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Plugging Into Movement Work: White Racial Justice Action in the Era of Colorblind Racism

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PLUGGING INTO MOVEMENT WORK:
WHITE RACIAL JUSTICE ACTION IN THE ERA OF COLORBLIND RACISM

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Dissertation Abstract

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This qualitative study explored the practices and consciousness of eight white identified participants, born 1970 or later, who are actively engaged in racial justice action. Although the field of critical whiteness studies has expanded markedly over the past couple of decades, little has been written specifically about white racial justice activists (and activism). This may be serving as a disconnect for white people who are trying to find their way in racial justice movement work.

Participants were involved in one or more of the following: community organizing, education, religious work and cultural arts. Research data was primarily generated/collected through qualitative interviews, and secondarily through an examination of participant artifacts and through participant observation. The findings revealed how participants engage (and how they came to be involved) in racial justice movement work. Additional findings detailed participants' early awareness around race and racism, as well as common tendencies of white people engaged significantly in racial justice action.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Garrett Naiman	May 18, 2016
Candidate	Date

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Emma Fuentes	May 18, 2016
Chairperson	
Dr. Shabnam Koirala-Azad	May 18, 2016
Dr. Christopher Thomas	May 18, 2016

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

"Research itself is a pilgrimage."
- Ariel Luckey

*"*I believe that information is political, and I believe that the ability to shape the stories that are told — about our present, about the future that we want and about our past — is political.*"*
- Amy Sonnie

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

White people credited with leading the way to dismantle racial injustice in the United States can be found in history books, Hollywood portrayals and are interwoven into the nation's established majoritarian mythos, but these narratives are skewed to overstate the role of white people in movements for liberation and are ultimately harmful to the struggle for real racial justice. This portrayal of white people (usually men) as the driving force behind progress toward racial justice, referred to as "white savior syndrome" (Cammarota, 2011), erases the struggles for liberation by people of color from our historical consciousness, while also misrepresenting the authentic ways white people have actually contributed. In addition to having access to historically accurate stories about people of color who have, through their own agency, struggled for their freedom, more research is needed about white people engaged in racial justice action and who are working in solidarity with (and not as saviors for) people of color. This study is meant to shed light on this work and provide guidance for white people trying to find their way in racial justice movement work (Tatum, 1997; Wise, 2008; Warren, 2010; Moore Jr., Penick-Parks, Michael, 2015).

Background and Need

It is important for white people to play a role in racial justice movement work. But many white people have not even explored the notion of themselves as racialized beings. This notion of thinking about race and racism from the perspective of *self* rather than from the perspective of *other* is commonly written about and advocated for in whiteness studies. According to Wise (2005):

> Race is still viewed as something that can only be understood from the perspective of the "Other." Whites are encouraged to think about race from the perspective of blacks. Indeed whites should listen to and learn from the stories of Black and brown people. But the discussion left untouched is the examination of the white experience. (p. 3)

It is important to examine the white experience as it relates to the praxes of white racial justice action, and to include such narratives in larger discourses on race and racism. As previously mentioned, this should not be done so in ways that overstate the role or the importance of white people in movement work for racial justice. However, documentation of how and why white people choose to engage in racial justice is important so that others may follow their lead. hooks (2003) writes of the importance of sharing the narratives of white people who are actively engaged in racial justice work.

> If we fail to acknowledge the value and significance of individual anti-racist white people we not only diminish the work they have done and do to transform their thinking and behavior, but we prevent other white people from learning by their example. All people of color who suffer racial exploitation and oppression know that white supremacy will not end until racist white people change. Anyone who denies that this change can happen, that one can move from being racist to being actively anti-racist, is acting in collusion with the existing forces of racial domination. (p. 57)

This study is intended to document the experience of white artists/cultural workers, educators, community organizers, and religious workers who are approaching racial justice work in different ways. White people who grew up after Jim Crow and who

are currently engaging in racial justice work are the singular focus of this study, as it is for younger generations of white people (or those working with younger white folks) who are attempting to navigate today's 'colorblind' milieu, that this study is primarily intended. This last point is important, as according to O'Brien (2001) many young people may relate more readily to activists who are engaged in racial justice work currently. According to O'Brien (2001):

> [T]oday's forms of racism are often more covert and unacknowledged than slavery or Jim Crow, so whites need more contemporary answers to the question "What can I do?" than their ancestors who fought for abolition and desegregation can give them. I can think of few better ways to demonstrate what whites can do to fight racism than to go to the source—today's white anti-racists themselves. (p. 10)

This study explores white racial justice activism in the era of colorblind racism by heeding O'Brien's advice and going directly to the source, the activists themselves.

Statement of the Problem

(Critical) Whiteness Studies (the broader theoretical framework for this study) is a relatively new field despite the "veritable explosion of critical work on whiteness" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 91) over the last two decades. Scholars of color have been writing about whiteness for many years (Dubois, 1920; Baldwin, 1984; Tatum, 1994), and a rapidly growing portion of the scholarship generated today is being done so by white people critiquing whiteness and white supremacy. Yet within whiteness studies, little has been written specifically about white racial justice action. According to Warren (2010), "While studies of white racism may fit a small library, the studies of white anti-racism, if you will, could fit in a small bookcase" (p. xi). This void in the literature may be serving as a disconnect (O'Brien, 2001; Thompson, 2001) in the discourse for white people who

are trying to assume a more anti-racist, white identity, and/or who may be trying to find their way in movement work for racial justice.

Purpose of the Study

This study is not intended to replace the still much-needed documentation of people of color who have struggled and continue to fight for racial justice, and who do so at a much greater risk and cost than white racial justice activists. The study is, however, rooted in the notion that white people seeking to engage in the struggle for racial justice, as well as educators who are teaching white students about race, racism and movement work, could benefit from (and be inspired by) documented examples of white people working in solidarity with people of color toward collective liberation. The purpose, therefore, is to explore the consciousness and informed practices (praxes) of white people currently engaged in racial justice work in the United States.

Additionally, although a small portion of whiteness studies literature focuses on the everyday work of white racial justice activists (O'Brien, 2001; Thompson, 2001; Murray, 2008; Warren, 2010; Crass, 2014), little to no research has been conducted specifically on the praxes of those who grew up and came of age politically 'after' the Civil Rights Movement and Jim Crow racism. This study focuses on white people who came of age in this so called era of colorblind racism and who are working to further racial justice despite the belief (feigned or actual) by many that we now live in a post-racial United States. White racial justice activists who grew up after the Civil Rights Movement came of age in a vastly different racial and socio-political landscape than the generations of activists before them. Jim Crow racism had ostensibly been legislated away prior to their lifetime; opening the door to a new racial milieu predominated by

color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Powell, 2012). How has this racial paradigm shift affected the consciousness of younger generations of white racial justice activists, or those who they may be trying to reach in their work? This question and other related questions helped shape this study.

Finally, because this study is primarily intended as an educational tool for white people trying to better understand their own racial identity development and place in movement work for racial justice, I define 'racial justice action' broadly, transcending (but not excluding) more widely adopted notions of what typically constitutes 'racial justice activism' (e.g. community organizing, political protest). This mirrors Thompson's (2001) approach to studying white racial justice activism. Writes Thompson:

> A common stereotype of activists is that of placard-carrying protesters attending rallies and demonstrations. Although protests have often been used as markers for the telling of social movement history, activists' everyday lives tend to be much less dramatic, much more mundane, and much less collective than the activist-as-demonstrator icon suggests. (Thompson, p. xxvi)

For this study, I dialogued with white people involved with racial justice movement work in a variety of ways including the arts/cultural work, education (formal and informal), community organizing and religious work. This broader notion of racial justice action/activism is intended to provide a variety of models for engaging in movement work for readers of the study, and in so doing provide different entry points for them to consider participating themselves.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of white racial justice activists in era of colorblind racism?

2. How has this racial paradigm shift affected the consciousness of younger generations of white racial justice activists or those who they may be trying to reach in their work?
3. In what ways is their work anchored by the legacy of previous generations of racial justice activists (both people of color and white people) on whose shoulders they stand?
4. In what ways is their activism representative of entirely new 21st century approaches to racial justice work?

Theoretical Framework/Rationale

Critical Whiteness Studies

This study is rooted in a critical whiteness studies (CWS) framework. It is common when theorizing, writing and teaching about race and racism, even when done critically, to do so primarily by focusing on the experiences and oppression of people of color. While this is of paramount (even urgent) significance, an examination of the "machinery of whiteness" (Martinot, 2010) as the driving force behind those experiences and that oppression (or what Paula Rothenberg (2007) calls the "other side of racism"), as well an exploration of white people as something other than (or in addition to) oppressor is often missing from the discourse.

CWS asks race scholars to explore white racial identity, as well as white privilege/supremacy and their collusion (or synonymy) with racism to create and maintain inequity in society. Critical whiteness studies, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), involves:

> [E]xamining what it means to be white, how whiteness became established legally, how certain groups move in and out of the white race, "passing," the

> phenomenon of white power and white supremacy, and the group of privileges that come with membership in the dominant race. (p. 83)

Explained more succinctly, Leonardo (2009) writes, "[W]hiteness studies poses critical questions about the history, meaning, and ontological status of whiteness" (p. 92). CWS also includes literature about white racial justice activism and the narratives of white racial justice activists; this study is meant to contribute to this latter portion of the literature.

Although CWS is focused on majoritarian subject matter, it does so in ways that address power, privilege and oppression. In this way, it is aligned with (and owes its origins to) fields like Critical Theory, Critical Race Studies, Ethnic Studies, African American Studies, Critical Asian Studies, LatCrit, Women Studies, Critical Feminist Literature and Queer Studies. CWS could be categorized as a social justice interpretive framework in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013):

> The exploration of the problems and the research questions in [social justice interpretive frameworks] aim to allow the researcher an understanding of specific issues or topics—the conditions that served to disadvantage and exclude individuals or cultures, such as hierarchy, hegemony, racism, sexism, unequal power relations, identity, or inequities in our society. (p. 34)

Critical whiteness studies is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing heavily on scholarship in Education, Psychology, Sociology and History.

White (Neo)Reconstruction

In addition to a critical whiteness framework, this study more specifically assumes a neo-reconstructionist stance within whiteness studies. There are two "significant camps" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 92) of thought (and thinkers) in whiteness studies regarding how to approach whiteness, 1) white (neo)abolition and 2) white (neo)reconstruction. White neo-abolitionists believe that the socially constructed category

of whiteness (and by extension race altogether) needs to be eliminated and that no amount of attempts at reform would be sufficient to eradicate white supremacy and racism. Roediger (1994), a leading white abolitionist, proclaims that "whiteness is not only false and oppressive, it is *nothing but* false and oppressive" (p. 13). Ignatiev and Garvey (1996), two of the other most vocal and visible leading scholars of the abolitionist intervention, and editors of the journal, *Race Traitor*, frame it another way; "treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity" (p. 10).

White reconstructionists offer an alternative strategy for addressing whiteness, believing that white people can work toward a more "positive white identity" (Tatum, 1994), one rooted in an acknowledgement of white privilege and supremacy (and their complicity in them), and in action toward racial justice and collective liberation. According to Leonardo (2009):

> [White reconstruction] offers discourses—as forms of social practice—that transform whiteness, and therefore white people, into something other than an oppressive identity and ideology. Reconstruction suggests rehabilitating whiteness by resignifying it through the creation of alternative discourses. It projects hope onto whiteness by creating new racial subjects out of white people, which are not ensnared by a racist logic. (p. 92)

This study is framed in reconstructionist notions of whiteness because it explores the thinking and action of white racial justice 'activists' with the end goal of educating others about multiple approaches for white people to engage in the struggle for racial justice as white people.

Reconstruction vs. abolition: My personal beliefs. Although I subscribe to reconstruction strategies, it is not because I do not understand or sympathize with the impetus for white abolition; in fact I believe myself to be an abolitionist at heart and yearn for the day when whiteness (and white supremacy by extension) is excoriated. I do

not believe as Ignatiev, Garvey and other neo-abolitionists do, however, that white people who actively rebel against the established tenets of their own racial identity (whom they call "race traitors") become "white bodies that no longer act like white people" (Leonardo, p. 92). This key point of white abolition, the idea of white people no longer 'acting white,' is a misguided notion to me for two reasons. First, although I do believe whiteness to be inherently oppressive, I also believe there can be some redemption in actively doing the self-work necessary to have a more 'positive white identity.' White people who assume a more positive (racial justice oriented) white identity commit to actively working to dismantle the very system that bestows upon them unearned power and privilege. However (and this is my second reason), although I believe whiteness to be inherently *false*, white people who acknowledge white supremacy and their complicity in it while working actively for racial justice are still inescapably white, and thus complicit in the oppression of people of color. There is no way around this. The falsity of whiteness does not negate its very real social implications. Said another way, Yancy (2008) writes:

> [W]hiteness is not just a question of deliberative investments in whiteness, but has to do with how one is *positioned by* a racist social structure that provides one with certain privileges. This does not deny the fact that whites are invested differentially in whiteness, or that there are whites that engage in antiracist forms of praxis, though, even in this case, they will continue to benefit from being white independently of their good intentions. (p. 53)

Not only is it an impossibility for white people to remove themselves from whiteness (or whiteness from themselves), it can also be potentially damaging to their racial identity development to think that it is. Leonardo (2009) warns us against this idea of 'no longer acting white.'

> Because of their colorblindness, many whites may find it ironically convenient (and not in the sense that Ignatiev and Garvey predict) to use abolitionism as a way to further mask white privilege. By disabusing themselves of having to take

> responsibility for white atrocities, white abolitionists do not face up to whiteness, which sounds too familiar. (p. 105)

I share this concern with Leonardo; I do not believe that one can or does opt out of whiteness as part of the larger intervention of abolishment, and instead believe that the road ahead (at least for now) is for white people to reimagine themselves in a different shade of white, one that is rooted in racial justice consciousness and practice.

I am also a developmental educator and therefore a reconstructionist almost by default. My disagreement with Ignatiev and Garvey about their interpretation of the term "race traitor,"—whereby I do not believe that it is possible to opt out of whiteness no matter how anti-racist one is in conscience and practice—inhibits me from pursuing an abolitionist intervention (at least in the way abolitionism is currently framed). As a developmental educator of other white people around issues of whiteness, power and privilege, I require somewhere to lead them; an ontological foundation for them to stand on after unlearning whiteness the way they know it. If white people opt out of whiteness altogether, then who, what and where are they in the world? Without a viable answer to this question, I am left with reconstruction strategies for my racial justice education work. This study is conceptually reconstructionist, as it is meant to explore and highlight alternative, more racially just ways of being white.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations and delimitations of this study overlap. One of these limitations is the sample size of the participant pool. Though eight participants is a sufficiently sized group for a doctoral thesis, it may not be the optimal sized pool to address the multiplicity of approaches to racial justice work being carried out by white people in the United States. The four or five regions that provided my research setting did not capture

the full diversity of geo-political nuances that influence the work of white people engaged in racial justice action around the country in this era of colorblind racism. There were also challenges to conducting participant observations (see chapter 3), as opportunities for observing participants did not often coincide with the dates of scheduled guided dialogues (see chapter 3), and financial and time constraints kept me from visiting research settings more than once. As a result I was only able to conduct participant observations for two of the eight participants. An additional limitation was the length of time I had to complete the study. Because the study was undertaken as part of the dissertation process, it 'needed' to be completed in two semesters (or one academic year). Although this was sufficient to complete the dialogues and data analysis, it put time constraints on the overall research process.

Significance of the Study

The goal of the study is to highlight the work of white people engaged in racial justice action in an attempt to better understand their praxes, and to educate other white people who are trying to find their way in movement work for racial justice. Exploring a diversity of praxes is important, as white people should look to each other for guidance concerning the examination of their unearned privilege, as well as different strategies for working in solidarity with and under the leadership of people of color against white supremacy. Understanding the ways in which white racial justice activists are developing consciousness about themselves as racial beings and translating that consciousness into action can prompt other white people to develop their own consciousness, and to approach working toward collective liberation in a time when color-blind ideology has changed the way racism persists and pervades in the United States.

Positionality and Background of the Researcher

As a researcher on race and whiteness and someone who engages in racial justice praxes, I was considered (and treated as) an 'insider' by the research participants. It was/is important for me to name my position as an insider both as a way to gain trust from research participants as well as to ensure transparency about my connection to the topic for potential readers. To borrow a phrase from Negron-Gonzales (2009) that she used to describe her own work, "this project grew out of my own political, personal and intellectual trajectory" (p. 14). This study is as much for me as it is for other white people who may be trying to find their way in the movement for racial justice. I have been actively and intentionally exploring my whiteness while engaging in racial justice praxes for nearly two decades. Currently, I work for a Bay Area organization that partners with schools, districts, community organizations and families to empower underserved students, and support them in achieving college and career success. My work is predominantly focused in communities of color. My ongoing commitment to exploring my own white identity is an important part of my work, as I am not from the communities in which I work (I call this process "understanding self to be in solidarity with others"). I also teach (and co-developed) a graduate level course on *Whiteness, Power and Privilege* and am sometimes invited by friends and colleagues to guest lecture and dialogue with students in their high school and post-secondary classrooms about white identity, racism and racial justice.

Like the participants in this study, I grew up and came of age politically in the post-Jim Crow, post Civil Rights Movement era of colorblind racism in the United States. I am unsure, at times, of when I began to see myself as racialized, and to think deeply

about what it means for me to be white. Sometimes, when I am asked how I came to be involved in racial justice work, I feel like Macon Detornay, the fictional racial justice oriented (albeit wildly misguided) white, young man from Adam Mansbach's satirical novel, *Angry Black White Boy* (2005). Early in the novel, Detornay responds to the question of how he came to be aware of his whiteness and become committed to racial justice. Detornay's response was as follows:

> It's an impossible question. How did *you* become who *you* are? I've scrolled back through my memory as far as it will go, looking for some embryonic moment of divergence, some split from the growth pattern of my genotype, but I can't find one. It would be nice if there was some simple answer, some creation myth—*when I was ten I watched* Eyes on the Prize *twelve hours a day for seventeen straight weeks and I been pro-Black ever since, or I ate a special soup made from Eldridge Cleaver's boiled hypothalamus and presto change-o, or in a secret drum ceremony in Ghana I learned to channel the spirits of the tribal elders, or my daddy was a trumpet player who toured the Southern chitlin' circuit back in '63 and passed for an albino brother*—but there's not. My parents are standard-issue white liberals, just as puzzled as anybody. (p. 3)

Some white racial justice activists I know or have read about have had what I call 'catalyst moments,' interactions or experiences that propelled them into awareness and ultimately into action. Though his response was rife with absurdity, Detornay's sentiment that he wished he had a catalyst moment from which to anchor his praxis resonates with me. The path to racial awareness for me, an ongoing process to be sure, was a gradual one. I will attempt, however, to recount several key elements of my development (not a complete list to be sure) that led to my work as a critical whiteness scholar and to my commitment to racial justice.

I am certain that being raised in a Jewish home played an early role in my understanding of racism. Part of that upbringing involved what Friedman (1995) would refer to as the "holocausting" of my narrative. Though Friedman believes the

holocausting of our (Jews') narrative is problematic (rendering us as victim), I see it differently. The stories of *Exodus* and of the genocide of Jews at the hands of the Nazis were told and retold in my home and in the Hebrew school/synagogue I attended. These stories and the knowledge that my religious identity was a historically marginalized one, provided me with an early frame of reference for understanding (and discussing) oppression. I am simplifying a complex understanding of race and ethnicity, but in essence, I experience(d) Judaism, a religion, as a marginalized ethno-cultural identity that would come to help guide my understanding of racism. I was and am unable to fully disaggregate being white from being Jewish. I carry with me an inherited narrative of oppression, and have occasionally been made to feel marginalized for being Jewish while simultaneously experiencing the world as a white body. Brodkin (2004) describes [white] Jews as having, "a kind of double vision that comes from racial middleness: of an experience of marginality vis-à-vis whiteness, and an experience of whiteness and belonging vis-à-vis blackness" (p. 2). I believe that to be true for me growing up (and now), and that double vision has played an integral role in my racial identity development.

Other memories of how I came to understand racism and to explore my white privilege are more fleeting. I remember being in a divided eighth grade History classroom. Our teacher had us watch live on television, as the verdict of *Not Guilty* acquitted the police officers that had brutally beaten Rodney King. I was one of the students in a divided classroom that day that thought a gross injustice had just occurred and remember feeling upset and confused that not everyone shared my feeling that justice had been eluded by the officers. I also remember feeling apprehensive about my family's

trip to Lake Tahoe trip immediately following the verdict. I recall sitting at a diner, feeling uneasy, as the city of Los Angeles (I grew up in a suburb of Los Angeles) rioted and burned. Perhaps those feelings were early, visceral reactions to the privilege I possess because of my race and class backgrounds (I grew up in professional middle class home). I find that memory to be particularly jarring as I write this now, in the midst of Black Lives Matter, a movement ignited by a wave of documented instances of state sanctioned violence (murders) against Black people at the hands of police around the country.

Hip-Hop was another element that played a key role in my racial identity development. My brother introduced me at an early age to hip-hop music and by extension, hip-hop culture. Hip-Hop served as my earliest education about racial injustice being pervasive in the U.S. even after 'progress' that came as a result of the Civil Rights Movement. Despite hip-hop not being mainstream in the suburban community where we lived, my brother brought home cassette tapes from rap groups such as Public Enemy and Boogie Down Productions, artists whose lyrics addressed issues of racism, blackness, police brutality and other politically and racially charged issues. White youth, like myself, who listened to hip-hop in the early eighties, were inherently politicized (even if subtly) by the music and culture. Kitwana (2005) writes of this phenomenon.

> The more progressive and radical messages of Public Enemy, Poor Righteous Teachers, X-Clan, and KRS-One attracted young Whites... So did the idea of Black kids having voice and agency. For many White kids during this period, being down with hip-hop was as much a political statement as it was an alternative musical choice. (p. 27)

To some extent I think Kitwana's ideas about the relationship between earlier hip-hop music and young white people rings true for my own adolescence.

Later, my love affair with hip-hop would accompany me to college where it became the soundtrack for my political activism and provided a space to gather for those of us who were organizing around racial and social justice on and off campus. My activism in college was prompted by issues such as the abolishment of affirmative action in California (proposition 209 passed during November of my first year at UC Santa Barbara), attacks on Ethnic Studies, and another California ballot initiative, proposition 21, which further criminalized youth of color. I began to learn what it meant to be in solidarity with and follow the leadership of students of color and queer student activists, many of who served as peer mentors to me as we engaged in actions for racial and social justice.

What was only beginning to develop in my consciousness, however, and had been missing from childhood lessons, was a deep self-exploration of what it meant to be white in the United States. Because I grew up in this era of colorblind racism, I was not taught to understand the unearned privilege and power that white people benefit from as part of a greater system of racial oppression, a system that continued to exist after the Civil Rights Movement. Although my parents brought me up with a value system that included condemnation of outward and intentionally directed bigotry, they were not able to help me see myself as white and to understand my whiteness. I think the saliency of my family's Jewish identity likely contributed to a lack of ownership of my (our) whiteness. But it was also the fact that racism after Jim Crow had become more covert, hiding (at least for white people) in plain sight under the auspices of a pervading national narrative that would have us believe that with the exception of overtly bigoted discrimination, racism writ large was legislated away in the sixties. The fact that I was a beneficiary of

that system was not something I learned or explored until I went to college. There are many other key moments (too many to write about here) along the path to self-exploration of my racial identity, pivotal experiences that catalyzed me into awareness and action. New experiences continue to shape me and help me evolve everyday.

All of these experiences have led me to this topic and this project. I was intrigued by the opportunity to explore further, the life and work of white people who, like me, came of age in this era of colorblind racism. I was interested in learning more about white people engaged in racial justice action in a socio-political landscape where people are convinced (or feign to believe) that we live in a post-racial United States, or worse, feel like roles have been reversed and believe white people are the ones now being marginalized in this country. The goal of this study was to explore some of the ways that white people are approaching racial justice action in this era of colorblind racism and to share that knowledge with other white people who may be trying to find their way in racial justice movement work. I count myself as one of those other white people, perpetually trying to find my way in the struggle for collective liberation. I continue to search for new ways of taking action that will disrupt racism and white supremacy.

