Contemporary Black Civil Rights Activism Strategies in East Tennessee: Gaining Economic and Political Power in the Black Community

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all the activists – past, present, and future.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the contemporary Black civil rights movement in East Tennessee to gain a better understanding of the strategies being employed to mobilize publics. Though an important aspect of the public relations field, in public relations academia there is a lack of research centering on activism. Little has been explored outside of organizational settings, especially since the rise of technology and increased interconnectedness of the world. To learn more about the movement in East Tennessee, the researcher interviewed eight leaders of the contemporary Black civil rights movement across the East Tennessee region. The researcher asked a list of five open-ended questions with the potential for follow-ups with prompts. Questions centered on topics such as goals and strategies, and the researcher followed the Attride-Stirling data analysis model for thematic analysis.

Throughout the analysis, several themes emerged. Basic themes included educating non-Black people on racial disparities and oppression, reforming the criminal justice system, developing unity among the Black leaders, and creating opportunity for Black people. The organizing themes that emerged included progressing power structures and creating allies and developing the Black community. The overarching theme of the movement is to gain economic and political power in the Black community. These findings indicate that in East Tennessee, while activists often rely on political and social events to spur the movement forward, creating a network of activists could help them more successfully gain economic and political power. The most important finding of this study is that more unity is needed in the Black contemporary civil rights movement for the movement to see the level of success that is desired.

Keywords: Contemporary Black civil rights activism, strategies, community, Black, racism, social movement theory, political process theory, resource mobilization theory.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION 1
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW 3
History of American Civil Rights Movements 3
Strategies 3
Resolution 5
Contemporary Black Civil Rights Movements 6
Goals 7
Strategies 9
Unforeseen Events 10
Donald Trump Presidency 10
COVID-19 Pandemic 11
2020 Police Killings 12
Public Relations and Activism 14
The Rise of Social Media 15
Theories 16
Social Movement Theory 17
Political Process Theory 17
Resource Mobilization Theory 18
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY 19
Research Question 19
Participants 19
Measures 20
Analysis 20
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION 23
Basic Themes 24
Educating Non-Black People on Racial Disparities and Oppression 26
Reforming the Criminal Justice System 33
Creating Opportunity for Black People 36
Developing Unity Among the Black Leaders 40
Organizing Themes 48
Progressing Power Structures and Creating Allies 48
Developing the Black Community 54
Global Theme 58
Gaining Economic and Political Power in the Black Community 58
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION 67
Implications 68
Limitations and Future Research 68
LIST OF REFERENCES 70
APPENDICES 79
VITA 117

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The United States of America is in the middle of one of the biggest civil rights campaigns in history, fighting for justice and equality for Black people with the contemporary Black civil rights movement centering around the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement. After the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, many communities across the country have cried out for criminal justice reform (Gibson et al., 2020). People are chanting for defunding of the police, justice for police brutality victims and their families, and systemic reform that alters the way Black people and other racial minorities can be treated in the country (Holmes IV, 2020).

Much of today's activism is centered on the topic of police brutality and the ways in which Black people are systemically discriminated against and disadvantaged (Holmes IV, 2020). Systemic racism is the theory of race stating that there are structures, systems, and policies set in place in the United States to maintain and reinforce oppression of groups and individuals based on race (Feagin & Elias, 2012). For activism to effectively create systemic change, both people and political parties must communicate and create dialogue with one another (Braddick, 2015).

Given the vast revolutionization of activism due to the connectivity of the digital age, more research must be done on how activist groups are utilizing these platforms and which methods of communication and engagement are most effectively mobilizing publics (Toledano, 2016). Political movements are more powerful and possible now because "citizens are able to more easily connect to one another, to send and receive original content, and to coordinate

action," (Joyce, 2010, p. 2). Though social media has vastly changed the ease of communication between organizations and their key publics, it can be questioned as to whether social media communication alters the communication or simply makes it more accessible (Hon, 2015). It is incredibly important to understand how individual activists and groups perceive their publics because this understanding is the foundation of their strategic efforts (Ciszek, 2017).

In East Tennessee, the contemporary Black civil rights movement is growing, with BLM being the predominant group leading the cause. However, given the deep conservativism of the state, the movement still receives considerable backlash from the community and from government officials. Tennessee remains one of nine states that takes away voting rights from felons, which disproportionately affects the Black community and leads to voter suppression (Leach, 2020). Current research on this region of the United States is limited. This research is intended to add to current literature on the contemporary Black civil rights movement and the strategies of activists to mobilize publics specifically as it exists in East Tennessee.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of American Civil Rights Movements

Throughout the course of American history, there have been many rises and falls of civil rights movements. Each time the movement has re-awoken, there have been new goals, strategies, and tactics employed by its leaders, causing a shift in the future of the movement (Shaw, 2020). Perhaps the most notable movement to date took place in the 1950s and 1960s as Black Americans pushed for equal rights. The movement started making strides as legendary civil rights activists such as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, John Lewis, Bayard Rustin, Roy Wilkins, and more entered the field (Witter, 2019). The central goal of this movement was always to end segregation in the United States of America (Roy, n.d.).

Strategies

The Black civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s was incredibly strategic and organized around shared principles (Simkins, 2014). Each group seemed to follow closely behind the philosophies of one of two main leaders, either Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcolm X. Martin Luther King Jr., perhaps the most well-known civil rights activist of all time, had one key strategy - nonviolence (Jones, 2013). MLK Jr. centered his entire work in the movement around nonviolent direct action with an emphasis on love. He believed that through love, integrity, and intention that the movement could create desegregation, which could lead to integration and unity. His strategies included conducting marches and boycotts and giving empowering speeches (Jones, 2013). In 1955, these strategies became even more prevalent when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus for a White man, and thus began the Montgomery bus boycott (Brunner

& Haney, 2021). Since then, these have remained strategies for mobilizing people and creating change for the Black community.

Malcolm X, another key figure in the movement, had a different approach that often followed the rule "by any means necessary" (Schmitt, 2018, p. 18). He believed his purpose was to call out American hypocrisy, and his strategies included anything that could bring truth to justice. He often spoke about the cultural oppression and dehumanization that occur in the American society with law built on racialized principles and economy built on slave labor capitalism (Schmitt, 2018).

Another strategy of the movement was to make the damage of White supremacy blatantly visible for White Americans to see to create a sense of political mourning (Pool, 2015). In 1955, Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old boy, was kidnapped, brutally murdered and thrown into the Tallahatchie River for allegedly whistling at a White woman (Brunner & Haney, n.d.). After his murder, rather than having a closed casket and a small ceremony for his dismembered and waterlogged body, his mother decided she wanted an open casket and a funeral that was open to the public so that anyone could come and see the brutal violence that had been done to her son. This display of his beaten body and the truth of his story created great political mourning (Pool, 2015). This is a strategy that worked effectively and continues to be employed. Leaders of the movement in the mid-1900s began to realize that peaceful protests and testimonies were necessary in shifting public opinion and mobilizing publics into action.

Within the framework of the two dominant leadership styles, another strategy was the establishment of different organizations that spearheaded different aspects of the movement, working toward the universal goal of ending segregation (Lawson, 1991). These organizations strategically mobilized and utilized their resources rather than acting as reactionary groups that

emerged randomly or carelessly after acts of discrimination occurred (Lawson, 1991). While new ideas, organizations and individuals emerged in this movement, the new strategies, groups, and tactics were continually created out of established organizations. Meaning, there was a great deal of collaboration with new ways and revitalization of old ways rather than an uprooting of the work of those who came earlier in the movement (Lawson, 1991). In this stage of the movement, women were often tasked with supporting and creating networks of resources while men were often tasked with drafting statements and speaking publicly about the movement. While there was a heavy focus on community outreach and engagement, building the Black community network was just as crucial to their work.

Resolution

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled on the groundbreaking *Brown v. Board of Education* case, stating that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional and that all public schools should be desegregated (Brunner & Haney, 2021). This ruling overturned the 1896 "separate but equal" Supreme Court ruling. The Montgomery bus boycott lasted for over a year and eventually ended with the desegregation of buses on December 21, 1956 (Brunner & Haney, 2021). In 1957, desegregation began, and in Little Rock, Arkansas, troops were brought in to ensure the new laws were upheld after nine Black students were blocked from entering their school (Brunner & Haney, 2021).

Throughout the rest of the 1950s and 1960s there were many wins and losses for the civil rights movement. There continued to be attacks on Black lives, and people continued to push for change and equality with the movement (Lawson, 1991). In 1964, the same year MLK Jr. gave his famous, "I Have a Dream Speech", the Civil Rights Act was finally signed, making discrimination illegal in the United States, and in 1965, the Voting Rights Act passed, outlawing

voter disenfranchisement (National Park Service, n.d.). The movement slowed drastically following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in a hotel in Memphis, Tennessee (Brunner & Haney, 2021). While there have been a few smaller uprisings in the movement in the 2000s, there had been few new stories that sparked the whole nation into action until May 25, 2020, when George Floyd was murdered by a police officer putting his knee into Floyd's neck while he begged for life on the streets of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Contemporary Black Civil Rights Movements

The term "contemporary Black civil rights movement" has been chosen to provide an overarching phrase for all current segments of the Black liberation movement. Within this movement there is the Movement for Black Lives, New Black Panther movement, BLM movement, and more (Dray, 2020). The Movement for Black Lives centers around the work of allies, meaning it involves White people who are joining alongside the Black-led BLM movement (Burgin, 2018). The New Black Panther Party often follows behind the Malcolm X vanguard of leadership with a greater emphasis on Black nationalism and more radical practices and ideologies (Mulloy, 2010). For the sake of this research, BLM will be focused on, given its dominance regionally in East Tennessee.

BLM is the most dominant contemporary Black civil rights activism group in the world today. While the 2020 movement sparked after the killing of George Floyd, the movement has been on the rise for almost a decade (White, 2016). BLM was founded in 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted for the murder of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). In 2013, this organization became central to the new civil rights movement. Following Trayvon Martin's death, BLM began organizing protests, spreading awareness about systemic racism and injustice, and pushing toward police reform (Williamson, Trump, &

Einstein, 2018). BLM operates as an inclusion organization with values emphasizing the creation of space for marginalized people (Desai, 2020).

While comparable in objective, the differences between the BLM movement and the 1960s civil rights movement often seem as prevalent as the similarities. Frequently, BLM finds itself at odds with leaders who fall within the more established, historical civil rights movement, and this new movement has been described as, "not your grandfather's civil-rights movement," (Cobb, 2016, para. 3). The differences in these movements lies in the strategies and tactics, rather than the goals (Reynolds, 2015). Some trained under Martin Luther King Jr. feel as though this new movement is going against everything they have built and demonstrated (Reynolds, 2015). Musgrove (2019), noted in his article on Black movements, "Like generations before them, Black Lives Matter activists have examined the rich history of the black freedom struggle, taken what they needed, and fashioned a new politics for a new time," (p. 656).

Goals

Rather than having outspoken national leaders, BLM operates with horizontal leadership (Barrón-López, 2020). This means that rather than a pyramid of individuals who answer to leadership within the movement, individual leaders do not have to answer to others. Due to this horizontal leadership model, the movement has often been criticized for lacking direction and holding conflicting values and goals (Barrón-López, 2020). It can also be difficult to determine what BLM actually stands for, since some activists appear to be peaceful and uniting and others appear to invoke violence and division (Reynolds, 2015). However, those who are involved in the movement backup their decision to remain without one leader, stating, "it makes it harder for those who are against us to do what they did in the '60s, which is target one leader," (Barrón-López, 2020, para. 10). In the 1960s, after MLK Jr.'s assassination, the movement slowed

drastically without his leadership (Joseph, 2018). The BLM movement has attempted to shield the movement from this by keeping key players from being in the spotlight or in charge of the movement (Barrón-López, 2020).

Within the BLM movement, there is no specific, measurable objective beyond advocating for Black lives (Chernega, 2016). The overarching goal of the BLM movement, as stated on their official website is, "to eradicate White supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes," (Black Lives Matter, n.d., para. 1). In an interview with PR Week, Shanelle Matthews, lead communications strategist for BLM, laid out the organization's short- and long-term goals more in-depth (Bhambhani, 2016). Short-term goals center around engaging in powerful conversations about race, publicly and privately. Long-term goals focus on shifting the culture around race and the changing attitudes and behaviors of people toward one another (Bhambhani, 2016).

Since BLM has horizontal leadership rather than vertical leadership, these goals published by the national organization do not encompass the goals of all those who claim BLM as their platform for change (Bhambhani, 2016). The movement is more of an idea than a structured movement, with many local chapters setting their own goals based on regional needs. The emphasis is on racial identity and acceptance as opposed to specific policy initiatives from the national organization (Chernega, 2016).

Though there is no one goal, most goals fall under the theme of the national organization. Many BLM goals include police reform, creating dialogue for people to share their stories and personal experiences with oppression and discrimination, offering community, and building toward greater healing and reconciliation in the world (Desai, 2020).

Strategies

Lead BLM communications strategist Matthews stated that the BLM strategy is to organize and mobilize, spread awareness to the issues of systemic violence and oppression of Black people and communities, push for more conversation, and implement policies that benefit the lives of Black people (Bhambhani, 2016). However, she also noted that there is a lot of variation in strategy across the country. Each city is different and working toward their own unique goals, and BLM embraces the divergence in strategy toward the shared goal (Bhambhani, 2016). Matthews said, “We’re all anchored in what we believe is the right thing to do. Some of us choose reform while others want abolition. They’re fundamentally different concepts with divergent strategies for winning,” (Bhambhani, 2016, para. 28).

One BLM strategy is creating unity and connectedness. The goal of BLM is broken down into four main ideas: expansion, affirmation of lives, elimination of systemic targeting, and affirmation of humanity (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). The first two strategies are defined more in-depth, while the latter two are left open for more interpretation. BLM works toward expansion by bringing new people into their mission and creating space for inclusion. They work toward affirmation of lives by including other marginalized people into their mission, such as those LGBTQ+, disabled, women, or those with records (Black Lives Matter, n.d.).

Another strategy BLM uses is strategically planning event locations. According to Williamson, Trump, and Einstein (2018), BLM protests often center around cities with higher rates of racial disparities, particularly in those where Black people are disproportionately murdered. This strategy can be explained by social movement theory, which helps explain the correlation between movements and circumstances (Chernega, 2016). While strategy is a key facet of any movement and societal change, not much research has been conducted into the

strategies of the BLM movement. Much information on BLM centers around the tactics being utilized rather than the strategies behind them.

Unforeseen Events

There were many societal events that lined up in 2020 that created the necessary conditions for activism and mobilization of publics (Rosenblatt, 2020). While some of these events have been prevalent in society before, the overlapping of these events created the so-called "perfect storm" for activism and collective action to occur.

The Donald Trump Presidency

In 2008, Americans elected their first Black president, Barack Obama ("The Presidents Timeline," n.d.). This was seen as a big win for the African American community across the United States (Koeske, 2017). However, that glimpse of progress quickly diminished in 2016 when Donald Trump was elected as the 45th president of the United States. Racial tensions heightened during the Donald Trump presidency as he continued to make racist remarks and incite violence from White nationalist groups throughout his presidency (Michaels, 2020). Likewise, his handling of several race related issues sparked feelings of injustice across the country (Michaels, 2020).

After a 17-year-old White militia group member shot three people and killed two during a BLM protest in Wisconsin, Donald Trump defended his actions, stating he was within his rights (Fritze, Johnson, & Jackson, 2020). During a peaceful protest in 2020, Donald Trump had police and National Guard teargas the crowd of protesters in order to take a photo posing with a Bible in front of St. John's Church in Washington D.C. (Gjelten, 2020).

Throughout his campaign and presidency, Donald Trump became an avid user of the Twitter platform. He used this as his main strategy for reaching his publics and achieving his

goals (Bennett, 2020). In a New York Times article, Shear, Haberman, Confessore, Yourish, Buchanan and Collins (2019), analyzed the content of the over 11,000 tweets Donald Trump had made since his inauguration. Their findings were startling. Almost 6,000 of those tweets were a direct attack against something or someone, including but not limited to, Democrats, investigations, news organizations, minority groups, immigrants, former presidential administrations, and ally nations. Almost 5,000 of his tweets praised something or someone, such as himself, various conspiracy theories, conservative media, his followers, and dictators (Shear et al., 2019).

Donald Trump was a president who defied social norms and made racism and hatred socially acceptable (Ellis, 2020). Not only did he engage in hate speech and unethical behaviors, but he actually incited violence (Cineas, 2021). According to an FBI hate crime report, throughout Trump's presidency, the number of hate crimes increased almost 20 percent, and hate-motivated murders increased more than they have in almost 30 years (Villarreal, 2020). The majority of these hate crimes were racially motivated, creating an even more unsafe environment for Black Americans.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic slowed down society. People started spending more time on social media and became more virtually connected to one another and the world (Defran, 2020). This provided an opportunity for people to become more aware of what was happening in the world around them and engage with others about it online. The COVID-19 pandemic united people in struggle together (Grant et al., 2021). It was likely easier for movement leaders to create collective action because collective identity was already occurring. People were experiencing a connectedness in the struggle against the pandemic. Therefore, the movement did

not have to create this collective identity in order to mobilize (Grant et al., 2021). It made it easier for the movement to gain traction because they merely had to spur action rather than identity.

The pandemic exposed discriminatory structures in more ways than one. Throughout the pandemic, many studies also emerged demonstrating the drastic differences in medical care provided for Black people (Desai, 2020). This is highlighted in the disparate deaths of Black people from the virus (Desai, 2020). While this was not one of the greatest factors that contributed to the rise in the contemporary Black civil rights movement in 2020, it was certainly an aspect of oppression that could not be ignored.

2020 Police Killings

While the movement formed in different ways across the country depending on regional racial climates, goals, and strategies, the 2020 movement *sparked* out of the myriad police killings of unarmed Black people (Belle, 2020). The United States has a violent history of police targeting Black people. In 2020, there were only 18 days in which someone was not murdered by police (Mapping Police Violence, 2021). Though Black people make up only 13 percent of the U.S. population, 28 percent of the 1,127 people killed in the U.S. last year were Black. In 2020, some of these untimely deaths led to a public outcry in the United States and many protests, events, and hard conversations across the country.

On February 23, 2020, 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery was murdered while out on a run near his home in Georgia (Fausset, 2021). Former police officer and investigator for the local district attorney's office, Gregory McMichael and his son Travis McMichael followed Arbery in a pickup truck, armed with a shotgun (Fausset, 2021). Travis got out of the car, saying he wanted to talk to Arbery and was allegedly attacked by Arbery. Travis then shot and killed Arbery,

which was recorded on a cell phone by another neighbor who went with the McMichaels in his vehicle behind them. It then took several months for the three men who pursued and killed Arbery to be arrested (Fausset, 2021).

On March 13, 2020, 26-year-old Breonna Taylor was murdered in her apartment by Louisville police officers, searching for drugs tied to her ex-boyfriend (Oppel, Taylor, & Bogel-Burroughs, 2021). None of the officers were wearing their required body cameras, there were 32 shots fired into her apartment, and it took half an hour after the raid began for EMTs to arrive (Browne, Singhvi, Reneau, & Jordan, 2020). No drugs were found at her apartment.

On May 25, 2020, 46-year-old George Floyd was murdered on the street in Minneapolis, Minnesota, after laying on the ground for eight minutes and 46 seconds, begging to breathe with an officer's knee in his neck while three other officers stood and watched (Hill et al., 2020). Bystanders stood recording the incident, begging for Floyd's life along with him, but the officer did not relent.

While some police killings garnered more media attention than others, a total of 233 Black people were killed by police in 2020 (Mapping Police Violence, 2021). The issue of police violence against Black people is not new. Each year, Mapping Police Violence comes out with new statistics on the police killings that have occurred in that calendar year across the U.S. according to statistics found on their website, in 2019, 274 Black people were killed by police. In 2018, 260 Black people were killed by police. In 2017, 276 Black people were killed by police. In 2016, 279 Black people were killed by police. In 2015, 305 Black people were killed by police. This means that over the past five years, 1,627 Black people have been killed by police (Mapping Police Violence, 2021). Between 2013 and 2020, 98.3 percent of police killings did

not result in the officer being charged with a crime (Mapping Police Violence, 2021). This is one of the main areas in which the BLM movement is trying to fight for reform.

Public Relations and Activism

Much of the public relations and activism scholarship that exists today takes the point of view of the organization and practitioner rather than that of the activist group (Ciszek, 2015; Toledano, 2016), and little scholarship in public relations reflects upon activism's relationship to social change (Demetrious, 2013). In this sense, activists and public relations practitioners are seen as being at odds with one another rather than working together (L'Etang, 2014). However, activist groups have been utilizing public relations since before the invention of corporate public relations as a field (Hon, 2015). The inability of public relations scholars to view the work of activists as that of a public relations practitioner for a movement is a true shortcoming of the field. This lack of research and scholarship into activist public relations causes a prevalent bias in the field.

While activists have been utilizing public relations for over a century, much has happened in the last 70 years between the 1950s civil rights movement and the current civil rights movement of today. The popularization of the internet, smart phone, social media, and more has created shifts in the ways people communicate and connect (Ryan, Allen, Gray, & McInerney, 2017). By default, this has altered the way politicians, activists, and corporations interact with people as well. Activist organizations are increasingly using public relations to develop strategies for their campaigns to engage and mobilize more publics (Ciszek, 2017). More research is being done into how activist and practitioners' relationships may differ from the established viewpoint (L'Etang, 2014), and scholars are requesting for more research to be

conducted on activism and the utilization of public relations strategies and tactics (Toledano, 2016).

