democratic Party in the 2020 elections. There is no breakdown on how the other $6.4 million was spent.

The organization also reported that it has committed $21.7 million in funding to its official and unofficial chapters, in addition to 30 local organizations that received six-figure grants. These funds, it states, "will go toward the sustenance of Black communities and Black movement-building." BLMGNF ended 2020 with more than $60 million in its coffers.

The BLMGNF has benefited from opposition to police violence which erupted in mass protests across the US and internationally following the police murder of George Floyd last summer. On June 2, seven days into the wave of protests, BLMGNF's website drew 1.9 million visitors, with a total of 24 million visits in the second half of 2020.

BLMGNF's report does not include any detail about who donated to the organization last year, and its leaders declined to name prominent donors. However, much of BLM's funding in 2020 can be linked to the swelling of corporate support for racialist movements, when last year's multi-ethnic and multi-racial protests shook the ruling class. Multiple corporations pledged substantial sums of money, usually over a period of years, to organizations ostensibly fighting for racial equality.

The BLMGNF is part of a broader group of organizations operating under the umbrella of the "Movement for Black Lives." The latter includes, in addition to BLMGNF, the National Conference of Black Lawyers and the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights. Cullors is also a board member of the Ella Baker Center, which was founded by Democratic Party member and former Obama advisor Van Jones.

Technology companies were some of the largest contributors to the Black Lives Matter movement. Google pledged $12 million to various groups, while Facebook and Amazon each donated $10 million. Apple pledged $100 million for a Racial Equity and Justice Initiative that will "challenge the systemic barriers to opportunity and dignity that exist for communities of color, and particularly for the black community."

Walmart announced $100 million over five years will be dedicated to creating a new center for racial equality, and Target donated $10 million to a similar cause.

Before 2020, the Ford Foundation pledged $100 million over six years to several organizations associated with the "Movement for Black Lives."

The swelling financial basis for BLMGNF has led to infighting over access to the resources. Multiple local branches have accused its leadership of lack of financial transparency and accountability. Ten chapters,

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dubbed #BLM10, claimed that local groups have received little to no financial assistance from their parent organization. Records BLM shared with the Associated Press say that local chapters received multiple rounds of funding ranging between $800 and $69,000 since 2016.

However, #BLM10 complained that the grants are not proportionate to how much the organization has raised over the years. Additionally, they questioned the decision to remain silent about prominent donors. In its early years, BLM disclosed receiving donations from wealthy celebrities such as Beyoncé, Jay-Z and Prince.

The BLMGNF foundation restructured its chapters into a separate entity called BLM Grassroots last summer. The chapters are eligible for $500,000 grants if they sign on to a multi-year agreement, including a series of demands from leadership. Only one BLM group in Denver met the demands and received funding in December.

In response to the allegations, BLMGNF co-founder Cullors, who now plays the leading role in the organization, claimed that there were misunderstandings about the organization's finances and that it was often "scraping for money" in previous years.

The Black Lives Matter organizations have been promoted by a section of the American ruling class as part of an effort to promote racial divisions and obscure common class interests of all workers, including in the fight against police violence. The agenda of these organizations has nothing to do with the grievances of workers and youth of any race or ethnicity. Rather, they speak for privileged sections of the middle class seeking to cash in on the promotion of racial politics to advance their own positions within the state and corporate America.

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