A Word on Language

When it comes to issues of race and racism, words matter. I have tried to be intentional with my words throughout my writing, and yet I still used certain terms that may be insufficient or problematic. I want to address some of my use of words upfront so that readers will understand why I selected certain terms/phrases throughout the study. Let me first address the phrase *racial justice action*. I use *that* phrase in the title, and not *racial justice activism*, for a couple of reasons, the first of which is that there are wide

ranging views on what exactly constitutes *activism*, and also because not all the participants in this study identify as activists (or name their work as activism). Additionally, I originally thought that I might use the *phrase white racial justice activists* (as opposed to *racial justice action* or *racial justice activism*) in the title, but as readers will learn in chapter two, there is a trend (one that I subscribe to) to move away from labels such as *white anti-racist activist* or *white ally*, and focus instead on the actions of individuals or groups (e.g. *person engaged in movement work*). This resonates with me and so I landed on the phrase *white racial justice action* for the purpose of the title.

Having said all of that, readers will find that I still vacillate between several different terms/phrases to describe white people engaged in racial justice, and to describe racial justice action. I do this for several reasons. First, I began this study with four research questions that included the term *activist(s)*. I had completed most of my research before I decided to use the term *action* and not a*ctivism*, and before I had begun to commit to moving away from labels (such as *white racial justice activist*) and instead use phrases that connote action. Thus, the terms *activist* and *activism* are used periodically throughout the study, particularly in the first few chapters. I did this, in part, to keep the integrity of the study intact (I cannot re-write my original research questions) and because I think doing so also shows an evolution in my own thinking and learning. As a researcher and a scholar, I am also a learner. The changes I made with certain terminology and phraseology serve as a mark or a trail of my own learning during the research process. I like the idea of readers being able to see my progression as a learner. Additionally, at times due to stylistic considerations, I still succumb to the use of the terms *activist* (so as not to have to write the clunky phrase, *white person engaged in*

racial justice action) and *activism* (if I have overused the term *action* in a particular section, or because *action* does not sound quite right in a particular context). Finally, I use the phrase *movement work* (my phrase of choice) as a synonym for *racial justice action* and *activism* throughout the study.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review for this study includes three major themes that are central to understanding research on white racial justice action in the era of colorblind racism. Each theme will receive its own section. These sections include (1) white identity and ally development; (2) colorblind racism; and (3) existing studies about white racial justice action. In addition to their relevance to my research, each of these themes is central to critical whiteness studies, which as mentioned in the introduction, is the broader theoretical framework for this study.

This review of literature is intended to provide readers with the background information needed to understand and contextualize my research topic and findings. The purpose of my study is to explore the racial justice work of white people who grew up and came of age in the post-Jim Crow, post-Civil Rights Movement era of colorblind racism. An understanding of the existing literature that explores white identity development and white 'allies' will give readers insight into the consciousness of potential research participants in this study. A review of this topic will demonstrate how white people come to an initial awareness of their racialized identity (and of white privilege) and detail some of the traits and tendencies that are common amongst white racial justice allies. This section will also include a critique of the depiction of white people as allies and suggest new ways of framing white racial justice action. In the third section, readers will gain a better understanding of this notion of colorblind ideology and colorblind racism. This is significant to this study, as it is within this racial milieu (colorblind racism) that participants in the study grew up and now engage in racial justice praxes. Colorblind racism informs the participants' entire reality as well as the reality of

those they may be trying to work with as part of the actions they take. The third section is a review of other studies about white racial justice activists, providing a glimpse of what has already been researched on my topic and what gaps may still exist. It is this final section that provides the context for where my study fits into the existing critical whiteness studies literature.

White Identity and Ally Development

From a young age, white people are taught not to see or understand their racial privilege or to understand the systemic nature of racism and their complicity in it (Wise, 2008; Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). White folks are led to believe that they are simply 'normal' or 'American' *(*Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999*)*, and that with the exception of some outlying bigotry or discrimination, institutional racism is something that was legislated away in the sixties (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Helms, 1993). One of the areas of focus in Whiteness Studies is the development of a racial consciousness and the development of a "non-racist" white identity (Helms, 1993) or what Tatum (1994) calls a more "positive white identity." How can (do) white people come to understand their unearned power and privilege? In the section below, I provide an overview of one white identity development model and summarize the literature on white racial justice 'ally' development. The section concludes with scholars who are calling for us to move beyond traditionally used labels, and to focus more on the action that is needed to further racial justice.

White Identity Development

Helms (1993) developed a model of white identity development that demonstrates a process through which white people can come to assume a "non-racist" white identity.

The model includes two phases and six stages. The first phase, *Abandonment of Racism*, includes the first three stages, *Contact*, *Disintegration*, and *Reintegration*. The second phase, *Development of Non-Racist White Identity*, contains the other three stages, *Pseudo-Independence*, *Immersion/Emersion*, and *Autonomy*.

In the Contact stage, white people are oblivious to their own racial identity and to the pervasiveness of systemic racism. They do not see themselves as having a racial identity; whiteness equates to normal. They subscribe to a 'colorblind' worldview, while unconsciously propagating existing stereotypical notions of people of color and holding up existing power structures rooted in race and racism. Racism to them is made up of individual acts of bigotry or prejudice, and not viewed as a system of oppression that unfairly advantages white people and disadvantages people of color.

In the Disintegration stage, white people gain an increased awareness of racism and of their own racial privilege. This awareness tends to come from forming relationships with people of color, from participating in a workshop or course on race and racism, or from witnessing a racist incident, whether in person or through the media. White people in this stage become unsettled and may experience feelings of guilt, shame, helplessness, anger, or denial and avoidance, as well as a strong sense of cognitive dissonance stemming from holes being poked in the myth of meritocracy. They may also be eager to try and disrupt others' racist thinking and behavior, while simultaneously being conflicted by peer pressure to show allegiance to existent power structures associated with race.

During the Reintegration stage, white people are persuaded back into collusion with a colorblind (and colormute) mentality as part of a larger social contract of solidarity

amongst white people. White folks in this stage are aware of their whiteness and the helplessness or guilt they may have experienced in Disintegration may give way to anger or resentment of people of color. Avoidance becomes a coping mechanism to thwart off the confusing and frustrating struggle toward a more positive (non-racist) white identity.

The pseudo-Independence stage, according to Helms, inaugurates white people into the second phase of her model, the development of a non-racist white identity. In this stage, white people recognize that they have complicity in racism and begin to intellectually explore race and racism, particularly with regard to the experiences of people of color. They are uncertain about how exactly to move forward despite their newfound understanding. They may distance themselves from other white people who they perceive as less racially conscious.

In the Immersion/Emersion stage, white people begin to actively explore their own whiteness, and to look for ways to reimagine and redefine their racial identity. White people in this stage become invigorated by the idea of racial justice and attempt to immerse themselves in situations with others who also may be exploring the development of a non-racist white identity, and who share an inclination to participate in racial justice actions.

The final stage of Helms' White Racial Identity Development model is Autonomy, during which white people build upon awareness developed during Immersion/Emersion and begin to recognize the complexity of intersections between racism and other systems of oppression. In this final stage, white people are comfortable in their skin, having internalized a more positive (non-racist) white identity, and are

comfortable navigating multiracial spaces. They actively engage in racial justice actions in their communities.

Helms' seminal model on developing a "non-racist," white identity would pave the way for other literature on white identity development, but similar studies are still relatively few in number. Following Helms' study, Tatum (1994) called for the need for more scholarship of this kind to be undertaken. In her work, Tatum (1994) addresses the scarcity of positive white identity models for white students to learn from and aspire toward. Anchoring her research in Helms' model of white identity development, Tatum posits that there are three prevailing models of whiteness that students can turn to for guidance. The first model, the *actively racist white supremacist*, is a Klu Klux Klan like individual, who subscribes openly and earnestly to the notion of white supremacy and who overtly discriminates against people of color. In her second model of whiteness, *what whiteness?*, Tatum echoes Helms' *Contact* stage, as she outlines the white individual who does not claim a racial identity of their own and by extension does not acknowledge (by ignorance or choice) the power and pervasiveness of racism in the United States, nor their own complicity in that system. The third model, the *guilty white*, introduces the white individual who recognizes racism and skin color privilege, and as a result is shamed into social paralysis on the topic of racism, feeling guilt by association but not knowing how to move to a sense of responsibility and action.

Tatum's acknowledges that any of the these three models, which she believes are the prevailing archetypes of whiteness, is unlikely to appeal to someone who is in the second phase of Helms' model, during which white people seek to construct a positive cultural identity. Tatum highlights the frustration white folks must feel when they have

come to understand the existence of racism and perhaps to understand their own complicity in it, but are left with no outlet other than these three models of whiteness. She offers as a response, a fourth model, the model of the *white ally*. According to Tatum (1994), "There is a history of white protest against racism, a history of whites who have resisted the role of oppressor and who have been allies to people of color. Unfortunately these whites are often invisible to students; their names are unknown" (p. 471).

Although Tatum (1994) did not develop an actual white ally development model, she does allude to what that model might look like. A white ally does not act as savior for people of color from racism, but rather one who actively works in solidarity with people of color against systemic racism. She encourages educators to share stories of historic and contemporary white figures who have engaged/are engaging in the struggle against white supremacy with white students who are struggling to formulate more "positive white identities."

Racial and Social Justice Allies

Since Tatum's call for white ally development models, there have been a growing number of authors who have taken up that task as central to their scholarship. I include below, literature that defines, analyzes and problematizes the concept of 'white ally.' Kivel (2011) sought to understand what exactly an ally does. "People of color," writes Kivel, "will always be on the front lines fighting racism because their lives are at stake. How do we act and support them effectively, both when they are in the room and when they are not (p. 117)?" Acknowledging that different situations call for varied actions, Kivel compiled a list of thirteen general guidelines to help those seeking to engage in racial justice ally work through the myriad of situations they might encounter. At the top

of that list is the idea that white people should "assume racism is everywhere, every day (p. 119)." Kivel suggests that allies examine the world with this basic assumption, and subsequently track words, policies, social patterns and dialogue that although coded, are tied to race and racism.

Holt-Shannon (2001) takes it a step further, asking white people to internalize Kivel's analysis, operating from the starting point that not only is racism everywhere, but that all white people are racist. "Accept that you are a racist in a racist world and that many of your least examined assumptions are tinged with racism. Work at discovering and getting beyond them without beating yourself up for not being as smart yesterday as you are today" (p. 32). For Holt-Shannon the acknowledgment that people are inherently complicit in racism because of their whiteness is the foundation on which allies need to build.

Broido (2000) introduces the idea of "social justice ally" development amongst college students, a model that focuses on social justice writ large, and not specifically on white racial justice allies. According to Broido, "Social Justice Allies are members of dominant social groups (e.g. men, whites, heterosexuals) who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social group membership" (p. 3). Broido approached her study with two important questions that delved not only into ally awareness and behavior, but more specifically, into how that awareness and behavior is formed. She did so by entering the study with two overarching questions:

1. How do students who have become social justice allies during college understand their development as allies?

2. What in the collegiate environment do they see as impacting their development? (p. 5)

Broido discovered that there were three main factors that lead to ally development:

1. Increased information on social justice issues
2. Engagement in meaning making processes
3. Self Confidence

Students increased their information/knowledge from a variety of sources in and out of the classroom, from peers (target as well as other non-target students) and through their residential life experience. In addition to accumulating knowledge and awareness of issues related to being a social justice ally, participants in the study addressed the need for concurrent reflection and discussion to shift their frame of reference (meaning making) about issues of social justice. Broido called this process "transform[ing] information into knowledge" (p. 10). Self Confidence, according to participants, was what assisted them in moving from awareness to action. Whereas students may be able to explain newly formed assertions related to issues of social justice, developing an inner confidence around those beliefs supported students as they began to shift from speaking like allies to acting like allies. Broido further explained that the same inner confidence aided students in coming to grips with their own privilege, often one of the hardest steps in ally development, and one that without that confidence often find students paralyzed by guilt associated with their privileged status. Holt-Shannon (2001) describes this paralysis vis-à-vis guilt as "white hesitation," or "what happens when well-meaning whites reach a point in interracial situations where [they] struggle to move from intellectualizing to acting" (p. 31). This is also congruent with what Helms (1993) describes in the *contact* stage of white identity development.

A final key element of ally development, according to Broido, is the notion that someone or something generally catalyzed students into ally action. According to students, this recruitment often comes in the form of an unexpected invitation to participate in the social justice process as a result of responsibilities or expectations associated with some sort of leadership position on campus or elsewhere.

Reeson, Roosa Millar, and Scales (2005) mirror Broido's and Tatum's notions of social justice ally as being those who "actively work against the system of oppression that maintains power (p. 1)," and explain that for white people to become allies, they must not only be aware of racial oppression, but also actively take steps against racial injustice. Using the above definition as part of their conceptual framework, Reeson et. al conducted two concurrent studies, a study on *First Year Students* and an *Ally Study,* in an effort to begin building the ally model that Tatum brushed the surface of in her article.

In the *First Year Study*, the researchers followed 11 white women students throughout the course of their first year in college. Five of the students were placed in a Sociology course focused on issues of race, and also into a residence hall that included intentional programming on multicultural issues and that was relatively ethnically diverse in make-up. The other six students were placed in a large introduction to education course, not necessarily focused on issues of race and racism. In the *Ally Study*, a snowball sample of upper division white students who engaged in racial justice endeavors on their college campus was examined to determine what sort of activities, both in the class and out, encouraged white students to become racial justice allies.

The findings of both studies substantiate Broido's earlier findings, as they indicate that course curricula focused on issues of race and diversity, as well as multicultural

centered co-curricular experiences and substantive "interracial relationships" (including those in the multicultural residential living environment), are all leading factors for getting white students to reflect on race (including their own) and to begin to move toward allyship. Including cognitive development into their conceptual framework also mirrored Broido's work. Reeson et. al approached their research with the base understanding that the development of multicultural competencies is cognitive in nature, and thus for students to move from a self-centered narrow worldview regarding race and racism, to a broader, "socio-centric" view of race (including racial justice), they need to engage in depth-filled reflection of both their curricular and co-curricular involvement related to issues race and racism. Though limited in scope given that its was focused explicitly on college students, the research of Reeson et. al is an insightful look at the process of white racial justice ally development.

Edwards (2006) contributed the word "aspiring" to the lexicon of ally vocabulary. His commentary on allies focuses heavily on the motivation behind ally behaviors, indicating that without the proper motivation, "aspiring allies" can do more damage than good. According to Edwards, "Some who genuinely aspire to act as social justice allies are harmful, ultimately, despite their best intentions, perpetuating the system of oppression they seek to change" (p. 39). Building on the Broido and Reeson, Roosa Millar, and Scales studies on the development process of social justice allies in college, Edwards sought to better understand, "how those who already aspire to be allies can be more effective, consistent and sustainable and how student affairs professionals can encourage this development" (p. 46). Edwards highlights certain subtexts tied to varying

motivations behind the development of allies addressed by earlier studies. His research determined that there are at least three different kinds of ally identities:

1. Aspiring Ally for Self-Interest
2. Aspiring Ally for Altruism
3. Ally for Social Justice

Edwards describes each of the three ally identities as statuses, choosing not to use the term *stage* like Helms and other identity development scholars, and thereby indicating that identity and ally development are not a linear processes, but rather aspiring allies likely move back and forth (or simultaneously) through different statuses.

Aspiring Allies for Self-Interest, according to Edwards, are members of non-target groups (groups that are not historically marginalized/dominant groups) who are motivated by a desire to protect someone they care about who is experiencing oppression because of their status as a member of a target (historically marginalized) group. According to Edwards, this near sighted motivation for ally work means that this group of students is likely to see the world as neutral, and acts of discrimination that their loved one(s) may be experiencing as isolated instances of bigotry. Aspiring allies for self-interest do not generally make the connection between acts of discrimination and the existence of larger, more complex systems of oppression at work in society. They are also not likely to be familiar with or identify with the term 'ally.'

Aspiring Allies for Altruism may recognize that systems of oppression are at work, and so they seek to help or save those that are targeted by that oppression. They are not aware of how they are also being made unwhole by oppression (even if in a very different way) and lack the self-awareness to see that their paternalistic approach to social

justice may in fact be perpetuating the very structures of power they are attempting to dismantle. Cammarota (2011) and others refer to this as "white savior syndrome." Freire (1998) describes the phenomenon Edwards is alluding to, of non-target groups feeling like they are needed to save those who are oppressed, as "false generosity." False generosity, writes Freire, is an "attempt to soften the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed" (p.46). *False generosity*, *white savior syndrome* and *allyship motivated by altruism* all fail to see and address oppression systemically and negate the leadership and agency of those who are oppressed. According to Edwards, aspiring allies for altruism are riddled with guilt (even if subconsciously) stemming from their non-target group status and thus act from a place that attempts to distance them from any negativity associated with being a member of that group. They have a heightened awareness of the perpetuation of oppressive behavior by other members of their non-target identity group, but do not necessarily acknowledge their own position of privilege or complicity in systems of oppression.

Allies for Social Justice (Edwards drops the "aspiring" qualifier for this ally identity), on the other hand, act not *for*, but in solidarity *with* members of oppressed groups. They understand that oppression dehumanizes everyone (albeit in very different ways). According to Edwards, "By working toward social justice, allies are seeking not only to free the oppressed but also to liberate themselves and reconnect to their full humanity" (p. 51). Allies for social justice are not allies to individual people, but rather allies for communities and against systems of oppression.

Kendall (2006) echoes Edwards' ideas of allies for social justice in her critique of what it means to be an ally. "As an ally with privilege, I have to ask constantly: Do I

think I am doing charity work—allying myself to those who, from my perspective, are unable to help themselves, or am I doing this for the greater good of us all" (p. 148)? However, whereas Edwards and other scholars believe that allies can only be named as allies by members of the oppressed group they are working in solidarity with, Kendall believes members of non-target groups can label themselves as allies, even if they cannot dictate what makes up effective and appropriate ally behavior.

Further, although Kendall like other Racial and Social Justice Ally Development Scholars, includes actively working against systems of oppression as a key tenet of allyship, she does not do so at the exclusion of the possibility of being an ally to individuals and groups of people. Allies, according to Kendall, can be change agents at both the (inter)personal and institutional levels. She is, however, careful to distinguish between helping others as an impetus for being an ally, and the real work of being a change agent. Writes Kendall, "It is not about helping. It is about working with [people of color] and using our privilege, power, and access to influence and resources to change the systems that keep people of color oppressed" (p. 148).

Kendall also distinguishes between being supportive and being an ally, stating that an ally does not simply support someone who is oppressed, but commits to standing in solidarity with that person (or group) in public. Moreover, like Edwards, Kendall cites motive as significant to one's effectiveness (and sustainability) when trying to be an ally to people or issues. Distancing oneself from other members of the same non-target group because they perceive them to be less aware, or seeking affirmation from members of a target group as a way of coping with guilt associated with one's privilege will lead to ineffective allyship. The issue of white guilt, specifically, is something Kendall says

needs to be worked on internally before engaging authentically and in solidarity with those who are oppressed.

Ayvazian (2001) describes white racial justice allies as "agents of change" and offers that ally work can be a remedy to the social paralysis of white guilt mentioned by other scholars (Edwards, 2006; Kendall, 2006; Helms, 1993). "Available to every one of us in the categories where we are dominant," writes Ayvazian, "is the proud and honorable role of ally: the opportunity to raise hell with others like us and to interrupt the cycle of oppression" (p. 600).

Goldberg and Levin (2006) call for a new "radical white identity." This new identity calls for whiteness to be newly defined, complete with different ways of establishing relationships, the creation of art that reflects white culture anew and new ways of gathering as a 'cultural' group. There are five foundational concepts that make up Goldberg and Levin's *radical white identity*:

1. [Understanding] Privilege
2. Ethnic/religious/cultural roots
3. Multiple Identities
4. History of multiracial struggle and radical white anti-racists
5. Anti-Racist Practice

The first concept, *[understanding] privilege*, puts forth the idea that in order to work toward this new, more radical white identity, white folks must first recognize the privileges associated with being white in an effort to stop undertaking oppressive actions, and begin to use their privilege to dismantle the very system that affords that privilege to them. The second concept, *ethnic/religious/cultural roots*, calls for white people to

reconnect with their cultural roots, which were stripped from them through the process of assimilation when their European ancestors immigrated to the United States. The social construction of whiteness was created out of this collective cultural. According to Goldberg et. al, the resultant absence of that cultural identity serves to strengthen white supremacy and weaken real human connection between white people and people of different ethnic backgrounds. The third concept is the notion of *multiple identities*. This posits that white identity does not exist in a vacuum, and that it is important not to simplify whiteness into a homogenous experience, but rather to be aware of whiteness in the context of its intersections with other identities, both target and non-target. The fourth concept, *history of multiracial struggle and radical white anti-racists*, mirrors what other scholars have written about, the need for educating aspiring racial justice allies about the history of other white people who have struggled in solidarity with people of color for racial justice in the United States. The final concept of radical white identity, *anti-racist practice*, is a call to action. Radical white identity requires taking action with other white people, as well as engaging in solidarity with people of color to create changes at institutional and systemic levels.

Beyond Allies and Anti-Racists: Focusing on Action

Indigenous Media Action (IAM), a volunteer collective of indigenous media makers and activists, has called for the use of the term "accomplice" rather than ally, feeling that the latter term has lost its authenticity and potency for describing white people who are in solidarity with people of color in the struggle for racial justice. According to IAM (2014):

> The risks of an ally who provides support or solidarity (usually on a temporary basis) in a fight are much different than that of an accomplice. When we fight

> back or forward, together, becoming complicit in a struggle towards liberation, we are accomplices. (IAM, 2014)

Accomplices, according to IAM, start first and foremost with the acknowledgment that they occupy land stolen from indigenous people, and with a commitment to understanding the multitude of experiences and practices of indigenous communities. Accomplices act not from a place of guilt or shame, but rather from a desire to build mutuality, solidarity and trust with oppressed communities.

Other critiques find labels such as ally to be problematic altogether, and have called for the focus to be on racial justice and solidarity *action* instead. McKenzie (2014), speaking directly to would-be-allies, writes:

> Allyship is not supposed to look like this, folks. It's not supposed to be about you. It's not supposed to be a way of glorifying yourself at the expense of the folks you claim to be an ally to. It's not supposed to be performance. It's supposed to be a way of living your life that doesn't reinforce the same oppressive behaviors you're claiming to be against. (p. 138)

McKenzie offers seven suggestions (six if you omit the repeated suggestion) for what white people can do to be in solidarity with people of color. These suggestions include: 1) shutting up and listening; 2) educating yourself; 3) knowing when to step back and give space for voices of the oppressed; 4) being open to feedback and critique about how certain behavior or actions may be more harmful than helpful; 5) shutting up and listening; 6) supporting projects, groups and organizations led by marginalized people; and 7) not expecting marginalized people to provide "emotional labor" for you (p. 138-139). McKenzie shares action-oriented phrases (e.g. "currently operating in solidarity with," "showing support for," "demonstrating my commitment for," "showing up for") as an alternative way of discussing allyship (p. 139-140).

Leonard, a white, race scholar, citing McKenzie as influencing his thinking, also problematizes the use of ally as a signifier. In a joint blog article with Park (2013), Leonard explains that of primary concern to him is that the term *ally* "presumes that struggles against injustice are the responsibility of someone else—those who are subjected to the violence of racism, sexism, [heterosexism]—and that the 'allies' are helping or joining forces with those who are naturally on the frontlines" (Park, 2013). Thompson (2001) echoes this sentiment, describing the term "ally" as limited in scope and problematic in connotation. "As an ally to the struggle for racial justice, white people find themselves supporting someone else's struggle, not their own" (p. xviii). Leonard also believes the term "ally" indicates a choice about engaging or not engaging in the struggle against white supremacy, and although technically it *is* a choice for those who are from non-target groups, framing it as such invites unwarranted celebration or extra credit for those labeled 'allies.' Echoing McKenzie (2014) and also Kivel (2006), who writes "Ally is not an identity, it is a practice" (p. 116), Leonard believes that the focus should be on what people are doing to combat white supremacy instead of on "what people are" (Park, 2013).