The Rise of Social Media

The invention of social media has made the world incredibly interconnected (Ryan, Allen, Gray, & McInerney, 2017). While this increased interconnectivity is often seen as a positive for individuals, it is also being utilized by large corporations to sell ideas and products (Culnan, McHugh, & Zubillaga, 2010), by politicians to spread their message and increase their base (Bennett, 2020), and by activists to spread movements (Murthy, 2018). People from all across the world can hear about the police killings, discrimination, personal testimonies, etc. through the use of social media.

Social media has shifted the paradigm of communication and connectedness (Yang & Berger, 2017). The use of social media in campaigns has allowed for new and creative ways to reach more under-represented audiences (Osili, 2019). Many social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are among the top ten most frequently visited websites in the United States (Auter & Fine, 2018). Due to the vast popularity and efficiency of social media, organizations now use these platforms as a tool in their public relations plans (Pressgrove & Pardun, 2016). This new media can be used to "communicate key messages, engage stakeholders, solicit contributions, provide space for marginalized voices, share information, bolster accountability, and build their volunteer base," (Pressgrove & Pardun, 2016, p. 147). It has become essential to organizations in creating and maintaining communication and engagement with individual stakeholders (Ting, Ming, de Run, & Choo, 2015).

Social media presence is incredibly important for nonprofit organizations because frequent information dissemination on these platforms increases public awareness of social

causes, regardless of whether or not people are actively engaging the material (Mano, 2014). One study found that the more engaged organizations are on social media, the better their reputation (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015). Their findings suggest that if organizations focus on social media activities, they are dealing directly with their un-reached target audience and, therefore, have the opportunity to convert people's opinions. Social media can even help recruit volunteers who can serve as secondary fundraisers, promotors, program leaders, and more (Hovey, 2010). Social media posting promotes dialogue and knowledge sharing among people from different cultures, backgrounds, and geographic locations who without this media would be unable to connect (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). It allows for faster, deeper, frequent, and more convenient communication with more people involved in the conversation (Sashi, 2012).

According to Ji, Chen and Stacks (2017), the use of social media has completely changed the way organizations communicate with stakeholders and vice versa. Therefore, it is important to understand the new ways in which organizations promote engagement online. This research is important because the world of social media remains very unexplored and full of unknowns for organizations. In Bashir and Aldaihani's (2017) article, they point out that while social media usage by organizations for communication with publics is becoming more prevalent, it is more often used experimentally than strategically. The goals and objectives are often not clearly set or measured, making the strategies and tactics used potentially time-consuming and unbeneficial. This research will center on the contemporary Black civil rights movement and the strategies activists and their organizations are using to mobilize publics.

Theories

There are several social and political theories that likely contribute to the ways in which activist groups interact with publics to mobilize them. Three potential theories at play during the

strategic planning of movements are *resource mobilization theory, social movement theory, and political process theory*. All of these theories involve the ways in which resources and opportunities are utilized to work toward social and political change.

Social Movement Theory

Social movement theory, often thought of as the parent of resource mobilization theory, focuses on *why* collective identity and action occur (Carroll & Hackett, 2016). Movements are created in reaction to something (Chernega, 2016). They emerge around an increase in cultural awareness on a social issue that, in turn, increases understanding. This increased awareness and empathy that comes from people resonating with a message and moment helps move others who would not typically be involved toward collective action (Chernega, 2016). Within social movements, there are always counter-movements created by those who oppose the movement (Dennis, 2016). In order for the movement to maintain its success, leaders must strategically communicate with publics to maintain and grow their base of supporters (Dennis, 2016).

Political Process Theory

Political process theory includes how movements continue to grow, decline, and move in society based on the rise and fall of different political opportunities (Bracey II, 2015). Previous research on political process theory and the BLM movement has indicated that movements are likely to be more prevalent in cities where political leaders recognize the presence of police brutality (Williamson, Trump, & Einstein, 2018). Previous research has demonstrated that activism strategies differ based on the political climate of the surrounding area (Riverstone-Newell, 2012). This will likely be the case with the strategies utilized by those in the contemporary Black civil rights movement given the great discrepancies in how people view the movement across the political spectrum. Pew Research Center has published a study illustrating

the vast differences between the views Republicans and Democrats have on the BLM movement (Parker, Horowitz, & Anderson, 2020). Republicans often characterize the movement as being radical, liberal, and mob-centric with the goal of disrupting the lives of Whites (Barrón-López & Thompson, 2020).

Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource mobilization theory involves a cross between sociological theory and public relations theory (Munshi-Kurian, Munshi, & Kurian, 2019). This theory looks closely at how movements form and how leaders utilize resources such as current events, knowledge, money, and equipment to sustain and encourage the movement's goals (Munshi-Kurian, Munshi, & Kurian, 2019). Resource mobilization has had an incredible impact on activist movements of the past, given that activist groups generally hold less political and social power than the structures they are opposing (Hon, 2015). Due to the increased interconnectivity that social media affords, activists with limited resources have been able to overcome some of these resource disadvantages more readily than in the past (Hon, 2015). However, it is likely that resource mobilization is now reflected in different ways, such as in the ability of activists to recruit opinion leaders and have shareable content. More research into advocacy in the digital age is needed to see how these traditional theories interact with movements in the digital world (Hon, 2015).

Given the diversity of ideas, strategies, and tactics that likely exist among different BLM chapters across the country, it is likely movement leaders are utilizing the basis of some of these theories to create and mobilize a base of supporters for their cause. Having a better understanding of what strategies leaders are using will help better understand which theories are being implemented and whether or not they are successful.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Question

1. How are leaders of the contemporary Black civil rights movement in East Tennessee employing strategies to mobilize publics?

Participants

The researcher chose to conduct a qualitative research study using interviews to begin answering this question. In order to be eligible for participation in this study, there were two requirements individuals had to meet. First, individuals had to be 18-years-old or older when they agreed to participate in the study. Second, individuals had to be considered a "leader" of the contemporary Black civil rights movement.

The researcher interviewed leaders of the movement to a point of repetition across the region of East Tennessee to learn more about the strategies they are utilizing to engage publics with their cause. The researcher found participants for interviews in three ways. First, the researcher utilized personal contacts across the East Tennessee region to get connected with other key leaders of the movement in East Tennessee via email or phone. The researcher reached out to professors, colleagues, acquaintances, and friends to get contacts of others considered "leaders" of the movement. Second, the researcher sent Facebook messages to local Black civil rights leaders, groups, and organizations asking for participation in the study. Lastly, the researcher used snowball sampling by asking participants at the conclusion of their interviews if they had anyone else they would recommend for participation in the study.

Measures

The researcher followed a five-question interview guide with a list of open-ended questions and prompts throughout the study. This interview guide is listed in Appendix D. The questions were on topics such as day-to-day tasks, long-term goals, and personal perceptions of the movement. Interviews were conducted via Zoom video chats. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and there were no follow-up interviews. The sessions were recorded for reference during the data analysis process and were deleted within 48 hours of recording, after the interview was converted into a transcription by the interviewer. The recordings were not made public. No tangible incentives were given for interviews. However, participants were informed that this research is intended to lead to a better understanding of strategies used to mobilize publics, which may, in turn, help the leaders of the contemporary Black civil rights movement. This was offered as a social incentive for participation in the study. Participants were thoroughly informed of the purpose of this research, and they were each asked to read a consent form and verbally consent prior to the start of their interview. This consent form, listed in Appendix B, outlined key information about the study and requested permission for recording and the publication of unidentifiable interview responses. At the onset of each interview, participants were told they could end the interview at any time without penalization and that their partial results would not be used in the study.

Analysis

The researcher followed Attride-Stirling's (2001) model for thematically analyzing qualitative data. Throughout the data analyzing process, the researcher organized themes into three separate categories. Those categories are as follows: basic, organizing, and global. The thematic network is demonstrated in Figure 1 on the following page.

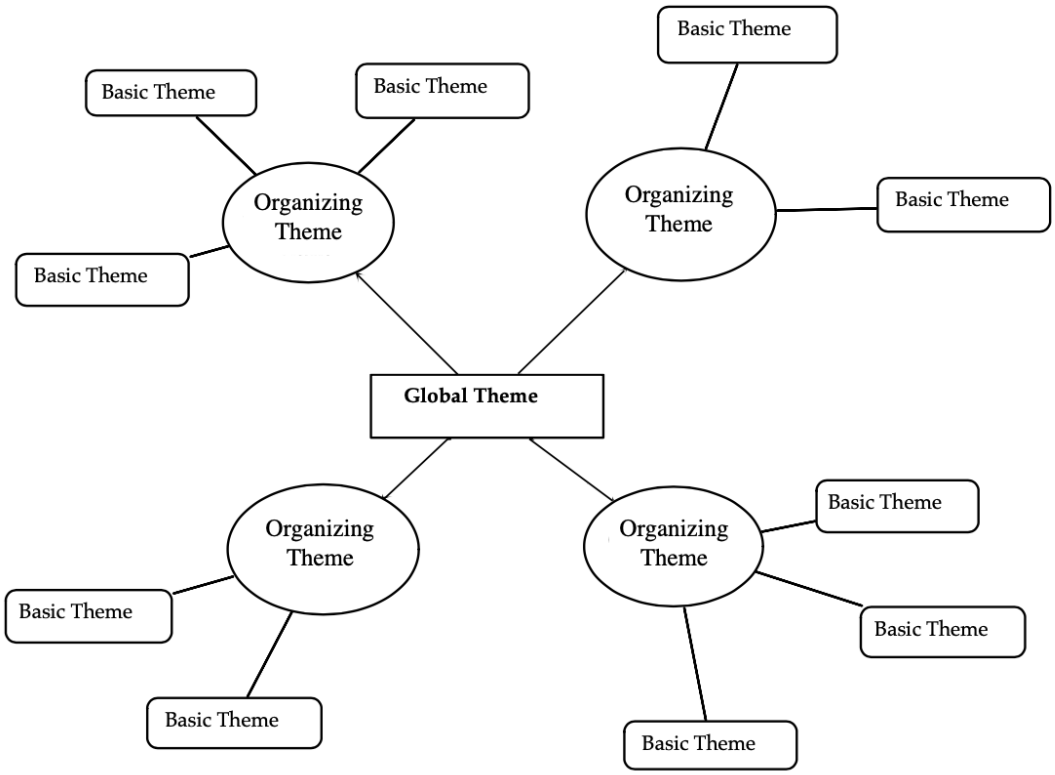


Figure 1: Attride-Stirling's Thematic Framework (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Before beginning to analyze the data, the researcher transcribed the recordings from each interview. First, the researcher thoroughly read through each transcription separately, making note of important information in each individual response to every question. Then the researcher analyzed the data for significant similarities and differences among those interviewed. The researcher looked question-by-question at the responses from those interviewed side-by-side, looking for similarities and differences in strategies and other important or notable information.

Following the Attride-Stirling (2001) model for analyzing qualitative data, throughout each step of data analysis the data was coded, categorized by theme, arranged into a thematic network (e.g. basic to organizing to global), and then those networks were dissected and analyzed. Once each of these steps was completed, the data was summarized, and patterns were interpreted and explored. The following section outlines the basic, organizing, and global themes and the findings that each of these led to.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the 2020 calendar year, the contemporary Black civil rights movement saw strides being made that had not been seen since the original 1950s and 60s Black civil rights movement. Social movement theory helps explain how this occurred. Social movement theory focuses on why collective identity and action occur. In their interviews, participants continually talked about how the movement rose in 2020 because the world was "on pause" due to the COVID-19 pandemic. People were more focused on the news and their social media accounts than usual, and White people increasingly became aware of the national racial disparities against Black people. Everyone was paying attention to the police killings, and they were noticing the injustices against Black people. Participant B stated, "I just felt like there was a mass enlightenment that took place last year with the platform." Participant D attributed this enlightenment to the lack of other forms of entertainment. He said,

> "There was no NBA playoffs. There was no going to the movies. There was no going out to eat. America was forced to take a hard look at what happened to Breonna, to Ahmaud, to George, and what that did was got people engaged."

Donald Trump's presidency also allowed for implicit bias to become very explicit in the world. People who, in the past, would have covered their faces in White sheets to protect their face from being seen while they chanted for White power were instead putting themselves on camera. They were posting videos, photos, and comments of demonstrations, and they became unafraid to go so far as to storm the capitol building. Participant G said in her interview, "[Trump's presidency], I really feel like it kind of pushed things up to the surface."

This 2020 movement was the first time in history when many people of power were using their platform to speak out against racial injustice. Participant D said,

> "We are seeing the most social awakening across the world ever. This is a time where people in affluence who have a platform are empowered to use their platform to speak out more so than any other time."

This movement that sparked out of the events of the 2020 year created a new backdrop for social justice and reform. In East Tennessee, many new activist groups formed, seasoned social justice activists organized, and new publics were reached and mobilized.

Table 1 on the next page demonstrates participants' demographic information and their primary roles in the movement. Throughout the interview process, it became clear that this movement is still in a developmental stage in East Tennessee. Local activists often held conflicting ideologies, distributed conflicting messages, and employed a wide variety of tactics. While the researcher asked questions primarily surrounding the strategies currently being employed, many responses surrounded the *strategic vision* for the future of the movement and areas where the movement is currently falling short. Given the continual citing of the strategic vision and what the movement is hoping to move toward rather than simply where the movement is currently, the researcher found it prudent to include both the work that is currently being done and the work that those in the movement are moving toward in this analysis. The following demonstrates different themes that emerged throughout the interview process.

Basic Themes

Basic themes are the lowest level of themes in the Attride-Stirling model of analysis. Within the contemporary Black civil rights movement, each leader has a very distinct, unique role. It seems as though no two leaders are alike in their strategies, and there are a wide variety

Table 1: Participant Codes and Identifiers.

Participant Identifier	**Race**	**Sex**	**Preferred Title**	**Primary Role**
Participant A	White	Male	BLM movement ally	Educating White people
Participant B	Black	Female	BLM movement leader	Engaging systems
Participant C	Black	Male	Establishment leader	Providing resources to the Black community
Participant D	Black	Male	BLM movement leader	Educating White people
Participant E	Black	Female	BLM movement leader	Providing resources to the Black community
Participant F	Black	Male	No movement affiliation	Providing resources to the Black community
Participant G	Black	Female	No movement affiliation	Engaging systems
Participant H	White	Female	BLM movement ally	Educating White people

of tactics being employed by movement leaders to mobilize publics. However, though the leaders have different approaches, each strategy falls into one of four basic themes. The basic themes are as follows: (1) educating non-Black people on racial disparities and oppression, (2) reforming the criminal justice system, (3) creating opportunity for Black people, and (4) developing unity among the Black leaders.

Educating non-Black people on racial disparities and oppression

For this strategy of the movement, non-Black people are the key publics. Non-Black refers to any other racial group besides Black people. This term is preferred to "White" in this case because Black leaders are trying to appeal to not only White people but every other racial group. While educating all non-Black people on racism is important, getting White people in particular involved in the movement is imperative to creating any lasting change, therefore, much of this work does focus on the White population. As Participant B stated,

> "Racism is not a Black problem. Black people are a victim of it. It is a White problem… Our due diligence, just like the woman or child that is raped, is that we're supposed to tell this out loud so people can become aware and conscious of it, so we can try to get these people that are involved or doing these things off of our streets and held accountable."

Similarly, Participant D said,

> "I hope that White people understand that racism is a White people problem that White people created. If it's gonna be better, White people who are the majority in this country, who have the majority of the wealth, who historically have done the oppression have to step up… As long as we have legislation in law and law enforcement that is oppressive, [disparities in] economics and education, the reconciliation is not going to happen, and our country is not going to be unified."

One of the problems activists often encounter when working toward this goal is that non-Black people, and White people in particular, often do not understand the systemic racism that is occurring nationally. White people are not as confronted with racism, so unless they are educated by others on what oppression looks like, they have no concept of what it really is. Participant C stated,

> "White individuals that I've come in contact with – neighbors, friends, close associates – they view racism distinctly differently… I think from this area, there's a considerable contingent of White individuals that see racism in the context of hate… In that context, White individuals are moving forward, but this recent conversation [with] Black Lives Matter, as I understand it, is more rooted in the systems of our society and how racism is attached, connected to those systems, and how, in many regards, we just blindly live our lives, not realizing… sadly, I don't think that concept of institutional racism clicks with everybody."

There are many different strategies being employed to reach, engage and educate non-Black people. The two White interview participants both considered their roles in the movement to be bridging the communication gap between the Black community needs and the White people's resources. Participant A, whose focus is always on how to drive the message home to people, said his approach is mainly through guilt, shame, and empathy. He said,

> "Instead of having the conversations of 'why is it this way', we're having conversations that are, 'how did we let it get here'. 'Why' is so accusatory, but I think asking 'how' questions compels folks to think about how they can change it… we have to do that before there's any kind of healing and unity."

He also added that his main goal is to help other people who are new to the movement get engaged and find their place. He said,

> "I'm an on-ramp for new activists… Education. It is the single most important backbone to any movement. Because if you're able to educate people then you can get them on board for the reform and the systemic change… Education is the key component because none of the rest of it's possible without it."

He went on to talk about how during the height of protests in 2020, his job was simply to call the Black community leaders continually asking what they needed and then translating that to the White people to get more of them involved. His goal at the time was really just to listen to the leaders of the Black community and strategize how to include more people.

Participant H, who is also White, stated that her role in the movement is strictly to help empower the voices of Black people in the movement. As a White person dealing with a Black movement, her job is to be a helper rather than a leader. She said, "As a White woman, I've just learned that it's not my place. This isn't my movement, and I'm here to be told what to do, and that's fine." She went on to talk about a big part of her role as "checking White people" when they say racist things and need to hear why their words are not acceptable. She joked that her role is really that of a White woman liaison. She said that educating White people and having honest conversations with them about privilege and their complicit involvement in Black oppression is her main purpose in the movement.

Building this communication between the Black leaders of the contemporary Black civil rights movement and White leaders of the anti-racism ally movement is crucial. Without the guidance of the Black leadership, White leaders have no way of knowing if their work is actually what is needed in the community. They rely on their Black informants to tell them about the

needs of the Black community. The Black movement also needs the White allies in order to have the scope that is necessary for systemic changes to be made. The majority of people who hold positions of power in the United States are White; therefore, in order for a movement to gain the necessary traction to create change, White people must also be mobilized in the movement.

Participant C is also someone working toward bringing Black and non-Black people together to educate on and fight against racism. His work focuses on getting people to ask questions and seek knowledge. One of his strategies is creating spaces for people to come together to ask their questions. He said, “I'm working with some other organizations to really focus on a civility school, and racism and race relations would be the nucleus for this civility school and having these critical conversations.” One of the important factors for him is that people can engage and help however they see fit. He is not trying to push people into getting involved in one way or another. His goal is to listen to people and let them engage in the movement how they feel they could be effective. This strategy is especially effective for people who are new to the movement. For those who are just learning about their implicit roles in racism, the more aggressive relational strategies and more intense events can be a bit overwhelming, and lead them away from the movement. Having someone offer classes or a space for conversation is a great way for new activists to feel they have a place in the movement.

Participant D stated, “A wise old Black lady once told me ‘You catch more flied with honey than you do shit,’ so I try to use the honey approach.” His approach is to educate others on how racism is occurring, why it is occurring, and how that can be combated with education, truth and love. Similarly, Participant G believes people can be brought in through storytelling. She said, “Being able to communicate what the issue is, but also communicating that there is a

solution." People need to hear not only that there is a problem, but also that there is a way to fix it and that they can be a part of that process.

On the other hand, some people are better reached through tough reality. Participant B said her approach is unapologetic, harsh unadulterated truth, stating,

> "Tell people the damn truth. And for Black people, like I said, our main objective is to tell it unapologetically, Black, truthfully… Just be honest and truthful with the public about the harsh reality of what racism looks like, how it is affecting daily interactions of Black people's lives… People have gotten tired of sugar on shit."

While this strategy may not work for all people wanting to find their place in the movement, some people really just need to hear the facts and stories of how deeply racism and oppression has affected the lives of Black people.

Participant D has a unique strategy in that he tries to engage with publics by incorporating music, poetry, and fun into the movement. For example, one of his main goals is to get people out to vote and remind them that their vote matters. When talking about this initiative he said,

> "One of the main goals is to get people civically engaged… to get people to the polls to vote for Council and the mayor, I'm gonna rent a bus for people who need transportation… We're gonna have a DJ, we're gonna have treats, so it's going to encourage people to be like, you know, it's not a drag to be a part of the movement. So I think that helps get people mobilized."

He also has a podcast where he interviews different figures in the city such as city council members and mayoral candidates to help people engage more with the leaders of their community. His approach to engagement is very different from the rest of the participants. His

emphasis on entertainment helps the movement appeal to another group of people who potentially would not be reached through education or harsh truth.

When asked about the different platforms being used to reach people, some participants had clear cut answers on what they think is effective, mainly social media. Participant A mentioned that the current strategy for this engagement is to meet people where they are, which during the COVID-19 pandemic is sitting at home on social media. Likewise, other participants noted that social media plays a big role in their outreach. Participant D stated,

> "I found that social media is not just for selling t-shirts or insurance or whatever they use it for. It's also to bring people together for the greater good… it was a great way to get people together."

Even Participant C, who does not use social media as a dominant aspect of his outreach, stated that he still thinks it is important and a valuable tool for activists to use to mobilize publics. He said, "It impressed me to see how social media was used to communicate with each other… I mean, literally hundreds of individuals would show up."