Leonard also views the label of 'anti-racist' as a signifying term for white people as problematic, believing that it indicates that racial justice work is somehow innate to people of color, thereby rendering invisible the efforts, risks and cost to people of color who struggle to dismantle white supremacy. Labels like 'ally' and 'anti-racist,' according to Leonard, are also a way for white people to avoid acknowledgment of their complicity in white supremacy, claiming these monikers with the hope that doing so will somehow alter their racial positionality in a system that affords them unearned power and privilege

at the expense of people of color. Leonard also believes labels are a distraction from the real work, and result in white people becoming focused on "showing" and "being" rather than on the " listening and doing" needed to "[move] the fight forward" (Park, 2013). Additionally, Leonard problematizes the notion of white allies being seen as being part of a "diverse community of individuals," while people of color make up some sort of homogenous group of others. Finally, explains Leonard, the idea of individual allies sets up white people as "lone freedom fighters," somehow engaged in the work outside of and without accountability to larger communities. (Park, 2013)

Thompson (2001) muses over why the term "white anti-racist" has come to be seen by many people of color as problematic, surmising that it is because the racial divide between people of color and white people in the United States is too profound to allow for the acceptance that white people could be authentically and consistently committed to racial justice. Setting aside whether or not "white anti-racist" is a legitimate label, Thompson provides historical context for how the term "anti-racist" came to be popularized in the first place. In her research about white anti-racist activists, she found that the participants in her study who were involved heavily in civil rights work in the 1960s often referred to being part of the "Movement," a term used with equal frequency by Black people and white people. Thompson found that generally it did not occur to these particular activists to use the term "anti-racist" as a descriptor for themselves (in addition to being hesitant to use the term "activist"). One participant, Dorothy Stoneman, describes 'anti-racist' as "basically a white invention" used by white people in the 1970s that were "not particularly grounded in the Black community" (p. xvi). Thompson believes the move from integrationist to Black Power politics has a lot to do with the

emergence of "anti-racist" as signifying term for white racial justice activists, because as result, white people were subsequently encouraged to work in their own communities, organizing other white people. White people at that time, explains Thompson, may have grown up hearing about "the Movement," but came of age politically in a time when movement work was more segregated, and so the terminology used to describe that work was differentiated. (p. xvi)

Whether or not terms like "white ally" or "white anti-racist" continue to be used to describe white people immersed in racial justice work, it is important that scholars continue to explore the role of white people in movement work for racial justice. It is also important that there continue to be "ally" models for white people to consult. Competing theories and frameworks makes the literature richer and give white people (and people of color who seek to build multi-racial coalitions that include white people) an opportunity to explore different paths and approaches to movement work

Colorblind Racism

Why and how people choose to engage in racial justice action is influenced (andcomplicated) by the particularities of the racial landscape of any given historical period. Presently we are immersed in what many have described as a racial milieu predicated on colorblind ideology (Powell, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2010, Wise, 2010). This era of colorblind racism is the racial landscape within which participants of this study will have grown up, and now engage in racial justice activism. A better understanding of colorblindness will provide context for the identity development and praxes of the participants in this study. The section below provides definitions, theoretical analyses and historical roots of the colorblind ideology/racism.

Following the Civil Rights Movement and 'the end' of Jim Crow, a "new racism" (DiAngelo, 2012) predicated on colorblind ideology emerged as the pervading framework through which white supremacy now operates in the United States. DiAngelo (2012) defines "new racism" as "The ways in which racism has adapted over time so that modern norms, policies, and practices result in similar racial outcomes as those in the past, while not appearing to be explicitly racist" (p. 106). Addressing this new, colorblind racism, Bonilla-Silva (2010) writes:

> Jim Crow racism served as the glue for defending a brutal and overt system of racial oppression in the pre-Civil Rights era, color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era. (p. 3)

Lipitz (2011) describes colorblindness as a "cynical strategy" used to "protect and preserve the traditional privileges of whiteness" (p. 14), and explains that proponents of colorblind ideology erroneously equate the consideration of race in programs and policies meant to ameliorate the effects of historic racial injustices as equivalent to the racial discrimination that led to the enactment of civil rights laws. "In all areas of U.S. life," writes Lipsitz, "we now confront the presumption that color-bound injustices require color-blind remedies, that race-based problems should be solved by race-blind remedies" (p. 15).

This colorblind racism, or 'laissez-faire racism' (Bobo, 1997) as other scholars have named it, is necessary in today's socio-political climate where overt acts of bigotry and prejudice are mostly taboo. Bonilla-Silva (2010) explains, however, that this shift is really only surface level. According to Bonilla-Silva, white people today "support almost all the goals of the Civil Rights Movement in principle, but object in practice to almost all the policies that have been developed to make these goals a reality" (p. 131). Bonilla-

Silva refers to color-blind racism as "racism without racists," because of the way white people employ the language of colorblindness, language he describes as "slippery, apparently contradictory, and subtle" (p. 53). Leonardo (2009) echoes Bonilla-Silva's sentiments about colorblind racism:

> The transparency of racial power is arguably more opaque in the era of color-blindness or post-Civil Rights race relations. Unlike the overt forms of White supremacy, the softened and coded/coated expressions, like normative knowledge and unequal funding in schools, are either harder to transfix on race or are confounded by class issues. However, the resulting relationship is consistent: White reigns supreme. (p. 16)

Succinctly put, DiAngelo (2012) defines colorblind racism as "pretending that we don't notice race or that race has no meaning [,] [a] pretense [that] denies racism and thus holds it in place" (p. 107). This denial of race and racism while upholding it is what makes colorblind racism distinct from racism in other historical periods in the United States. "And the beauty of this new ideology," writes Bonilla-Silva (2012), "is that it aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those it rewards" (p. 3-4).

Powell (2012) explains that post-racialists (the name he gives to colorblind ideologues) claim to be unaware of any substantial impact of structural racism on people of color today, while also denying racial anxiety and unconscious bias. In other words, "[Post-racialists] insist on a simple notion of race and racism: either you are a racist, or you are not" (p. 9). DiAngelo (2015) speaking on this last point puts it another way; "The good/bad binary is the foundation of new racism" (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

Another manifestation of colorblind racism is race-neutrality (Powell, 2012). This facet of colorblind ideology leads to the 'neutral' design of policies and programs. But

"fairness is not advanced by treating those who are situated differently as if they were the same (p. 9)," writes Powell, and often, race neutral policies and programs are anything but neutral in their impact on different groups of people. And because the legal system, as well as public opinion, is predicated on colorblindness, it is the design (intent) of these supposedly neutral programs and policies, and not the impact that is scrutinized when those programs and policies prove to be inequitable.

Historical Origins of Colorblind Racism

Socio-political history of colorblind theory and practice. Wise (2010) and Haney López (2014) single out a 1965 document, known as "The Moynihan Report on the Black Family," as key to the beginning of colorblind ideology and what Wise calls "post-racial liberalism." Patrick Moynihan was a white academic that served as advisor to Presidents Johnson and Nixon, and later became a United States Senator. In that report, Moynihan called for a new era of "benign neglect." According to Wise, civil rights activism and uprisings by communities of color led Moynihan to this strategy, a strategy that would end up shaping politics for years to come. Writes Wise:

> As whites became increasingly agitated about urban riots during the middle and latter part of the sixties, these voices began to argue that in order for the nation to move forward on an agenda of opportunity for all, it would be necessary to de-emphasize the issue of racism and discrimination, and focus instead on other concerns. (p. 27)

The Moynihan Report did just that, providing the emerging notion of a "culture of poverty" (see Lewis (1961) *The Children of Sanchez*) analysis of disparities between affluent, white people and low-income communities of color. Like colorblind liberals do today, Moynihan acknowledged the history of racism in the United States, but concluded that by 1965, it was anything but race (and racism) that was to blame for disparities

between communities. In his report, Moynihan proclaimed that inequities were largely a result of family breakdown in low-income communities of color (e.g. growing rates of children born out-of-wedlock, welfare dependency). His contention was that moving forward, any policies developed to combat inequities needed to be race-neutral, which according to Wise was "the political imperative of colorblind universalism" (p. 28). Additionally, although Moynihan considered issues affecting Black communities to be distinct in some ways from other communities of color, strategies meant to uplift Black communities and other communities of color needed to be drafted and implemented as race-neutral policies intended to help everyone in need because of the racial fatigue of congressmen (who vote on legislation) and the white population writ large.

By the 1970s, conservatives were calling for a full-fledged rescinding of the laws that were enacted as a result of the Civil Rights movement. According to Wise (2010), although white liberals were not demonstrating outright backlash to civil rights like their conservative counterparts, they were in favor of Moynihan's suggestion of *benign neglect*, a race-neutral analysis of and response to existing inequities. In 1978, according to Wise, William Julius Wilson, a prominent, liberal, African American (University of Chicago and Harvard) sociologist, building on Moynihan's ideas related to benign neglect, wrote *The Declining Significance of Race*, a book that regurgitated "culture of poverty" notions that blamed Black families for their own plight, while also encouraging policy makers to set aside racial discrimination as significant, and instead examine structural economic issues (e.g. the closing of factories and insufficient funding in education) as the cause (exclusively). *The Truly Disadvantaged*, Wilson's second book written in 1987, like his first book, was widely circulated and celebrated amongst liberal

policy makers. In fact, according to Wise, President Clinton credited Wilson as having heavily influenced his thinking on race and class issues. Moynihan, Wilson and other scholars in the 1970s and 1980s would ultimately ensure the ushering in of colorblind racism as a phenomenon engaged in by not only conservatives who wanted to deny the ongoing impact of historical racism in the United States, but by liberals as well. The conservative version of colorblindness used the notion of "culture of poverty" as an essentializing, aggressively judgmental commentary on the pathology of Black culture, pathology directly responsible for the plight of Black communities. The liberal version was much more sympathetic, but became every bit as pervasive. By the 1980s, notes Wise, colorblind (or post-racial) liberalism, along with its ideological counterpart of colorblind conservatism, had become the predominant racial framework(s) in the United States.

A brief history of colorblind ideology in the courts. Haney López (2014) offers a historical analysis of how colorblind ideology/racism came to be the dominant legal paradigm regarding race in the United States, and in so doing reveals a pendulous struggle between liberal and conservative colorblind ideology in the courts dating back to the late 19th century. Justice John Marshall Harlan, in his lone dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court decision that upheld racial segregation as legal in 1896, wrote, "Our constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens" (as cited in Haney Lopez, p. 80). According to Haney López, this was the first time that the term "color-blind" was introduced into our lexicon with regards to race talk. Harlan's dissent in *Plessy* was rooted in his belief that segregated train cars curtailed the ability of Black citizens to participate in civil life and the marketplace, and not because

he believed the government should never consider race (as conservative colorblind ideology would come to dictate in subsequent years) or that the Constitution disallowed government efforts to address the historic effects of racism.

Civil rights movement leaders, beginning in the 1940s, started to anchor their work in the legal terminology of colorblindness, as according to Haney Lopez, "the phrase 'Our Constitution is color-blind' carried important rhetorical force, for in its simple declarative form it seemed to command an immediate end to all government laws mandating racial segregation" (p. 80-81). Beginning in the 1930s, Thurgood Marshall served as lead counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, where he anchored much of his work in Harlan's *Plessy v. Ferguson* dissent phraseology. Eventually, the use of colorblind legal terminology would lead to a victory for civil rights lawyers, when in 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned *Plessy.*

Civil rights lawyers would soon after evolve their thinking and tactics, however, and move from colorblind to color conscious strategies. State governments were slow to integrate and civil rights lawyers felt that colorblind arguments were not helping them make headway with desegregation. According to Haney López, in 1965 (more than a decade after *Brown v. Board*) there were still less than 1 in 100 Black students in the South enrolled in schools that were legally white prior to *Brown*, and the number of white students in Black schools was also minimal. A move toward color consciousness, and away from the colorblind strategies that had led to a victory in *Brown* v. *Board* was necessary to bring about actual change. "Simply declaring segregation laws illegal," writes Haney López, "would not make African Americans "equal" in the eyes of a society steeped in degrading views of nonwhites" (p. 82).

But while civil rights lawyers were moving away from colorblind strategies, conservatives began to adopt their own brand of colorblindness in an effort to block integration. Haney López cites two court cases, both involving a particular federal district court in South Carolina, in which colorblind conservatism emerged to do just that. In 1955 the federal court ruled that the Constitution does not mandate integration, it just does not allow discrimination. Ten years later, the same court issued this statement: "the Constitution is color-blind; it should no more be violated to attempt integration than to preserve segregation" (as cited in Haney López, p. 83). Prominent segregationist lawyers and political leaders at the time, such as Barry Goldwater and William Rehnquist pushed colorblind conservatism forward.

According to Haney Lopez, this brand of colorblind conservatism was met with resistance in the mid to late 1960s and early 1970s. The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964 and the idea of structural racism became popularized, an idea substantiated by the Kerner Report issued by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders in the wake of a rash of riots related to race and racism in cities across the country. The Kerner Report, which warned that the United States was "moving toward two societies, one Black, one white—separate and unequal" (an obvious nod to *Plessy*) (p. 85), detailed evidence of pervasive and overt discrimination, segregated and inferior schooling, inadequate housing, lack of access to health care, systemic police violence, and labor market exclusion.

Another big victory for civil rights lawyers and color conscious thinking came in 1971, when the Supreme Court (which included Lyndon Johnson's appointee, Thurgood

Marshall) overturned a North Carolina law mandating 'colorblind' school assignments. The court issued this statement:

> Just as the race of students must be considered in determining whether a constitutional violation has occurred, so also must race be considered in formulating a remedy. To forbid, at this stage, all assignments made on the basis of race would deprive school authorities of the one tool absolutely essential to fulfillment of their constitutional obligation to eliminate existing dual schools systems (as cited in Haney López, p. 84).

Also in 1971, according to Haney López, color consciousness and the recognition of structural racism had a victory in the Supreme Court. In *Griggs v. Duke Power*, a larger Southern employer, had ostensibly done away with formal racial discrimination against its Black employees in compliance with the Civil Rights Act, but continued to implement hiring practices that although technically race-neutral, negatively impacted Black employees with regards to hiring and wages. According to the 1971 Supreme Court, "good intent or absence of discriminatory intent does not redeem employment procedures or testing mechanisms that operate as 'built-in headwinds' for minority groups" (as cited in Haney López, p. 85).

And in 1977, the Supreme Court presided over the first ever challenge to race based affirmative action, when it heard a case that involved New York's creation of a "majority-nonwhite" voting district. Here the Court's developing concept of the "intentional harm" rule worked in favor of affirmative action proponents, as the Court could find "no racial slur or stigma with respect to whites or any other race" (Haney López, p. 86). Although this decision was a victory for race-based affirmative action, it would prove to be an anachronistic use of the "intentional harm" rule and would not be indicative of what was to come. In *University of California v. Bakke* (1978), Justice Powell stated that intentions were irrelevant in affirmative action cases, and in fact

"constitutional harm occurred the moment the government took express notice of race" (Haney López, p. 87). Bakke was an important turning point with regards to how the courts considered race. "A reactionary form of colorblindness became king[,]" writes Haney López, "quick to condemn all corrective uses of race, but blind to racial discrimination against minorities" (p. 87).

Color conscious legal precedents used to ensure integration, ameliorate past discrimination or account for ongoing structural racism turned out to be short lived. In addition to a move away from supporting affirmative action, Haney López describes *Griggs* as the "high-water mark for anti-discrimination law" (p. 86). During Nixon's tenure as President (beginning in 1969) he appointed four Supreme Court Justices, effectively ending any hope of color conscious legal decisions in the courts, and marking the beginning what Haney López calls the "racism as hate" precedent that dominates the United States legal system today, a precedent that mandates "proof of malice on the part of the culpable actor" (p. 86). The Supreme Court formally adopted proof of malice as doctrine in 1979, and since then has never found discrimination against nonwhites. "As far as the Court is concerned," writes Haney López, "racism against nonwhites must involve proclaimed animus, and that has all but disappeared" (p. 86).

Haney López (2014) and Alexander (2010) both cite a 1987 death penalty case as emblematic of just how colorblind and resistant to arguments about structural racism the courts have become. *McCleskey v. Kemp* involved Warren McCleskey, an African American man who was facing the death penalty for the murder of a white police officer during an armed robbery in Georgia. The NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund challenged the death penalty sentence, citing evidence that racial bias had infected

sentencing practices, thus violating the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments. The defense cited the Baldus Study (a study of more than two thousand murder cases in Georgia), which found that that defendants charged with murdering white victims were eleven times more likely to receive the death penalty than defendants charged with murdering Black victims. Additionally, Georgia prosecutors requested the death penalty in 70 percent of cases that involved a Black perpetrator and white murder victims, as compared to less than 20 percent of cases involving with white perpetrators and Black murder victims. Ultimately, the Supreme Court ruled against McCleskey, and declared that the Baldus Report did not prove unequal treatment under the law, and that short of providing evidence that the prosecutor had sought the death penalty or that the jury made its decision based on race in McCleskey's case specifically, that his sentencing would not be overturned. According to Alexander, "racial bias in sentencing, even if shown through credible statistical evidence, could not be challenged under the Fourteenth Amendment in the absence of clear evidence of conscious, discriminatory intent" (p. 107). Ultimately, explains Alexander, the case transcended the death penalty, and what was really at stake was "whether—and to what extent—the Supreme Court would tolerate racial bias in the criminal justice system as a whole" (p. 107). "The Court's answer," writes Alexander, "was that racial bias would be tolerated—virtually to any degree—so long as no one admitted it" (p. 107).

Colorblind ideology continues to impact the legal system. The rhetoric of the courts misappropriates past decisions and dissents (e.g. Justice Harlan's *Plessy* dissent and Justice Marshall's language justifying the *Brown* decision) and ignores historical context when justifying positions that uphold segregation and allow for systemic racial

discrimination (Haney López, 2014; Alexander, 2010; Wise, 2010). For example, in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle Schools District No. 1.* (2007), the Supreme Court, blocked public school districts from considering race when placing students in schools as a way to promote ongoing integration (Powell, 2012; Haney López, 2014). To justify the Court's decision, Chief Justice Roberts wrote:

> Before *Brown*, school children were told where they could and could not go to school based on the color of their skin. The school districts in these cases have not carried the heavy burden of demonstrating that we should allow this once again—even if for very different reasons… The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race. (as cited in Powell, 2012, p. 6)

According to Haney López (2014), this decision equated school district plans to ensure diversity, equality and school integration with practices meant to exclude and intentionally promote racial segregation, a false equivalent devoid of historical context. Powell (2010), referring to the same decision, explains that the decision "not only ignores the policies, structures, and conditions of marginalization; it also ignores the extent to which our behavior and motivation are unconscious" (p. 6). Using colorblindness as doctrine in the legal system, according to Powell, ultimately serves not to promote equality, but rather, upholds the racial status quo, a status quo that continues to marginalize people of color and to further inequity. In his dissenting opinion, Justice Stevens writes critically of the Chief Justice's use of the *Brown v. Board decision* as justification for the *Parents Involved* decision: "[H]istory books do not tell stories of white children struggling to attend Black schools. In this and other ways, the Chief Justice rewrites the history of one of the Court's most important decisions" (as cited in Powell, p. 7). The rewriting of that history has helped usher the United States into this era of colorblind racism within which we now find ourselves.

The colorblind works of scholars like Moynihan and the politicians who adopted those works as part of their governance/legislation, and the colorblind doctrine of the courts, have not just impacted our legal system, but have shaped the way people behave in day-to-day interactions as well. Below, I move away from definitions and historical origins of colorblindness, and detail what scholars have written about with regards to its everyday application to the way people (particularly white people) act in society.

Framing the Conversation: Speaking and Living Colorblindness

The four frames of colorblind racism. Foundational theory about colorblind ideology and how it is enacted in society often begins with the seminal work of Bonilla-Silva (2010). Bonilla-Silva developed an ideological framework for understanding the ways white people demonstrate colorblind racism in the United States. His analysis, derived from data from the 1997 Survey of Social Attitudes of College Students, data from the 1998 Detroit Area Study (DAS) and subsequent interviews, includes four central frames: 1) abstract liberalism, 2) naturalization, 3) cultural racism, and 4) minimization of racism. The first frame, *abstract liberalism*, entails the use of progressive language and the espousing of progressive ideas in a broad sense, while omitting any mention of race or racial inequality. One example of abstract liberalism is the idea of equal opportunity for everyone being used by colorblind ideologues as a rationale against affirmative action policies. The thinking is that race conscious policies are discriminatory regardless of the end goal, even when intended to ameliorate racial injustice.

Although the second frame is the least used of the four, according to Bonilla-Silva, 50 percent of the respondents employed *naturalization* in their responses. Naturalization enables white people to "explain away" racial (or racist) situations by

portraying them as natural occurrences. This frame is generally applied in conversations regarding schooling or residential situations, such as when rationalizing segregation or normalizing why white people *naturally* gravitate toward other white people. This "just the way it is" or "it's only natural" approach to rationalizing segregated spaces may seem to contradict the notion of "colorblindness," but according to Bonilla-Silva it is actually a way of "reinforc[ing] the myth of nonracialism" (p. 28). In other words white people create and maintain exclusively white, segregated spaces because of a biological predilection. They are also quick to point out that people of color do this too. Naturalization allows white people to justify phenomena such as segregated spaces without mention of historical factors such as marginalized and immigrant communities being formed out of necessity or survival, or of the systemic factors that led/lead to discrimination and segregation.

Cultural racism portrays people of color as culturally deficient (e.g. Black people lack work ethic or motivation) in order to explain discrepancies between people of color and white people with regards to education, socioeconomic status, incarceration rates, etc. According to Bonilla Silva, cultural racism is the colorblind era replacement for biological racism, both of which have been used as an explanation or justification for inequality in the United States. Wise (2010) agrees with Bonilla-Silva and argues that colorblindness and its corresponding rhetoric not only fail to recognize (and thus ameliorate) racial discrimination; it actually rationalizes and perpetuates inequity by fueling cultural racism. It does this by distorting racial bias into some sort of rational byproduct of something inherently wrong with those who experience that bias. According to Wise (2010), "Whereas a color-conscious approach allows for a more nuanced

understanding of racial inequities and how they've been generated, colorblindness encourages placing blame for the conditions of inequity on those who have been targets of systemic injustice" (p. 19).

Bonilla-Silva's fourth frame of colorblind racism is the *minimization of racism*. The discursive tactics used as a part of this frame suggest that discrimination has been greatly diminished as a factor in the everyday lives of people of color, and often includes phrases such as "It's better now than in the past" (p. 28), or with regards to a specific scenario such as discriminatory hiring practices, "[I]f they're qualified, they'll hire you and if you are not qualified, then you don't get the job" (p. 45). Minimization also lends credence to the idea that racial discrimination in the 21st century is relegated to isolated incidents of overt bigotry and prejudice, largely dismissing notions of systemic or institutional racism.

Powell (2012), while not explicitly referring to Bonilla-Silva's research, names the invisibility of the "white gaze" as the driving force behind at least three of the four frames. He notes that ideas that can be viewed through the lenses of abstract liberalism, minimization of racism, and cultural racism are all connected to white people's "pull yourself up from your bootstraps" meritocracy mentality, a mythology that is made possible by white normativity and the invisibility of white supremacy. This mythology leaves only decontextualized (and false) explanations for racial disparities. According to Powell:

> [This] decontextualized view of race and "merit" portrays racial differences in the distribution of opportunities and benefits either as the aberrant result of irrational discriminatory individuals or as individual failure on the part of minorities. This analysis serves the ends of racial domination because de facto racial segregation, our racial history, and current racial hierarchies are all ignored, while race-based remedial efforts, such as affirmative action, are considered to be as irrationally

> tainted as the programs and practices that maintain color-coded systems of privilege. (p. 65)

Powell singles out the invisible normativity of whiteness as a particularly potent facet of colorblind ideology, and as the central cause of cultural racism. Writes Powell:

> Racial minorities have simultaneously been defined as the other and denied the benefits of membership in American society. This has caused the adverse effects of exclusion to manifest along racial lines, and the white majority uses the results as justification for the original definition and exclusion. (p. 55)

Colorblind ideology in a local context. Burke (2012) (who is one of the participants in this study), building on Bonilla-Silva's seminal work on colorblind racism, applied the four frames of colorblindness to the localized context of three racially/ethnically diverse neighborhoods in Chicago. Echoing what Bonilla-Silva writes about colorblind racism and writing specifically about use of his four frames by white people in the above-mentioned communities, Burke writes, "They specifically take plausible and empirically defendable racism-related explanations for racial inequality off the table, and insist that they do not matter" (p. 59). Burke chose to apply the four frames to a local setting as a way to learn how the frames are applied in more specific, nuanced ways. According to Burke, Bonilla-Silva's findings are based on respondents' answers to hypothetical scenarios and thus the responses are often delivered in the abstract. "[Instead of] asking people in general how they view common policies like welfare or affirmative action to identify the frames," writes Burke, "we need to begin to examine how these ideologies and discourse, or ways of speaking, impact real-life, local settings" (p. 61).