However, while social media can be a great way to reach publics, others are still unsure of how to communicate effectively with publics and how to get them involved and invested. Participant E talked about the growing need to connect with young people on social media through the various channels they use,

> "[Generation Z], they're on Tik Tok. They're not really on Facebook. They have Snapchat and Instagram. I don't even know if they're really on Instagram. The reason I say that is because they're next. They are going to be the ones that continue to carry on this torch… Facebook and YouTube are good platforms, but we still need to figure out how to get that information to them."

Figuring out how to reach and engage non-Black people with this message is key to spreading the movement and creating real systemic change. As several participants noted, racism is a White people problem. It was created *by* White people *for* White people. In order for this movement to succeed, White people need to realize their role in oppression and step up to fix it.

One of the challenges for activists is often a limited amount of resources. As resource mobilization theory demonstrates, in order to successfully mobilize, there needs to be strategic use of the available resources. While there is some diversity in strategy for how to engage people in the movement, the majority of activists are reaching out on the same platforms – social media – and therefore, are likely reaching a lot of the same people. In order to increase the spread of their movement, it would be beneficial to find ways to utilize other platforms as well. The non-Black population of East Tennessee is an incredibly large majority. In order to reach different segments of this population, it is important to break this up into sub-groups. For example, older generations can be reached more through the use of newspapers and local media stations. While the strategies being employed may be finding success where they are being used, resources must be more strategically distributed to reach the target population.

Social movement theory can also be applied to this objective. This movement was created out of a reaction to Black people being murdered by police and out of White people having more time to really think about and process what this means. Cultural awareness drastically increased around this issue, so activists reacted to this by becoming readily available with resources and information for non-Black people to learn and understand more. Different messages of empathy, guilt, anger, and hurt were available for non-Black people to listen to and try to understand. Increased understanding and collective action were achieved, and more non-Black people became allies in the movement than ever before.

Reforming the criminal justice system

A key theme in the national social movement is to stop the police killings of Black people. In 2020, this is what the movement mobilized around after the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. It was these events that really triggered the movement and the mass enlightenment and involvement of people advocating for racial equity and equality. This overt, clear demonstration of a system that values White lives more than Black lives, is an important issue that people have mobilized around across the country. For this strategy, the key publics are legislators and law makers, citizens, and police departments.

Participant B talked about how the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery really provided momentum to police reform across the country. Citizens of all nationalities became aware of the injustices and rose up to say the system is unjust. The influx of people speaking out against criminal justice injustices forced law makers and law enforcement to take a hard look at their policies. Even regionally in East Tennessee, police departments have a history of police brutality and police immunity. Participant B talked in her interview about the tragic murder of Philly Pheap in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 2018, when a hit-and-run incident turned into the fatal shooting of an unarmed Black man. She recalled,

> "The officer's name, Dylan Williams. To this day, I have never forgotten his name. Because the scary part I think about how they handled this case is, where the hell did he go? No one knows his accountability today. Is he still on the force? Is he not on the force? Is he working a desk job? Is he back out in the field? So, Dylan Williams' identity, we don't know where he's at… [District Attorney general] gave him police immunity… And so, the last known news article had documented Dylan Williams as coming off of his

> administrative leave and reporting back to duty. But again, we don't know if that duty was in the office or back on the streets or anything."

This particular initiative and aspect of the contemporary Black civil rights movement came with some challenges during the 2020 calendar year as the key phrase "defund the police" was popularized around the country. Participant A spoke in outrage against this, stating,

> "That was the worst thing that came out of last fucking summer was, and it's the same thing that always happens when narratives get taken by someone who's trying to demean the message. No one wants to shut down the fucking Police Departments… no one has an issue defunding education whatsoever. They defund public education in Tennessee all the damn time and no one cares about that, but you use that D word with police. Oh, that was a bridge too far."

This "defund the police" narrative often took over and overshadowed the more important narrative, which is that there is a great need for police and criminal justice reform. There was a consensus across all participants that policing has to be different. Participant D talked about the issues within the criminal justice system stating,

> "We gotta enforce justice reform immediately… mass incarceration and police brutality is fucked up… we can change this with easy tangible policies and implementations that can be started almost overnight."

Participant D talked about initiatives he is working on with several Black leaders of the movement. He said,

> "We're pursuing that immediately Tennessee adapt the Breonna Taylor Act and the Breathe Act, which would eliminate a lot of the police brutality and the unfair investigations that we see in Tennessee, in the south, in the country."

The Breonna Taylor Act makes it illegal for law enforcement to carry out a warrant without announcing their presence and purpose for being there. The Breathe Act provides reallocation of funding by investing into a new vision of public safety where police officers are not always first responders.

Participant B also talked about her work trying to appeal to the police department and with law makers in this initiative for the reallocation of funding. She said,

> "We were actually already in communication with the police department about the integration of the mental health program and services coming in to replace the current style… our primary objective was number one, we wanted to see mental health services and resources implemented into the police department, and we wanted a full-scale reformulation of the 911 dispatch system. Meaning that if you call and say, 'I need mental health,' the cops are automatically excluded from that because these calls will now be forwarded directly to the mental health professional and certified individuals. Versus before, or right now, if you dial 911 and you say mental health, unfortunately police officers are still primary responders… there [were] three direct, very specific demands to the police department and for police reform."

Participant H also talked about the importance of activists stepping into some of the law spaces in order to reform and provide resources for those suffering under the current criminal justice system. She said the team she is a part of actually started out of providing for these needs, stating,

> "We need more of a legal aspect of this organization that can jump in… We need actual legal team protection that is able to enforce the legal side of matters… So that's kind of

how it started was with, ‘Do you need legal assistance? Do you need legal counseling? Do you need some type of resource or access to resources or funding?’”

Political process theory indicates that movements are more successful in cities where politicians recognize the need for the movement. This has also been demonstrated throughout the 2020 protests and movement. In Louisville, where Breonna Taylor was murdered, the Breonna Taylor Act has been passed to protect other people in the future from no-knock search warrants. Similarly, in Minneapolis, where George Floyd was murdered, there have been rapid changes in how policing is conducted. These success stories demonstrate that the closer cities are to events that spark movements, the more successful the movements will be.

While criminal justice reform has not yet been achieved in East Tennessee, the work activists are doing is pushing the needle of change forward. It is important to remember that political and social movements do not see success quickly. It is a slow progress toward change. The work these activists have done in the past year to create these systemic changes directly relate to the political process theory. The controversy in policing and the offensive, racist words spoken by Donald Trump caused people to recognize that there is still a lot of work to be done to create equity and equality for Black people in the United States. This momentum that the political process added to the movement created more space for change and mobilization.

Creating opportunity for Black people

Many leaders focus their efforts on informing and supporting the Black community rather than trying to create systemic change or mobilize non-Black people to get involved in the movement. A huge component of that is educating Black community members on resources available to them and creating opportunity for the community as a whole. The Black community, and young Black boys and girls in particular, are a key public in this aspect of the movement.

They are the ones these leaders are trying to make the world better for, and they are the ones who will take over this movement in the future.

Participant E emphasized in her interview that Black communities have often depended on White communities and government to create opportunity and include Black people in it. While legal segregation of spaces has ended, segregation of opportunity still exists today. She said, “We do have to figure out how we can create for ourselves because we can't continue to depend on others to help us.”

Participant D emphasized that a big part of this is simply getting the information about resources and opportunities out there on a platform where Black community members will know that it is available. In his interview, he said,

> “A big part of what I do for the community is giving information to people who are seeking it, or compiling information that I think people need to know that is not readily available. A lot of times organizations or government or the city puts information on social media or whatnot, or newsletters or newspapers, but that's not really how my people, the Black community, gets their information. If it's on social media, but it's not connected to somebody that they follow, they might miss it. People really don't read the newspaper or watch the news anymore, especially with streaming being the number one way that people, especially poor people who can't afford cable, are getting their entertainment… it's mostly social media, so I'm on social media sharing stuff, running meetings – non-stop meetings – networking with people, trying to build relationships so that Black people and poor people will have a bridge to certain relationships and will have the information to certain opportunities.”

Similarly, when talking about her work, Participant E said her work centers around “all things Black”. She feels it is her duty to go out and learn about what White people are doing and how it might be affecting the community and then coming back and educating the Black community about it. Her overall goal is to educate and create opportunity for young people in the Black community. She also emphasized the importance of providing training to help the Black community learn necessary skills to get certain opportunities. When talking about the different initiatives she is involved in, she said,

> “Economic development, closing that wealth gap. What that would look like would be like trying to figure out how to create job opportunities for my community of people, providing training to my community, so that we can have access to those jobs that we're typically not afforded the opportunity to get. I look at education, I'm a part of a nonprofit, and we've been doing it for about 10 years now, but we have a youth summit, where we have one day where we bring in speakers to educate our community of youth on there's so much more.”

Participant F also considers it a big part of his role to engage and educate young Black men in his community. His main role in the movement is running a mentoring organization that helps reach out to young Black men, primarily from single parent homes. He said of his work,

> “We try to provide strong Black male role models for the community and for these young folks, and we try to help them find direction… We show them lots of different career paths so they can know that's a that's an option for them. We provide them support for while they're in secondary school, high school, junior high school, elementary school. We provide them educational support in the form of tutoring, mentoring, and things of that

> nature. Once they graduate, we give them scholarships so they can pursue some education beyond high school."

Participant G addresses this lack of opportunity from a different angle. Her work is focused within the school system and addressing disparities there. One of the main points she makes is that even within dominantly Black schools, the teachers are White, middle-class people who do not live in the Black community. Coming from that background, there is often a disconnect in what teachers say and what the students need. Her goal is to help bridge that gap and create safe spaces for Black children. She said, "I work with administration and teachers, and I provide training to teachers, and training to staff as far as how to instruct and engage."

While the majority of the work being done to educate and create opportunity for the Black community focuses on Black children, there is also a need to create opportunity for Black adults. Participant D provides free classes for people re-entering society after incarceration, and he provides them with resources and helps them find jobs. Likewise, Participant E tries to help Black businesses to start up, grow, and thrive in the community. Solving the opportunity gap is a difficult problem. This problem is only solved by bringing together people who have opportunity to offer and people who need opportunity. Often, White people are the ones who have opportunity to offer, so having that information and those connections is necessary for advancement in this area.

When talking about his hopes for the movement, Participant F said that his whole goal is for there to be more equality in opportunity. He said,

> "As we go through the different civil rights movements, as we march, and do our voting and different things, I hope it culminates into identifying and making available real opportunities to people where they are… I think that's what it comes down to. We need to

give people opportunities. When you level the playing field and give people opportunities, people will thrive."

This theme directly relates to resource mobilization theory. While the Black community often struggles to gain the same resources as White communities, by using strategies to broaden the scope of their available resources they will see greater levels of change. As is demonstrated in resource mobilization theory, in order to see success in the movement, leaders must utilize resources such as events, knowledge, money, and equipment to further the movement's goals. In this study, these leaders are using all resources available to the Black community in order to further their goals and help their community. By providing opportunity and resources to the people in their community, they are making steps toward gaining more equity and equality for the Black community as a whole.

Developing unity among the Black leaders

There are many contradictory strategies activists are using to achieve the goals of the contemporary Black civil rights movement. This all boils down to significant differences in the fundamental ideas of how to create change. There are leaders in the movement who consider themselves to be part of "The Establishment". These are the leaders that follow the 1950s and 60s civil rights movement strategies. There are also the leaders who consider themselves leaders of the BLM movement, which is the most predominant movement in the contemporary Black civil rights movement. Lastly, there are those who do not align themselves with either label, but rather consider themselves independent leaders simply doing their own work in the contemporary Black civil rights movement. With this aspect of the movement, the key publics are the Black community and the other contemporary Black civil rights leaders themselves.

While this was one of the most mentioned topics of each interview, this is an area in which strategy is currently limited. This section is more aligned with the *strategic vision* of the movement rather than the current strategies; therefore, there are not as many current strategies being employed to reach this goal. This shift toward strategic vision rather than current work is evident in the following analysis.

Even though many leaders connected themselves to the BLM movement, as was talked about in the literature review section of this thesis, the BLM movement operates with horizontal leadership with different communities having differing goals, strategies, and tactics under the *BLM* title. This research found that in East Tennessee, BLM means something different not just on a local level, but on an individual level as well. The fundamental ideologies of activists about how to create movement and work toward their shared goals differed drastically from person to person.

The ideology that offers the most controversy for the movement is whether people need to be aggressive and fired up or need to be calm and rationally having conversation. Participant A comes from the latter perspective, saying,

> "You have to de-escalate things before you can make change, like rapid change. No one likes rapid change in their own life or otherwise it's too hard to deal with. And so, some of the greater changes are controlling the narrative of BLM so that it doesn't get bastardized by people who have no desire to see racial equality."

Participant C, who considered himself to be a leader of the Establishment, saw things very similarly. He said,

> "Looking at racial equality in the context of a spectrum, you might have more, quote unquote, 'conservative approaches', you might have more 'moderate approaches', and

> you might have more ‘progressive approaches.’ But at the end of the day, if we're trying to get to racial equality, then *each has merit*… The best approach is to have everybody align themselves with this spectrum and try to have a space that is welcoming and inclusive. And, hopefully, we can kind of lower the temperature a little bit and listen to each other.”

He followed up with that, talking about the BLM movement as a whole and the struggles he has had as a more traditional leader in engaging with younger leaders.

> “The Black Lives Matter movement, I think, really sped past me… I feel like in a way, I'm kind of the old man in terms of this latest chapter of racial progression… There were different periods of the summer 2020 where there were certain tactics and questions and certain aspects of the movement that I struggled with. I struggled to understand. And so, I guess I give that preface to say that a lot of the work that I'm doing on a day-to-day basis is rooted in what we may now call ‘traditional civil rights’… the Black community had to deal with the fact that there were younger individuals that were involved in this movement. Younger people were playing a leadership role in the movement, and they were individuals that were not part of the, quote unquote, ‘establishment’.”

Participant C went on to talk about the problems different elders in the community had with the new approach of the BLM movement. Traditional leaders felt they had to deal cautiously with the new BLM movement, trying to connect with them and form diplomacy between the new Black leadership and the Establishment. He said,

> “Twenty years ago, when I got my start, there were people that were rooted in the Martin Luther King-esque approach to civil rights. There were many ministers that were part of the Black leadership contingent. And so, as a 20-something coming back home, I had to

> network extensively with the ministers. I had to earn their trust, get on their radar, and then have some of them take me under their wing so that as I got older, my leadership capacity grew. Black Lives Matter comes about and the killing of George Floyd comes about, and immediately we have young men and women who come out of nowhere, and there isn't this sense of new people looking to the established leaders and ministers saying, 'We want you to guide us and help us.' It was very much, 'We're mad. We're angry. This does not need to be in the 21st century, and we're going to make our voices heard.'… There were many, quote unquote, 'elders' in the Black community that were very frustrated with the younger men and women. And so, I found myself playing the role of a diplomat trying to encourage elders to connect with youth, and encourage youth to connect with elders. Youth did not really want to connect with elders because they were sick and tired of being told, 'Listen, that's not the way to do it.' Elders didn't want to connect with youth because elders would say, 'Well, let's pray,' and youth would say, 'Wait, wait, wait, now's not the time to be praying. We need to be acting. We need to be moving.'… It really did stun a group of Black leaders."

Contrarily, Participant B took the opposite point of view. Her perspective is that people need to be fired up and angry in order for real change to occur. She said in her interview,

> "What we saw is the power of having a tyrant leader like Trump in office, who is belligerently stating his indifferences. Which, personally, I prefer that because now we have Joe Biden who's gonna do a lot of hidden belligerent actions, so we're not gonna be as aware of his type of policies and acts that are gonna be very harmful to our community… we just lost our biggest flame thrower in Trump. Trump kept things flamed up… He kept people fired up and angry about why they need to get out there and do

> something anyways. And so, to me, I think we're getting to lose a very critical piece to the movement without Trump's presence… Like I said, unfortunately, Biden is going to do a lot of pacifying. He's going to do a lot of things to put flames out. And so, my concern is, one of the reasons I think the movement did move so slow prior to Trump's arrival, was because of the ability of the federal, local and state governments to pacify situations… we can't go back to normal, because going back to normal is allowing things like Breonna Taylor and George Floyd to continue."

Not only is there conflict in how to run the movement, but there is also conflict amongst the leaders. Participant B struggles with the ways in which other, more traditional leaders are working in the movement, stating,

> "There [were] some formalities of the division that came out… there is obviously conflict in ideal. You know, not everybody is not going to hold the same ideology of how we should go about attacking this monstrous machine of White supremacy and how to get it taken down. And so, those were some times where it came with some frustration and learning and growth and development and understanding and not losing the objective… there has obviously been Black leaders before me, but even they have been apologetically Black, not unapologetic. They are apologetically Black, so they stayed diplomatic with it. They stayed in the gray areas with it. They stay in this space where they wouldn't make people feel uncomfortable for the reality of their behavior and actions. And so unfortunately, that's not what pushes the needle of change… [that's] the problem with all the Black leaders I've been looking at, before I got into this and found others that were more like me compared to the ones we're trying to replace."

Participant D was the only leader who considered himself a leader of the BLM movement who still spoke highly of those involved today from the Establishment. He talked about his experience in 2020 and the respect it gave him for the elders and all of the activists who came before him. People often do not understand the risks activists are taking to their personal freedoms and lives, and he gained considerable respect for all of those who entered into the movement back when pretty much anyone who spoke out in this movement ended up being murdered. However, though he holds this respect for elders, he did mention there are still some difficulties in collaboration but that this collaboration is a necessary component to pushing the movement forward. He said,

> "Sometimes it's hard working with the elders because they don't want to be as fun and open minded. You know, they have those conservative views. But working with other people, working with people who are maybe not all the way in your lane, but we have a common goal. We want liberation for Black people and poor people. So, working with other people is a great way to get people mobilized."

Participant F, who does not consider himself aligned with any formal movement, was able to speak from a third-party perspective on the issue. He discussed the need for more strategic organization and collaboration, stating,

> "There are lots of different groups. You have the Black Lives Matter group, you still have some of these older groups that are still there… There has not been a coordinated effort to say, you know, 'We need to develop these new leaders and put these new leaders in charge and see where it goes'. And I think we're sort of going through some of that now… since we don't have that one championing organization that's fighting that one unifying issue, who's our leader? Who's leading this organization? So, you have, a lot of

different ideas, a lot of different people that are doing different things. And, maybe we don't unify under one issue in the future under one leader, but we need to be moving in one direction. And I hope we get to that."

He also points to the problem being that there is actually not one issue that contemporary activists are fighting. He said,

"As for Black people, what's our big unifying issue? I really don't know what that is right now. You can say racism, but racism impacts a lot of different people. That's not just our issue. You can say poverty. That's not just our issue. I think one of the biggest things that unifies us would be opportunity, but no one is saying that. So, the biggest difference between the 50s and 60s and now is that we don't have that one unifying issue to line up behind. We don't have that lead organization that's fighting that one uniform issue that we have before… But back in 1960, when we said segregation, there was no Black person in this country that couldn't say, 'That's not my issue.' So, you had the ability to get people to speak with one voice. And when people are speaking with one voice, they're willing to make sacrifices and do different things so that we can address that issue. So, that's the problem that we're having right now. Being able to get people to speak with that one voice, making those sacrifices for that one issue, so that we can move in the same direction… It impacts you being able to rally people and get together and speak with one voice. That's been the issue, getting people to speak with one voice."

Given the vast diversity of ideas in how to operate, there is a lack of cohesion among those leading organizations and offering services to the Black community. Participant H examined this struggle of the movement and her goals of having one standardized organization, saying,

> "We need to get on a national level that is standardized in solidarity with all of this… we can hopefully standardize so that it can become an actual official movement organization that's recognized by the government, that's recognized by other organizations that they can collaborate with and build partnerships with, that actually can make meaningful change… We have to start working towards that goal as one solid, solidified unity, not just different chapters doing different things in different ways."

Many other participants also mentioned the need for an organization that simply organizes information about resources available to people in the Black community. Participant E said,

> "I want to just bring it together… like a centralized organization or place… If you want to go get COVID health care, this is the organization doing it. This organization has given back to the homeless. This is the people that are trying to do after school programs and schools, for Black children. You know, just bring it all together."

Regardless of the problems and conflict among the leaders, they seem to agree that collaboration and unity are necessary for the movement to reach its full potential. Participant B stated, "I feel like for the Black movement and Black leadership, especially, we're gonna have to get really on a full scale across the board collaborative platform." Participant C said,

> "Black solidarity is not the strongest. That's a quest. A desire that I have is to really strengthen that sense of solidarity." Similarly, Participant E stated, "Within our own race there's still division there. We have to come together first."

Currently, the movement is struggling for unity and a cohesive voice and message. This could be indicative of how the contemporary Black civil rights movement will move forward in the future. Either the movement will continue moving in separate directions, sparking

controversy within itself as well as with those in counter-movements, or the movement will mobilize around unifying issues and begin working more cohesively.

Organizing themes

Organizing themes are the mid-level of themes in the Attride-Stirling model of analysis. The organizing themes each contribute to the major shifts being made across the board within the movement. The basic themes can each be separated into one of two organizing themes: (1) progressing power structures and creating allies, or (2) developing the Black community. Figure 2 on the following page demonstrates how each of the basic themes can be categorized into the organizing themes.

Progressing power structures and creating allies

White people hold the majority of the power in the United States. In order to see shifts in power and structures, White people must be brought into the movement and find a place in it. This is why leaders of the contemporary Black civil rights movement emphasize getting White people involved in the movement as allies. In order to create structural changes, Black leaders must mobilize White citizens, legislators and law makers, and other people with economic and political power.