In Burke's study, the *local setting*, as mentioned above, is comprised of three racially diverse neighborhoods, where many of the "liberal" residents choose to live, in part, because of a desire to live in a racially diverse community. What Burke found was a

nuanced set of uses of Bonilla-Silva's frames amongst the residents. The residents expressed pride in their neighborhoods, including their diverse make-up, while at the same time expressing ambivalence about the impact of race and its impact on segments of their communities' populations. The fact that many of the residents Burke interviewed were homeowners made this duality all the more complex and pronounced, often putting their own economic considerations at odds with their purported support of efforts (e.g. low-income housing) that would sustain the very neighborhood diversity of which they claim to be so proud. Attempting to negotiate these multiple, often-conflicting aims in a local setting, according to Burke, can tell us a lot about our national consciousness regarding race, and about the "the pitfalls of good intentions" (p. 2).

To unpack this complexity further, Burke took a closer look at Bonilla-Silva's four frames of colorblind racism as used by residents of the three Chicago neighborhoods. In Bonilla-Silva's study, *abstract liberalism* was perhaps the most commonly employed frame. Burke's findings were quite different, observing almost no evidence of the use of abstract liberalism by the mostly liberal residents. Instead, those interviewed by Burke tended to focus on circumstances or social structures (often class) when discussing racial inequalities in their communities. Here Burke cites Yancey (1999), whose research on racially integrated communities found that despite levels of education being tied to support for integration, that those with higher education are not necessarily less prejudiced, but rather have simply learned to give responses that are deemed socially acceptable in today's colorblind racial milieu. In other words, it is possible that the research participants in Burke's study knew (even if unconsciously) that

employing abstract liberalism, despite its colorblind tendencies, could still make them sound racist or insensitive to racial issues.

Chang (2015), citing several different sets of poll data, substantiates Burke and Yancey's findings that perhaps people are merely better at *saying* 'the right thing' in this era of colorblind racism, while their actions continue to support policies that create a divided society. In a Gallup Poll, white people over a 40-year period were asked, "Would you move if great numbers of Blacks moved into your neighborhood" (as cited in Chang, p. 280)? In 1958, 79 percent said they would move, but by 1997, 75 percent said they would not. In December 2008 (a month after Obama was elected President), the Pew Research Center revealed that 60 percent of white people (and 52 percent of Republicans) between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine would prefer to live in a racially diverse community. Additionally, almost 70 percent of those in that same poll, who made $100,000 a year or more, said that they would prefer living in a mixed-economic neighborhood, and many others have expressed in similar polls that they wanted their children's schools to be racially diverse. But according to Chang, when Reardon and Bischoff, two Stanford researchers, examined data from 1970 to 2009, they found that residential segregation by income had increased markedly and the wealthiest people had segregated themselves off most dramatically. Thus, there is a large discrepancy between the poll-generated data and actual social circumstances. Referring to the notions that we have moved increasingly toward "cultural desegregation" (p. 280) and that we are becoming a post-racial nation, Chang writes that on the contrary, "our modes of living together [reflect] distancing and blindness, rancor and silence; our politics [bespeak] deep pessimism and a desire for disengagement; and our social indexes [reveal] increasing

social resegregation and racial inequality" (p. 280). So again, the absence of abstract liberalism in Burke's study may not mean progress toward greater racial consciousness, but rather, is a good indicator that white people may simply be getting more sophisticated with their responses to questions about racial inequity.

Participants in Burke's study *did* display *cultural racism*, however, which Burke explains as the frame that is most reminiscent of traditional racism because of "its categorical descriptions of any race's imagined 'culture'" (p. 66). Reiterating Bonilla-Silva's findings, Burke explains that cultural racism can be demonstrated in ways that are obviously problematic, but can also be delivered in an apologetic, almost sympathetic manner. It is this more sympathetic version of cultural racism that Burke found consistently (and without exception) espoused by residents in her study, demonstrating the "uniquely liberal flavor of color-blind ideology" (p. 66) in the communities in which she conducted her study. Regardless of this apologetic or sympathetic packaging, the liberal participants in Burke's study still anchor much of their beliefs about discrepancies in wellbeing between white people and people of color in deficit analyses of people of color.

Burke also found *naturalization* to be a commonly employed rhetorical tool used by residents to explain segregated schools, and segmented neighborhoods and social networks. Preference for associating with people from similar backgrounds, and/or social class was used to explain segregation without acknowledging ongoing structural racism and the significance of race.

Finally, Burke found that residents in her study utilized *minimization of racism* as a way to put forth "liberal" views while minimizing or avoiding altogether, race and

racism as a factor with issues such as gentrification and forced displacement of people of color, or of the over-policing of Black and brown youth. The residents tended to use a "class not race" approach (ignoring any analysis that involves their correlation) to explain displacement of people of color and the policing of Black and brown youth (coded by one resident as "hooligans" and another resident as "not our kids"), and also rationalized this latter issue as being due to excessive loitering of youth in the area. Though their exact phrasing minimizes the role of race and racism, it is clear that their language is still racially coded, thus indicating that they know on some level that these are racial matters.

Burke explains that her goal was not to prove that liberal residents, who claimed to be invested in their neighborhoods' racial diversity, were, in fact, racist. She did, however, seek to understand Bonilla-Silva's framework of colorblind racism in a localized setting, and in everyday situations affecting the residents. In so doing, Burke revealed the complexities of the use of and subscription to colorblindness. Writes Burke:

> My point […] is to notice the complex terrain residents of these communities are navigating, simultaneously "informed" by cultural racism so easily adopted from popular culture, and working hard to forge community in a diverse environment. Here if nowhere else are the constraints of color-blind ideologies, and the vast system of misinformation that perpetuates it, most apparent. (p. 70)

Burke found that white people, even liberal white people who actively seek out diverse neighborhoods and theoretically support diverse leadership, succumb to colorblind racism, keeping them from fully integrating themselves in their communities, and from supporting local policies that promote sustained diversity and the uplifting of poor and working class people of color.

Burke also discovered that the "liberal" white people who are purportedly invested in their neighborhood's mixed racial make-up manage to insulate themselves

from people of color even within these uniquely diverse neighborhoods, creating what Burke (borrowing again from Bonilla-Silva) names as "white habitus." According to Bonilla-Silva (2010), white habitus, which develops out of "social and spatial segregation" (p. 104), is a "racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that *conditions* and *creates* whites' racial taste, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters" (p. 104). Bourdieu (1984) was the first to write of the concept of *habitus*, defining it as "not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principles of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social word is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes" (p. 170). Bonilla-Silva's *white habitus* builds upon Bourdieu's concept to describe the way in which racism (even if colorblind) and racial division are specifically articulated as a version of habitus. The most important aspect of Bourdieu's concept, according to Bonilla-Silva, is that it influences a person's "'perception, appreciation and action' through routinization, without express calculation, and with little need for external constraints" (p. 125-126n7). In other words, the participants in both Bonilla-Silva's and Burke's studies were enmeshed in a white habitus. This is particularly compelling in Burke's study, as her participants all live in racially diverse neighborhoods and yet still walls themselves off in white habitus. Burke names white habitus as the "engine of colorblind ideologies" (p. 117), explaining it in this way:

> Because the dominant ideology does not allow for a coherent and utilitarian approach to analyzing and acting around the significance of race in these communities, community members are left to act on the only means available to them—individualized, consumption-driven actions and those that keep the community safe and intact for the interests of whites and homeowners. (p. 117)

White race discourse: Talking about race without talking about race. Foster (2013), like Bonilla-Silva and Burke, focuses on colorblind discourse as a key facet of colorblind racism. In his study on white race discourse (WRD), he finds that in many ways, white people support systemic racism while completely avoiding expressing it verbally, "at least on the front stage of social life" (p. 3). WRD, a colorblind or "color- and power-evasive discourse," according to Foster, is overwhelmingly the discourse used by white people in the United States today. "WRD," writes Foster, enables white Americans to talk about race when actually not talking about it" (p. 175).

Foster believes that because white people tend not to see themselves as racialized beings (they are merely "normal" and race is something others possess), and because they remain unaware (or feign unawareness) of the unearned power and privilege that comes with being white, their discourse tends to be "privilege evasive" (p. 34-35) while the discourse of people of color tends to be "privilege-cognizant" (p. 35). It is important to examine white race discourse, explains Foster, because it is discourse that moves white people toward accepting and supporting structural and institutional racism, which in turn is how "racial hierarchies remain unchallenged while even reinforcing what color-blindness had presumably set out to destroy: essentialist racism, or the belief in inherent natural (biological) differences between the various races" (p. 35).

According to Foster, survey questionnaires administered over the last few decades have on the surface, indicated that white college students no longer display anti-Black attitudes (or do so at much lesser rates than they did prior to the Civil Rights Movement). But like other scholars (Yancey, 2008; Burke, 2012; Chang, 2015;), Foster believes (and reveals through his research) that white people, by and large, have merely gotten better at

answering questions in a way that is socially acceptable; in other words, in a way that sounds non-racist.

Foster's study included qualitative interviews with white college students enrolled in Sociology courses. He analyzed data from these interviews to better understand attempts by white people to come across as "non-racist" when talking about race or race related issues. He describes this "frontstage" (p. 3) dialogue as being part of an intentional, even if at times unconscious, "impression management campaign" (p. 173), a framework he borrows from Goffman's ideas in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959).

Ultimately, Foster discovered that the non-racism displayed by the white students in his study was only surface level rhetoric, and when participants were pushed further in interviews, that rhetoric revealed stark contradictions. In fact, according to Foster, the white students he interviewed go to great lengths to dismiss or minimize the pervasiveness of systemic racism. Foster observed four key ways that white people engage in discourse that situates them as non-racist and supports their denial of the existence of widespread white supremacy/systemic racism. These include 1) defining themselves as raceless beings; 2) defining "race" as bad in and of itself; 3) seeing themselves as victims of reverse racism; and 4) being more defensive about the rights of white supremacists than they are of Black people. According to Foster, the participants demonstrate these discursive approaches and yet expect not to sound racist while doing so. They do this, explains Foster, by "employ[ing] a sophisticated discursive strategy that defends white supremacy while simultaneously attempting to come across as not defending it" (p. 174).

Two other key themes also surfaced throughout Foster's interviews with white college students, "bureaucratization of race discourse" and a "blame blacks, victimize whites" rhetoric. Foster explains that white people's discourse is bureaucratized in that it employs "evasive techniques to avoid expressing their 'true' feelings." One example is when white people use impersonal pronouns to distance themselves from race related actions or incidents. Foster also borrows as part of his "bureaucratization of race" analysis, Ritzer's concept of *McDonaldization*, which includes characteristics such as efficiency, calculability, predictability and nonhuman technology (unreflective, almost robotic language). In summary, Foster describes WRD as "a kind of machine that delivers specific messages that portray the speakers as ambivalent, innocent, and above all nonracist" (p. 175).

Foster also discovered the regular practice of white people blaming Black people for racial problems and for the victimization of white people by Black people in the years following civil rights advancements. This notion of 'reverse racism' (a false notion in actuality) that participants of the study lamented about often came up in conversations about affirmative action in college admissions. This theme also surfaced when research participants continually shared the following: a) they feel stigmatized for being white; b) they believe Black people are irrationally sensitive and make everything about race; and c) they feel that Black people are to blame for segregation because of too much "Black pride" (p. 177).

Additionally, Foster found that there are four main discursive strategies used to present a non-racist image while ignoring (or supporting) the realities of racism. According to Foster, these strategies (or "rules") "are really strategies of resistance:

resisting the mere acknowledgement of racial oppression, and thereby providing a rationale for doing nothing to stop it" (p. 179). Foster prefaces his analysis of these strategies by explaining that often (but not always) white people who employ them, do so unconsciously. These four rules include 1) avoidance; 2) conversation terminators; 3) semantic moves; and 4) bailouts.

Avoidance is when white people avoid discussing issues related to race or racism altogether (at least in "frontstage" settings). Foster collected little to no data on this strategy, however, since the strongest avoidance strategy is to choose not to sign up for an interview that is focused on issues of race. *Conversation terminators* are declarative statements that essentially end any further line of inquiry about issues of race. Foster cites "I was taught not to see race" and "I don't care whether he's Black, white, or purple" (p. 180) as two examples of conversation terminators. *Semantic moves* are strategies that involve pre-cursor statements (e.g. "I'm not a racist, but…") or altering speech to be inaudible or incomprehensible when conversations about race persist beyond a place where white people are comfortable. Finally*, bailouts* are used after "slippage" (instances when they have said or revealed something that they had not intended to share in a "frontstage" setting) has transpired during dialogue. The bailout comes in the form of a post-comment qualifier such as "but I don't really know about that" (p. 182). Bailouts not only "soften the blow" of (racist) comments that have accidentally slipped out, but also serve doubly as conversation terminators that end any further conversation on issues of race. As Foster, Burke and Bonilla-Silva have demonstrated, colorblind discourse is a major vehicle for carrying out colorblind ideology. Scholars have observed that this

discourse is deeply embedded in our society, employed by liberals and conservatives alike (Wise, 2010; Powell, 2012).

Colorblind Conservatism & Post-Racial Liberalism: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Both liberals and conservatives have adopted colorblind ideology as their modus operandi for understanding and addressing racial inequity, albeit with some small differences with how that colorblindness is manifested (Powell, 2012). Colorblind conservatives, according to Powell, avoid discussion of unconscious bias and the realities of racial inequity, focusing only on intended malice or "purity of the conscious mind" (p. 7). According to Powell (2012):

> The evil they seek to guard against is the psychological state of those in power—the noticing of race—not the condition of various racial groups or current and historical patterns in the distribution of opportunity. Indeed, if conservatives do take notice of them, they are likely to explain existing racial arrangements as caused by a non-white "culture of poverty," a term used often to excuse the lack of effort to improve conditions in low-income communities of color by implying that the problems are caused by blameworthy and immutable group behavior. (p. 7)

Liberal proponents of colorblind ideology are not much different according to Powell, believing that we live for the most part, in a post-racial society, and that with the exception of some outwardly bigoted individuals who intend harm, we are beyond race. Or as Powell puts it, "'Race doesn't matter!'" – much" (p. 7). Powell does believe post-racial liberals to be more sensitive to race in some circumstances, even allowing for some admission of inequality, but at the same time believing that a "frontal attack on racial conditions is divisive" (p. 7).

Congruent to Powell's analysis and echoing Bonilla-Silva's (2010) *minimization of racism* and *cultural racism* frames, Wise (2009) explains that proponents of colorblind liberalism recognize the history of racism in the United States, but rationalize perceived

racial inequities today as being about anything other than racial discrimination. "Though they certainly do not deny the weight of past oppression," writes Wise, "[they] tend to minimize the extent to which past injustice determines the current status of blacks and other people of color in the United States" (p. 70). Rather, they see class and macroeconomic issues (e.g. factories closing in urban settings) as predominating reasons for disparity, as well as certain behavioral and cultural characteristics of people of color (cultural racism) as leading to disparities between white people and communities of color.

A Dream Distorted: Coopting MLK & the Civil Rights Movement

Similarities between liberal and conservative colorblind ideologues also exist in their practice of anchoring (and rationalizing) their colorblind convictions in coopted (and misused) ideas. (DiAngelo, 2012; Lamont Hill, 2015; Smith, 2015). As with Harlan's *Plessy* dissent, the language of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement has been hijacked (and distorted from its original meaning) by colorblind ideologues as a rationale for supporting colorblind racism (DiAngelo, 2015; Lamont Hill 2015; Smith, 2015). According to Lamont Hill (2015), proponents of colorblind ideology have distorted Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous words, "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character" from his speech at the 1963 March on Washington, and turned him into some sort of "multi-cultural action hero" (personal communication, March 3, 2015). DiAngelo (2012) describes the Civil Rights Movement and parts of King's speech as a turning point in the (verbal) manifestation of racism in the United States. Mirroring what Lamont Hill said about the misinterpretation of King's

message, DiAngelo explains that prior to MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech, many white people in the United States were comfortable asserting their racial biases and internalized racial superiority. The portion of the speech mentioned above by Lamont Hill, however, "hit a moral chord" (p. 106) with much of white America, thus playing a role in the ushering in of a new racism predicated on colorblind ideology. According to DiAngelo:

> Seizing on this part of King's speech, dominant culture began promoting the idea of "colorblindness" as a remedy for racism. But this was not the primary message of King's speech. King's speech was given at a march for economic justice […], and he was there to advocate for the elimination of poverty, but few people today know the breadth and complexity of King's activism. Further, King did not mean that whites should *deny* that race mattered, but that they should actively work toward creating a society in which it *actually* didn't matter. (p. 106)

Lipsitz (2011) also notes that proponents of colorblind ideology, who have such a narrow understanding of King's words, were not paying attention to his larger message(s). According to Lipsitz:

> They do not know that Dr. King argued that "giving a man his due may often mean giving him special treatment," that he wrote that "a society that has done something special *against* the Negro for hundreds of years must do something special *for* him, in order to equip him to compete on a just and equal basis." They do not know that by 1967 Dr. King talked less about his dream and more about how important it was for white America to wake up. (p. 15)

Lipsitz also believes that misinterpretation of Martin Luther King Jr. and the messages of the Civil Rights Movement have been used by government officials to shape public policies and by courts (including the Supreme Court) in opposition to affirmative action, school desegregation, and fair housing, hiring and lending practices.

Referring specifically to white millenials, Smith (2015) also believes the messages of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement have been misrepresented to, and now by this younger generation of white, U.S. Americans, and that [white] millenials are fluent in colorblindness and diversity, while remaining

illiterate in the language of anti-racism" (Smith, 2015). According to Smith, members of the Baby Boomer generation and Generation X "ignore[d] King's diagnosis of the problem—white supremacy—and opted to make him a poster-child for a colorblind society, in which we simply ignore the construct of race altogether and pray that it will disappear on its own" (Smith, 2015).

This misinterpretation of King's message and the pervasiveness of colorblind ideology amongst white millennials has also led to skewed views of racial [in]justice (Smith, 2015). Citing data from a 2012 Public Religion Institute poll as reported on by Al Jazeera, Smith shared that 58 percent of white millennials believe that discrimination affects whites as much as it does people of color, compared with 39 percent of Latino and 24 percent of Black millennials. Smith also cites an MTV poll conducted as part of their "Look Different" campaign that found that only 39 percent of white millennials think "white people have more opportunities today than racial minority groups," while 65 percent of millennials of color believe white people have greater opportunities. This data is in line with Foster's (2013) findings that white students feel like, not only is racial discrimination against people of color largely a thing of the past, but they (white people) are now victims of reverse racism. Smith (2015), repeating what other scholars have written about the phenomenon of colorblind racism, writes:

> Millenials have inherited a world in which the idea of 'reverse racism' has been legitimized, but 'reverse racism' only makes sense through the erasure of the power dynamics of racism, which has been accomplished through the teaching of racism as a strictly interpersonal issue of hatred and intolerance.

It is clear that colorblind ideology has no natural political allegiance and is put into practice by liberals and conservatives alike. Scholars like Bonilla-Silva, Burke and Foster have demonstrated how those who subscribe to colorblind ideology (largely white

people) talk about race and racism while managing to avoid naming race explicitly in their discourse. These discursive strategies lend credence to colorblind ideology, ultimately upholding the status quo of white supremacy. The great irony is that colorblind ideologues ultimately rationalize their post-racial analysis in language and ideas that they have coopted from the Civil Rights Movement, ideas that were meant to expose racism and further racial equity but are now being used to keep inequity squarely in place. It is in this colorblind landscape that racial justice activists today are working to further racial justice. This includes the participants in my study. But before sharing my findings, it is important to examine the work of other scholars who have studied white racial justice activism, both in this era of colorblind racism and in other historical periods. In the section below, I summarize existing studies on white racial justice action.

Existing Studies on White Racial Justice Action

Throughout the history of the United States the stories of patriarchal white leaders have been conflated, giving those individuals undue credit for racial justice victories while negating stories of people of color and their collective struggle for freedom. At the same time, the white people who have fought alongside communities of color at the grassroots level have also largely been left out of national narratives. These white activists participated in abolitionist movements against slavery, in the Civil Rights Movement and in many other important ways (Warren, 2010, p. xi). A growing, yet still limited portion of whiteness studies includes the narratives of white racial justice activists. It is important for the narratives of white racial justice activists to be documented while also continuing to document stories about people of color, who

through their own agency, struggle tirelessly for collective liberation. This section includes a brief summary of some of the scholarly work on white racial justice action.

In *Whites Confront Racism: Antiracists and Their Paths to Action* (2001), O'Brien shares findings from her study on white "antiracist" activists. O'Brien interviewed 30 white antiracist activists over a three year period (1996 – 1999), and also included archival analysis and participant observation as part of her study. The participants were men and women of diverse ages, socio-economic statuses, and geographic locations. Half of the research participants came from one of two antiracist organizations, Anti-Racist Action and the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, and as a result O'Brien focuses on the collective work of those two organizations as part of her study as well. O'Brien found there to be three key areas in which white people engage effectively in antiracist activism and which can potentially serve as models for other white people to learn from as they join in the struggle for racial justice. These areas include 1) *finding strength in numbers*; 2) *strategizing actions for maximum effectiveness* and 3) *striving for humility*.

Strength in numbers is important to antiracist work, according to O'Brien, both in and out of organizations like Anti-Racist Action and the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. Belonging to one of those organizations gave activists in her study a sense that they were part of something greater than themselves and helped sustain their work. It also motivated them to recruit other white people to join efforts to further racial justice. According to O'Brien, "White antiracists should remind themselves that part of their antiracist work includes reaching out to others, particularly other whites, so inviting others to meetings and workshops with their organization would be a crucial way of

extending this work" (p. 145). *Strength in numbers* is also important outside of formal organizations, and O'Brien, informed by the stories of those she interviewed and observed, addresses the need to reach out to people in one's own community regarding obvious and overt racial discrimination as well as to gather with others to address racism that may be more covert, but damaging to the community nonetheless.

O'Brien found there to be two main strategies involved with the second key area, *strategizing actions for maximum effectiveness*: 1) courage to speak out in difficult situations and 2) diplomacy enough to maintain relationships with those in whom change is desired (p. 146). She describes these strategies as a balancing act between diplomacy and complacency, urging the need to disrupt problematic behavior and actions of other white people while at the same time not alienating those that might potentially join movement work. Finally, O'Brien writes about the idea of *striving for humility* or stated more bluntly, "There is no room for an 'ego' in white antiracist work" (p. 147). O'Brien's findings indicate that effective white antiracists know that they are going to make mistakes, expect to be lifelong learners and remain open to criticism and self-improvement. Humility is necessary for white antiracists who seek sustained involvement in racial justice activism.

In *Fire in the Heart: How White Activists Embrace Racial Justice* (2010), Warren uses data from interviews with white racial justice activists focused primarily on anti-Black and to a lesser extent anti-Latino racism, and who are involved in criminal justice, education, or community organizing work. His findings include six major themes consistent in the lives and work of white racial justice activists including 1) seminal experiences leading to their activism; 2) the role of relationships with people of color as a

pathway to deeper commitment to racial justice; 3) motivation to act coming from a sense of morality; 4) a calling to work with other white people around issues or race, racism and racial justice; 5) working in multiracial alliances and 6) the tension they experience in white communities as a result of their racial justice work.