Participant E, whose work focuses on the local level in her city, talked about some of the difficulties in having the breadth of activists that is needed to create real, lasting change. She said,

> “You're just battling all the departments within the city. We got to get on the police. They're not doing their job. We got to get on the mayor because she's removing money from our budget and putting it somewhere else. We got to get on the purchasing department, when it comes to being equal in the jobs that they’re giving and contracts

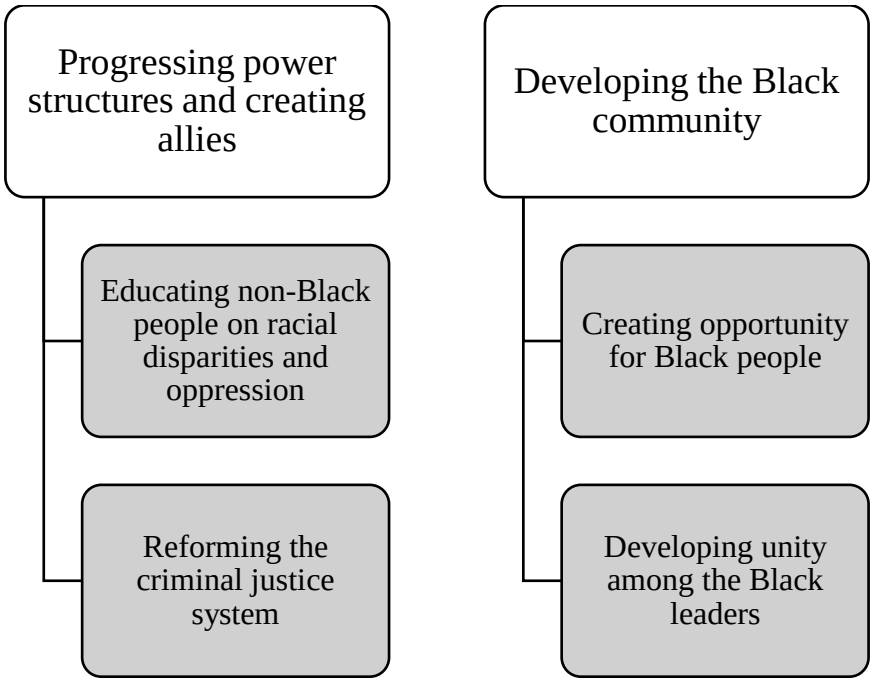


Figure 2: Basic Themes Structured into Organizing Themes.

> that they're awarding to people. It's just the whole system. And when you're trying to address a whole system it sometimes can feel overwhelming."

Since this is a movement consisting of mostly volunteers, resources can be limited. Therefore, finding ways to utilize resources in the most effective and efficient way is key to success. Participant G talked about this strategic use of resources, stating,

> "Figure out the mode of communication… think about how to really reach the community… it seems like social media is really the biggest platform to reach the widest amount of people to engage different groups of people… a lot of my things also deal with the message; how do we tell the story?... It we can really, strategically figure out who those people can be unbiased, tell the whole truth, not the happy stuff, but you know the whole truth. I think that's how we will reach more people."

Due to the limited resources and the need for collaborators in the movement, one of the main strategies used is mass message dissemination. Rather than reaching out to a few and hoping the message sticks, activists put the message out in as many places as they can, hoping some people will get involved. Activists do this by making is clear that everyone has a place in this movement. No matter someone's race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, sex, disability, etc., everyone has a role to play. Participant D summed it up well, saying,

> "I just want something I said or did to help you get in your lane. Whether that's educating yourself and your family, putting your boots to the grounds and directly organizing and mobilizing with us, or if it's doing your own thing… get in your lane and keep it pushing. Do something. There's something we can all do."

Participant G talked about the strength that is found in numbers and in diversifying the areas in which publics are mobilized. She said,

> “I hope that people are able to really understand the movement and to figure out where their place is in it, so that there can be strategically a way to really address some of the systemic issues… I'm really clear that my place is systemic racism within the education system, that's my place. You may not see me marching in the streets or holding a sign, you may not see me being more of an agitator or an activist in that sense. So, I think it's important for us to like holistically look at some of the systemic issues and have some champions. Have some champions in education, and then have some people in healthcare, have some people in your social justice or your legal system. I think it's very important for there to be people planted in different areas to really systemically impact it.”

Participant B said,

> “Find your role, Find your lane. Maybe your lane ain't so much in the forefront. Maybe it is just showing up with a sign when we say show up so we can make some noise.”

Likewise, Participant F said,

> “The key takeaway is get involved. That would be my key takeaway when people look at [our organization] is to take a stand, get involved. If you see an area where you can have an impact, go into that area and make that impact. It may impact one, it may impact a hundred. You never know.”

Participant B also talked about the great movement that can come out of having allies and said it is important to encourage allies to get involved. Having White people involved to connect with other White people is incredibly affective. She said,

> “One of my favorite models that did come out of the White allies and supporters’ space was, ‘silence is violence’. I loved it… I hope for White people it raises their conscious

awareness and makes them really get down to the nitty gritty, hard, disgusting, in the trenches work of really addressing the racism."

She said in order for change to happen, White people need to be willing to ask the hard questions and engage in the hard work of addressing racism and its power structures. White people need to be engaged and impacted so powerfully that they collectively destroy a system they are benefiting from.

Participant H also talks about how resources are limited and people need to be active in the movement all the time. In order for the movement to see success, they need to be constantly reaching out, bringing in more allies. She said,

"It's not just on your weekends. It's not just when you show up to the protest. It's every single day. You have to be boots on the ground, doing something that is either promoting some sort of anti-racism… talking to friends, maybe correcting your parents when they say [racist comments], making sure that you raise awareness about these organizations, about legislation, and about the actual roots of racism that need to be addressed."

Along with White people, White power structures also need to be changed. This country was founded on racist principles, and those principles have never been fully eradicated. While there is greater equality than there was in the early 1900s, discriminatory policies and practices are still very much in all levels of government.

Participant D also talked about the importance of engaging with power structures. He is engaging in similar state-wide initiatives. He said,

"Black communities and the poor communities around the state and around the country, they all look the same… I'm working with organizations all over Tennessee where we're

> advocating for access to jobs, access to wealth, access to health care, poor education, housing, etc."

While there are several initiatives his team is pushing for, the number one thing is a boost in the unemployment budget. He said,

> "Especially with the pandemic times because they have a budget for unemployment, but they usually lowball it, and then when things get rough, they have to go back in session and ask for more money and do all this. So, what we're saying is if you adequately fund this budget, people will get their money quicker, people will be supported, less people will be evicted. We won't have to do all this extra legwork when it's an emergency."

Participant B also talked about her work in affecting policy changes, saying,

> "Last month we went up and we initiated our initial demands [to state legislators], which was Medicare for all, full funding of Medicare for all, full funding of unemployment benefits, and the complete adoption of Breonna Taylor's law. That is our main objective starting out with this year with our state legislator."

One of her key strategies is to give three demands at a time to government. Once they complete a few, they will be given a few more. She also emphasized the importance of giving demands that could be realistically achieved. She said,

> "Give them things that they can do under the current legal administration and legislators that will not require a lot of adoptions or changes to it. It's just a simple implementation at this point."

This is a great example of how to successfully implement resource mobilization theory. This initiative demonstrates some level of collaboration with the national BLM movement. While the movement is often very segmented, this is a great way to bring it together. By utilizing

the successful strategies from other areas of the country and trying to implement them into East Tennessee, activists are more likely to see change happen. This strategy is an excellent way to save resource power and utilize all of the resources available to activists.

Developing the Black community

While some strategies have focused on external communities such as non-Black publics, legislators, city officials, etc., another key public in this movement has been the internal public – the Black community. Through creating opportunity for the Black community and developing unity in the Black leaders, the ultimate goal is to develop the Black community. By creating more opportunity and unity, the Black community will be able to mobilize and create change for their community on a higher level.

Many participants noted that Black communities look the same everywhere. There are the same struggles because the problem is systemic, and it is happening all across the country. Participant C talked about what this looks like in his Black community, specifically, stating,

> "Black businesses are so few. Really the only entity that is alive and vibrant in a lot of Black neighborhoods comes down to the church and what we might call a convenience store… the church is very integral in terms of economic development, issues like community development, the idea of empowerment."

One of Participant F's strategies for community development is to be incredibly present in the community. He believes the most important thing to do is build relationships of trust within the community and to provide a safe space for people to come and share about their problems and frustrations. Building trusting relationships is the only way to really connect and understand the needs of the community on the level that is needed. He said,

> "We reach out to them all the time. And through these young men, we find out what's happening in their homes. And if there's a need in their homes, we try to connect the homes to where the services are in the community… we try to educate. We have health fairs, we have an annual gala each year, and we have other activities that we have for the community. So, we mainly try to educate the community, let them know where services and help is, and try to connect people in the community to whatever services they need… We participated in some food donations, some food drives, delivering food into the community."

Many participants emphasized this need for relationship building. One of the keys to success is figuring out a way to work together to ensure Black voices are being heard in all spaces. Again, participants brought up the importance of building a better network of resources for the community with one another. Participant E said,

> "I think we need to figure out how to work more together. And not that we're not working together. We're just not working together. Does that make sense? It's not like I don't want to work with you. We just probably haven't had a conversation on how we can work together."

Her fear is that Black communities have started to go numb to the things affecting them and that people will stop trying to push for change. She said it is important that her community not give up. Gentrification, lack of development, and deterioration are a constant struggle in the Black community. Living in a city with a 42 percent poverty rate amongst Black people and a lack of available resources, Participant E emphasized struggles within her Black community to stay hopeful. She said there is a need for her organization to be in every conversation and every space to ensure that Black voices are being heard. She said,

> "We want to be that catalyst. We want to be that organization that people want to talk to when you're going to do something over here in our community. When you think about Black community, when you think about Black people, businesses, we want people to be like, 'Oh, you might want to go talk to [organization] to just either get their opinion or see how you can help,' because we are going to continue to help our people… talking with city government, getting on zoom calls, talking with the mayor of the city… meeting with the city officials, elected officials, our city council members, being in those conversations that are happening that we're typically left out of."

Similarly, as an elected official in his city, Participant C noted that one of his strategies to begin creating more opportunity for Black organizations is to be incredibly well-networked and to advocate for the Black community. While some cities in East Tennessee have already seen some rebuilding and progress being made to create infrastructure for the Black community, his city is not yet one of them. He said,

> "I spend a great deal of my time trying to stay aware of (a) who are the players, and (b) what are they involved in. So, networking would be the catch phrase that I would use in terms of outreach. Somebody has to stay highly networked with a community… My long-term goal is to see an infrastructure for the Black community. It's kind of weird on the front end when you hear that. Because what does that really mean? But there is a serious need for an infrastructure within the Black community. If you were to use Knoxville as an example, there are established organizations. There's an established Black business community. There are various established Black professional classes. There is a Black political contingent. Reverend Harold Middlebrook and a variety of

other individuals are fixtures in the Knoxville community. There is infrastructure in Knoxville. In [this city], there still isn't an infrastructure."

Black community development is another area in which strategies are not currently being employed as much as activists would like. Participant C talked about how more strategy is needed in order for the Black community to successfully mobilize. He said,

"Here locally, the Black Lives Matter movement, again, it accelerated so quickly. And you had 20-somethings, forgive me, I don't mean to insult you. But you had young individuals, young men and women, who were moving rather quickly. And at times, I felt like they did not have a firm grasp of the theory of nonviolence. And why are you moving? What is the strategy behind your movement?"

One leader who is deeply imbedded in strategy, and who is constantly trying to remind others to move strategically, is Participant G. She had similar things to say, stating that activists always need to be checking one another and making sure their hard work is really providing and filling in gaps where there is need. She said,

"I've been working with individuals, but also with groups to recognize what their service looks like, and how it really meets the needs and if it's really meeting the needs. And for the people that they have in leadership, because that's where a lot of my focus is, for those that are in leadership, whether it's within a system or organization… a lot of my work really looks at really taking a step back and seeing the fullness of what you're doing, who you serve, and specifically with groups and organizations that serve inner city youth and families… so that's kind of my takeaway, like, whatever you're doing, how are you evaluating whether it is effective enough? And what the implications? And what

potential harm can be done or is being done? And how can you really improve those outcomes? And then, on top of that, how can you grow within your role?"

Participant H noted that due to the systemic racism and oppression of Black people, building up the Black community is the only viable option. She said,

"It has to start from the community and then it goes up. Because our government's not going to change, we have to change it. And so, that would take BLM getting on this kind of same page about what we're doing, what our goals are, and how every chapter could be promoting that."

Each activist has individual strengths and stories that are necessary to the movement. If these activists would work together to strategically disperse themselves in the community, each filling different needs, it would drastically increase the scope and spread of the movement. Creating organized change would help the Black community develop at a much faster rate. Again, resource mobilization theory plays an important role in this movement. In order to see the desired level of change, resources must be utilized more effectively than they have been in the past.

Global theme

The global theme is the highest level of themes in the Attride-Stirling model of analysis. This is the overarching theme of the movement that was demonstrated across all interviews. Figure 3 on the following page demonstrates the overall thematic framework for this study.

Gaining economic and political power in the Black community

The overall goal of activists is to gain economic and political power in the Black community. Every goal, strategy, and tactic all points toward this one essential need. "Poverty is the common denominator," stated Participant F. Participants spoke more frequently on the

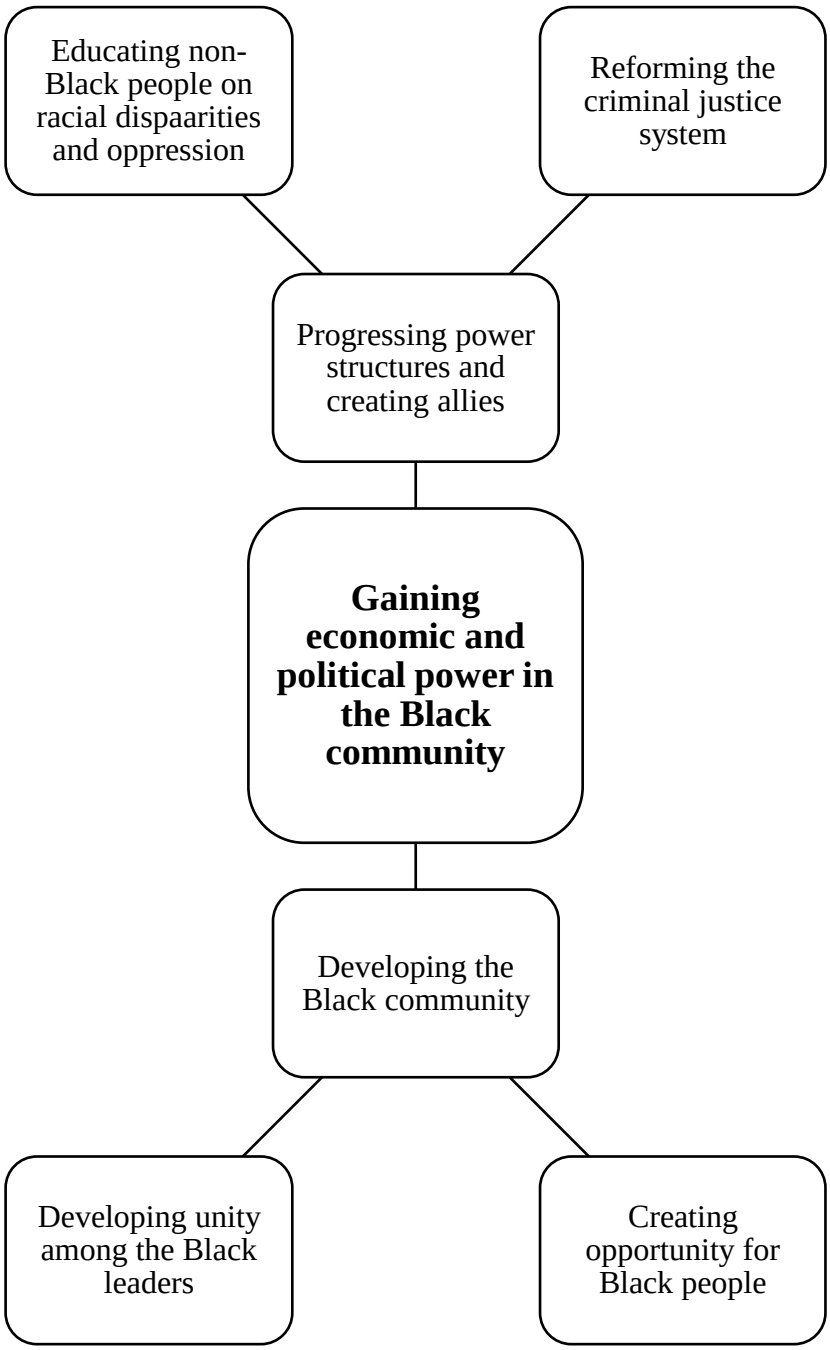


Figure 3: Thematic Framework.

economic disparities between Black and non-Black communities than any other form of systemic oppression. They stated that Black communities everywhere look the same and what is happening in East Tennessee is simply a reflection of what happens nationally and internationally.

When speaking about economic inequalities and the importance of Black communities gaining economic power, Participant D stated,

> "If we don't support Black people to have access to wealth, it's gonna be 100 more years of oppression. That's the number one thing… People respect people who have resource power, so if the majority of Black people are poor and in destitute, they're never going to get respect from their White counterparts. Period."

Participant G also spoke about the lack of economic and political power that exists today in the Black community, stating,

> "There's a disconnect between those that make decisions for the Black community as far as what their needs are, as well as what their assets, what their abilities are. And so, a lot of decisions are being made for the Black community. And things are being done to the Black community versus like with the Black community."

The main reason participants noted for the lack of economic power was the lack of political power. Political power is necessary in order to be granted government funds for community development. When Black voices are not heard or valued within local, state, and federal government, they do not receive the same access to resources and funding as other demographics. Participant H said, "It's systemic oppression that is causing extreme poverty. Families in poverty do not have any sort of resources."

The strategies for gaining this economic and political power include all publics for the movement – non-Black publics, the Black community, legislators and law makers, local, state, and federal government, etc. Every single one of these groups must mobilize in order for this goal to be achieved. While participants each had their own unique avenues for how to create more economic and political power for the Black community, the need for resource development is clear. Targeting politicians, legislators, and the Black community itself and creating more equitable resource distribution and development is imperative to the contemporary Black civil rights movement.

Gaining economic and political power will likely go hand in hand. Participant E talked about her work and strategies for gaining economic power often through political initiatives. In order to gain political power, activists are meeting with publics such as city council members, state legislators, and Black community members who could be prepared to take office and leadership roles in the future. She said,

> "When I look at City Council, majority of those people don't look like me, majority of those people have not come from my background and don't know my same struggle. So, I mean, you're already at a disadvantage, because you can't speak for me. So how can I have my place in those spaces? So, then that would look like for me, you know, possibly running for city council. So that's another part of that umbrella, because we just have to be anywhere and everywhere, unfortunately, if we really want to progress our people… Like, one of our platforms might not be police brutality, or defund the police. But don't get me wrong, those are things that need to be looked into. But also, part of that movement is economic wealth for our people and how to get that. Some people think of it as just protesting and boycotting and raising noise and making loud… In the end, it is all

those things, but it is also running for city council running for elected offices or positions so that we can still can't continue to be left behind."

As Participant B mentioned in her interview, Black people do not have a mass form of economic or political power. The focus of her work is trying to create infrastructure around strategically gaining economic and political power. She said,

> "The main objective right now is infiltrating more political seats and platforms, so we can create more voice and have another platform for directly impacting the actions in the policies of White supremacy by just being there to rewrite those policies and laws, as well as maintaining our voice and our narrative, continuing to push the Black Lives Matter movement, continuing to raise awareness about issues and concerns that we are encountering as people suffering under the system that is designed to oppress us so well."

Participant C, who is an elected official in his town, also spoke about the importance of political power and appealing to voters. He encountered many difficulties while running for re-election in his own town in 2020. All of the sudden the narrative shifted and White people in his town did not feel a need for a Black person to hold a political seat. While he ended up winning re-election, it was not without difficulty. He emphasized that his platform for engaging voters was all about creating a sense of community and unity. He stated,

> "One of the greatest challenges was truly trying to embrace, what is community? And not get into this echo chamber. Really having to exhibit a sense of leadership and say, 'We are a community. We may fall on various spots along the political spectrum, but we are a community at the end of the day.'"

He believes the emphasis on this message is what helped him win re-election.

Though creating a sense of political power is one of the main platforms for the contemporary Black civil rights movement, there is still a lot of diversity in the way activists believe they can create this political power. While building unity and community and getting people out to vote was a platform for some, others had very different approaches. Participant B talked more about long-term goals, stating,

> "We are going to have to create our own political party, and we're going to have to infiltrate the political system to take seats so we can get in control to basically finally push for the rewriting of the American Constitution. The Constitution is shitty. It was written by a bunch of rich, slave-owning, White men. That's a lot of people that were not included. That's literally one demographic classification, and everybody else was left out. And they were allowed to impose this ideology upon the entire country… if America wants to be honest about addressing racism on a local or state level, it starts with the Constitution itself. That constitution is going to have to be rewritten. Flat out. There's no ifs, ands or buts about it. So, as far as the objectives and goals on the home front, yes, we are going to infiltrate these political spaces, so at some point, we can claim the House. We can claim the Senate. We can claim the Presidency. We can claim the state legislator. So that way, you have a top to bottom agreement across the board, that it is time to rewrite this constitution. That fixes any problems on the local, state and federal level instantly, because you're going to change the laws of the land by rewriting the constitution that is now inclusive of everyone that exists in this country and not just one select demographic that then gets to decide who benefits and who don't."

Likewise, Participant E also talked about the need to build a Black political party. She even went on to talk about possibly seceding from the city and creating a separate Black

community in order to allow the Black community to make decisions about where resources go. She said in her interview,

> "I just feel like we have to have our own stuff. Whether it's our own political party that we can advocate for our own people… I've even had conversations with some of the elders in the community about seceding from the city, which would look like forming our own city within the city… Maybe that's what we need to think about doing so that we can start getting those resources directly to our community and not saying that is going to the city. And then it gets divvied out and we're still getting less than everybody else."

Once again, while different leaders emphasized the importance of gaining political power, there were stark contrasts in how to achieve this. Some participants believe creating unity and community is key, while others think overhauling or abandoning the system is better. These conflicting ideas of leaders in the movement make it difficult for progress to be made, given that leaders are sending vastly different messages to the same publics.

Participant C provided a criticism of the BLM movement, stating that while they were successful in mobilizing people and keeping energy for a time, they were not able to capitalize on the moment to strategically build political power. While some other BLM movements nationally have been able to flip political seats and see deep political changes, locally this has not yet been accomplished. He said,

> "I don't know if everyone sees things the way that I see it, but for [me], I would hope that there is a new sense of political power… one of the things that [Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.] talks about is the need for political power, and the need for Black people to coalesce their political power. I don't know, locally, if we realized the political power that we possess… They wanted to make their voices heard. And for that moment, they were loud,

> and they were seen. But in terms of building political power, I think that they've been woefully deficient in terms of really understanding the strategy. I mentioned that theory of nonviolence. There has to be some kind of strategic vision that we have at the end of the day. So, to go back to your question, I would hope that what we see nationally would seek locally. As Black Lives Matter develops, as Black Lives Matter is articulated, as Black Lives Matter is manifested on the streets, that now becomes political power. It is formulated. It is structured."

Social movement theory is incredibly prevalent in the contemporary Black civil rights movement. Until the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor sparked conversation and movement across the country, little was known about the social movement in East Tennessee. The social movement was created out of collective identity, and it has also dwindled without it. In order for the movement to continue to be successful, leaders must find a way to continue sparking the movement and demonstrating the need for change without the unpredictable, national level tragedies.

As stated previously, political support of the movement is not going to be easily achieved. This is a process that takes years to achieve as more people infiltrate power structures and make Black voices heard. While in many ways the election of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris has had a positive effect, it has also erased some of the urgency for change. Without a blatant, outspoken leader expressing racism toward Black people, less non-Black people see a need for systemic reform. Continuing to infiltrate political spaces and elect Black people and Black allies will be key to continuing to find success through the political process.

Lastly, resource mobilization is probably the most important aspect to finding success in this social movement. In a community that often lacks resources for Black people and the Black community, finding ways to build economic and political infrastructure for the Black community is imperative. People with power are the ones who inevitably create systemic change. In order for the goals of this movement to be reached, these leaders must find ways to unify in order to disperse resources in the most effective way to the Black community.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The contemporary Black civil rights movement is still in the early stages of development in East Tennessee. While strategies are being employed by different leaders, there is not a lot of cohesion among the leaders. This study found that the overall goal of the movement is to gain economic and political power within the Black community. This is being done by engaging power structures and forming allies with non-Black people and by developing the Black community. The main strategies being employed are to educate non-Black people on racial disparities and oppression, to reform the criminal justice system, to create opportunity for Black people, and to develop unity among the Black leaders.

Social movement theory can be demonstrated through the rise of the movement and leaders in the 2020 calendar year. The opportunity that the events of this year created allowed for growth of the movement. Political process theory can be seen in the ways national and regional politics have played a role in the movement. While the movement was able to see growth due to what was happening on a national level, the regional level of politics stifled the movement locally. Resource mobilization theory is key to creating a more effective movement. In a movement that centers around the work of volunteers and community members, there needs to be more structure around how the movement engages with people in the community to create change. The lack of unity among leaders keeps them from building off of one another in the movement. While the intentional horizontal leadership is valid and justifiable, there needs to be a *network* of the leaders and organizations involved in the movement in order to create more structure. Successfully implementing strategies to keep activists engaged and communicating

with one another, regardless of their individual role, would be beneficial for the progress of the movement.

Implications

The practical implications of this study include resources for how the contemporary Black civil rights movement could become more successful in the future. While activists often rely on political and social events to spur the movement forward, creating a network of activists could help them be more successful in their search for economic and political power. The most important finding of this study is that more unity is needed in the movement for activists to see the level of success that is desired. In the literature review, the researcher discussed in detail the BLM movement and the intentional lack of leadership they have created. However, this study found that the lack of leadership in the movement seems to create more conflict than opportunity. One of the problems in the movement is that there is often contradiction in the stories that are told. Rather than working on such an individual level, collaboration is needed to ensure each group is really providing necessary, cohesive information to publics. Creating a more unified voice and movement would help the leaders better distribute and utilize available resources and mobilize publics toward systemic change. This finding also has great theoretical implications as it demonstrates the need for more cohesive strategies in combating racial injustice.

Limitations and Future Research

One great limitation of this study was the limited number of interviews. Finding interview participants was made difficult by the small population of contemporary Black civil rights leaders in East Tennessee and the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, as has been demonstrated throughout the analysis of this study, resources are incredibly limited for the leaders of this movement. This lack of resources forces leaders of the movement to work full-

time jobs along with their volunteer activism work. This made it difficult for the researcher to engage with activists who had enough time to participate in the interview process.

This study was qualitative and, therefore, only considered the stories of a few local activists. These findings are, therefore, not transferrable to the whole region nor to the whole movement. This study was also conducted via one hour Zoom sessions. If the study included more in-person, long-term engagement with activists, more information likely could have been unearthed. The researcher suggests further studies be conducted to learn more about the contemporary Black civil rights movement in East Tennessee. More holistic understanding is needed in order to build on the understanding of the movement.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE KNOXVILLE

January 25, 2021

Lily Joy Crosby

UTK - Mech, Aero & Biomed Engr

Re: UTK IRB-21-06219-XM

Study Title: Black Lives Matter Activism Strategies for Mobilizing Publics in East Tennessee

Dear Lily Joy Crosby:

The Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) reviewed your application for the above referenced project and determined that your application is eligible for exempt review under 45 CFR 46.101, category 2: Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if the information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by .111(a)(7).

You may use a Consent Cover Statement in lieu of an informed consent interview. The requirement to secure a signed consent form is waived; willingness of the subject to participate will constitute adequate documentation of consent.

Your application has been determined to comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects. This letter constitutes full approval of your application (Version 1.1), and the following study documents:

- Participant consent form v. 1.1
- Recruitment documents v. 1.1
- Interview Questions v. 1.0

Please note that restrictions are in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and all in-person contact with research participants is on hold until further notice.

- Newly-approved studies with in-person interactions may not begin enrollment until further notice from the IRB/HRPP.
- Newly-approved studies with no in-person participant interaction may begin after receiving IRB

approval.

Please monitor the COVID-19 Updates at https://www.utk.edu/coronavirus/faq/ for the latest information. Human Subjects Research updates are being filed under Information for Instructors/Research.

Any alterations (revisions) in the protocol or study documents must be promptly submitted to and approved by the UTK Institutional Review Board prior to implementation of these revisions.

Sincerely,

Colleen P. Gilrane

Colleen P. Gilrane, Ph.D.

Chair

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement
1534 White Avenue Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697 865-974-7400 fax irb.utk.edu

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Flagship Campus of the University of Tennessee System

Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: Black Lives Matter Activism Strategies for Mobilizing Publics in East Tennessee

Researcher(s): Lily Joy Crosby, Graduate Student, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

We are asking you to be in this research study because you are over the age of 18 and are considered a leader in the Black Lives Matter movement in East Tennessee. The information in this consent form is to help you decide if you want to participate in this research study. Please take your time reading this form and contact the researcher to ask questions if there is anything you do not understand or would like further clarification on.

Why is the research being done?

The purpose of the research study is to better understand how leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement are working to spread awareness and increase engagement with the movement in East Tennessee. This study is being conducted by a graduate student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

What will I do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you take part in a virtual interview via Zoom. The questions ask about strategies you are using and the ways in which you and your team are engaging with people in your community to advance the Black Lives Matter movement. You can skip questions that you do not want to answer.

Can I say "No"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can stop at any point up until the interview is complete, as it will then be identified by letter for the duration of the study.

Are there any risks to me?

You will not experience any more risk than what you experience in everyday life.

What are the potential benefits for taking part in this study?

The potential benefits for taking part in this study include helping to build upon the shared knowledge of civil rights activism in East Tennessee. This research has the potential to inform future research.

What will happen with the information collected for this study?

During the process of each interview, the researcher will first ask if they can record the session to later create a transcript. Following each interview, the researcher will transcribe the interview. Interviewer's recordings and transcriptions are to be saved in a secure drive on a computer in which only the researcher has the password, and that computer will be stored behind a locked

door for the protection of interviewees identities. Each interviewee will be assigned a letter or number and will henceforth be identified as such.

Information collected for this study will be published and possibly presented at scientific meetings. No identifying information will be included.

What will happen to your data in the future?

Your data will be transcribed within 48 hours of the interview. At which point, the entire recording will be permanently deleted. The transcription will be assigned a letter and will be henceforth identified as such. These recordings will not be released in any form. Any identifiable information from the transcript will not be used.

Will I be paid for being in this research study?

There will be no monetary compensation for taking part in this study.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researcher, Lily Joy Crosby, **lcrosby4@vols.utk.edu** , (423)557-2258, or the Faculty Research Advisor, Dr. Michael Palenchar, **mpalench@utk.edu**.

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
1534 White Avenue
Blount Hall, Room 408
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
Phone: 865-974-7697
Email: utkirb@utk.edu

Statement of Consent

I have read this form, been given the chance to ask questions and have my questions answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By marking the check box below, I am agreeing to be in this study. I can print or save a copy of this consent information for future reference. If I do not want to be in this study, I can end contact with the researcher.

If you would like to participate in this study, please insert an “X” or check mark into the box below.

I am at least 18 years of age.

I agree to participate in this study.

Appendix C: Recruitment Documents

Recruitment Documents

Research Study Title: Black Lives Matter Activism Strategies for Mobilizing Publics in East Tennessee

Researcher(s): Lily Joy Crosby, Graduate Student, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Facebook Message:

“Hello. My name is Lily Crosby, I am a graduate student at the University of Tennessee, and I am currently interviewing leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement in East Tennessee who are 18 years or older for my thesis. The purpose of my research study is to gain a better understanding of the BLM activism strategies being employed in East Tennessee. The interview will take place via a Zoom conference call and should last approximately one hour. The results will be used in my thesis which will then hopefully be published. You will be asked to complete a digital consent form prior to the interview. Any information that could expose your identity will not be used to ensure anonymity. Please let me know if you would be interested in this. You may contact me by responding to this message on Facebook Messenger or by emailing me at lcrosby4@vols.utk.edu. Feel free to ask other qualifying individuals if they would be interested in participating in this study as well. Thank you!

Email:

"Hello. My name is Lily Crosby, I am a graduate student at the University of Tennessee, and I am currently interviewing leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement in East Tennessee who are 18 years or older for my thesis. My (insert nature of relationship to personal contact), (insert personal contact who connected me with this person) mentioned (he/she/they) thought you might be willing to participate in this study and gave me your contact information to reach out to you about participating. The purpose of my research study is to gain a better understanding of the BLM activism strategies being employed in East Tennessee. The interview will take place via a Zoom conference call and should last approximately one hour. The results will be used in my thesis which will then hopefully be published. You will be asked to complete a digital consent form prior to the interview. Any information that could expose your identity will not be used to ensure anonymity. Please let me know if you would be interested in this. You may contact me by responding to this message or by emailing me at lcrosby4@vols.utk.edu. Feel free to ask other qualifying individuals if they would be interested in participating in this study as well. Thank you!"

Phone talking points:

- My name is Lily My name is Lily Crosby, I am a graduate student at the University of Tennessee.
- I am currently interviewing leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement in East Tennessee who are 18 years or older for my thesis.
- My (insert nature of relationship to personal contact), (insert personal contact who connected me with this person) mentioned (he/she/they) thought you might be willing to participate in this study and gave me your contact information to reach out to you about participating.

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-21-06219-XM
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 01/25/2021

- The purpose of my research study is to gain a better understanding of the BLM activism strategies being employed in East Tennessee.
- The interview will take place via a Zoom conference call and should last approximately one hour.
- The results will be used in my thesis which will then hopefully be published.
- You will be asked to complete a digital consent form prior to the interview.
- Any information that could expose your identity will not be used to ensure confidentiality.
- Please let me know if you would be interested in this.
- You may contact me by responding to this message or by emailing me at lcrosby4@vols.utk.edu.
- Feel free to ask other qualifying individuals if they would be interested in participating in this study as well.
- Thank you!

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-21-06219-XM
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Appendix D: Interview Guide

1. What has your experience been like as a leader in the Black Lives Matter Movement?
    a. Describe a day of what it's like when you're active in the movement. Is it a lot of social media? Flyers? Events?
    b. Describe your normal every day experience being a part of this movement
    c. Where do you focus your efforts in the community?

2. What about this specific movement made you want to get involved?
    a. Describe what is special about your team and what they are doing that makes you want to be a part of the movement.
    b. Describe the key elements of the work you are doing.

3. What have been your greatest triumphs and challenges during the 2020 year, and how have the events of this year affected your work?
    a. Has anything been handled differently than in past years?
    b. How has COVID-19, police killings, and the 2020 Presidential Election affected your work? Did it affect your goals or your outreach?

4. When you think about this movement, where do you hope this is moving toward in the future?
    a. Describe your goals: is it to educate, inform, create systemic change, see movement within a certain target population.
    b. How do you hope people respond to your message?
    c. What are the key takeaways from your work that you hope people in the community take from it?

5. What does it look like to do this kind of work in East Tennessee? How do you think that differs from other parts of the country?
    a. What have you found is the most effective way to engage people in your community with your message and purpose?
    b. How does the political climate of this region affect your outreach?

Appendix E: Participant C Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Okay, so I just want to make sure that you agree to everything in the consent form, and that you're willing to participate in this study.

Participant: I do agree.

Interviewer: Awesome. Thank you so much. And I just want to remind you that you may end participation at any time without penalty, and your results would not be used for this research, if you choose to do so.

Participant: Okay.

Interviewer: So, are you ready to dive in?

Participant: Let's dive.

Interviewer: Okay, great. So, first, I want to ask, what has your experience been like as a leader in the Black Lives Matter movement in East Tennessee?

Participant: So, for the Black Lives Matter movement, I feel like I've been a wise sage. And being in my early 40s, that's kind of startling. The Black Lives Matter movement, I think, really sped past me. I got my teeth wet and my initial training from people who were from the civil rights movement, many of whom were from faith communities. And so, a lot of preachers, a lot of activists that were rooted in the faith tradition, they were the ones who taught me not only strategies for Black liberation, but also the theories, or maybe *the theory* behind nonviolence. And so, you learn about Satyagraha, and you learn about Dr. King. He had about four different criteria before you actually go to direct action. So, that has guided me in my career for the past two decades. Here locally, the Black Lives Matter movement, again, it accelerated so quickly. And you had 20-somethings, forgive me, I don't mean to insult you. But you had young individuals, young men and women, who were moving rather quickly. And at times, I felt like they did not have a firm grasp of the theory of nonviolence. And why are you moving? What is the strategy behind your movement? So, I felt like my role in the Black Lives Matter movement was more in tune of trying to provide guidance, a listening ear, instruction at times. Trying to provide a safe space so that people could feel comfortable conversing because there'd be a lot of frustration. Really trying to be a voice of reason with individuals who were very, very angry, and we would probably say justifiably angry.

Interviewer: Absolutely. So, what have you found is the most effective way to engage people in your community with your message and purpose? Where do you focus your efforts in the community?

Participant: So, now for [me], I think that what I have determined is that if we looked at it, I guess on a board, it would be like a lot of concentric circles. And each circle would represent different groups of individuals, and maybe even their socio-political beliefs. And, I would argue that in the quest for racial equality, you take all of those respective concentric circles and they are legitimate. Particularly if they are all moving in the same direction. Maybe a better example would be looking at racial equality in the context of a spectrum. And you might have more, quote unquote, "conservative approaches", you might have more "moderate approaches", and you might have more "progressive approaches". But at the end of the day, if we're trying to get to racial equality, then *each has merit*. Now, depending on where you are on the spectrum, you may take issue with it. But here at [organization], that's the conclusion that we've reached. We call ourselves Switzerland. We want to be a space that anybody and everybody is welcome to come and engage. For example, in an area like this that is ninety percent White and politically conservative, you do have individuals that say they want to address the racial issues and want to do something, but tears start streaming down their face when conversations come up about White privilege. In other words, they can't handle those conversations. They get very tense when conversations come up about how slave patrols would lead to the modern-day police force, and how slavery is fused with the political institutions of our society in systemic racism. People get very, very tense about that. So, this space has been an inclusive space for them. When they come here, and they say, "We want to do something in regards to race," and in their mind, they think that a volunteer service project, for example, is a good way to bridge the racial divide. I have not told them any different. If they wish to use our space to plan a volunteer service project, then I'm very much receptive to that. On the other end of the spectrum, we have an antiracist reading group. Right now, I'm working with some other organizations to really focus on a civility school, and racism and race relations would be the nucleus for this civility school and having these critical conversations. That's the other end of the spectrum. So, I have determined for myself, the best approach is to have everybody align themselves with this spectrum and try to have a space that is welcoming and inclusive. And, hopefully, we can kind of lower the temperature a little bit and listen to each other.

Interviewer: So, when you think about what you hope is the outcome of your work, what would you say is your goal? Would it be to educate, to inform, to create systemic change, to see the movement within certain populations? Or, is it more of seeing people coming together and have conversation?

Participant: I guess, a hybrid. Certainly, it is to educate and inform, and yes, we do have space for individuals to network to have these conversations.

Interviewer: Great. Could you tell me a little bit about what just a typical day looks like for you in the movement?

Participant: A great deal of management of the [organization]. I hope that I'm a good resource for you. I must admit to you, I was humbled to get the invitation to participate, but I have to admit I have not seen myself, and this may be a startling revelation here, but I have not really seen myself as a part of the Black Lives Matter movement. Not that I'm opposed to it, not that I'm against it. Not that I am averse to it. Again, as I said earlier, I feel like in a way, I'm kind of the old man in terms of this latest chapter of racial progression. Like I said, certainly in terms of quote unquote, "civil rights", I feel very much at home. There were different periods of the summer 2020, where there were certain tactics and questions and certain aspects of the movement that I struggled with. I struggled to understand. And so, I guess I give that preface to say that a lot of the work that I'm doing on a day-to-day basis is rooted in what we may now call "traditional civil rights". I don't know if it's necessarily Black Lives Matter. As I understand Black Lives Matter, there is a much deeper dive into not just Black liberation, but also a variety of other systems that seem to affect Black people. If it's environmental justice, or if it's militarism, if it's sexism, it's a variety of other things that kind of align itself to race or race aligns itself to those other issues. So, day-to-day work that I deal with, for example, here with this small African American community and even smaller Latinx and Asian community, for the past 20 years, we have tried to utilize all resources at our disposal to try to move the needle forward in this area in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We have formed a diversity and inclusion Alliance. We're pursuing our 501C3, so I'm working on developing the bylaws for that organization, developing the board for that organization. And our hope is that we can work with the business community in helping them develop DEI plans. Our hope is that diversity, equity, and inclusion could be a part of the Northeast Tennessee culture, and not have a lot of pushback, that it would be received. So, again, I don't want to bore you, but that's some of the work that I deal with.

Interviewer: Oh, no, that's great. It's not boring to me. That's why I'm doing this research. I'm very interested in it. So, during the 2020 year, we had so much going on. There was the rising of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were all of the very publicized police killings, and then we had the 2020 presidential election. Right? So, how did all of that affect your work? And what would you say were the greatest triumphs and challenges that you had last year with all of that going on?