Seminal experiences, according to Warren, are instances that create cognitive dissonance for white people, between the values they were raised with and the "reality of racial injustice" (p. 213). It is authentic, collaborative *relationships with people of color*, however, that get white people out of their heads and into their hearts, giving white people an emotional connection to racial justice work while moving them from paternalistic 'do-gooder' or working *for* people of color, to being in solidarity and working *with* communities of color for change (p. 213). The *motivation to act from a place of morality* is connected to these relationships, "providing opportunities for "shared identities as multiracial political activists" (Warren, p. 82). This shared multiracial identity motivates them to strive for the world they want to live in, for themselves, with the recognition that everyone is made unwhole by racial injustice (albeit in very different ways). In addition to forming authentic relationships with people and communities of color, Warren found that 40 out of the 50 participants he interviewed expressed a sense of *responsibility to talk to, work with and organize other white people* around issues of racial justice. Although they stressed the need for education, they ultimately saw education as falling short of the larger work of relationship building and direct action. Warren sums up the research participants' collective thinking on this by writing, "If we want to change behavior, they argue, we need long-term engagement through relationships that focus on practice, which will, in turn, challenge stereotypes and change

thinking" (Warren, p. 147). The need for *multiracial coalition building* and venues for multiracial collaboration was also a common theme amongst the study's research participants. More specifically, activists in the study discussed the *tensions* that can arise when attempting to build and work in coalitions, and their strategies for working through that tension. A final theme analyzed by Warren involves the phenomenon of "problematic identity" amongst white racial justice activists.

> They have made a break with the dominant white society by taking up the cause of racial justice. This fact places them in tension with many other white people, often including their family, neighbors, and old friends. Their values are more likely to be similar to those of communities of color, with whom they might share the political and moral project of building a racially just society. Yet they are not members of communities of color. In other words, they claim a problematic identity. (p. 184)

Warren learned that as a result of this problematic identity, many white racial justice activists find solace and community in the networks of racial justice activists they have formed as part of their work.

Ultimately, Warren found that the process through which white people develop a sustained commitment to racial justice activism is a cyclical one, filled with triumphs and setbacks. He depicts the cycle as having three main areas in which white racial justice activists develop and maintain their activism. He signifies these areas though the monikers *Head*, *Heart* and *Hand*. *Head* represents the cognitive or intellectual ways that white people become engaged and includes knowledge and interests. *Heart* represents values and emotions, which help white activists become more personally invested in racial justice. *Hand* involves the relationships with people and communities of color that sustain activists over time and deepen their commitment to their work (p. 214).

In *Everyday White People Confront Racial & Social Injustice* (2015), Moore Jr., Penick-Parks and Michael seek answers to the questions "(a) How did you get into this work? (b) What have you learned? and (c) What do you recommend for future generations?" (Moore Jr. et al). The editors of the book curated a group of sixteen contributors, all of whom have 25 years or more experience in the "field of social justice," and most of whom are regular presenters and participants at the White Privilege Conference (WPC), a conference founded by one of the editors, Eddie Moore Jr. Although not an actual research study, Moore Jr. et al. contribute to the literature about white racial justice activists (described simply as "everyday white people" contributing to racial and social justice) in a manner that gets at the same questions and issues included in more formal research. The contributors to the book share both stories of how they came to be involved in racial justice work, and lessons they have learned about themselves as activists, and about white privilege and white supremacy along the way. The approach of Moore Jr. et al. is unique both because of the stand-alone narratives (though prompted by specific questions given to the contributors) and because all of the participants are established (even well known) white racial justice activists.

In A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism (2001), Thompson analyzes the narratives of 39 white racial justice activists in the United States, ranging in age from early twenties to late eighties, and including several well-known activists and authors such as Ann Braden and Ruth Frankenberg. The end result is more of a social history (or people's history) of white racial justice activism, as well as of the individual movements the activists participated in during the second half of the twentieth century. Some of these movements include the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power Movement,

and the Sanctuary Movement, as well as early and late second wave feminism. Thompson explores how the research participants developed racial consciousness, became involved in activism and the overall nature of their racial justice work.

In Accountability and *White Anti-racist Organizing: Stories from Our Work* (2010), the editors, Cushing, Cabbil, Freeman, Hitchcock and Richards, like the editors from *Everyday White People* (2015), assembled a group of white activists to author their own pieces, giving insight into their racial justice work. This book differs, however, in that the editors explicitly asked the contributors to address their work in the context of accountability to "people of color and to anti-racist people of color in particular" (Cushing et al., p. 4). According to Cushing et al., the need for accountability stems from the idea that "people with privileged statuses who set out to undo oppressive systems often do not have the faintest notion of what is really needed. The balance of power rests with the privileged but the balance of knowledge rests with the oppressed" (p. 4). The book includes narrative essays from a range of multi-generational white racial justice activists, and includes (among others) social workers, educators and community organizers.

The above-mentioned studies of white racial justice activists are an important part of the larger literature of critical whiteness studies (CWS). They provide needed insight into the myriad of ways that white people come to this work in the first place, and subsequently work in solidarity with people and communities of color to further racial justice. My study builds on studies like those detailed above, with a singular focus on racial justice action in the era of colorblind racism.

Summary

The first section of this literature review revealed what researchers and scholars have found regarding white identity development and the characteristics of white people who have assumed a more 'positive,' racially just, white identity (who some call allies). As it turns out, many of those same traits and tendencies are shared by participants in my study and so the existing literature provided a foundational understanding for my own qualitative inquiry into the lives and praxes of white people engaged in racial justice activism, and will do so for readers of my study as well.

The historical and theoretical underpinnings of colorblind ideology, included in section two of this literature review, are important for understanding the racial milieu that shaped the research participants in my study (all of whom were born after Jim Crow Racism had been legally abolished) and shaped the landscape in which they now engage in racial justice action.

In the final section of this literature review, I presented a summary of studies similar to my own that focus on the lives and praxes of white racial justice activists. The literature ranged from collections of narratives written by the activists themselves with little guidance about what to share, to qualitative studies, like mine, that include qualitative interviews and observations of participants. These latter studies detailed predominantly, the praxes of civil rights era activists and/or included multi-generational analyses of white racial justice activists. There is a prominent gap in the literature focusing specifically on the experiences and praxes of white people who grew up and engage in social justice work exclusively in the era of colorblind racism. Because of this gap I chose to focus my study on the racial justice action of this particular group of

people. Some of my research explored what impact colorblind ideology may have had on participants' white identity development, as well as on their racial justice work. The literature reviewed in this section also covered a wide variety of types of racial justice activism. However, little to none of the literature focused on new and innovative approaches to racial justice activism or on the arts as a viable platform for engaging in racial justice work. My study helped fill in those gaps by including research participants with a broad range of approaches to racial justice action, including those that are influenced by 21st century technology (i.e. blogging) and those that use art as a central component in their work. In addition to contributing to the literature in these ways, my goal was to add to the whiteness studies literature in a way that continues to challenge white supremacy and inspires white people to engage (or engage further) in the struggle for racial justice, and to work toward collective liberation for us all.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

In this study I employed a qualitative research approach to explore and better understand the praxes of white people engaged in racial justice action in the United States in the era of colorblind racism. My methodology consisted primarily of semi-structured interviews, which I describe as *guided dialogues* (explanation provided in the "Methods and Data Collection" section below). Drawing, in part, from Warren's (2010) qualitative study of White activists in the United States, I designed this study to be exploratory and inductive, given that the data was be generated primarily during in-depth participant dialogues, and to a lesser extent from participant observations and analysis of artifacts related to the participants. Initial research participants were selected using purposeful sampling, while subsequent participants were identified through snowball sampling. As with Warren's (2010) study, participants were selected based on several specific criteria, the most central of which was the nature of their racial justice movement work and their age (I selected participants who were born after Jim Crow ended and who engage in racial justice activism currently). Because the purpose of the study is to educate white readers (who those who educate white people on issues of race, racism and racial justice) about the work being done currently by white racial justice activists, and to perhaps inspire them to become involved (or further involved) themselves, it made sense to do as Warren (2010) did and use *action* as the jump off point. In *Fire in the Heart: How White Activists Engage in Racial Justice*, Warren (2010) describes his thinking on this matter, thoughts that resonate with the purpose of my own study.

> Much new scholarship on race concerns itself with what white people think or how they identify themselves. I take a different approach. I start

> with action. As we have seen, whites can state a belief in racial justice and yet remain passive in the face of continued inequities or participate perhaps unintentionally in the perpetuation of institutional racism. (p. 9)

My approach to selecting participants will be outlined in greater detail below, but I began that process by zeroing in on the activism of participants I had identified as being significantly involved in racial justice action, and then, through the interview/dialogue process "work[ed] backward" (Warren, 2010, p. 9) to have a better understanding of their life experiences and underlying consciousness that called them to racial justice movement work.

Guided dialogues, coding, and analysis of the data took place concurrently throughout the research process. I also supplemented data generated from the guided dialogues when possible, with participant observations (this occurred with two of the eight participants) and with artifacts related to the participants' activism (visual art, prose, poetry, blogs, articles, music, curricula and personal mementos). Additionally, I used field notes and personal memos (journal entries chronicling my thoughts throughout the research process) to generate new, and analyze existing data throughout the process. Finally, existing literature was considered as a way to inform data analysis when that literature supported or substantiated emerging themes or patterns. It is my hope that this blend of data generating and collecting techniques led to a nuanced and depth-filled exploration and analysis of the actions and underlying consciousness of the participants in this study. My data generating, collecting and analysis techniques are described in greater detail below. Throughout the research process attempted to explore the following research questions with the research study participants:

1. What is the role of white racial justice activists in era of colorblind racism?

2. How has this racial paradigm shift affected the consciousness of younger generations of white racial justice activists or those who they may be trying to reach in their work?
3. In what ways is their work anchored by the legacy of previous generations of racial justice activists (both people of color and white people) on whose shoulders they stand?
4. In what ways is their activism representative of entirely new 21st century approaches to racial justice work?

Participant Selection

I conducted guided dialogues with eight white people involved with racial justice action in the United States who were born in or after 1970 (see below for explanation) and are engaged in racial justice work currently. Purposeful sampling was used to determine the initial participants. Criteria for selecting participants in this study were related to the nature and scope of participants' racial justice movement work. For the purposes of this study, *racial justice action* (also referred to as *activism*, *work* or *movement work*) was defined broadly, so that I could include a variety of approaches to racial justice work in the study. Participants included individuals who could be described as one or more of the following:

- community organizer;
- educator;
- religious worker;
- cultural worker;
- artist.

I intentionally included participants that defy archetype notions of racial justice action or activism (e.g. marching and protesting) (although most of the participants in this study

also engage in and/or organize those very kinds of actions). I did this for two reasons. First, I believe that activism comes in many forms and there is important racial justice work being done (and in need of being done) on many fronts. Second, I wanted to provide a sort of 'get in where you fit in' roadmap for readers of the study. Because the endgame of this study is to document the work of white racial justice activists in the United States in an effort to inspire other white people (particularly younger white folks) to action, it is important that they see that there are many ways to get involved in movement work. I employed maximum variation sampling (the selection of a diverse group of participants based on specific characteristics) to ensure that the different types of activism listed above were all represented in the study, as well as to include participants from different regions throughout the country.

Participants included those engaged in action that addresses and seeks to dismantle systemic or institutional racism. In this colorblind era, institutionalized racism is often seen as a relic of a different time, something that was left behind in the Jim Crow past. Individual acts of racism or bigotry are often highlighted in the media, but such acts are portrayed as disconnected from any greater system of oppression, and as anachronistic in an otherwise post-racial United States. One of the reasons I decided to focus my research exclusively on white activists that grew up after the Civil Rights Movement and Jim Crow was to find out how they came to be engaged in racial justice praxes that address institutional racism during a time in our history when many would have them believe that for the most part, we are have moved beyond race and racism. I also wanted to understand how they are able to 'move' other white people who may believe (or purport to believe) that we live in a post-racial society. Although addressing

individual acts of racism is also important in its own right, I was more interested in exploring the actions and underlying consciousness of white activists dedicated to disrupting and dismantling racism at the institutional and systemic levels, or to educating others about systemic racism.

I sought out participants born in or after 1970 (as mentioned above) for two reasons. First, I wanted to explore the racial justice action of white people who grew up, and came of age as activists during this era of colorblind racism. I sought to explore how this shaped their involvement in and the nature of their racial justice activism. 1970 as a starting point was selected to screen for participants who were born 'after' Jim Crow racism in the U.S., and 1970 represents the beginning of the decade following the legal end to Jim Crow.

Second, my intended audience is primarily younger white people trying to find their own path to becoming involved (or further involved) in racial justice work. It is my hope that they will see themselves in one or more of the participants' narratives and believed that they would be more likely to do so if the participants were closer in age to them, and also if the participants were currently involved in racial justice activism.

Research Setting

Participants were selected several geographic areas in the United States in an attempt to account for regional influences on racial justice activists' work. These areas included the San Francisco Bay Area (Oakland), Illinois (Chicago and Bloomington), Arizona (Phoenix and Tucson) and New York. These locations were selected because of personal connections to networks of racial justice activists and/or because of my interest

in racial justice work being done in areas certain epicenters for particular manifestations of racial oppression or racial justice movement work (e.g. immigrant rights in Arizona).

I conducted guided dialogues with at least two participants from each region (with the exception of New York), which enabled me to compare experiences of activists *in* and *across* different regions in the United States. Warren (2010), who interviewed clusters of activists from multiple geographic areas, explained the importance of doing so. "[I]ssues of race have a context and a character that are peculiar to any particular locality" (p. 12). Although I found his words to be true in my own research, the extent to which this proved helpful and informative was not as significant as I thought it might prove to be. I think part of the reason for this is that all but one participant have moved around quite a bit, and lived in different regions in throughout the country. Only Ariel (Oakland) was born and raised in the region where he now lives and engages in movement work. The decision to conduct guided dialogues with two to three participants from each region was also made due to financial and time constraints.

Data Collection

Guided Dialogues

I used the term *guided dialogues* for this study rather than *interviews* after thinking at great length about what being a researcher means to me, and about the notion of asking others to trust me with their narratives, lend me their time and aid me with my scholarly work. I align myself with second-generation grounded theorists who recognize the researcher as a major part of the process of narrative interaction (Birks & Mills, 2011), and by extension of the data generated during interviews. In other words, there is no way to objectively remove the researcher (me) from the interview process, and thus

using the term *dialogue* names me as a participant in interviews regardless of how intentionally I try to keep the focus on the participants' narratives. My use of *dialogue* instead of *interview* was also an attempt to signify to participants of the study that my aim was to create a space for storytelling, and for them to feel like they had the agency to take the conversation in directions of their choosing. Though I cannot remove myself from the inherent position of power a researcher holds, and though ultimately I was the one shaping the conversations, I believe approaching narrative interactions as *dialogues* rather than *interviews* creates (and hopefully created in this case) a more authentic space for the participants and researcher to occupy together while generating ideas. My use of the word *guided* was/is also intentional. According to Birks and Mills (2011), even in the most unstructured of interviews, "the interviewer acts as coordinator of the conversation with an aim of generating fodder for the developing theory" (p. 75). Though I attempted to facilitate spaces that allowed for participant agency, I was still the architect of the study, and use of the term *guided* names me as such. It is important for me to own that as guider of the dialogues I am inherently in a position of power.

The guided dialogues were, on average, 1.5 – 2 hours in length. Drawing on Warren's (2010) study of White activists who embrace racial justice and Negron-Gonzalez's (2009) study of undocumented youth activists, the guided dialogues were semi-structured and involved what Negron Gonzalez (2009) calls *life history interviews* and *analytical inquiry*. This approach involves not only inquiring about the participants' activism, but also about their upbringing, experiences while growing up and beliefs about particular issues or events. The semi-structured format allowed me to ask all participants a series of standardized questions so that I had comparative data to analyze while also

letting the individual participants share their narratives in a more free-flowing manner as the conversation progressed. The first portion of each dialogue focused on constructing the participants' *life histories* while the second portion explored participants' racial justice praxes (activism and underlying consciousness). Sometimes these portions got intertwined depending on the conversational style of a given participant or due to a particular follow-up question. Guided dialogues took place at a time and location of the participants' choosing to help level the power dynamic between researcher and participant, to create a space in which participants' felt more comfortable sharing their stories and out of convenience for the participants (I also offered to bring food or coffee when I could). I made audio recordings of each dialogue using a digital recording device and subsequently saved all recordings as mp3 files on the hard drive of my computer. I also used a second recording device operating during each dialogue to safeguard against a malfunction with the primary device (this came in handy at least once during the research process).

Participant Observations and Examining of Artifacts

In addition to guided dialogues, I conducted participant observations with two of the participants (Ariel and Alison). With Ariel, I attended a performance of one of his shows, *Amnesia* (Ariel uses theater as part of his racial justice movement work). With Alison, I attended a meeting of clergy (she is a pastor) that were/are working together (and with the community) to provide sanctuary for undocumented immigrants in Arizona, and also attended a meeting with her that included a group of undocumented immigrant activists (and some college students/other community members) who were/are organizing in the Tucson area. My role in these observations is best categorized as *non-*

participant/observer. This type of observation involves the researcher staying on the periphery of the activity to take notes without participating in the activity while one or more of the activity's participants are aware of the researcher's presence (Creswell, 2013). This is an accurate description of my role during the above-mentioned observations (although I was introduced and included in group introductions at both meetings with Alison). These experiences were an important (and vibrant) part of the research experience and led me to have a deeper understanding of these two participants' work. Had time and circumstances permitted, I would have liked to observe all the participants engaging in portions of their movement work.

Additional data collection included examining artifacts germane to the participants' movement work. Artifacts included video recordings of performances; audio recordings of music; prose; poetry; blogs and articles written by or about a research participant; and personal mementos (e.g. art adorning the wall of an office or home). Like the observations, the examination of relevant artifacts enhanced my ability to learn about (and from) and understand the participants' movement work.

Field Notes and Memos

Throughout the research process I kept field notes consisting of both descriptive and reflective details. I followed the recommendation of Creswell (2013) by keeping descriptive notes about events, activities, and settings, as well as reflective details such as personal insights, ideas, confusions, hunches, initial interpretations and breakthroughs. I stored all field notes in my computer as soon as possible following a guided dialogue or participant observation so as to ensure the greatest level of accuracy in my descriptions and reflections.

In addition to keeping detailed field notes, I wrote personal memos throughout the research process. *Memoing* allowed me to keep a more general record of my thoughts and ideas about, observations of, and plans for the study. Birks and Mills (2011) describe memoing as "an uninhibited activity in which you are free to explore your ideas, instincts and intuition in relation to your research" (p. 40), and as "a series of snapshots that chronicle your study experience and the internal dialogue that is essential when conducting any research, particularly that with an interpretive component" (p. 41). My style of memoing was largely unstructured and consisted of me keeping a journal about anything at all that I thought would help with further generating and analyzing of the data, as well as tangential thoughts related to my overall research study. I labeled each memo entry with the date and a descriptive title.

Data Analysis

In the interest of time, I had each guided dialogue professionally transcribed. Dialogues, transcription and analysis were carried out concurrently. I coded the dialogue data into themes and patterns (from individual participants and comparatively across dialogues), approaching the data inductively (developed directly from what participants shared in the dialogues) and theoretically (using existing literature as a guide). Data collected from participant observations and/or from the examination of personal artifacts was also used, when relevant, to enhance or substantiate findings from the guided dialogues.

Ethical Considerations

I used the participants' actual names in the study. I felt doing so was important (and ethical) in this kind of study for a couple of reasons. First, because the purpose of

the study is to ultimately highlight and learn from the work of white racial justice activists, using the participants' real names (and the names of organizations they may be involved with) will make their narratives more tangible to readers. Second, publicizing the work of the activists could potentially bolster participation in and/or support for their efforts, efforts intended to further racial justice in the United States. All participants were given the option to use pseudonyms. This approach of using the real names of research participants in a study about the life and work of white racial justice activists has been employed before by some of the leading scholars in this area (O'Brien, 2001; Thompson, 2001; Warren, 2009).

I also endeavored to respect the participants throughout the research process. Following the advice of Creswell (2005), research participants were given the opportunity to select the location and time of the guided dialogues out of convenience for them, as well as to contribute to their overall comfort level with the process. I also reminded participants one to two days before the scheduled dialogues of the exact time and location we agreed to meet. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent letter prior to the interviews. The letter included a description of the research purpose and methodology and indicated to the participants that data generated or collected during the study would be used in my dissertation. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants also received a copy of their transcripts and the portion of chapter four that included their data to read and send feedback about should they feel misquoted or misrepresented by my how I organized and analyzed the data. I sent those two documents along with the introduction to chapter four, explaining how their transcripts were used and how the data about them was organized.

Finally, it was incumbent upon me to try and frame my research and share the results of the study in a way that highlights the work of white racial justice activists without decentering the voices of people of color or undercutting the importance of their activism, which is associated with much greater risk and cost than is the actions taken by their white counterparts. I tried earnestly to convey this in my writing.

CHAPTER IV: SUMMARY OF THE DATA

Returning to the Purpose of the Study

This chapter will present the data that came primarily from the guided dialogues, and secondarily from participant observation and examination of participant artifacts. As stated in chapter one, this study is meant to contribute to a small (but growing) aspect of critical whiteness studies, the study of white racial justice action. The lack of stories about white people engaging in racial justice movement work, particularly those doing so currently, may be serving as a disconnect in the discourse for white people (or educators who work with white students) who are trying to assume a more anti-racist white identity (O'Brien, 2001; Thompson, 2001), and/or who may be trying to find their way (or further their involvement) in movement work for racial justice.

How I Organized this Chapter

My research attempted to address the following research questions, the first of which was the study's overarching question:

1. What is the role of white racial justice activism in era of colorblind racism?
2. How has the racial paradigm shift to colorblind racism affected the consciousness of younger generations of white racial justice activists or those who they may be trying to reach in their work?
3. In what ways is their work anchored by the legacy of previous generations of racial justice activists (both people of color and white people) on whose shoulders they stand?
4. In what ways is their activism representative of entirely new 21st century approaches to racial justice work?

Although readers will benefit from 'holding onto' the original research questions as they move through chapter four, the chapter is not explicitly organized around the research questions. Rather, while attempting to get at the heart of these questions through dialogue (and observations/examination of artifacts) with the research participants, reoccurring themes and patterns were revealed about how white people in the study came to be involved in, and how they now go about engaging in racial justice action. It is these themes and patterns that shaped this chapter's structure. The themes are essentially a cluster of patterns, which I call *associative patterns* for the purpose of this study. Each theme includes two or more associative patterns. Each of the participants demonstrated all three themes. A portion of the participants demonstrated all the associative patterns; others demonstrated some, but not all.

There is no one way, no precise set of steps white people can take to find their way (and stay engaged) in racial justice movement work, nor is their one way to approach that work. As stated above, each of the participant's stories included all three themes (and some or all of the associative patterns), but they each did so in unique and nuanced ways. It is because of this nuance, and the particular uniqueness of each participant that the chapter is ultimately organized first by participants, and then by themes. Doing so allowed me as a researcher and author to honor their voices and their contributions to movement work. There are eight major sections, one for each participant. In each section readers will learn how that particular participant addressed the three themes and their associative patterns. If the end goal of this study is to inform readers about white racial justice action in this era of colorblind racism, and to perhaps inspire other white people to find their way (or further their involvement) in racial justice movement work, then I can

imagine no better way to present the data than to have each research participant's story displayed front and center. It is my hope that formatting the data in this way will be an effective educational tool for readers of the study.

At the beginning of each section, readers 'meet' participants in the midst of a pivotal 'moment' in their growth and development around race, racism or racial justice. These moments, reconstructed from stories told to me during the dialogues, are presented in a pseudo-literary (hopefully intriguing) style of writing that is different from the rest of the style and tone of the chapter. The purpose of these 'introductions' is two-fold: 1) to draw readers into the narratives of each participant in an intimate and 'non-academic' manner and 2) to highlight upfront, the very different backgrounds (childhood, upbringing, consciousness development) that the participants come from, demonstrating that there are many (and varied) paths by which white people come to be engaged in racial justice action.

Themes and Associative Patterns

The three major themes that emerged from the data are: 1) Plugging Into Racial Justice Action 2) Initial Awareness (Race Cognizance) and 3) Common Tendencies. The themes, along with the associative patterns, are described below.