Participant: So, added to what you just mentioned, those three major issues in 2020, I am an elected official in [town]. And I was running for reelection in 2020, so I was part of a rather contentious election season. My mind was very much focused on trying to win reelection. And in a [small town], politics took a rather nasty turn. It was something I had never seen, and I grew up in that town. I've grown up and lived there all my life. Well, [the town] took a very nasty turn. Individuals wanted to suggest that myself and others were anti-police. There was an underground movement, people had signs in their yard to talk about "back the blue" You know, there were these suggestions that we did not need a person like myself, a person of color, on the board. Even though for the past 52 years we've had a Black

person on the board. The night Dr. King was assassinated was the same night that [this town] elected its first Black alderman. So, for 52 years, we've had a Black person on the board. But they thought we now no longer need a Black person on the board because of what was going on nationally. And so, the "Trump effect" had had seeped into [our town], and [our town] prides itself on being a community and really embracing community-building principles. So, I think for me, one of the greatest challenges, was truly trying to embrace, "What is community?" and not get into this echo chamber. Really having to exhibit a sense of leadership to say, "We are a community. We may fall on various spots along the political spectrum, but we are a community at the end of the day." And the fact that as an elected official, I have a responsibility to serve all citizens in [our town], and not just those who might agree with me. So that was a heavy challenge. At the same time, as a Black man in East Tennessee, trying to explain to the best of my knowledge what Black Lives Matter means to individuals who say, "Well, all lives matter." Well, if all lives matter, then then we really shouldn't have a conversation. Because it seems like we should just easily agree that we need to dismantle systemic racism. Why is that a difficulty? You know, if all lives matter, then hopefully we can clearly see that some lives haven't mattered over the course of recent history. And so, it seems like we really don't have a need to have a detailed conversation if all lives matter. But sadly, we are saying all lives matter, but we're not really comprehending what we're saying. And that's something I think was another challenge. White individuals that I've come in contact with –neighbors, friends, close associates – they view racism distinctly differently than I think, a certain segment of White people and the overwhelming majority of African Americans. I think from this area, there's a considerable contingent of White individuals that see racism in the context of hate. So, you know, the Klu Klux Klan burning crosses, using the N-word, spitting on people, literally killing somebody because of their skin color. In that context, you have a lot of White folks that would say, "Listen, I don't like that, I can't stand that, I'll stand against it, I'll cuss somebody out if they use the N word." You know, there's a lot of people that over 50 years, their feelings have progressed positively in terms of addressing and rooting out hate. So, in that context, we went to school together, we work together, I see somebody at the store, and I say hello. In that context, White individuals are moving forward, but this recent conversation Black Lives Matter, as I understand it, is more rooted in the systems of our society and how racism is attached, connected to those systems, and how in many regards, we just blindly live our lives, not realizing. And I know you understand this, but sadly, I don't think that concept of institutional racism clicks with everybody. Thus, the clash. So, I did see some challenges in 2020. That's an excellent question. I did see some challenges in 2020, trying to explain systemic racism. I wrote an article in our local newspaper, as a matter of fact, and tried as best as I could to give a historical overview about systemic racism. I thought it was interesting because I only had maybe three or four individuals call me. It was dead silence when I put the article out, only three or four individuals called me and said, "That was a very well-done article." But it was a lot of silence. Because it's very difficult for people to really grasp that something that happened back in

the 1780s with the three-fifths compromise - even the notion of the three-fifths compromise - blows the mind. But to think that the guiding document of our country essentially allows for segregation, for a stratified society, that's difficult for a lot of people to grasp.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, was there anything that you all had to handle differently this year than you would have in past years? You talked about the problems with running in your in your city. We saw a lot of movement happening quickly in the Black Lives Matter movement this year, so was there anything that you all had to adjust to do differently in the community to get the right word out and to connect with people better?

Participant: Excellent question. Yes, the Black community had to deal with the fact that there were younger individuals that were involved in this movement. Younger people were playing a leadership role in the movement, and they were individuals that were not part of the, quote unquote, establishment. They were not part of the establishment. So, we really had to walk on eggshells with young men and women who were very new to many of us. If you can imagine, as I mentioned earlier, twenty years ago when I got my start, there were people that were rooted in the Martin Luther King-esque approach to civil rights. There were many ministers that were part of the Black leadership contingent. And so, as a 20-something coming back home, I had to network extensively with the ministers. I had to earn their trust, get on their radar, and then have some of them take me under their wing so that as I got older, my leadership capacity grew. Black Lives Matter comes about and the killing of George Floyd comes about, and immediately we have young men and women who come out of nowhere, and there isn't this sense of new people looking to the established leaders and ministers saying, “We want you to guide us and help us.” It was very much, “We’re mad. We’re angry. This does not need to be in the 21st century, and we're going to make our voices heard.” There were many, quote unquote, “elders” in the Black community that were very frustrated with the younger men and women. And so, I found myself playing the role of a diplomat trying to encourage elders to connect with youth, and encourage youth to connect with elders. Youth did not really want to connect with elders because they were sick and tired of being told, “Listen, that's not the way to do it.” Elders didn't want to connect with youth because elders would say, “Well, let's pray,” and youth would say, “Wait, wait, wait, now’s not the time to be praying. We need to be acting. We need to be moving.” This was really an eye-opening scene for me because again, for the 20th century, the civil rights Black liberation was very much rooted in the faith tradition. This was the first instance, I think that we saw this movement for Black liberation that has not necessarily been rooted in the faith tradition. And it really did stun a group of Black leaders. And some of that, too, might be ego. I'll grant that. You know, these young people are moving, and they haven't consulted me. They have not come to me. You know, we're the ones that usually have the phone number to the mayor. We're the ones that usually have the ability to connect with different leaders. I think that there were some Black leaders that felt that way.

Well, it's more than I thought, I know there were Black leaders who felt that way. When I began to see who some of the young men and women were moving forward in the movement, I reached out to them. There were some young men and women who had taken classes of mine at [college / university], so they knew me they would message me or email me, and ask if I would meet with different leaders of the movement. So, I was grateful to get to interact with them, and I tried to be proactive in moving with them. But yeah, I would say, we walked on eggshells just trying to keep some degree of balance and diplomacy here in East Tennessee between this new Black leadership contingent, and the establishment.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, when you think about this movement, in all of the different facets that it has right now, what do you hope it's moving toward in the future? And in an ideal world, what would you hope comes out of all of this?

Participant: Another excellent question. I don't know if everyone sees things the way that I see it, but for [me], I would hope that there is a new sense of political power. If you read Dr. King's last book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community*, Dr. King, in a very prophetic sense, outlines about four or five things that Black people need to consider. 1967 is when the book is written, so he's saying now that the Civil Rights Act is passed, now that the Voting Rights Act has been passed, and now Black people have rights that they never had in the 20th century, now there are some things that we as Black people need to do. And one of the things that he talks about is the need for political power, and the need for Black people to coalesce their political power. I don't know, locally, if we realized the political power that we possess, when we engage in movement, when we engage in nonviolent civil disobedience. I don't think that we've picked up on it. Frankly, I think that there were young men and women here locally, who were angry because a man had placed his knee on another man's neck, and that man died. I think people were mad because a young Black woman was in her own home, and people intruded on her and killed her. I noticed there were young men who wanted to curse the police officers. They wanted to make their voices heard. And for that moment, they were loud, and they were seen. But in terms of building political power, I think that they've been woefully deficient in terms of really understanding the strategy. I mentioned that theory of nonviolence. There has to be some kind of strategic vision that we have at the end of the day. So, to go back to your question, I would hope that what we see nationally would seek locally. As Black Lives Matter develops, as Black Lives Matter is articulated, as Black Lives Matter is manifested on the streets, that now becomes political power. It is formulated. It is structured. And it elects people like Rashida Tlaib. It elects people like Cory Bush. It elects people of that magnitude. I would just hope that young people really understand that. And I don't know if we were as productive here locally, as we've seen nationally.

Interviewer: So, you think that one of the problems is that there has not been much strategy that you think would be effective long-term?

Participant: I am very much an outside observer, I've never been asked. No one has requested me to participate in a conversation about strategy, but as an outside observer, that's what I perceive. We've had a couple of incidents here with protests when some people were hurt. We've had our own version of things. As an outside observer there were a number of meetings and gatherings. I think this is the point I wanted to make, there were a number of daily meetings and they would gather at one of the local parks. And it impressed me to see how social media was used to communicate with each other. And so, you had this interracial crowd that would show up. And I mean, literally hundreds of individuals that would show up. And so, people that if you were my age and older, you saw 20-somethings that you never see at a city council meeting, or that you never see at a chamber of commerce meeting. And after so long, you begin to wonder and assume that everybody that is a mover and shaker in this town is a certain age, and older. Black Lives Matter showed a lot of individuals 50s 60s 70s, that there are 20 somethings that are here. You know, and I just go back to that point, and I just believe that we did not seize that moment, or they did not seize that moment. Like to say, "Yes, we're here. And we have a voice. And we are determined to express ourselves."

Interviewer: Yeah. So, with your organization, you said that a big part of what you do is just providing and creating space where these conversations can happen. As far as your outreach, how are you trying to mobilize people who maybe wouldn't come or really be a part of it under normal circumstances? How are you reaching out to them to mobilize them into action or to get them more involved in the Black civil rights movement? And what have you found is effective in really getting people involved?

Participant: I spend a great deal of my time trying to stay aware of (a) who are the players, and (b) what are they involved in. So, networking would be the catch phrase that I would use in terms of outreach. Somebody has to stay highly networked with a community. Black solidarity is not the strongest. That's a quest. A desire that I have is to really strengthen that sense of solidarity. So, somebody has to stay heavily network. You're always wanting to know, what are the ministers thinking? What is the NAACP is thinking? What are they doing? And, if you want to get someone involved, or if you want to get groups of people involved, then you have to know what's going on. That's where I feel like it's important for me to stay networked. Once I have an idea of who is doing what, we use our organization to create a venue to get different groups to come together. So, we ask questions. Can we collaborate? Can we not duplicate services? Can we be stronger together? And so, in terms of outreach, trying to think through, how do we build that solidarity? That's definitely a focus of mine.

Interviewer: How do you hope people respond to your message and your work?

Participant: My long-term goal is to see an infrastructure for the Black community. It's kind of weird on the front end when you hear that. Because what does that really

mean? But there is a serious need for an infrastructure within the Black community. If you were to use Knoxville as an example, there are established organizations. There's an established Black business community. There are various established Black professional classes. There is a Black political contingent. Reverend Harold Middlebrook and a variety of other individuals are fixtures in the Knoxville community. There is infrastructure in Knoxville. In [this city], there still isn't an infrastructure. There's a need to build that and mold it and develop it. So, at the end of the at the end of life, when I retire from the scene, I hope that someone can say he tried to build the infrastructure for the Black community to be sustainable. Nothing's any worse than to be out here doing this work, and then when, when I die, someone else comes along and has to start all over again. And we've dealt with that where it was one person who had the had the influence, the prestige, the platform, and there was never a succession plan. So, building the infrastructure of the community is how I hope to be remembered.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. I want to ask you a little bit more about the church and the role of the church in all of this and how that kind of works together in your movement.

Participant: So, for me, the church is very integral. Black communities today, you see very few small businesses. Black businesses are so few. Really the only entity that is alive and vibrant in a lot of Black neighborhoods comes down to the church and what we might call a convenience store. But literally, these are the only thriving alive businesses in certain Black neighborhoods in certain parts of the south or even in the country. So, the church is very integral in terms of economic development, issues like community development, the idea of empowerment. Now for the Black Lives Matter movement, I think that there was a lot of frustration here locally, that there were ministers that weren't as focused on these issues. And I think that after George Floyd, Briana Taylor, Ahmaud Arbury, when all that happened, young people were saying something has to be done. And so, there wasn't as much of a loyalty or an allegiance to the African American church.

Interviewer: Who do you think right now are the key players in the movement? You said, the church, the convenience store, city council… Are there any others that I'm missing?

Participant: In terms of what I might call Black community development, there's the church. There is a what I would call a Black establishment leadership. And then there's this new vanguard of leadership and the new vanguard of leadership is younger, focused, energetic. What we see nationally is young, focused, energetic and also attuned to many systems that plague the current process. And they have a rather bold and progressive vision for the future. I have not seen that level of depth locally. But nationally, the new vanguard of leadership is challenging the Black established leadership to reconsider. The new Vanguard is challenging the Black establishment that this can no longer be about trying to get cozy with White moderate Democrats. I mean, William Lacy Clay, in St. Louis. That seat was quote, unquote, his seat. He had that seat. It was his seat to lose, and he lost it

because he was so out of touch with the new vanguard of leadership. Cory Bush came in, and no one expected her. I mean, he had that seat locked in his favor and could never imagine that she would come in and mobilize people and beat him as a result of Ferguson and various other incidents there in that area. So, the new vanguard of leadership, they are certainly a player in this in this new era.

Interviewer: Yeah, awesome. Well, I think that's all of my questions for you. Is there anything else that I maybe didn't ask a question for, but that you think is important for me to hear

Participant: No, no, I enjoyed the conversation. I hope that something has provided you is fruitful.

Interviewer: Absolutely, I really appreciate it. It has been so interesting for me to hear so many different people's perspectives and take on things, and I am just I'm so honored to be in this position where I get to hear so many people's stories. I'm really thankful for that. All right. Well, I think that's all I had. Thank you again, so much. I really appreciate your time.

Participant: It's been a pleasure. I hope you have a good day.

Interviewer: Thanks, you too. Bye.

Appendix F: Participant B Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Okay, so I have started the recording, and I just want to make sure that I get the verbal consent that you agreed to everything in that consent document. You know that you can end participation at any time without penalty.

Participant: Okay.

Interviewer: Okay, awesome. First, I just want to say thank you, again, for agreeing to this, I really appreciate the opportunity to talk with you and hear from you on this subject. Okay, so I'm just going to dive right in then. My first question is, what has your experience been like as a leader in the Black Lives Matter movement?

Participant: Um, it has its own multiple ways to that. I will say that it has been rewarding, as well as revealing at the same time. America has a series racism problem. Period. It is a serious core problem of this country. Unfortunately, the Foundation of America has been built on racism. And so, what we saw is the power of having a tyrant leader like Trump in office, who is belligerently stating his indifferences. Which, personally, I prefer that because now we have Joe Biden who's gonna do a lot of hidden belligerent actions, so we're not gonna be as aware of his type of policies and acts that are gonna be very harmful to our community. Whereas with Trump, he just was out loud and telling us directly, so we were able to better prepare for his different avenues and tactics of attack, versus, like I said, Biden's gonna be more of a hidden agenda now. Also, COVID was a great factor, I think, with the world pretty much on a slowdown, or total paus in some spaces. It just led people to be more articulately aware. They were more reading, more getting information on the website, more information on social media, more information on Google. It just was more relevancy to the information getting output. Because let's just be honest, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, by no means died in vain, but they are not the first ones either. But as you see, with the world on pause and people's attention not diverted into many different areas, our ability to slow down and to be focused more into the news and political spaces and social activities that are happening in our world, we saw an influx of awareness go across the board in all demographics, in all classifications, nationalities, ethnicities, etcetera. And so there was beauty in that. We were probably for the first time in a long time, since probably the 1960s, really bringing Black leadership and Black leadership voices back to the forefront of the Black struggle social movement. And so, there was a lot of power in that. However, there was also much frustration and again, the true harsh reality that Black America lives every day, because we are the ones that are subjected to the victimization of racism, what that looks like in a daily lifestyle practice. It brought to the forefront the reality, I think, for many non-racist White people and non-racist people of color, the harsh reality that here is this issue of racism that so many for so long overlooked, or as we all know, the infamous, are you sure that's racist? But again, you can't tell me what racism is when you don't experience it. So, for you to try to determine or decide for me, what does racism look like or if that is a racist encounter was already inappropriate on many levels.

And so, I just felt like there was a mass enlightenment that took place last year with the platform that the movement had as well as the recognition that the movement took place with because of COVID slowing the world down, and really just engaging people to become more activated, more importantly, people figuring out what can I do to help this? How can I become more involved and be part of the solution that we are clearly seeking not only as Americans, but as we are particularly talking about our African American community that for 620 years, we have blatantly oppressed in multiple ways. But this was the first time since, like I said, probably the 1940s to 1970s, that's how long the whole movement with Malcolm X and him went through, but that was probably the first time since we have seen that kind of emergence really came out. Because I mean, Trayvon Martin got killed in 2014, I think is when he was killed by george Zimmerman in Florida. I believe it's somewhere around there. II remember Obama was in office, and that's why I was frustrated with Obama, because I was like, "You're a Black man, you know about the danger of being a Black person and having this type of behavior being condoned." Even worse with Obama, in my opinion, he failed to actually address it from his federal position. And so yes, you saw a revamp to that. I mean, even with Trayvon Martin, and then like I said, their murders, it did not have the same response as we saw in 2020. And literally the only difference was this thing called COVID that forced the world to stop.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. So, kind of going back to this summer when the movement was booming. What did a typical day look like for you? What kind of things were you doing?

Participant: So, we did not have our initial protest until about 72 hours later after George Floyd's death was announced. And at that time, it was still a lot of fire breaking out across the country. We just saw this explosion of demonstrations coming out. And so, we were already in conversation with our police department, which is ironic, you know, like I said, I think that for Black leaders, particularly those of us who are already in the trenches of this thing, there was nothing new for us other than just the participation factor. That's the only thing that really changed. Everything else was pretty much in the same initiative, same ideals, agendas, the same objective and goals to be achieved. But we were actually already in communication with the police department about the integration of the mental health program and services coming in to replace the current style, which is still currently in this particular platform of resistance. Even though I've seen the police in the city try to make this program that they're trying to create, bringing in the social workers and mental health professionals. So, we were already in conversation about that. But, of course, the [city] Police Department and [county] Sheriff's Department, they have their own history of racial discrimination, prejudice, and even murder. I will not let [county] departments forget that two summers ago now, when Philly Pheap was murdered out in a parking lot that was supposed to be a basic hit-and-run incident that was being investigated, that led to this man of color getting murdered, unarmed murder at that. And the officer's name, Dylan Williams. To this day, I have never forgotten his name. Because the

scary part I think about how they handled this case is, where the hell did he go? No one knows his accountability today. Is he still on the force? Is he not on the force? Is he working a desk job? Is he back out in the field? So, Dylan Williams' identity, we don't know where he's at. I know that Charme Allen came out with her factual findings a few months later, and deemed the actions, I think she gave him police immunity, basically is what she gave him. And so, the last known news article had documented Dylan Williams as coming off of his administrative leave and reporting back to duty. But again, we don't know if that duty was in the office or back on the streets or anything. My personal opinion, once you have a shooting as an officer, I think is grounds for termination at that point because you cannot be trusted with anybody at this point. And so, we were already in those communication spaces. And George Floyd and them really gave us the hard momentum to really push for police reform in our area, because like I said, [city] Police Department and [county] County Sheriff's Department has their own history and their own reputation of being exactly like any other police department in America. I tell people all the time, you know, it's really sad that Black Code is universal in some aspects. It doesn't matter where I'm at in the world literally doesn't matter where I'm at in the world. It's a Black universal code that if I am in a facility, and somebody particularly White, yells, "I'm calling the police", Black people know universally to get the fuck out of that space. Because we already know it's about to become a danger because the police officers are entering and we already know that we are target number one. Whether we're involved in the incident or not, we will be targeted from the get go. Because unfortunately, White supremacy is not just limited to America, it is a universal worldly problem. White supremacy exists everywhere. And unfortunately, even the programming, even that has been infiltrated down through generations on generations on generations. Like I said before, the African American population is the longest oppressed demographic. We are 620 years. The Jews don't have that kind of time. The Native Americans don't have that time. The Latino Hispanic community doesn't have that time. The Asians do not have time. No one has lived through greater oppression under White supremacy than the Black people. And so, when you have 620 years of oppression, that is designing a system like White supremacy that has been able to move itself to an international space of control. And in addition to that, we got to keep informed the harsh reality of slavery and how that again was not just limited to America's shorelines. That was again a worldly thing that happened, everybody participated in slavery. And so, you have, again, this platform, this ground space where you can push for real reform against White supremacy, particularly, that has been allowed to create the spaces that killed George Floyd and Breonna Taylor or Philly Pheap and any of the other members who have lost their lives, unfortunately to police violence and brutality. And so, for us, it was pretty much an opportunity to shove some information and some stuff out there. And so, our primary objective was number one, we wanted to see mental health services and resources implemented into the police department, and we wanted a full-scale reformulation of the 911 dispatch system. Meaning that if you call and say, 'I need mental health,' the cops are automatically excluded from that because these calls will now be forwarded directly to the mental health

professional and certified individuals. Versus before, or right now, if you dial 911 and you say mental health, unfortunately police officers are still primary responders. Which, we identified with Chief Thomas and several her staff how that could already be altered just by when you dial 911 for mental health, send the damn ambulance. They are certified to deal with mental health people better than the police department. So, that was one of our primary objectives. Um, what were those three demands that we gave at that time? I think we were definitely asking for reallocation of funding, so defund the police, because we had just given it… actually, that's crazy. Because right when that all happened in May, we have just approved our city budget of $60 million to the [city] police forces. Yes, we gave them 60 million last year in 2020. And I know for a fact out of 60 million, $3 million of the police budget is spent on unmarked cop cars. Why the hell do you need that much money on unmarked police cars? That's a form of almost practicing entrapment at this point. Because it's like you have so many unmarked cars that people literally will not be able to tell the difference between your unmarked cop car to a regular car just driving down the street. So, to me, you're practicing some form of entrapment as a police department, which we all know that's a federal crime in the first place. And so that was one of the pieces. I know we have different pushed for some defunding of the police budget, because it was unnecessarily inflated. And then, I can't remember what that third demand we had at that time. But there was three direct, very specific demands to the police department and for police reform particularly. And so, that built the momentum for where we are at today. You know, we have moved from that platform to driving into the political ranks and getting Black people on council, like what with Amelia Parker taking a seat, finally, and being one of the first Black women, Black people, period, to hold a large seat in the city. And, as you know, we're gearing up for ‘21 election season, and we're going to push for some more people take office. So, it was an opportunity to use some political influence to get more progressive, more people-oriented leadership into some of our political offices, particularly at our local and state level. And then, of course, the third big factor of I think what we were objectively pushing for and goal-oriented around is obviously getting the Black narrative back under control. Because right now, not only just in America, but a lot of places like even [city] does this. And I've had to check so many White media outlets about telling this narrative, but from your perspective, you're not Black. So, how the hell you gonna tell a story from your White narrative perspective, when in reality, all you are doing is being an outside of looking in? And if anything, you're giving an opinion, at this point. You have no real connection to the community. You really don't know what it was like to grow up in [city], from birth all the way through high school and then, for some of us, even going on to college like UTK, which is a PWI school. So, people don't really know the narrative of Black Knoxville to its wholeness. And that's not only in just some spaces, it’s in a lot of spaces. You know, lately, a lot of Black leaders have been stepping up, talking about some of our coalition spaces. Like, for example, the Black and Brown Coalition. Well, if you're Black, that coalition is not a real thing. It's been White media that's pushed the Black and Brown Coalition narrative. But again, you are an outsider of looking in, telling a story

that you really do not fully know or understand. And so, that's something that I know a lot of Black leaders have stepped up on to. Being like, wait a minute, we need to talk about some of these Coalition's that are false. Same thing with the gay coalition. You know, there's supposed to be this whole Gay and Black Lives Matter Coalition too. But same thing again, that's a false narrative. There are some issues with this particular coalition relationship that has not been fully told because again, people who are not Black are trying to tell the story. And so, you know, that's kind of been where we're getting more into the spaces of. Just one, like I said, trying to reclaim our narrative and really factually tell the stories like they need to be told and take less of the say so off of White media. And take less of the say so off of powerful people, period, who are not Black, who are not participating in the Black movement, and who are not doing the day in day out trench work to really see what this Black Lives Matter movement looks like. So, for me, a typical day, I wake up after I do some social services work with my other organization. I normally get calls across the board for various types of injustice and issues that are concerning our community, but I'll be honest, I hand select those issues because some issues, honestly, I feel like are not Black issues. These are White related issues, or these are White supremacy related issues. And so, I give White people that accountability to handle that issue. Racism is not a Black problem. Black people are a victim of it. It is a White problem. So, you cannot make the victim be in charge of controlling or getting rid of the problem. No, the source of the problem has to address the problem itself, so that the victimization can stop. Like I tell people all the time, an excellent example is the rapist. Right? When someone gets raped, we don't tell the rape victim, "Go catch the rapist." We go to find the rapist and ask him, "Why the hell do you think it's okay to rape this child or this girl, or whatever you're doing." So, it's the same concept with racism. Racism is not a Black problem. It is a White problem. We are the victims of it. Now, our due diligence, just like the woman or the child that is raped, is that we're supposed to tell this out loud so people can become aware and conscious of it, so we can try to get these people that are involved or doing these things off of our streets and held accountable for their actions. But to actually charge Black people with the issue and the problematic part of racism is not only totally unfair, but it is absolutely inconsiderate and another way that White people have failed to obtain accountability for something that was created out of their ancestry. So, that's kind of what the movement looks like on a preface of where we're going and what we're doing now. The main objective right now is infiltrating more political seats and platforms, so we can create more voice and have another platform for directly impacting the actions in the policies of White supremacy by just being there to rewrite those policies and laws, as well as maintaining our voice and our narrative, continuing to push the Black Lives Matter movement, continuing to raise awareness about issues and concerns that we are encountering as people suffering under the system that is designed to oppress us so well. And then the third factor is getting more involved in economic and political infrastructure. Because one of the biggest pieces is that the reason why you don't see Asian Americans marching the streets when they face injustice is because they have economic power. One of the reasons why you don't see

Latino or most of the Hispanic people marching the streets is for the same reason, they have some form of economic and political power. The reason why you don't see fellow demographics who are also oppressed in the streets is because they have some type of economic and political power. And unfortunately, for Black people as a whole in this country, that's two areas we lack. We do not have a mass form of economic power, and we do not have a mass form of political power. So, I think it's very prudent that this year particularly, we really try to focus on opportunities of creating some type of infrastructure around economic and political power.

Interviewer: Okay, yeah. So, I just want to make sure I'm understanding you correctly. The work that you do is very focused on systemic and structural changes in [city] that will impact the way [city] works and functions on a fundamental level.

Participant: I'm beyond that. I want people to understand something. I have moved past a local or state or even a federal level with this. I'm looking at a global level of this. Because the core issue to what I know for a fact is truly the reason why the Black nation has stayed so oppressed is because of Africa. So, let me ask you, what does Africa hold that White people do not want to give back? *The wealth*. Your diamonds, your lithium batteries, your cell phone, that gold jewelry and all that stuff you like to wear. Where does that come from? Africa. So, Africa is the pillar of economic power because it holds all the natural resources and wealth that comes with it. You know, Africa doesn't need oil. You know, that's one of the places where gas is extremely cheap. Why? Because it produces its own oil. It's almost any resource that you look at in the American economy that they fight and kill people over. Literally go to war over - Africa holds it right now. Now, if you go look at what's going on Africa, what's happening in Africa? Well, a lot of countries and invaders are fighting over claim ship. And also, at the same time, the native African people are telling the colonial powers to get the hell out. So that's kind of what's going on right now. Africa is in the form of an apartheid. But it's not the narrative, depending on whose news story you watch or whose story you listen to. It's not this narrative of the Africans that went unruly and they're practicing guerrilla warfare. No. It is that the African people, the native people want their land and their continent back. And after 600 years, allowing the Neo-colonial and Neo-powers to rape it, we are finally saying you got to get the hell up out of here. So, honestly, the racism and oppression of the Black people is directly tied to our continental wealth. So, to me, the overall source of destroying the White supremacy system is reclaiming continent Africa's Motherland back. Because once we obtain the control of our riches and our jewels, it stops a lot of things in its track because they will no longer have the economic power to use against us to influence their control. See, we'll have the economic power. So now we'll have all of the say so. So, to me, that is a bigger goal. That's like the primary goal. The primary goal is get our continent back. So, we can claim our economic power and our structure back, and therefore, we can get rid of this White power rulership, because they hold our country jewels right now. Um, the second part is coming back maybe more to the America front of this is that, yes, we are going to

have to create our own political party. And we're going to have to infiltrate the political system to take seats so we can get in control to basically finally push for the rewriting of the American Constitution. The Constitution is shitty. It was written by a bunch of rich, slave-owning, White men. That's a lot of people that were not included. That's literally one demographic classification, and everybody else was left out. And they were allowed to impose this ideology upon the entire country, because they had written up basically the country's laws, the bylaws of this country. So, to me, if America wants to be honest about addressing racism on a local or state level, it starts with the Constitution itself. That constitution is going to have to be rewritten. Flat out. There's no ifs, ands or buts about it. So, as far as the objectives and goals on the home front, yes, we are going to infiltrate these political spaces, so at some point, we can claim the House. We can claim the Senate. We can claim the Presidency. We can claim the state legislator. So that way, you have a top to bottom agreement across the board, that it is time to rewrite this constitution. That fixes any problems on the local, state and federal level instantly, because you're going to change the laws of the land by rewriting the constitution that is now inclusive of everyone that exists in this country and not just one select demographic that then gets to decide who benefits and who don't. Because they have all the say so at this point. So, to me, that is probably the primary objective as you look in America's scope, but the ultimate objective is reclaiming of the continent of Africa, so we can reclaim our wealth basically.

Interviewer: Yeah, definitely. I had not thought about it that way.

Participant: I've been thinking about it for a long time, like I've read what our ancestors said.

Interviewer: Wow. Yeah. Okay, so looking at the 2020 year, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the myriad police killings, this election season, and anything else that happened this year, how did that affect the movement and your work?

Participant: So, yes, the movement in itself was not a total loss. There was a lot of changes that took place. We saw the Breonna Taylor law that came into effect in Louisville. We saw the I Can't Breathe Act that came out of George Floyd choke out. We saw multiple cities across the country practice true defunding of the police, like several cities did take millions of dollars of their police budget and put it towards social services and resources. But then, at the same time, you still have people like Cameron Daniels, who would not charge these police officers for their wrongdoing. You still had the Department of Justice doing these external investigations that came up with the finding of no wrongdoing. And so, you know, there was these major strides, and there were these kinds of steps back like, "Oh, we did this, but we went back at the same time." And so, you know, there was some formalities of the division that came out, obviously, right. Because, the thing about unfortunately, when you're in this kind of level of the movement, where you're more of a leader and not so much of a follower, is that there is obviously conflict in ideal. You know, not everybody is not going to hold the same ideology of how we should go about attacking this monstrous machine of

White supremacy and how to get it taken down. And so, those were some times where it came with some frustration and learning and growth and development and understanding and not losing the objective of what we all came here for, which was at the end of the day, liberation of the Black people from 600 years plus of oppression at this point. So, those, to me, were some of the success stories. I mean, we saw Marquita Bradshaw become the first Black Lady for the State of Tennessee to hold the democratic card for the federal seat. That has never happened. And so, you know, in some senses there also, to me, was a little bit of frustration in that space. I think it is, you know, as much as it is celebrated it is also frustrating to, like I said, live in a country for 600 plus years now, and still have the first happen in 2020. That is still disturbing at the same time. So, it's like these moments of hope. And then at the same time they're diminished, maybe to a certain extent, by the overshadowing of the reality of again, how behind this country really is in still addressing this core problem of racism. And so, you know, like I said, I don't take anything from the movement. I mean, I went to Louisville, Kentucky, and participating in Good Trouble Tuesday with the freedom organization that organized that event. It was much needed. So, in some capacities, I did feel like I earned some rites of passage as a Black activist and a Black leader because we all know that John Lewis, our ancestor that recently passed away from the Senate, spent numerous times in jail. I mean, MLK, Malcolm X, you run the list down in the 1940s to 1970s, you didn't call yourself a Black leader, until you went to jail a few times, because that was just part of it. That was part of destroying the structure and the system and putting pressure on these systems for people to know that we are willing to practice civil disobedience up to the point that, yes, we will give up our freedom to let you know how serious we are about the changes you're going to make. When we're talking about the oppressive state of our country, and what you must do as a leader or fellow leader in the political race, on your due diligence on making corrective actions to a country that has failed to address its main problem of racism. So, you know, I did feel honored to take that rite of passage, like, to sit in jail with fellow activists and fellow supporters and fellow Black people and Hispanic, Latino people. Just to see that rainbow coalition of support that comes with this movement. You know, but the concern is, like I said, you know, we lost a big piece in Trump. Trump kept things flamed up. He kept things flamboyant. He kept people fired up and angry about why they need to get out there and do something anyways. And so, to me, I think we're getting to lose a very critical piece to the movement without Trump's presence. Because, like I said, Biden is not going to ruffle feathers and upset people the way Trump is. And again, like I said, Biden is still a White man that has gained and served and his servitude is through the benefit of White supremacy still in itself. And so, the fear factor here is going back to the old ways. This is the part that everybody keeps talking about, going back to normal. I'm like, "No, we can't go back to normal, because going back to normal is allowing things like Breonna Taylor and George Floyd to continue." That's the norm. So, if we're going to change the norm, that means that this now stops. And unfortunately, as we see, already on Joe Biden, we are still seeing Black people be brutalized and attacked. Most recently, the nine-year-old little girl that was pepper

sprayed by the Rochester Police Department. I still don't understand that. You got a child in handcuffs, and she don't put her legs in the car, so you think as a grown ass person, the only way to get this child to do what you say is to now use a toxic irritant substance. If you read the label it flat out tells you, “Do not use against children,” because it can literally suffocate them to death. It can literally kill them. If you see what it does to an adult person, damn near kills you, so why would you think it's okay to spray this pepper spray on a nine-year-old child whose lungs, as we know, medically are still in the process of growth and development. They have not fully created their cells in their areolas and their bursal sac spaces that are critical to their future lung health as adults. So, at this point, we are still seeing this type of behavior. And, like I said before, my greatest frustration with Joe Biden is that Black people got you in office. No one's gonna forget Stacey Abrams, and all the work she did in Georgia to literally flip a state. She flipped a state. Not by herself because there was a whole set of amazing Black women, particularly who flipped Georgia just for Joe Biden. Now, here you are in your first three weeks, and you've done something for everybody but the Black people. Most recent act he did was something for the Palestinian community. And I'm still sitting here like, “Joe, no way you're gonna sit around here and do something for the gay people, the Muslim people the Latino, Hispanic people, you done went over to the Palestinians, and you still forgot about us? You still ain’t done nothing for us?” Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. So that's what cannot continue to happen. And that's why I was saying from the get go that no matter if Joe or Trump gets in office, we still need to go to Washington D.C. and make our noise. Because this will not change unless we keep our foot on the gas and on their necks at the same time.

Interviewer: Yeah. Um, so, what has your experience been like doing this kind of work in in East Tennessee, in the South, with the political climate that we have here?

Participant: Tennessee is part of the Confederacy South, period. I mean, it has its own history to slavery and participating in it, and we all know about the tobacco fields and a few cotton fields they had going more West into the Memphis area. So, Tennessee is definitely every bit as much of the Confederate South as any of the rest of the Confederate southern states. What I will say about Tennessee is that it is embarrassing to be a Tennessean. I mean, Tim Burchett and Marsha Blackburn and Bill Haggerty all supported those actions of the Washington DC riot that we've seen take place. And, you know, even with Bill Lee and the way he's handled things. I mean, with this COVID funding, 6.4 billion federal dollars came down just for Medicare, and you reject it because you refuse to acknowledge the need of Medicare for all. You refuse to do that because you've been spiteful at this point. I mean, locally, look at Kane in Indya, excellent examples of failure. I mean, Kane is trying to help overthrow the health board that is there to protect us during COVID-19. And then, to be a flat slap in the face to people who have had issues with COVID-19, or lost loved ones, you have the audacity put up a memorial out here, but you're trying to overthrow the health board at the exact same time. Or even worse, the failure of the mask mandate day, the simplest thing

you could have done. And again, we're seeing the state legislator right now try to write a law trying to make it illegal for businesses to deny customers who don't wear masks. Well, good luck on that, because that's a federal law that you're violating, and just like they made the protest law, as we see, they have not been able to implement it. Why? Because it's a direct violation of constitutional freedom of speech, First Amendment right. So, you can't impose it. Tennessee's hilarious. They write laws that they literally cannot impose. They just write them, I guess, to say, we can do it. I guess that's kind of the ego tripping thing that's going on. So, Tennessee, to me is just as horrific as everybody else. Now, as far as my personal experiences of it, I think that there has been a unique response. Outside in the public eye are events, rallies, etcetera. Most of those spaces are very supportive, very loving, very caring, compassionate spaces because the people who are there are those who want to be there, and they came to support the event or the venue that's been held or function. But there has been *some,* not as much, I would say 90% of our events are very, not agitated. No presence of resistant forces or contradictory presence, those types of things. 90% of them were very efficient, smooth, no problems at all. But there was a small window of where we had a few moments where the Blue Lives Matter people came down here and try to hold a pro-supportive protest for the police department, which we went and shut down. Like, no, you're not gonna do that over here. We have had a few individuals that came to the BLM mural painting, and tried to cause a few problems there. But again, they were quickly removed and exitted out of our space. And then, you know, I feel like most of the resistance that I received is really through social media, email, and those type of platforms. You know, those are the areas where people send their evil messages and their ugly little death threats to me. Or they email it to our email thread. And of course, it's always to some weird Google account that you can't trace back. So, to me is cowardness, actually. So, it's like, you can say it, but you really can't identify yourself for it. Because you probably have a lot to lose. You could probably lose your job or your home if it's known out here that you're threatening to kill people. And so, to me, that's kind of been where I've met most of the resistance. It has not actually been in person. It's mainly been through social media and email, those types of platforms that people have tried to send these ugly messages. I even had at one point, I had a $60,000 bounty on my head. Like, somebody was actually willing to pay 60K for my death. But I don't think they really had the money because no one touched me, so I don't think they really had the money. But yeah, I had a death threat up to $60,000 on my head. Yep. True story.

Interviewer: What?

Participant: I had a whole wanted ad out here that people didn't even know I had. Last year, in the summertime, when things were really gearing up and going off. Somebody put a $60,000 bounty on my head. Yep. True story.

Interviewer: Wow, I can't fathom that. Oh, my gosh. That's crazy.

Participant: I mean, I have had to learn how to deal with that harsh reality. And I'm grateful for MLK's book, *1968*. It was a book that highlighted his last year. And in that book, there are a few chapters where MLK talks about the reality of death, how he is aware that this energy of death is around him, it is present on him. Um, and you know, when I read all of my ancestor stories, many of them have ended in some form of horrific, tragic form of death. And so, I had realized, it's kind of funny when I first started getting into this, really heavily into this, I have spoke with and a few Black leaders, [names]. And we kind of made a pact because I was like, "Hey, you do realize we're Black people about to stand up for the Black nation, and that's gonna bring a whole lot of shit down the pipeline. Like we low key could get killed for this shit." But everybody was understanding. Everybody knew, like, "Yeah, we know what we're get ourselves into, we're aware of the real risks on the table. But this is so much greater, so much more important. This has to happen. This has to be done. Like the torch has set and rested long enough. It is time for us to pick that torch of the social movement for the Black people back up, and really ignite it and push it forward." So you know, we were aware of that. But again, nothing can really fully prepare you for the experience of it. Even when you know it's a possibility, or it's coming at some point. And so, I did have to do some fear checking last year to really get my own wits together about myself. And to understand that if you're going to do this, you must maintain fearlessness in it because fear is what they will use to try to discourage you. It is the number one tool used by White supremacists for forever. Forever. KKK didn't burn crosses in people's front yards and hang them from trees for nothing. They did it as a form of intimidation tactic to create fear. So therefore, if you are aware of the tactics of your oppressor or your enemy on the battlefield, that can no longer be a useful tool against you. Because you know they'll do it until you are prepared for them to do it. So, once I gave myself that reality self-check of, "Okay, this is how you know it's getting real and you are really in this role as a leader because this is coming with it. So, if anything, this is really a confirmation that you are really a Black leader and a Black activist for the Black movement." And so, once I get myself a little bit of a reality check, I had a kind of a conversation with my network to kind of let them know what it was what it ain't, that we were not going to stop. We're going to push forward. We're not gonna let intimidation tactics and fear tactics be used against us. But I understand everybody is not cut for this call for this type of work. So, I allowed my members of my group to dismiss themselves. You know, if this is in too far over your head, if this is getting too deep for you, by all means please step to the right, so we can continue to move forward. No one's gonna be mad at you. But again, find your role, Find your lane. Maybe your lane ain't so much in the forefront. Maybe it is just showing up with a sign when we say show up so we can make some noise. But again, you know, I had that conversation with my team. And I was very surprised that out of 30-something members that make up the [organization] network, only two people walked away. Everybody else stayed. Everybody was like we're here to ride it out. Period. So that was the beauty of that too. So that farther confirmed my presence and my role, and father instilled into me the principle of the work we're doing. And again, that fear could not be a turnaround,

the fear of anything. We're gonna drive and push forward to push past it and challenge it. You put 60K on my head, okay, I'm going to keep working. And let's test the 60K out here in our community, and in our city, in our state to see how the public really feels about me. And as you see, I'm sitting here talking to you, so it's clear that even though there are people mad at me, it must be more people that love me because not a single person touched me at all. If anything, I remember a lot of you coming and tell me, "Don't worry about that 60K, we know about that through the streets." I had Bloods and Crips members coming up to me like, "Don't even worry about that. We will handle anybody that think they're gonna touch you on your head. You keep fighting for the people." So, it's kind of a dope thing that kind of came out of all that.

Interviewer: Wow. That's unbelievable. So, what have you found has been the most effective way to engage people in the community with your message and your purpose?

Participant: Unapologetic, harsh unadulterated truth. Tell people the damn truth. And for Black people, like I said, our main objective is to tell it unapologetically, Black, truthfully. Again, we are living this experience. We're the ones having these daily and continuous cycles and encounters. And so, it is time for us to control the narrative. But we have a due diligence to also tell the truth. And so, I think that's what made a lot of people just get behind me from the moment I started talking. Because when I spoke, I was telling the truth and the raw uncut truth at that. I was flat out saying, "Yeah, White people, you racist as hell, and I'm gonna say it out loud. Yeah, Tennessee, you are racist as hell. I'm gonna say it out loud." And so, I think that was just refreshing for people to have such a raw uncut form of truth because there has obviously been Black leaders before me, but even they have been apologetically Black, not unapologetic. They are apologetically Black, so they stayed diplomatic with it. They stayed in the gray areas with it. They stay in this space where they wouldn't make people feel uncomfortable for the reality of their behavior and actions. And so unfortunately, that's not what pushes the needle of change. Because, if you're showing complacency to it, or acceptance or condoning to it, then what happens? People say, "Oh, well, they're not offended. It's okay. We can keep doing this. They're not even bothered by it." Where instead, you should say, "No, I don't fucking like this." So, somebody can make a change to it. And so, that's where I got to. You know, the problem with all the Black leaders I've been looking at, before I got into this and found others that were more like me compared to the ones we're trying to replace. But I was like, the problem is that you are not telling these people the raw, uncut truth. I was like, you know, people will respect you more, if you tell them your truth. You know what I'm saying? And so, you know, when we have some of those political races where we endorsed candidates, that's one of the things I emphasized to several candidates. And that's how you kind of got an endorsement for my organization or not. Because there were the candidates who were like, "Oh, I'm going to do this, I'll do that." And I was like, "You're not being true to yourself. Why would you change yourself up to conform to some people who may or may not still vote for you?" Because somebody may say, "Well, you're being fake. I know, who you

really are. I'm not vote for you. Or there'll be others who will be like, “Uh, it don’t matter who chance yourself to. I'm a diehard Republican. So, no matter what you say, I'm still gonna vote Republican. And F you.” So, I was like, why would you do all that? I can lose with more dignity and grace if I ran a race true to who I was, versus trying to run a race and be something that I'm not and still lose. Boy, that's probably the worst loss you could ever have in your life at that point. Because not only do you lose, but you lost your dignity and a lot of other things in the process because you tried to change yourself to fit what you thought voters like. And so, I just found that a lot of my support, and a lot of the people that join into my efforts and my space, it just came with me. Just be honest and truthful with the public about the harsh reality of what racism looks like, how it is affecting daily interactions of Black people's lives. And then also, helping people understand how the oppressive system that was perfectly designed for Black skin is used in multiple areas to oppress people all the damn time, including White people. And so, I think that was just a refreshing delivery for people. Like I said, people have gotten tired of sugar on shit. And here I was finally just saying, “Okay, well, I'm not gonna put the sugar on it. I'm just giving you shit straight up how it is. Just straight up shit.” And so, I think that's what led to a lot of the support that I was able to gain and what grew our platform from a few 100 to today several 1000. And so, you know, I just found that the best thing to do was just tell the people the truth.