Plugging into Racial Justice Action

Plugging into racial justice action (or plugging in) is the act (or series of acts) of engaging in racial justice movement work in ways that are most available and instinctive to any one person. Plugging in is an amorphous and fluid approach to engaging in (racial) justice work. The profundity of plugging in, ironically, is found in its simplicity; anyone can plug into racial justice movement work, it is just a matter of *what*, *why*, *when*, *where*

and *how*. The three associative patterns that emerged as part of the plugging in model include 1) recognizing an issue or issues of injustice (this is the *what*), 2) drawing a personal connection to the issue (this is the *why*) and 3) establishing or pursuing an outlet through which to take action (*when*, *where* and *how*). *Establishing an outlet* is used to describe instances when participants started a new project or campaign addressing injustice and *pursuing an outlet* is when there is an existing project or campaign that participants plugged into. Outlets are established or pursued based on an individual's knowledge, interests, passion, talents, relationships, resources or location (physical or social), or simply put, what is most available and instinctive to them. Additionally, outlets are often interdisciplinary and intersectional. The associative patterns that accompany plugging in do not happen in any particular order and do not often have a clear beginning or end. Movement work is continual and situational, and so plugging into racial justice action is fluid and ongoing.

Because of this fluidity of plugging in and its associative patterns, it was challenging to organize the data about this particular theme. Sometimes a participant would draw a personal connection to an issue of injustice and gradually find ways to plug into racial justice action. Other times, the recognition of injustice happened almost simultaneously with the establishing of a personal connection and a move to find an outlet for plugging into action. As a result, the precise use of, or any sort of chronological order of subheadings meant to delineate the associative patterns for plugging in was not plausible. Therefore, readers will find that I have organized the plugging in portions of each section using descriptive titles that are indicative of the stories that were shared by participants about plugging in. Readers can assume that each of the three associative

patterns is included as part of the plugging in process shared in those stories. A last caveat on the organizing of the *plugging in* theme is the decision to lead with it in each section as opposed to the theme of *initial awareness (race cognizance)*, which describes the background narratives of research participants. I went back and forth on which of the two themes I should begin each participant's section with, and in the end I landed on starting with *plugging in* because it immediately puts readers in the middle of the action which is ultimately the focus of this study. After learning about some of the ways participants plug into racial justice action, readers are then 'taken back in time' to learn about the background narratives of each participant, and given an opportunity to learn about how they came to be involved in movement work.

Finally, the phrase *plugging into racial justice action* was used to describe the theme (and landed in the title of this study) because *five* different participants used the phrase *plug in* or *plugging in* to describe their work or the work of others during our dialogue, and also because it is a really good metaphor for white racial justice action. I like *plugging in* as a metaphor both because it provides a simple way of explaining the often complicated and complex work of racial justice action ("taking action using what is available and instinctive"), and also because it names racial justice work as something that is already being (and has always been) done by others; in particular by (and alongside the leadership of) people of color. Although white people are (and have been) a critical contingent in racial justice movement work, they are not pioneers of those struggles; they plug into existing movements. Engaging in racial justice action is undoubtedly our collective responsibility, but people of color have long been leading the

charge for equity and justice, and doing so at a much greater risk and cost than their white counterparts. I hope that in a small way, the idea of "plugging in" names this fact.

Initial Awareness (Race Cognizance)

The second major theme that emerged from the data is *initial awareness* about race and racism (or *race cognizance*). At the beginning of each dialogue, participants were asked about their background (childhood, where the grew up, etc.) and how they came to be involved in racial justice work. Each of the participants shared their journey into race cognizance, some sharing a lot on this subject, some less so. The theme of *initial awareness* is made up of two associative patterns: 1) early messaging (about race and racism) and 2) reinforcement/disruption of racial messaging. The words *initial* and *early*, which are used in the titles of the theme and its first associative pattern respectively, perhaps imply that stories of becoming aware of race and racism and racial justice happened when the participants were young children. While this was certainly true for some of the participants, others had a slower introduction to issues of race, racism and racial justice, sometimes emerging as late as the end of high school or while in college.

Early messaging. For some white people, early messaging about race is delivered in positive ways. Race is spoken about openly with them and racism, even if not named as a system of oppression, is denigrated as hurtful and wrong. For others, although there is not necessarily positive messaging, there is realistic messaging about the ills of racism and oppression. For others, messaging is negative or hurtful, often delivered through overtly racist words or actions. Still others grow up in homes and communities where race is avoided altogether, and colorblind ideology is considered the standard for addressing race. The participants in this study range in their experiences; some of them

primarily received one of these forms of messaging while growing up, others received two, three or all four kinds of messaging. The fact that the experiences of the participants in the study with regard to *initial awareness* are so disparate is further evidence that there are multiple and varied ways of becoming engaged in racial justice action.

Reinforcement/disruption. Seven of the eight participants, after sharing stories about their early messaging about race, spoke about how that messaging was subsequently reinforced (if it was positive messaging) or disrupted (if negative or colorblind). Reinforcement/disruption commonly occurred in two key ways: 1) through literature/academia and 2) through cultural arts.

Common tendencies

The third major theme, *common tendencies*, consists of three associative patterns: 1) anchoring oneself and one's action in cultural heritage, 2) step up/step back and 3) building relationships and accountability.

Anchoring in cultural heritage. Although less than half of the participants displayed this pattern, I included it for a few reasons. First, it is a really important way that some white people who have a strong affiliation with, or sense of connection to the ethnicity or cultural identity of their family prior to their family being assimilated into whiteness (or in tandem with that assimilation), come to have a framework for understanding (or even just acknowledging) and ultimately acting against oppression. Second, those that do have a strong connection to or appreciation for their cultural heritage inevitably brought it up during some point in our dialogue, indicating that this is important for those to whom it pertains. Finally, it may provide encouragement to white

readers to explore their family's ethnic/cultural history before being assimilated into the socially constructed monolith of whiteness.

Step up/step back. *Step up/step back* is a phrase usually reserved for facilitated dialogues or workshops, a common tenet of group agreements decided upon prior to commencing a discussion. It refers to the idea of participants being mindful of when and how often they contribute, and how much 'space' they take up during a conversation. Stepping up involves taking risks, perhaps challenging oneself to be vulnerable when engaging in topics they are not altogether comfortable discussing. Stepping back is having the self-awareness to know when one has either spoken a lot already, or knowing when it might not be appropriate for that particular person to speak. The concept of step up/step back is used similarly in the context of this study, but is obviously applied to white peoples' participation in racial justice movement work instead of (or perhaps in addition to) facilitated group discussions. *Step up/step back* was a common pattern in the participants' racial justice work.

Relationship building and accountability. Participants in the study described this last associative pattern as crucial to racial justice work. All of the participants engaged in the intentional building of relationships with others committed to racial justice, often times across race, a pattern that was key for most of them when plugging in. Additionally, most of the participants also explained their experiences with or philosophies around being accountable to people and communities of color while doing the work of racial justice.

Ariel

Ariel stands in shame next to the store manager, having just been caught shoplifting. His transgression wasn't done out of need; he was just messin' around, a sixteen-year-old kid who made a bad decision. Instead of calling the police and pressing charges, the store manager calls his father. Ariel's family pays a fine and he walks away from the situation without a police record or any other major consequences.

Not long after that incident, Ariel's good friend, who is around the same age, sits in his car at a gas station. He has a BB gun on him but is breaking no laws. Like Ariel, he is just messin' around. But unlike Ariel, he is a young Black man. The gas station attendant calls the police and six cars arrive, surrounding him. The officers converge on him aggressively, put him in handcuffs and force him to the ground. Despite determining almost right away that it was only a BB gun that he has in his possession, the police keep him in cuffs and lying there for over 45 minutes. Whereas Ariel was let off with a figurative slap on the wrist for stealing, this young man has committed no actual crime, and yet he is harassed and abused by the police.

The discrepancy between those two incidents and others that Ariel witnessed growing up in Oakland, California had a lasting impact on him. Those early observations of lop-sided treatment based on race, as well as disproportionate access and opportunity based on what neighborhood people were from, would become the foundation on which Ariel would begin to build with others in the struggle for racial justice.

Plugging In

Finding his unique offering. Ariel Luckey might describe the notion of plugging in as one's "unique offering," or the ways in which people are uniquely positioned to offer themselves to social justice movement work. He posed a series of rhetorical questions regarding this.

> What is your unique offering? Right? What is the thing that fills you with light, with power, with love, with energy, that then you can contribute to the movement right? And the social change that we're trying to see, and the world we're trying to build.

Ariel's unique offering to movement work is his passion and proclivity for the arts, specifically the performing arts. Performing has been a major part of Ariel's life from a young age. As a child, he would perform dance routines for his family. "I've always been a performer," explained Ariel. "Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album was my shit! As a kid I

would dance choreography. I would be like, 'Watch me watch me!' I got this little show I put together."

In 2004, he was working as the Director of Jewish Youth for Community Action (JYCA). Ariel enjoyed the position and felt like he was doing good work in the community, but he also felt like there was something else he should be doing.

> I felt this […] hunger for something missing in my life, and I was like 'I really want to make art; I feel called to do this work through art.' And so, to a certain degree, it was kind of selfish right? It was like my own fulfillment of wanting to perform, and create, work and share, but also, I think it goes back to this thing of like, "What is your offering? What do you want to give the world?"

Ariel was influenced early on by social justice oriented performers and artists like Wavy Gravy and June Jordan, as well as by the way Oakland activists approached movement work, so he had seen firsthand, examples of how the arts and performance could be used for organizing and activism. Ariel spoke about his early foray into arts influenced activism and about being inspired by his community.

> Folks who are able to use their artistry to change narrative, to give us hope, to give us relief, bring folks together, touch us, move us, all of that […] [G]rowing up in the Bay, the rich cultural landscape of music and theater and poetry… When I was in my 20s, the Youth Speaks and the spoken word thing. But it was happening all around, it was kind of that renaissance moment… Prop 21… all the hip-hop organizing. So we were like remixing hip-hop choruses with political slogans and using them as chants in our marches, right? … All that kind of stuff. And all the graffiti murals and all these ways that culture was embedded in that political movement. So when it finally came for me to try to center the arts in a way that I do my work… I've always been part education, part activism, and dancing and the different ways that these things could come together. After school programs, and summer camps, nighttime concerts, and daytime workshops… all these different ways that all those things could exist in the same places.

Ariel shared three major examples of how he has plugged into racial justice action, each of which are highlighted below.

Free Land: Performance-based movement work (example #1). With this revelation that it was the arts that Ariel hoped to contribute to movement work, he began to develop a solo performance piece that combined his love of education, activism and dancing. The result was his first play, *Free Land: A Hip Hop Journey from the Streets of Oakland to the Wild Wild West.* In *Free Land*, Ariel explores the legacies of stolen land and genocide waged against native people, and Ariel's family's (and other white people's) connection to that theft and murder.

> *Free Land* is my story. But in excavating the particular trajectory of my life and my family's journey through U.S. history, I unearthed some unresolved questions that resonate throughout our society: How do we talk about white people's genocide of Native Americans? How has it shaped the world in which we live? For those of us who are not Native, what is our relationship to the land we live on and to the Native American community? (Luckey, 2010, p. vii)

Ariel had plugged into his family history and into his love of performance, education and activism by writing and performing *Free Land*, and using the performance as an outlet to highlight the ongoing legacy of theft and genocide waged against native people on the land that is now the United States. Ariel explained his path to *Free Land*, and what it meant for him in the greater context of his work.

> […] I dove into Free Land which was really about claiming my whiteness and the legacy of my family as benefactors from the native genocide and the theft of their land, raising some real deep questions about who I am, and what my relationship to that history is, and to the folks who have survived it, the Northern Cheyenne, the Lakota, the Ohlone… like all these things.

Concurrent with performing *Free Land* locally, throughout the Bay Area, and across the country, Ariel planned an event (now an annual affair at La Peña Cultural Center in Berkeley) called *Thangs Taken*, which he describes as an "alternative Thanksgiving event that particularly highlights native voices to tell their own stories of resistance and survival in the face of the history of genocide and colonialism." *Free Land*

grew into an interdisciplinary project. It was eventually made into a DVD and Ariel developed a corresponding curriculum guide for educators to use with students who could then watch the play and learn about this part of the nation's history. The touring of the performance also became a way to plug into related actions. "I was able to build a lot of relationships with native folks [while] doing the research for *Free Land*," explained Ariel, "and start plugging into kind of different movements around the Bay Area in California to protect sacred sites, to push back against mascots, to talk about self determination…"

As he previously mentioned, in addition to highlighting the history of land theft and genocide waged against Native Americans, Ariel was, through *Free Land*, intentionally naming and claiming his whiteness and the complicity of white people (including his own family) in the perpetrating of that theft and genocide. He spoke to this when explaining the project.

> I want white folks to think about the land they live on, and to think about the native folks who they either live with or who have been pushed away, and what their relationship to that community is, what their relationship is to that history, and what their responsibility might be to something about it. So there is a very clear agenda embedded in the whole project of raising that awareness, and ultimately kind of rallying support for Native American campaigns and community.

Amnesia: A second performance-based outlet (example #2). Ariel's approach to plugging in, as demonstrated with the *Free Land* project, is to align his contributions to movement work (performed as interdisciplinary projects) with his passions, talents and his personal connection to urgent issues. A couple of years after he had been touring the country with *Free Land*, Ariel had an idea for a second project, this time a performance called *Amnesia: A New Play About Race & Immigration*.

> Layering theater, dance, spoken word and an original score inspired by hip hop, Klezmer and Mexican folk music, *Amnesia* tells the story of a young man who retraces his family's migration from a small village in Eastern Europe through New York's Lower East Side to Phoenix, Arizona, only to find that the violence his family fled cannot be so easily forgotten. (Luckey, Amnesia, n.d.)

Amnesia addresses the topics of immigrant rights, racism and xenophobia. Ariel spoke about the thought process he went through to create the show, first recognizing the issue of immigrant rights while drawing a personal connection to the issue, and ultimately establishing an outlet through which to address the issue through awareness and action.

> SP1070 passed in Arizona, and all of a sudden, Arizona became the ground zero for the national immigration debate. Everyone was talking about immigrants in Arizona, racism and brown folks, and this and that and everything. And I'm listening to everything, I'm kind of following it all, and I was thinking to myself, "Well dang, I have family in Arizona… Tucson, Phoenix, and pretty deep family history on my dad's side. Like folks have been there almost 100 years and we go back there every couple years for Bar Mitzvahs and weddings, and funerals and there's all this stuff in Arizona. And I was like, "And they immigrated there. They're not native to Arizona." But nobody's talking about white folks as immigrants in Arizona. There's this assumption that white folks are indigenous… in a certain sense… "This is our country, our state, our land, you go back home." "Well maybe I should do some digging around in my father's family story."

Ariel's personal connection was his own family's (on his father's side) migration narrative and the story of Jewish immigrants who journeyed to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century in order to escape pogroms in Eastern Europe. He drew parallels to the ongoing struggle of Latino immigrants who, in search of safety and a better life, migrate to the United States. Once he had identified the issue and his personal connection, Ariel immersed himself in researching the history of Jewish migration to the United States, his family's immigration story, and the process of Jews, like his family, being assimilated into whiteness over time. Jewish migrants had once been treated much like Latino and other immigrants are treated today. *Amnesia* is meant to shed light on the plight of undocumented immigrants who have escaped danger by taking great risks to

migrate to the United States only to be persecuted upon arrival, while at the same time reminding white audience members that they too were immigrants, a history seemingly forgotten to the abyss of whiteness. Ariel spoke at some length about his research and his thinking at the beginning stages of developing *Amnesia*.

> If I can expose this experience of immigration that white people try so hard to hide and downplay, that fundamentally undermines the claim to authority, certainly any moral ethical authority, but even potentially political authority to be kicking someone out or building a wall, claiming that land. So I started doing research and quickly it was Himann Kivelevich, my great-great grandfather who emerged as this fascinating dynamic character in my family's history. And so I just started doing a ton of research on both my family's experience in Arizona since the 1920s and then Himann's experience of immigration and what was going on. I knew almost nothing about where he came from and why he left, besides [the fact that] lots of Jews left Eastern Europe during that time for the normal reasons, poverty and persecution…

Ariel spoke further about using Amnesia as an outlet for bringing awareness to his audiences, and to get white audience members, specifically, to think about their own family history and to think about the history of immigration in the United States.

> The play itself is another thing that I've been using, performing and using as a way to get people to talk about immigration policy. To get white folks to examine their own migration stories and break open the idea of inherent citizenship and inherent American-ness of "What is your immigration past, where did you come from, how did you get here?" As a way to get into the history of American empire and the legacy of stolen native land that all of this country's built on. Just using the theater piece as a catalyst and platform for political education, conversation, dialogue, sometimes explaining explicitly and sometimes not. We are halfway done recording an album of music that's inspired by the score; it's called "Re-memory," and hopefully all things good, will be out in the spring. So that will be kind of another vehicle; it's all thematic around migration and it's Klezmer remix, hip-hop, dub step, all that music. So that's kind of a cultural project. All of this is reclaiming my kind of indigenous old European roots or Jewish culture and tradition, which cracks the institution of whiteness, right? And when we claim our roots, it breaks down the monolith of corporate American white identity. And opening, hopefully opening a space and inviting others to share their immigration stories wherever they're from, and articulating a clear call for justice for the families who are being targeted, imprisoned, deported… all of the kind of atrocities that are happening in this country right now under immigration policy.

Dust to dust: Restoring sacred ground on two fronts **(example #3).** As part of the research that went into developing *Amnesia*, Ariel and his brother traveled to Eastern Europe together. It was a spiritual journey as much as it was research for the play. When they arrived in Lubcha, a small town in Belarus (what used to be Russia) where there family is originally from, they met up with local contacts that were to take them to the Jewish cemetery where their ancestors are buried. The excitement and anticipation that they carried en route to the cemetery ended abruptly when they arrived to the plot of land where the cemetery should have been, and instead found an empty lot filled with junk.

> We found it was totally desecrated; the tomb stones were taken, they had built a couple of buildings on part of the cemetery, and actually, there was a Mack truck parked in the cemetery and these guys, buff men with power tools… they were using it like an empty lot, essentially. And my brother and I, having traveled halfway around the world to pay homage to our ancestors… like I learned the Kaddish so that I could say it there at the cemetery for my ancestors… We were obviously very, very upset.

Out of their disappointment, however, came an unexpected result, a new project. When he and his brother returned, they began to raise money from as many relatives as they could. They contacted cousins, uncles and aunts they were in touch with, as well as other extended members of the Kivelevich (his father's) family. They then worked with their local contacts and the local government in Lubcha to see about using the money they had raised to restore the cemetery. And on the first day of Rosh Hashanah (Jewish new year), they received pictures of the cemetery restored to its original purpose, complete with a new fence, beautifully curved gate and an arched sign overhead that reads, "Lubcha Cemetery" in Hebrew. "It is the only visibly Jewish space in the entire town," Ariel explained with pride. "Everything else has been wiped out from the Holocaust."

The symbolism of the restored cemetery in Lubcha was not lost on Ariel. There was a clear synergy between the unexpected work of restoring the resting place of his ancestors and his work back home in the Bay Area that had started with *Free Land* and continued with *Amnesia*.

> [S]o now, whatever 10-ish plus years deep into this journey, I'm realizing that that is a significant thread to the work that I'm doing in terms of… in the face of genocide right? Like the genocide the Jews experienced in Europe and the genocide that native folks have experienced here… what does it mean to protect and restore those sacred sites of cemeteries, and drawing that parallel…

Out of that synergy and a personal connection to the injustices Ariel has been working against for over a decade came another opportunity for plugging in. This time, however, instead of establishing an outlet of his own, Ariel pursued an outlet that already existed. The project, which he spoke about with great excitement, is in support of the work of his good friend and long-time community activist, Corrina Gould. Gould's family is native to the Bay Area; she can trace her family to the East Bay from before the Mission era. She is Ohlone, Chochenyo and Karkin and her great grandfather, Jose Guzman, was the last recorded Chochenyo Ohlone speaker. Her ancestors are buried at Bay Street in Emeryville, California in the East Bay, now the site of a mall. Gould led demonstrations to stop the mall from being built and sixteen years later, she still leads an annual protest at Bay Street. She also leads shellmound walks to bring awareness to the piles of bones and artifacts that accumulated next to Ohlone villages over hundreds of thousands of years, many of them now unknown and desecrated in one way or another. Ariel described Gould's latest project, a project he has plugged into in a supporting role.

> [O]hlone folks don't have federal recognition, so they don't have the benefits that a lot of other federally recognized tribes have in terms of tax status and things like gaming industry and other opportunities to regulate and do their own kind of economic development and all that kind of stuff, and there's no land base. There's

> no reservation, there's nothing; it's all been stolen. So she and her friend and partner, Johnella LaRose, who's a Bannock-Shoshone woman, they co-founded Indian People Organizing for Change about 15 years ago; we do a lot of this activism today, together. And now they're starting an indigenous women-led land trust, the first of its kind in the country. And their vision is to buy back land in the East Bay, and build a round house for traditional Ohlone and native ceremony, and also to get some lands to create a cemetery to put the bones that have been stolen, that are sitting in boxes in the basement of UC Berkeley's Hearst Museum, or over in San Francisco State, back in the ground.

Ariel's role with the land trust involves getting people to contribute to what they are calling the Shuumi Land Tax, a voluntary annual payment that will go to the land trust to which non-native people living on Chochenyo and Karkin, Ohlone land, can contribute. The tax was launched this year at Ariel's *Thangs Taken* event. The tax is something actionable that anyone can do, explained Ariel, a way for others to plug into racial justice work.

> "Shuumi" means "to give" in Ohlone. So I've been organizing this project in support of the land trust, one, to try to generate some significant funding, which this project is obviously going to take. Two, to give white folks and non-native folks an opportunity, 'cause lots of people, I feel like, are progressive or liberal in the Bay Area. They know about native genocide, they know about the history, and they kind of are sympathetic or wanna do something… But what do you do? What do you do? You say, "Yeah, the Washington Redskins suck. They should change their name." Post in on Facebook. What are you really doing? So the idea is to give folks a way to plug in to this locally-led, indigenous women-led community center development land restoration project, all of this, in a tangible, financial, meaningful way, every year, that you can be a part of this growing movement.

Ariel is particularly proud of this new project and its synergy with his performance based work. He ended his story about the project by sharing this:

> And like in this moment of gentrification, of gluttonous real estate gambling and profiteering and this shit, this was the original gentrification, right? It feels timely and important and just personally fulfilling, given my own journey with all of these things, right? It just feels like the right thing to be doing.

Initial Awareness (Race Cognizance)

Early messaging. Growing up in Oakland in the ‘80s and ‘90s exposed Ariel to a mosaic of cultural diversity. He reflected on the cultural make-up and political backdrop of his hometown and it’s early influence on him.

> I absolutely think that where I grew up, when I grew up, and my family culture set me on this path. Born in 1980 in Oakland, California, so Reaganomics, hip-hop generation for sure, super multi-cultural, urban city life. Went to Oakland public schools through eighth grade, and I think that was really informative and influential, and made me kind of become aware and kind of grapple with my racial and ethnic identity early on. Because on the playground, we had kids from Iran and Ethiopia, and China, and Guatemala, and Latinos and Black kids and white kids. Just [many] languages; at home, everyone had different languages, different cultural practices, religious frameworks…

Ariel talked about the ways the rich, multicultural landscape of Oakland also began to ‘decenter’ whiteness in his life and render it non-normative, even thought he did not quite conceive of it like that at the time.

> [I]t wasn't like I would think of it now like, "My identity formation," or "I was grappling with whiteness," but as a kid, in those various ways, I would go to my friends' houses, and one of my best friends was Ethiopian; he had just immigrated a few years earlier, so we'd eat injera and doro tibs at his house, right? And then like go to my other homie's house and have tacos or whatever. It just was a very rich multicultural environment. I think that was helpful for me for a couple of things. It decentered whiteness and my experience, my family's culture and my racial experience was not universalized. White kids were a minority on the playground. And we were just one of many minorities 'cause there was no majority in my elementary school.

Ariel’s parents were also a big influence on him and introduced him at a young age to issues of racial and social justice. His father, who wrote the book *Uprooting Racism*, one of the earlier seminal books in critical whiteness studies, was heavily involved with racial and gender justice work in the community.