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely. Okay. How have you hope that people respond to your message?

Participant: I hope that for Black people, they are inspired, activated, motivated and encouraged. And hopefully, it helps them to move more into and live more into their Black truth unapologetically, as well. You know, I thought it was really disturbing and heartbreaking how many Black people in the wake of the movement, you know… we saw teachers and things like that, right? They wanted to wear their Black Lives Matter shirts to work, and they wanted to wear their masks and different types of paraphernalia. And you had jobs literally infringe upon their freedom of speech by trying to tell them that it was against company policy for them to wear that shirt. But like I told one lady, I said, “No, actually, it's the other way around. It is a violation of company policy to tell you cannot wear this shirt, because it is your right of freedom of speech.” Now, there is limitation there. Right? So a job can say, “Yeah, you can't wear a shirt that says, “I'm gonna murder all the gay people”. Okay, that's not the same thing. But in this particular matter where you're wearing something that says, “Black Lives Matter”. It's more of an appreciation of that life. And it's more of an appreciation of that demographic of life. Yes, all lives do matter. But we know for a fact the Black ones have been the ones that don't matter. So, guess what? All lives matter is not a true statement anymore because if that was the case, then the Black lives would matter too, and we would be advocating all lives matter, not Black lives matter. And so, you know, for Black people, I just hope it gives them the necessary empowerment more than anything that it is okay to be Black. It is okay to be unapologetically Black. You do not have to tone your Blackness down for

anyone. You ain't got to adjust your Black behavior for anyone. You're not going to change your t-shirt for somebody's White comfort anymore. You are Black. Therefore you identify as Black. Therefore, you have every right to celebrate and embrace every aspect of being Black, just like the Latino Hispanic people do. I see them draw red chili peppers and all types of things on there trucks. And somebody's gonna tell them, "You need to take that off. That's too Hispanic from my comfort right now"? No. I mean, same thing for the Jews when they practice Hanukkah and things like that. I don't see nobody walking up and telling them, "Oh, you need to tone down your Hanukkah activities over here. We don't celebrate that." Or for the Muslims. I mean, they did try it, but obviously it was a direct violation of their freedom of speech and their articulation of themselves. But I don't see nobody walking up and telling the Muslim, "You need to take your head covers and things off." Again, I just want Black people to understand, you have every right to be Black and embrace what that means for you. Or for what our culture of our people look like. And no one, including your job, is allowed to infringe upon that freedom of speech and First Amendment right that is protected under the Constitution of this country that you can do that. So, that's what I hope for my Black people. For White people, I hope a light bulb goes the hell off. I really do. I hope it goes "click". And I hope that many White people are able to take off the blinders of White privilege. Are able to take off the blinders of White benefit, Are able to take off the blinders of White entitlement. Are able to take off the blinders of White supremacy and the system that's designed for their benefit. And really start to look around not only themselves, but their family circles, their work circles, their church circles. You know, these variety of spaces where predominantly they are all White spaces. But this is the areas where we see this message spreading of White supremacy at the same time. You know, every year. Every year since about four years ago to now, so this will be about my fourth year in it on the frontlines now, particularly. Every year I ask White people, did you do the hard work this holiday season? At Thanksgiving and the Christmas table, did you bring up the factors? Or when grandmother or Uncle Joe made that racist ass unethical joke? Did you say something? Or did you sit there quiet and condoning? Because I know that that was one of my favorite models that did come out of the White allies and supporters' space was, "Silence is violence". I loved it. I was like, "Yes, that's right on the money." And so, you know, I hope for White people it raises their conscious awareness and makes them really get down to the nitty gritty, hard, disgusting, in the trenches work of really addressing the racism. I feel like right now for White people particularly, there can be no realistic conversation of unity or coalition until they deal with the real factor that is creating the division. Every time we try to unite or coalition with our White counter partners, there is racism. Somehow, someway, every single time that comes up somewhere along the way. Whether it's in the beginning, the middle or the end. At some point racism always shows its ugly face in our coalition and unified relationships. So, to me, this is the deal breaker. So, until you address the deal breaker, which is the racism, I don't see any real form of a rainbow coalition, or a counter cross unity coalition, or any form of unity as a human being on this particular continent ever. Because the issue is racism. You know, you take racism out of the picture, and a

lot of things go with it all. Suddenly, oppression against gay people, Jews, and everything else go right out the door with it. Suddenly the women and how their voice have been limited, it goes out the door with it. So, you deal with the core structural foundation of oppression, which is racism, you get rid of a lot of things that racism was basically piggybacking itself off of. And so, to me, for the White people, the message I hope they walk away with is, *how are we, meaning the White people, how are we collectively going to destroy a system that unfortunately ancestor created and even today, we are still benefiting from because we have just not actually addressed how this system has structurally infiltrated itself into our daily normal activities of lifestyle?* And then for the Brown community, I hope that they become more conscientious of another reality. I mean, here's why the Black and Brown coalition to me is a lie. Because Brown people do not fight on the frontline battles of the movement. They benefit, meaning like after we went out there as Black people and did all the hard work and the nitty gritty sweat, blood and tears, and now it's time for the goodies roll down here, all of the sudden they'll jump over here in our boat with us. But it's like, "No, you wasn't here from the get go." You know what I'm saying? And, my pet peeve is the Arabic community. Some of the Black community will tell you the Asian, some will tell you Latino, Hispanics. And the reason why is because many of the fellow Brown communities identify as White. So, here's the light skinned versus dark skinned card.

Interviewer: Sorry, when you say, "Brown community", I just want to make sure I 100 percent understand what you are referring to…

Participant: Arabic, Hispanic Latino, Asian, anybody who's not Black, basically, but still has a tinted skin tone.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. I just wanted to make sure I understood.

Participant: Because Black is Black, and Brown is Brown. I was talking about Black, and now I'm talking about Brown. When we talk about these communities, many of these communities identify as White. Don't believe me? Go look at the different the different Brown nationalities and ethnicities, and look how many of them voted for Trump. They identify most of them as White. And it's true. And why is that? Again, because slavery has a *global history*. And so, everybody knows that when you go into America especially, you don't want to identify as Black. Because everybody knows, if you identify as Black that automatically comes with lesser, harsher, worse and inhumane treatment. So, if I'm Hispanic, and I'm light skinned enough that I know I can go to a country and I can identify as White, and they will actually allow me to integrate and identify as White in their community. What the hell you think I'm about to go do? You think I'm about to identify as Black or White? I'm gonna go identify as White. So, that's the issue is that we have a lot of our Brown brothers and sisters who practice some form of racial oppression themselves, because White people allow them to because of the light skinned versus dark skinned card. How do we separate the Black people from the

other, quote unquote, “Black people”? Oh, well, all we want to do is say that African people are the slave niggers, and we're gonna say, the Brown people, they're the light skinned niggers that we can accept. That's really what happened here. And it's the harsh reality. Again, a lot of people don't want to deal with that. But it's the truth. And so, you know, like I talked about before, you know, it's crazy the amount of racism that we do. Like I said, my pet peeve is the Arabic community, because, one, they set up shop in our neighborhoods, normally some type of convenience store, gas station type setup. They profit from our Black dollars, but they do not invest, nor do they live, nor do they stand in our battles of our communities. Like, for example, gentrification that we're dealing with, they don't participate in those wars with us. They benefit from it, but they do not help us in our struggles. And unfortunately, the harsh reality is that I've been called “nigger” by White people, by Hispanic people, by Arabic people, by Asian people. Pretty much everybody. I'm serious, like everybody, but Black has called me nigger. And I'm being so serious about it. And even in the Black Code, we know about the word “nigga” being used as a brotherly, sisterly term in the Black community, but I discourage that. Because again, it is a terminology of insult to us. And so, you can never embrace an insult as a love comment, because it was always designed as an insult. And the fact that as Black people you get offended when others call you that clearly shows the basis of the insult and how it still stings today to be called that. So, I don't even let my own community call me that because I'm like, if it's not right for them, then it ain't no more right for you. So, I have a zero tolerance for the word in my vocabulary. Because I am not a nigger. I'm so far from that it ain’t even funny. And so, I just don't tolerate that. But that's the reality, again, from the Black people. And that's unfortunately, narrative that we are not controlling. That's why people throw around this BIPOC titles, that they're using now, which stands for Black Indigenous People of Color. Like, I tell people, “No, drop the B because that's not true. We are not in a coalition together,” because they also have their own racism that they're going to have to address. Which again, ties back to White supremacy addressing their racism first. If White supremacy dealt with the core issue of racism, then they would not be racist either because there would be no need for it. They wouldn't feel the need to do that. Because then they wouldn’t have to worry about trying to identify separately from being Black versus identifying more as White. So, that's kind of the primary objectives in my messaging, that I hope that each demographic, each ethnicity, each nationality that participates take from me. Black people be empowered. It's okay to be Black. White people deal with racism. It’s your core problem. And Brown people, pick a side. You can't be White today and Black tomorrow. You need to really pick what side of the war you're going to stand on. If you want to identify as White, that's fine. But if you want to identify as Black, that's fine, too. But you just need to make it clear where you stand because this war is getting to a point where gray area can no longer exist. It's either you're in or you're out.

Interviewer: Yeah. Thank you. So, I know we are almost out of time. Thank you so much for spending so much time talking to me. I really appreciate it. I just have one last

question. In your opinion, is the movement rising and growing? How do you think it's changing?

Participant: I would say we left off last year on a high note. This year has not fully revealed itself yet. And like I said, partly because Biden has done a lot of pacifying. He has stuck some pacifiers in people's mouths quick and I mean, real quick. And that's why I said, I feel like for the Black movement and Black leadership, especially, we're gonna have to get really on a full scale across the board collaborative platform. Because like I said, we just lost our biggest flame thrower in Trump. You know, he did a lot for us. I didn't have to really go out and be like, "Did you see notice…?" Trump was already doing the most. I didn't have to say nothing. The whole world already flipping before I even made a comment, they like, this motherfucker done said the most inhumane things ever. So, the world was already fired up before I even showed up. Like I said, unfortunately, Biden is going to do a lot of pacifying. He's going to do a lot of things to put flames out. And so, my concern is, one of the reasons I think the movement did move so slow prior to Trump's arrival, was because of the ability of the federal, local and state governments to pacify situations. And so, now what we're getting ready to head into, like I know, for Tennessee, our particular initiative is to start putting more pressure on the state legislator. Next year, Bill Lee is up for reelection, and I think this is a great year to really go to Nashville and make a heavy, strong presence and push on him to do something to sow significant changes, not just for Black Tennessee, but for Tennessee. Period. You are one of the highest states in COVID. You just did something that could have showed you care by just accepting the Medicare funding, but you rejected it. So far, you're showing a trend that you're going to continue to function in your White privilege, White male entitled elitist capacity and continue to do more harm because you don't understand what people are living like because you don't have to live that lifestyle. So, you fail to connect to the majority of your Tennessean population versus the ones you think that you're connecting to who are a few. It's not many rich, we're actually in Tennessee one of those medium states. We have kind of a bell-shaped curve that shows that we have poverty and we have wealth, but the majority of us are somewhere right in the middle. Right in the middle that 50-75,000 per year range. So, you know, Bill Lee, you're a multimillionaire, so your decisions are not helping the majority of Tennesseans. It is helping a few. And so, I know that this year, we're going to make a heavy presence in state legislator in Nashville. We are scheduled later this month to have a meeting with the Black Caucus. Again, we have an entire caucus presence. This was created in the 1800s, Tennessee created a Black caucus in the 1800s. And the main objective of the caucus was just that to protect the Black voices and to be that Black representation. Um, but as we've seen in the last few years, you know, last year with the school budgeting, how the Tennessee State of board budgeting went around. The lack of pay that the teachers received, and they are frontline essential workers. And you know, like I said the failures to address COVID appropriately and do proper funding with Medicare. Even with unemployment benefits, a lot of people are still waiting on unemployment health for where they lost their jobs last

year to COVID. So, I think there's just a lot of room in Tennessee to definitely keep the movement going and to continue to put pressure on our elitist White male leadership, particularly, because Tennessee is still heavily controlled by White power. It is still a lot of White power in play. Memphis is one of the few areas in the state that doesn't. But again, even they have some type of over-control of White power, because again, as you move up the ladder, it becomes less of our faces and more White faces. And so, to me, this is a great opportunity to really put a lot of pressure on state legislator, we've already issued our demands to state legislator. Last month we went up and we initiated our initial demands, which was Medicare for all, full funding of Medicare for all, full funding of unemployment benefits, and the complete adoption of Breonna Taylor's law. That is our main objective starting out with this year with our state legislator. And like I said, when we meet with our Black caucus, we're definitely going to emphasize those demands and continue to push that. I tell the team that as they knock a couple down, we'll give them a couple more. I find it better to give government three demands at a time. Because if you give them too many at once they're swat it down, say it's impossible and dismiss it. And then I also find it important to give government three demands at a time that they can realistically achieve. Meaning that you don't need no special counsels and no special meetings. You don't need six or seven public meetings to do this. This is things that in so many words and so many languages of different laws and charters already exist. We're just gonna put it in bold flat language that says all these pieces have come together in one language now and this is what it is. And so, I find it also easier to do that. Give them things that they can do under the current legal administration and legislators that will not require a lot of adoptions or changes to it. It's just a simple implementation at this point. And so, to me, the movement does have a lot of momentum. If you look at it in local platforms. If you look at it in state platforms, like Louisville, Kentucky, I know that's one of their main objectives is taking their Breonna Taylor law to their Kentucky legislator and get their state to pass that law. So, I think when you look in that aspect of it, small bunches are still going to push and still move. Now my concern is that we may possibly, I'm not saying that we will, and I'm hoping we don't, but there's a possibility you can see a dwindle down in the national platform just because you won't have Trump constantly spraying gas all over the fire. And then because the media was more in tune at looking for these scenarios, looking for these issues, I don't see the media feeding in so much to find these stories where we have armed Black people getting killed by cops for no reason really coming out. Now, so far it has not, like I said, they did blast the nine-year-old situation or things like that. And so, it is going to take some effort on the media support to keep the stories relevant by doing their due diligence as journalists, which is covering the full perspective of the story. And then like I said, with Joe Biden pacifying, my concern is fellow oppressed groups and fellow supporters and people participating in the demonstration may feel less necessity to get involved because they're gonna be like, "Well, Joe's doing things now. Why would we want to do that? That might disturb what is coming down the pipeline." But like I tell people all the time, you got to look behind the mask. Sugar on shit will always still be what? Shit. Like,

you know, you can sprinkle a little sugar on top of it. But if you're not gonna remove police immunity, Joe Biden, then you're not only leaving Black people still to be victims, but you're leaving other people be victims now. I know we didn't talk about it a lot during last year, because we all know that Black people are more likely to be killed by police or in police custody than other demographics, but there were White people that got killed by the police last year. There were Asian people that were killed by the police last year. It didn't happen as often. So, we didn't hear about it as much. But the reality is that somewhere in America, you can go somewhere and find that it wasn't just the Black who got killed by cops. It was White people and everybody else too. And so, that's kind of the concern I have is people losing motivation because Joe Biden is going to pacify situations and they're not gonna feel the need to want to do anything because, one, I feel like I'm taken care of now. So why am I going to go to serve the order? Or B it's happening, so why don't we give it a chance first so that it can take place? But like I tell people all the time, Joe Biden could have wrote the end of police immunity. Did he do it? No. So it looks like to me, there's still quite a bit of work to be done, especially after this nine-year-old kid that got pepper sprayed all up in her face. Or more importantly, like I tell people, what happened to the Washington D.C. riot? We ain't heard a damn word about that sense, huh? Keep paying attention. America's good at this. America is really good at picking that rug up and pushing a bunch of shit underneath and dropping it back down to the floor like it never happened. And that's what I'm really watching happen with the Washington D.C. incident. That's why I've been talking about it a little bit more often to keep it in reference. Like, "Hey, are we gonna keep talking about Washington because I sure ain't seen no more mention about the arrests, who else they found that was involved, the political people that participated in the activity, the cops that participated in the activity, the military force… you know, what happened to all these people? Where are all these pictures and faces so we can see what these people are like, so we can identify them? Oh, you're not even talking about it no more." Exactly. And that's dangerous. Because like I said, Joe, you started out the first couple of days, that's all you wanted to talk about. Now, we're three weeks in, and you don't even mention a damn word about it. And, you're the fucking president of this country. Make that make sense. So, that's how I know the work is far from over. But it's how I also know how America always historically moves. They don't like to address the core problem of racism. And that Washington Hill thing was nothing but racism in its finest display. And as you can see, America's already doing its due diligence to cover it up. They only want to dress it. That to me is the problem. You gotta address the racism if we're gonna move forward as a country.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. Wow. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about this. That's all of the questions I had for you. Is there is there anything else that you want to add, or is there anything else that you can think of that maybe I didn't ask about that you think is important for me to know or to note?

Interviewer: My message is for you, and that is, do due diligence in journalism. Journalism, due diligence is not to create bias or opinions. It is to remain neutral and direct to the facts and telling the story from the person that you took the information from. So, as you go through this and you get more people to speak, I am appreciative that you are sticking to the African American community. I do appreciate that. Maintain that integrity. This is a Black movement. It is not anyone else's movement but the Black people. And so, it is prudent that you speak to Black leadership across the board, or people in the ranks wherever it's at. But you made sure you give this story to the Black people and let them tell the narrative of what this movement was like for us, what it meant to us, our hopes, dreams and aspirations, and what we are hoping to be the final goal or finish line as we continue to push for the objective goal of liberation of the Black nation under White supremacy. And most importantly, you know, don't judge us. Being Black is hard. It is very, very hard. And the only other demographic that I say could totally possibly really relate to what is like is homelessness. Because I think they have the closest real same receptive of treatment from the public as we do. And so, you know, I'm grateful that I will be one of your easier ones more, one of your more relatable ones, but others may not be. Others may be gritty, rough and extra rough around the edges and corners to you. And it's not even necessarily to you as much as it is just the reality of being Black in a White supremacist system. And so, practice grace with future fellow leaders. And again, take nothing personal, as I did use "White" a lot here. You're a White woman. But like I tell people all the time, "Only people that get offended are people who are actually racist." So, if I say White, and you get offended, you already told on yourself. You got some racism going on in there and you need to deal it. Same thing with Black people, you know, Black people, we have issues, we have concerns and things like that, too. Like, I'm not a murderer. I'm not a thug. I'm not a gang member. So, if you were using that terminology, I wouldn't necessarily be offended. I might be like, hey, Black people are not all thugs. We're not all this. But in the end, am I really offended? No, because I'm not those people. So, I don't feel any need around that word when it's used because I'm not a thug. I'm not a gangster, I'm not a killer. So, I'm not offended by that terminology. And so, it's that kind of concept. stay neutral. Stay out your feelings. Really listen to the voices of these people as they tell their story. And most importantly, do true journalism. No controlled narratives other than the ones that were given to you. And it's literally the factual information from the voices in the mouths directly to your pen and paper. That's all I really have, as far as this particular interview goes. And journalism wise goes. I'm very honored, very appreciative you're doing it during Black History Month too. Thank you for helping to write our story, as this is our month of history awareness. And this is an excellent way to further instill some documentation from 21. From who knows 2030 maybe next time it appears, but it is documentation of our story. And what was going on at that time in history. So, I thank you for doing this very much needed documented and recorded work because the cameras are rolling, pens are writing, but I'll be honest with you, past some pictures, I really couldn't tell you much about anything anybody said or did because I was constantly going anyways myself. And so yeah, so yes, I thank you

for taking this very important story, and being one of the torch bearers to carry that forward. And thank you for UT, in its own subliminal ways, it has also been dealing with its own racial history because it has some problems too. So, as we know, Tennessee has its own history too. But I have definitely personally connected with many of the UT staff and students etc. across the border. And I know for a fact there is a culture on YouTubes camp campus where there are more people who have zero tolerance for racism than actually do. So again, please continue to be that voice in that presence, even in the campus life to also make it a word that just like in Knoxville, as a whole on this campus is the same thing because this campus is in the city. And the city is not tolerating racism, so we will not tolerate it anymore on our campus grounds and we could live on campus grounds. So yes, as always continue to be that diligent, "Violence is silence," White voice and continue to be that direct attack on racism when you see it happening.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you. I really appreciate it.

Participant: Alright, homie. Well, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it. I hope I gave you something that's good.

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely. Thank you so much. I'm really honored to be doing this work. Well, I hope you have a great day.

Participant: You too.

Interviewer: Thanks. Bye.

VITA

Lily Joy Crosby grew up in Madison, Wisconsin, and Johnson City, Tennessee. She earned her bachelor's degree in sociology at East Tennessee State University where she discovered her passion for advocacy and storytelling. She chose to go to University of Tennessee to earn her master's degree in public relations because she wanted to strengthen her communication skills in order to better serve local nonprofits and advocate for others. Her concentration is in advocacy and community relations, and her research interests include activism, corporate social responsibility, and social media engagement. Lily wants to thank all of her professors and mentors who have guided her along the way and taught her what it means to be an advocate for people and work to strengthen her community.