> [I] got to experience lots of different friends' families and culture and lifestyle of different class backgrounds. So that's one piece of it. My family, my parents in particular, super influential. My dad, doing the work that he did; he didn't write

> *Uprooting Racism* until I was a teenager, but in the '80s, when he founded Oakland Men's Project, he was working in a multi-racial community of men and women doing racial justice and social justice and gender justice work. So, I got to meet these folks who kind of became aunties and uncles because they were his close friends and colleagues. And he would drive me around to workshops and we'd have gatherings. Oakland Men's Project had their office in our living room for a while when it first got started. His work was present in my life. And again, I just had a little kid's awareness of it, but it was around; it was in the community and conversations and stuff that I was exposed to. And I think my mom in very different ways, but also really influenced my work as an activist, 'cause for her, as a girl growing up in Midwest in the '50s, she super shattered the glass ceiling. She was like, "I wanna be a scientist," and her high school counselor was like, "Oh you should be a nurse or a teacher." And she was like, "Fuck you, I'm gonna get a perfect score on my SATs and then go to Cal for biochemistry, one of the top schools in the country, and get my Ph.D. and be a tenured professor. So, don't fuck with me." And she's always had a rebellious, anti-authoritarian kind of streak[…] She went to Cal for postgrad and got her PhD there. So as a feminist, as a rabble-rouser forging her own path, and be a strong, smart woman in science, she also was a really strong role model for me.

Reinforced through cultural arts. In addition to the early awareness that came from living and attending public schools in Oakland, as well as the education Ariel was receiving from his family and the community they had established, hip-hop was becoming life's soundtrack for many urban youth in the Bay Area, including Ariel. Hip-hop had a big influence on Ariel while he was growing up. The lyrics of young, African-American emcees explained much of what Ariel was seeing in his community and reinforced some of his observations about racial discrimination, like the discrepancies found in the juxtaposing stories of Ariel's shoplifting experience and the incident with his friend at the local gas station.

> I think another big piece of it is just being a kid at the moment that hip-hop was becoming national. I wasn't in New York in the '70s, but I was in Oakland in the '80s, and so that's when Too Short, Digital Underground, all of these local folks started making a national impact and being real big; Tupac, all these guys. And then of course, the racial politic embedded in the music that I started listening to, really in, the end of elementary school, really middle school, junior high, and then listening to the narratives of these Black artists, in talking about their lives, in talking about things, and then seeing a lot of that around town… all of that

> absolutely informed my early consciousness development and politics around this stuff.

Ariel credits the interplay of hip-hop and growing up in Oakland as a blended education about issues of racial and social injustice, an experience that he surmises is likely very different than the experiences of white kids who grew up in segregated, all white neighborhoods, and who consume hip-hop without firsthand knowledge of the socio-political landscape from which it came.

> I think back then I wouldn't have even articulated [it as] social justice values, but the multiculturalism, the diversity just inherent in our experience was normalized. It wasn't 'til later that I learned about white kids growing up in all-white environments and had to conceive of what that might be like and how it might shape your world view, and how they might listen to hip-hop music versus how I listened to hip hop music and the difference there.

As a teenager, Ariel began connecting his love of and appreciation for the arts, to issues facing his community and to a calling he felt to get more involved. He cites two artist mentors in particular, June Jordan and Wavy Gravy, who influenced him and provided spaces for him to grow and learn as an artist and an activist.

> [T]he stars were shining on me because I got to like backdoor my way into June Jordan's small fall semester class. […] Her presence, her body of work, her pedagogy, the whole model of the program completely rocked my world, and her belief in poetry as a sacred art of truth-telling, and her love for everybody, and the rigor of her curiosity, right? And appropriate humility in the face of the scope of the diversity of the world and the breadth of human experience […] and she was a person who I saw really embodied as a political artist.

The other person he saw as embodying that approach to political art and who was an equally influential figure for him was Wavy Gravy.

> Wavy Gravy at Camp Winnarainbow… clown, hippie, jokester… From Woodstock to being at the BIA takeover, of the federal building in DC with the American Indian movement, with Black Panthers, that crew of hippies… hella activist, hella social justice. […] Wavy Gravy founded the camp. He and his wife direct it and run it. So I grew up with him as a major figure.

Common Tendencies

Anchoring in cultural heritage. Ariel grew up in a mixed faith family. His father is Jewish but Judaism was not a huge influence on his early childhood. His family celebrated both Christian and Jewish holidays in the home with very little formally organized religious activities or association with the synagogue. He was given the choice as to whether or not he wanted to be Bar-Mitzvahed and not appreciating the significance at the time, he opted out of it and all the studying he would have had to do. But during his senior year in high school, he joined Jewish Youth for Community Action (where he would later serve as Program Assistant and then Program Director) and his connection to Judaism strengthened, as did the link between his Jewishness and his growing commitment to social justice. JYCA was "created for Jewish high school students as a political education program to learn about social justice values in the Jewish context, and then to take action on various issues," explained Ariel.

> I don't think I really connected Judaism with justice work until JYCA, until it was explicitly in the nature of the program, looking at the connections… So related to like Tzedakah and Tikkun Olam and all this legacy of social justice activism in the Jewish community, all this stuff. So, I would say JYCA was really the first place that that was where I kind of explicitly connected, and then on one level as a participant—as a high school student—and then of course, on a whole another level, when I'm like staff and directing the program and running things.

Years later, when Ariel immersed himself in the *Amnesia* project, his connection to his Jewishness further strengthened, as did the connection between his Jewishness and his calling to social justice movement work.

> And then I would say on a whole other level doing all the research and work around *Amnesia* as an older adult, going back into the legacy of my ancestors and learning more of the traditions of Yiddish Theater and the Sweatshop Poets and Klezmer music and the Bund and secular socialists… social justice legacy of Jewish culture which, even until four or five years ago, I really didn't know much about. And now I see myself completely as an inheritor of that legacy, both the

> performing arts, the music, poetry, theater, dance, and all that stuff, and the politics.

Ariel believes that other white people can benefit from connecting to their lost ethnic/cultural heritage, and that doing so could contribute to the dismantling of whiteness. One of the goals of *Amnesia* was to get white people in the audience to do just that, to explore their ancestry prior to being enveloped into the whiteness monolith.

> The play itself is another thing that I've been using, performing and using as a way to get people to talk about immigration policy. To get white folks to examine their own migration stories and break open the idea of inherent citizenship and inherent 'Americanness.' "What is your immigration past? Where did you come from? How did you get here?"

Ariel describes this aspect of his work as a cultural project bent on dismantling whiteness and white supremacy.

> All this is reclaiming my kind of indigenous old European roots or Jewish culture and tradition, which cracks the institutions of whiteness, right? And when we claim our roots, it breaks down the monolith of corporate American white identity. And opening, hopefully opening a space and inviting others to share their immigration stories wherever they're from, and articulating a clear call for justice for the families who are being targeted, imprisoned, deported, all of the kind of atrocities that are happening in this country right now under immigration policy.

Ariel also shared responses he has provoked from audiences (something I witnessed when I went to watch him perform *Amnesia*) and how he hopes his performances will resonate with them in a way that spurs curiosity or a longing to reconnect with their own lost family narrative, whether that history be one of struggle, one of privilege or both.

> One of the main questions or responses is like, "Oh that makes me want to go talk to my grandma." That like… I do think that both my pieces actually, *Free Land* and *Amnesia*… have been effective catalysts for folks to think about their own family history. Cause it just kind of naturally comes up in the process. As you're watching me tell my story, you're like, "Oh, I wonder if my family had a homestead?" Or, "Oh, I wonder why my great-whatever immigrated?" …Like those questions. And that has been a fundamental goal of mine. I mean I think part of the problem is white folks are disconnected with our history, our family histories. The specific cultural traditions, the specific struggles, and the specific

> privileges, right? All of that gets blended, blotted, bleached out in the kind of 'amnesia' that US culture is always forward-looking, never backwards-looking, generic mass-produced cultural heritage, as opposed to a specific family or land-based cultural heritage. So that's part of it, and I think it's an important part for all of us who are 'white' to go on a personal identity journey, as a soul, kind of spiritual journey, to look deeply and grapple with who we are and where we come from… How we got to be where we are. Both the privileges that we've earned, the struggles that folks have gone through and overcome, the things that we've lost along the way, the damage that we've suffered, endured… just all of the different layers of that journey. I think it's important healing for us to move forward. This has to be for my healing too. The Amnesia project was so deep for that in terms of locating me in this legacy of folks who were persecuted. Genocide and violence and pogroms and all these things, it's like… It shifted my relationship to the Ohlone struggle. Because I'm no longer just a nice white person who's trying to help these native people restore their cemetery. Now I'm fourth generation out survivor of folks who… our cemetery got destroyed and now I'm relating to that struggle in a different way, right?

Relationship building and accountability. Much of Ariel's work is focused on racial injustice and the way different groups in the United States have been and continue to be marginalized and oppressed. As previously mentioned, he does this in ways that highlight (and anchor himself in) his personal connection to those issues. But he also makes sure to open himself up to critique and to make himself accountable to the communities that he is addressing in his work, particularly when it comes to his performance-based activism. He is able to do this as a result of authentic relationships he has created as well as by intentionally connecting to folks when working on a new project.

> [I]n the play for example, the play development process when I was writing *Free Land* and writing *Amnesia*, part of my methodology is to have several stage works and progresses, where I invite the general public community, but also really specific community folks to come and give me feedback both kind of artistically and aesthetically in terms of the craft of the work, and then politically in terms of content, and narrative and story. So when I was writing "Free Land," for example […] I had a relationship with Corrina [Gould], and also Ann Marie Sayers, who's an Ohlone elder from the South Bay, in Indian Canyon. And for both of them, I consulted them as sources in the research part, and I was gathering all the information research that went into it, and then performed the piece for them

> while it was still in development to make sure like, “Hey, is this an accurate, appropriate, honest portrayal of your story, it’s a story of your history in your family… your ancestry? Is this okay?”

When I asked Ariel specifically about being accountable to communities of color, he addressed it by tying it back to relationship building as the foundation on which accountability and trust is built.

> [A]ccountability is such a hard thing because it can feel so abstract, and I really feel like… It just comes down to relationships, having relationships with community members and folks, and just sharing, being in conversation, being in a relationship, being in dialogue about all this stuff, checking in… being open to feedback, hearing and using, and taking feedback. I think it gets tricky for people when there’s like, when it’s the Native American community as this abstract entity, and this idea of accountability is like, “How do I be accountable to the Native American community?” And so, the way that I found through that is just like, “Let me find these people that I super respect, who are clearly leaders, are clearly brilliant, and are doing the work in various different ways, and committed in engaged ways, and let me be in relationship with them and ask for feedback in different ways.”

Ariel talked about the need to build relationships continually and when he has a project that addresses a particular group or issue, to connect specifically about the development of his work before implementing a particular project publicly.

Step up/step back. Ariel is often asked to perform, speak or facilitate workshops about race and racism at conferences and other events. He relies on his instincts about the nature or context of an event to determine whether he steps up, steps back, or ‘passes the mic’ altogether. He believes that the best way to approach that kind of work is to do so as one of several voices.

> There's a lot of different pieces. There's a bunch of ironies, which is often it's the staff of color at schools who bring me in 'cause they're trying to talk to white students and they just brought a speaker of color in, and that was great, but now they're trying to reach a different demographic or whatever. So, I feel like... Ideally, my voice is one of many in a conversation about all of these issues. I'm not the sole speaker. Best-case scenario, and I've done this lots of times, I'm on a panel with someone or there's back-to-back presentations… literally we are

> dialoguing together. Other times there'll be a week of programing or a month of programing and it'll be this speaker, this speaker, me and that speaker, and there'll be speakers of color.

Ariel, when asked to come speak or perform, asks follow up questions to determine if his presence in a workshop or conference is appropriate. Then, based on what he learns, he can accept the invitation, decline it or ask that the format be modified to include voices/perspectives from people of color. A recent example of Ariel's inquiry about the event ahead of time leading to a modified format was when he was asked to deliver the keynote speech at a conference in Oakland. The conference planning committee wanted Ariel to speak to the history of Oakland in his talk, and he found it problematic that they wanted him, a white man, to be the lone voice speaking on the matter and welcoming conference goers to Oakland. He suggested they also contact his good friend who is native and a long-time organizer and activist whose ancestry is indigenous to this land. The planning committee followed his suggestion and the two of them ended up splitting the keynote.

Ariel does believe that there is a space for white people (including white men) in movement work for racial justice. Although he recognizes that some might disagree with the idea of white leadership, and that there is certainly a time, place and manner for which it is appropriate, Ariel believes it is important, even necessary, for white people to step up in significant ways that at times take up a considerable amount of space.

> And one of my guiding questions has been, what does bold, powerful, radical white leadership look like? …white male leadership look like? Most white male leaders are racists, are patriarchal, are classists, are violent and ignorant and hateful. We have a million examples of that. What does a different… but still bold? …not necessarily, I mean, we got to shut the fuck up and do our groundwork and raise up voices and all of that too, but I don't believe that our only voice is to be quiet and make space for other people. I think white people need to be loud and speak out against racism, and speak out for our humanity, and

speak out for our ancestors and for our kids. We can't just be on the background sidelines. And there are some real differences of opinion and philosophy on that particular piece.

Kevin

Kevin is thirteen years old. He is supposed to be studying for his Bar Mitzvah but instead he is glued to his dual tape deck boom box, mesmerized by the words spit by emcees through the speakers, consumed by the poetry and rhythm of hip-hop.

As an adolescent in Chicago, this was Kevin's daily routine. He would get home from school and push play… listening to, learning from and absorbing the lyrics from his favorite music.

> See there in school; see I'm made a fool
> With one and a half pair of pant, you ain't cool
> But there's no dollars for nothing else
> I got beans, rice, and bread on my shelf
>
> Every day I see my mother struggling
> Now it's time, I've got to do somethin'
> I look for work, I get dissed like a jerk
> I do odd jobs and come home like slob

KRS-One, a favorite emcee of Kevin's, rapped these lyrics in "Love's Gonna Getcha," track eight off the 1990 album, *Edutainment*. The lyrics resonated with Kevin. In them he heard pieces of his own narrative. He and his brother were latchkey kids from a single parent home. Their mother struggled with cocaine. The two brothers shared a room, shared clothes and shared the burden of trying to hustle money to contribute to rent, groceries and the electric bill.

He didn't know it at the time, but Kevin's love of hip-hop would lead him down a path to being the community organizer that he is today, whose impact on youth can be heard and felt throughout the city of Chicago.

Plugging In

"Ready or not": Trying out hip-hop as pedagogy. The path to plugging in for Kevin Coval is inextricably intertwined with his relationship to hip-hop. It was his love of hip-hop and its poetry that ultimately led to his decision to be a writer, a decision that came to him after high school while he was living overseas playing semi-professional basketball. After playing ball for a few years, Kevin returned to Chicago, and began to write prolifically and make his way in the city's emerging hip-hop, poetry, spoken word scene.

About six months into immersing himself into the world of open mics and spoken word gatherings, a friend of his asked him to lead a writing workshop at a local alternative high school. Kevin was just 21 years old and his friend thought that the eighteen-, nineteen- and twenty-year-old students in the class would identify with him, especially because of the students' mutual interest in hip-hop. He recalled conversations with his friend and his first experiencing teaching youth.

> [It was] a creative writing workshop, essentially. But, The Fugees' record had just come out, and so we, for an hour and a half that's all we talked about. But he, afterwards, he was like, "You should do a residency here and we'll pay you to do it." I was like, "Yo." I'm like, "Please." … He's like, "The cultural space, language of hip-hop is just bringing you all together in a way that no one's getting here."

Kevin was still finding himself as a poet, let alone as an educator, but he had success in that first workshop, essentially using The Fugees' album *The Score* (1996) as a textbook, so he continued with that approach moving forward.

> Whatever song I was vibin' with at that moment if some shit dropped, I could bring it today; I could bring it into the class today or tomorrow. And it was a way just to do this work of sharing these essential stories and I think, I think that because that's what hip-hop did for me, it was very easy to use what I perceived to be pedagogic… the pedagogy of call and response in classroom spaces. Because I received the call and my response was to start to create a body of work, that body looked like the body of work that I was making, but I also knew that not to be the response of other folks I would build with, inevitably who would be rooted in the very particular specific experience that might be able to then create a bridge between two people to hopefully elevate some sort of understanding or at least make folks cool.

Kevin saw that he was onto something with this hip-hop pedagogy and began to build and expand the ways in which he created educational, developmental spaces for youth using hip-hop as text and classroom.

> And so [starting in 1996] I just started to meet hundreds of kids, because Chicago was so segregated, they would never really meet each other. At some point right down the street from here… I was starting to work at the Northwestern University Settlement House, and we were doing like a Hip-Hop Fridays program, and it was

> like… the Brickheadz led a b-boy, b-girl workshop and they would sometimes battle and then I would do like an emcee poetry writing workshop and we'd sometimes battle… One of these, a kid that I met just through the… Was doing like, he would come in and DJ the whole thing. And so I just, I was like, okay, well, we were getting kids from the westside and the southside, it was just that same cultural space that I saw in the primarily house scene coming up.

"We gotta do something": In search of a larger outlet. Kevin had seen up close and personal, the challenges facing youth in the city. The conditions in urban neighborhoods, the ongoing criminalization of youth of color and other issues negatively affecting Chicago's young people made Kevin feel like he needed to expand his reach.

> 2001 comes around and Chicago was going crazy, passing the anti-gang loitering law… trying to lock up kids of color for hanging out on their stoop. The block would be swooped all the time. We were teaching a program at the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center at that point, probably from like '97, '98 on. Just running into the juvenile detention center, they have an alternative school, high school in the juvenile detention center and just teaching, writing hip-hop workshops. Now, I was seeing the school to prison pipeline made manifest. I'd see kids on Tuesday outside; I'd see them inside on Thursday. Then, they'd be automatic transfers or they'd be in there for six months, eight months waiting on trial, or something like that. The towers fell, and just our community here of teaching artists, and organizers, and practitioners, and classroom teachers we just were like, we have to respond. We gotta do something.

"My city": The making of an accidental organizer. Plugging in involves utilizing what is available and instinctive. Kevin was seeing inequity and injustice being waged against youth in his city and realized he already had the pieces in place to begin to address the issues negatively affecting young people in Chicago.

> At that point I felt like I knew 1,000 kids on my own in the city who were doing this new poetic. So, I wanted to bring them together; I wanted to create a space where they could see and speak to one another. So, we created *Louder than a Bomb* based off of, after the towers fell and based off the Public Enemy record… Organized folks in the basement, right around the corner from here… the Chopin Theatre. It was dope. We had a handful of teens and we broke fire code in the basement, which it might have been 150 people packed in one night.

Kevin had thought of *Louder than a Bomb* as a really successful one-time event; he had not conceived of it as the movement it would eventually become. But his thinking would soon change.

> So then, I guess after that… I mean, I was not thinking of myself as an organizer before that and then after that when somebody was like, "Yo, when's that going to happen again?" I'm like, "Oh shit I guess I have to do that, right?" So, we did it again, and the teams doubled, the kids doubled, and participation doubled. Then, I started to run around and try to politic with these institutions. Chicago History Museum was on of our first sponsors. They gave us space in their museum and we filled the auditorium. Columbia College, through a homie, became one of our sponsors in the fourth year or something like that, and started to give us loot. …So, we just started to build and that's how we grew.

"And they say Chi City": Hip-hop as counterhegemonic. Kevin realized they had stumbled onto something distinctly Chicago, entirely hip-hop, and bigger than he had originally imagined.

> So, Chicago's hip-hop community wasn't really getting it's recognition, but I knew how dope it was and I felt, I think we all felt like what was to come. We created… that was the space. That's when, I think, I added Poet. Then Educator. Organizer.

Kevin began organizing youth throughout the city. *Louder than a Bomb* was his outlet. It was a space that encompassed the poetic and the pedagogic that he had been using in his other work, but was bigger, bolder and more expansive. It affirmed the identity and existence of the youth who participated. It called out oppressive forces and then spit rhymes in their face. It was counterhegemonic and celebratory. It was an "aesthetic showcase and battleground and communal sanctuary" (Coval, Lansana, Marshall, 2015, p. xvi).

> I think that hip-hop has been saying "Black Lives Matter" for 40 years, so I feel like part of what we do… Is celebrate blackness, create stages and spaces to expand the spectrum in terms of a civic, public dialogue, but also expand the possibility for an individual to see themselves as a multitude. In the course of a festival event, it's 90 minutes; you only have the opportunity to speak really for

> three, so for 87 minutes you're listening to stories of people who are not you. They range from just everything; it's like spectrum of young human experience in this city at this moment, which means it is a lot of domestic terrorism and police brutality and murder. It's also about the hilarity of being a kid and having a crush on somebody, and it's everything in between that. We get nerds, and we get kids who are in gangs, and we get athletes, and folks who have gone on to become also some of the best hip-hop artists of the generation. And I think that we are just trying to create space for people to be themselves fully. It's like public educational space and civic town hall forums that are rooted in a hip-hop pedagogy. But a lot of times what I think you have to do is just get out of the way, create space, and then as people might ask for direction, maybe provide it to give critical feedback. But, it's organizing and it's public education that is rooted in this, you know… Hip-Hop began as a counter-cultural force, and so we still hold those same values to this moment to try to counter the hegemonic, to counter the monolith, to counter what is being said about young people of color in this city, and trying to get then larger and larger platforms for young people of color in this city to speak back to that fallacy and blatant racism.

Organizing through breakbeat poetics. Hip-Hop led Kevin to poetry. He has been writing and performing since that fateful decision he made to be a writer in 1996 while playing basketball overseas. It makes sense then, that he would utilize the written word as an outlet for movement work. His most recent project, *The BreakBeat Poets: New American Poetry in the Age of Hip-Hop* (2015), is a book he co-edited with two other poets (including one former *Louder than a Bomb* participant). Kevin described the book in its introduction.

> This is the first anthology of poems by and for the hip-hop generation. And it's about time. This book is the first of its kind. It includes more than four decades of poets and over the birth to the now of hip-hop culture and music and style. This is the story of how generations of young people reared on hip-hop culture and aesthetics took to the page and poem and microphone to create a movement in American letters in the tradition of Black Arts, Nuyorican, and Beat generations and add to it and innovate on top. We are in the tradition—and making one up. Hip-hop saves young people from voicelessness and art-less public educations. We came to writing in numerous ways, inside and outside of academia. We are dropouts and MFA degree holders, money folders and working folk. (Coval, Lansana, Marshall, 2015, p. xv)

The goal of the book is to bring these voices and this poetry to youth and to educational spaces; voices that represent those who have often been omitted from 'canonical' poetry and in the classroom. Kevin wrote about this as his motivation for compiling the anthology.

> When I was in high school, and still in many high schools now, poetry, and often art in general, is taught through the lens of a Eurocentric, white supremacist, boring-ass canon. Poetry, perhaps more so than any other art, is not taught as a practice but only as a site of pseudo-criticism and reading comprehension. It seemed dead white dudes who got lost in the forest were the only ones to pick up a pen, and what they wrote had to be about horses or beech wood. I also thought all the poetry had already been written. All the books closed, all the poets dead (and white). I garnered this from the backward, destructive way teachers were/are taught to teach poetry. Perhaps it was when DJs put their hands on the records, something you were *never* supposed to do as a kid, that the idea of writing and contributing to a public rhythmic, civic discourse became so prevalent in the minds of a generation. (Coval, Lansana, Marshall, 2015, p. xvii - xviii).

The book itself is another outlet. It's meant to amplify historically marginalized voices on their terms, in an anthology of poetry, but also to provide a literal (physical) space for youth to gain strength, be inspired and build together.

> The book is… it's doing It's also doing the work that we're talking about. I think it is a site for young people in high school, in college, and elsewhere to see themselves reflected in an anthology of American poetry that is maybe one of the only spaces where they see themselves reflected in. And so it's having that effect on college campuses. And I've been touring college campuses since '02. But we're also in this bigger moment of the need, the necessity, and really the clap-back from students of color on campus who are like, "I'm done with y'all. We're organizing. We're building. We're storming the president's office again." It's all the same impetus and cultural force. I think the book is also a space to have some of these conversations, and then our presence on college campuses is ending up being also a space to have some of these conversations…

Initial Awareness (Race Cognizance)

Early messaging. Kevin grew up betwixt and between the different social realities of Chicago in the mid '70s and early '80s. His family was working class and they lived in a predominantly Latino, working class unincorporated enclave of the city,

but one that was adjacent to an otherwise white, middle class suburb. After his parents divorced, his mother worked multiple jobs to make ends meet for him and his brother, and they moved nine times to escape landlords when she could not pay the rent. During part of his childhood, Kevin attended an all-white Jewish day school. As a result of these varied socio-cultural landscapes, Kevin got an early education about socio-economic differences. And while he was growing up, the city, all around him, was changing, disproportionately (and negatively) affecting poor and working class families, mostly people of color. He described this period in Chicago's history.

> This is in the mid '70s after a program in '73 that was finalized, the city called the Chicago 21 Plan or the Area 21 Plan which was this long-standing conversation, but they formalized it then between the mayor, Daley and... The old mayor, Daley, and a lot of major real estate developers, the great grandchildren of Marshall Fields and the universities, and it was just a play to build up the downtown. And then, essentially this concentric zone theory of wealth that European cities are modeled after and its really kind of one of the blueprints, I think, of gentrification after white flight… as tastes begin to shift. And there was the return [of white folks] and the literal burning of Black and brown neighborhoods and then the buying out from under, you know, this is that moment.

His observations at the time, of the disparity in wealth and affluence amongst different communities in Chicago made an early impression on Kevin and left him confused.

Reinforced through cultural arts. Hip-Hop was a big influence on Kevin from an early age. Its lyrics drew him in and helped alleviate some of his confusion. It described, in part, his own family's circumstances, making the music relatable, even affirming for him.

> I got really lucky. I've been listening to hip-hop everyday probably since '84,'85 and got it earlier than that because of *The Message* and because of *Style Wars* and because of Herbie Hancock's *Rockit*. I just started to understand that there was this vibrant youth of color culture that was also working class that was described in a reality that seemed a little more in step with what I was seeing in my home.

At first hip-hop was a solo experience for Kevin. He was receiving it second hand (by listening to it), drawn primarily to the stories that helped explain and affirm his own narrative. It was not yet the space (literally and figuratively) in which he would build community and plug into cultural movement work.

Hip-Hop made Kevin curious. Listening to hip-hop made him want to learn more about the content he was hearing about in his favorite emcees' lyrics. It was, in effect, the only curriculum that Kevin paid any real attention to, and the literature and poetry it led him to, made him excited about learning for the first time.

> Hip-hop sent me to the library because it had me wanting to research who I didn't know, that folks were talking about. And so, one of the first big things was reading Malcolm X's autobiography sophomore year of high school. And then in that same section, that was called I think the "Black Study" section in the library, Lerone Bennett Jr.'s *History of Black Folks Before the Mayflower*, Howard Zinn's for whatever reason was on the same shelf, *A People's History of the United States*. And then, they had an anthology Dudley Randall edited in there as well for The Black Poets. So that was where I read for the first time, Haki Madhubuti, Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez and Jayne Cortez and Nikki Giovanni and folks who, when I read them on the page... I hated poetry at that time; I only read what I liked. And, I didn't read for class. I just read for pleasure, outside the classroom. I was a bad student and all these things, but when I read that, it was something that resonated, because, again it was like... One, it was language of people that I felt sounded like they were alive in the last 100 years, whereas all the poetry we were getting in school was just ancient, dead, boring dudes in the forest. I just couldn't relate, like all the *thous* and the *roses* and the *horses* and the bullshit.

Hip-Hop, the listening and the reading, gradually became more than a source of learning for Kevin; it began to politicize him, make him conscious of white supremacy and his own whiteness.

> I think I was getting politicized through the literature, through my own experience. I wanted to be a Black Panther when I was 16. I wanted to disassociate myself from Judaism, which was another way for me, at the time, to probably also say, whiteness but I didn't have that language at the time. So, I just started to write. I started to write rhymes really attacking my history teacher. I was bugging out in Spike's *Do the Right Thing*, but instead of Sal's I was in my US History class.

During his senior year in high school, Kevin began to visit the city frequently. He was drawn to what he saw and felt while there. The city called to him and so did hip-hop, only this time instead of experiencing its music as a solo activity, it was the cultural, community and performance spaces of hip-hop that were drawing him in.

> On Saturday nights before I was on the varsity [basketball team], we would go into the city and hang out. I spent a lot of time on Maxwell Street, which was, in its era of Maxwell Street, '89 to '92 was the era where you could get Starter jackets, and weed, and crack, and bootleg tapes, and Malcolm X posters, and hats and everything. I would spend time there. So I just started to understand that this environment of Chicago was a place that I really wanted to be in and around. And then, I got a flyer to go to a b-boy battle and learned that this was also then the cultural space that I had seen. I had been to a few shows at that point, but this was the space I really wanted to be in. I got a fake ID to go see Jesse De La Peña spin records, the regular Monday night set at the Blue Groove Lounge. There was a record shop called Gramophone Records that you knew. They had vinyl and also mixed tapes and cassette tapes from local Chicago hip hop artists. And then, they also had flyers for shows, parties, and that's kind of where I found my entry into this world that I had hoped for and imagined, but wasn't necessarily privy to. Also though, at the same time, there was the very much raging house scene in Chicago. And so, I ended up as a kid also going to a lot of house parties because hip-hop in Chicago really wasn't a thing until the mid '90s. And so in order to go hear potentially hip-hop music you really had to be a house head.

Kevin had accessed the spaces facilitated by hip-hop. He had immersed himself in its diverse crowds and cultural spaces and was inspired by all of it. That inspiration stayed with him while living abroad, and when he came back to Chicago he decided to re-enter those spaces and contribute.

> And so, there were some all ages clubs and stuff like that, that were incredibly mixed spaces, and even in loft parties and actual basement parties that were really like the most diverse cultural spaces I'd ever seen up until that point. And then as the mid '90s rolled around, and as I came back to Chicago, I started to then just be out. At that point I was... By '96, I kind of had made... In '94, I think, I made the decision to be a writer, but I came back to Chicago after playing ball in '96, and started to make my foray into the emerging spoken word, hip hop, poetry scene.

Common Tendencies

Anchoring in cultural heritage. When Kevin returned to Chicago from playing ball overseas in the mid '90s and ventured into the spaces hip-hop carved out in the city, he found himself in predominantly Black and brown spaces. Many of the poets with whom he shared space, and later stages with, spoke passionately about their cultural identities. This prompted Kevin to explore his own racial and ethno-cultural identities as a way of showing up in those spaces as authentic and honest.

> And in some ways it's like… the only reason why I started to even write about being Jewish is because people were writing about being Black. And so, then I started writing about being white and Jewish, and then deconstructing from, at first probably like a Black Nationalist perspective, what that might mean. And then, having a broader and… as I grew up hopefully a more nuanced perspective about what whiteness and Jewishness is in this moment in my body. And so, it felt very easy and I think folks probably also… If I wasn't doing that in some ways then I wouldn't have been as accepted and propped in space because if I was not doing that critical work, which is what I was also immersed in, then I think it would've been a Vanilla Ice type of moment, where they would've just been like, "Oh, it's the style but not the substance." And I think because there was also, and I hope there's also substance, that it seems to me that that itself is the style.

The more Kevin did the work of critical self-exploration, the more nuanced his understanding of his whiteness and Jewishness became. It led him down a path of trying to find balance, a rhythm of both claiming and resisting his inherited whiteness and that which comes with being racialized as white. His Jewishness presents the same balancing act, trying to find the rhythm between his pride in tribe and rebuke of the white privilege and the ills of Zionism. "What will I tell my kids?" asks Kevin in *Schtick* (2013), a book of poetry Kevin wrote about his Jewish identity. Kevin anchors himself in his cultural heritage while simultaneously problematizing it. Below is an excerpt from his poem "what will i tell my jewish kids?" The poem is rife with the soulful struggle of this balancing act.

> i will certainly tell my jewish kids
> of Goodman and Schwerner who died
> with their brother James Earl Chaney.
> that for a time, we were freedom riders
> along with others, we were central
> in the movement. hated jim crow
> ourselves, for a time in this country
> we were the Others, now we are other
> than our selves. (Coval, 2013, p. 209-210)

Kevin explored (and continues to explore) through reading, through writing and through performing poetry. Before he recognized it for what it was, Kevin was using what he calls "breakbeat poetics" to understand himself, and the complicated relationship between his whiteness and Jewishness.

> …I have then done that other work of trying to reclaim and also resist what I inherit and maintain, and I think that what I understood to be a tool of, I guess at this point I would call breakbeat poetics, was that it was a tool. It was a shiv and a slingshot and an arrow and now a growing, various kinds of machinery to counter the heteronorm. You what I mean? That's why it exists.

Step up/step back. Kevin expressed concern about otherwise well-intentioned white people's hesitation to engage in the stepping up side of the step up/step back coin. He sees a need, particularly in this moment in the United States, for white folks to step up and 'put some skin in the game,' but feels that too many of them (us) are too apprehensive. He understands the need or want to think and learn before entering movement work, but also feels that at some point white people just need to stop overthinking and join the struggle.

> I guess when I'm thinking a lot about like… what do white people do; I think that we are in this moment where I think that white people feel like they can't, shouldn't, don't have the right to or are scared to act, and I think that that's very dangerous. I think it's to create a culture of static or unweave. It's just this literal death, and I think part of what needs to happen is just people to be moved into a movement, to be moved into their own life, to be propelled into doing something. Of course, studying and researching and learning and listening, these are essential parts. You don't want to just run into a space and be like, "I'm here to help or

> save," which often occurs all the time. And folks need to be checked […] when necessary. But I also think folks need to just act and do, and there's a lot of work that needs to be done.

Relationship building and accountability. When Kevin returned to Chicago after playing ball overseas, he immediately began trying to plug back into the community. He was trying to find his way as a working artist and artist-educator, and in so doing was establishing and maintaining relationships and building community. He described this process.

> …[S]o from '96 to 2001 I was running around to tons of schools. […] At that point I was like also, I was trying to find my people. And I was young and so I was just really trying to see who was surviving with… I was, I'd been outside of the city for, I was in and out, but I was outside of the city for like three years, and so I was back, and just trying to run around and build a career, build a practice, and build a community. And so I was running around schools, community centers, clubs, open mic spots, parties, wherever, doing the work of being a writer and a poet, and also starting to get asked into a lot of different schools and I liked the work because it was what was incredibly fresh in my mind I could bring directly into the classroom.

The natural process of community building—meeting and developing relationships with hundreds of young people through his work as an artist-educator, and with other artists through the spoken word circuit—eventually led to working on various projects. What he saw and what he learned along the way fueled the inspiration and motivation to begin projects like Hip-Hop Fridays and eventually *Louder than a Bomb*, which has become one of the largest spoken word festivals in the world, a space for youth to build with other youth from all over the city and to receive mentorship from artists and educators.

In addition to building relationships with and building community amongst youth from around Chicago, Kevin also is intentional about being in relationship with parents and families. He shared a story about an intimate (and life changing) conversation between himself and one of the *Louder than a Bomb* participants, a young man who

wanted to pursue a career as an emcee. It was a conversation that would have been unlikely if Kevin were not so intentional about relationship building with youth and their families.

> I have a lot of folks who I've been able to build with, 'cause I've been doing… This is my 20th year doing this work really in this city, and so I've met a lot of folks and [this young man] is one of those kids who I've been able to really build with because when I met him as a freshman; he tried out for the *Louder than a Bomb* team, and did not make it. And then his sophomore year really started to take the [rhyming] super serious and I heard… I'm like, "Yo, what you're doing is really fascinating and to me and so Chicago." Taking a lot of notes from Kanye, taking a lot of notes from other folks. His parents are great. I remember sitting with his parents when he was 17 in between [the creation of two of his first mixtapes] and just being like, "Look, I don't say this a lot, but if you let him go, he'll be fine. He has these things. The trajectory is… But you have to let him go." He can't have the same rules as a 17 year old who has to come home at a certain moment because he *really* is in the studio. He really is doing shit that sounds like he's lying, but he's really doing these things. And so… I'm very close with the family in part because of that conversation.

Today, that young man a young man is an internationally recognized artist and one of the hottest emcees in hip-hop.

Alison

Seventy police officers are marching in full riot gear toward the Chancellor's office at UC Berkeley, where student organizers, activists and supporters numbering in the thousands have camped out for nearly a week in defense of the Ethnic Studies program, and because of the university's overall failure to meet the needs of students of color. Among the protesters are six student hunger strikers that have, at this point, abstained from food for eight days and have vowed not to break their fast until all student demands are met.

Alison is one of those hunger strikers.

As police near the encampment, someone turns in the direction of the hunger strikers and asks them to address the crowd. Alison had been reading scripture earlier in the day, trying to draw strength from her faith, and so the bible's wisdom is fresh on her mind. Without thinking about it, Alison is suddenly standing with a megaphone and begins to testify to the importance of their cause, and to affirm that God is on the side of those gathered in protest.

This was Alison's first sermon; the campus was her pulpit.

It was a spontaneous and spiritual response to injustice from a young woman who would eventually go on to become a pastor. That was the moment that Alison began to understand the power of the moral voice and the role it has to play within movements for justice.

Plugging In

All paths lead to the church. Alison Harrington's outlet for plugging in is the church. Specifically, Southside Presbyterian in Tucson, Arizona, the church that birthed the sanctuary movement in the 1980s. Her faith has been engrained in her since she was a child. Both her parents are pastors in the Presbyterian Church and so becoming a pastor means being in the family business. But Alison had to find her own path there. Her calling to engage in movement work for social and racial justice from a place of faith was born out moments like the story featured above. The connection between her spirituality and her organizing work, however, is not a connection she believes enough people make,

an observation that helped motivate her to select the church as her primary outlet for plugging into racial justice action. She spoke of this and about her path to Southside.

> So I was organizing around [proposition] 21, which was an amazing period in the Bay Area of radical, youth resistance; it was just so inspiring to be a part of that. And then I went to seminary because it seemed to me we lost. But it was this interesting thing that I realized that a lot of the youth that we were working with were going to church in the morning and going to organizing meetings in the afternoon but they weren't connecting it. They weren't saying, "It's because of my faith that I'm doing that." And I thought, "Hmm. That's interesting." We also saw no churches really involved. Where was the church outrage? Maybe there was but I didn't really see it. The church needs to be more active in the public square in terms of issues of justice. As organizers, we need to find ways to sustain ourselves because the struggle is gonna be a long one. How do we sustain ourselves through protracted struggle? So I went to seminary. I went to San Francisco Theological Seminar, which is over in San Anselmo and ended up working in San Quentin State Prison for a while. It's where I met my husband actually. I was working in Palo Alto at a church and working in Santa Clara County Jail system, then just felt like it was time to move on. In 2008 I started looking and found Southside and applied and that's what brought me here.

Alison shared another moment of epiphany she had about wanting to live a life of mutuality between faith and activism. A friend of hers was working for June Jordan's Poetry for the People in Berkeley and was teaching poetry to incarcerated women at FCI Dublin. She explained to Alison that the only way to get books into the prison to use for class was to make arrangements through the prison's chaplain. This sparked excitement in Alison; she called it her "initial Aha." When her friend shared that story with her, Alison thought to herself, "I should be a chaplain. If Chaplains can bring books to prisoners, that's what I should do."

A movement reborn. One of the key ways that Alison uses the church and her position as Pastor as an outlet for justice is by working on issues of (undocumented) immigrant rights. Specifically, she has helped catalyze the resurgence of churches providing sanctuary to Central American refugees escaping violence in their countries, as

well as organizing to get deportations stopped (a legal clinic meets at the church to work on deportation cases). Alison is very cognizant of the legacy she has inherited by becoming Southside Presbyterian's Pastor and in many ways, when she chose to serve as the church's Pastor, she chose her outlet for plugging into justice.

Southside was the birthplace of the sanctuary movement in the United States in the 1980s, spearheading efforts to provide safe passage for Central Americans escaping civil war back home. Despite the dangers the refugees would be exposed to if deported, the US government because of its involvement in those wars, directed Border Control to send them back to the death squads of El Salvador. In 1982, led by the efforts of Southside, upwards of 500 churches (also synagogues and homes) established an underground railroad and smuggled Central American refugees into the country and provided them safe haven. John Fife, the pastor at the time, was arrested and incarcerated for his role in the sanctuary work.

The resurgence of the sanctuary movement began again in May of 2014 when Alison (Pastor Harrington) agreed to have a man named Daniel and later a woman named Rosa, avoid deportation by living at the church. From there, the movement was reborn; Daniel was the first person to be provided sanctuary in a church in 30 years. Alison shared the story of Daniel and the subsequent rebirth of the sanctuary movement.

> We had a father come to us, who was, who needed sanctuary and so we welcomed him into sanctuary here at Southside. This was May 2014, and he was here for 28 days and he was granted a stay of deportation. What happened at that time was that all these other churches started to do it, it wasn't and it's not like... There's all these myths in community organizing like the spontaneous combustion myths. Right? It wasn't that, it was like people had been planning it and, and doing it, it was just the way the timeline went out. So in the past year and a half we've had 12 people nationally enter sanctuary in different churches… Portland had one, Arizona's had, one, two, like four or five. Chicago, Denver, Philly, Austin, and we've been able to, yeah, get cases closed. And so what sanctuary means is, law

> enforcement has said, and ICE said they wont go into what are deemed sensitive areas, so churches, schools and hospitals. So they won't come here, and so we welcome someone into sanctuary and we have kind of the short-term goal of just providing them hospitality. And for us at Southside, our particular practice, 'cause it varies in every congregation, is that we provide 24-hour accompaniment for someone. So for 461 days, 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week, we had someone here staying with Rosa, in the room that we renamed the Solidarity Suite. And then we had nightly prayer vigils, every single day. And then you're mounting a campaign to get their case closed.

The struggle continues. Rosa left the church in late October or early November last year and Alison continues to prepare for other battles. She and the church remain focused on giving sanctuary to those who are being targeted for apprehension by the Department of Homeland Security. She sees her job as being ready for when that happens while equipping others to do the work of sanctuary and other actions for immigrant rights. A few hours before meeting with me, Alison and other clergy from around the country were on a major press call about current efforts. She recounted what she shared on the phone to media from around the country about the resurgence of the sanctuary movement, and the warning she gave to the government that the people and the churches will never stop fighting for immigrant rights and the protection of refugees.

> We're living through the same nightmare again, but the government needs to remember that they've been through this with us… And we won. “You might indict us, you might try us, you might find us guilty, but the movement keeps going. You might send spies to our church,” which they did. “You're not gonna stop us." And at the end, people in the movement sued the United States government for failing to follow their own asylum law and they won. Deportation of Central Americans was stopped, they were given temporary protected status and refugee laws were changed because of pissed off church ladies and churchmen. Who were like, “You're not doing this on our watch.”

Initial Awareness (Race Cognizance)

Early messaging. Alison was born in a town near Boston, where her father was finishing Seminary. After he graduated, the family moved to Central Florida, where

Alison would attend elementary school. Continuing efforts to desegregate schools meant that Alison was bused into an African-American school in a predominantly African-American neighborhood, an experience Alison describes as formative for her around issues of race. Her parents raised her with Christian values and mores about being kind to people and not being judgmental, but there was very little talk of race or racism in their home. Alison recounted early memories of living in DeLand, Florida—which she indicated was located 20 miles south of the town where Trayvon Martin was killed, and as being similar in socio-demographic make-up—and being bused to an almost all Black school.

> …[W]e were bussed into a Black neighborhood and for me that Black neighborhood was like the most beautiful neighborhood I have ever been to and my conception, my image of it […] what I remember is when we were being bussed in, that the houses were more closer together and that there was porches and the kids would hang out on the porches and they would play together. And there was this sense of community and the fact that people were playing together. It was just like, "This neighborhood is awesome!" […] I remember being jealous of the girls' hair because they had braids with beads and that was really cool. I thought, "I wish my mother would do my hair like that."

As much as those early friendships with Black children made an impression on Alison, she is clear that the relationships she formed at school had limitations, as did the relationships her parents developed. "I had friends," explained Alison, "but if I look back at my pictures, none of those girls were invited to my birthday party at my house [...]" Alison never visited their homes either. Her mom, however, did visit the homes of Black neighbors from time to time but even those visits, done so out of kindness, were lopsided in their power dynamics.

> [M]y mother says actually, she says that she was a PTA woman, so they would do charity for the families and bring them groceries for Thanksgiving and this is rural Florida. So some of the floors were dirt floors, so it was poverty. Some of the kids took showers at the school and had a hot breakfast there.

Alison's experiences as a child in DeLand laid the foundation for her race cognizance; "I kinda had the sense of racism is bad," she shared. So when her grandmother expressed overt racism in front of Alison when she was a little girl, she understood that her grandmother was on the wrong side of right and wrong. Alison believes that the cognitive dissonance that came from witnessing blatant anti-Black racism by her grandmother after having a largely positive immersion experience in a predominantly Black school was key to her early understanding that racism was wrong.

> So the really fortunate thing is, in my opinion, with my development, in terms of my consciousness around my race, is my grandmother was super racist, super old school. She's Irish; she's first generation Irish, poor. And she was just so racist and so the helpful thing about that is it was so blatant, it was so easy to be like, "You are crazy."

Alison recounted several instances, in particular, that stand out for her as moments during which she knew just how egregious her grandmother's behavior and actions were. Some of these instances occurred prior to her elementary school experience and some after, but Alison was keenly aware that what her grandmother was doing was wrong.

> I remember when I was like six years old, I was in the grocery store with her, and there was interracial couple and she said "Alison, don't ever marry a Black man, because if you ever get into the Black community you'll never get out." And when we would drive, so they grew up in Philly, DC area, moved to South Carolina and every summer we would drive up to Jersey, and, if there was ever… If they ever pulled into a hotel and there was like a Black family outside, we would find the next hotel. […] And I'll never forget one time we were in the car, it was super hot, we checked into the hotel, my brother and I were super excited to go swimming and there was a Black family in the swimming pool and we weren't allowed to go in. And so her racism was ludicrous and it was crazy and so it was easily rejected. And it was easy to be like, "Oh there's some people who believe this, and they don't reflect the values of our parents or our faith." You know what I mean? So that was kind of like… I feel a pretty good grounding even as a small child.

Reinforced through literature/academia. Alison's positive experiences in school and negative experiences with her grandmother were both part of early insights

into race and racism. But it would be in community college, through Ethnic and Women's Studies courses, when she finally began to delve more deeply into racial issues in the United States. Studying race and racism in a formal setting not only heightened Alison's awareness, but also began her down a path of taking action against racial injustices.

> I took a 'Women of Color' literature class. And that was when my mind was *pow* and it was like white privilege and then I had to deal with what I think we all have to do and I think it's annoying, it's the white guilt. "Oh my God, I can't believe my people did this to people, and how do you move through that? How do you wrestle with those feelings?" And so for me it really was through literature and reading the experiences of other people that I began to, especially women of color, I began to really have a sense of what white privilege meant. And it's devastating. I mean it's devastating to think that every ounce of my being is contested… not contested… it's not… That I'm not in a vacuum… like nothing is rightfully mine. Everything is soiled. Everything is soiled. Everything is ruined. Everything is rotten and it's hard to find a way to move through that, and I think that a lot of people get defensive and get reactionary and like, "All lives matter." […] And they just have a hard time with that for whatever reason. I kind of moved through it and was rigorous in trying to understand more and so was taking African American Studies 101 and really immersing myself in some of that academic works that I could understand more about what it meant. And for me, understanding more helps me in understanding how race was formed in the United States… helped me… helped it feel more concrete versus just this really horrible thing that just exists. And so it helped me figure out, "Okay well. There is a responsibility that we have, to act in ways that are just and to work for justice."

Alison's experiences in community college followed her to UC Berkeley, which, as revealed in the opening story above, became a battleground for defending Ethnic Studies, a battleground that Alison stepped into in a big way. She felt protective of Ethnic Studies because it had elevated her own thinking and heightened her awareness of racism in the United States and her complicity in it.

> For me, defending Ethnic Studies was really important because I feel like it was through Ethnic Studies that I really understood who I was. It wasn't like through American History… whatever that friggin means, right?... That I was gonna get a picture of who I was. And it was only though ethnic studies that I began to see this picture of the United States. I feel like that was how I understood who I was

> in a more clear way. And of course, as a white person, it's not like it's this history that I am super proud of, right? But, it's a different kind of learning of your history.

Common Tendencies

Anchoring in cultural heritage. Alison is a pastor like her parents before her, and her faith is intertwined with her commitment to racial justice work. For Alison, the church is both an anchor and an outlet for plugging into movement work. Alison is also of Irish descent. She took care to explain that she does not wish to overstate her connection to her Irish ancestry, or to culturally appropriate customs that have long been assimilated out of her family's traditions. However, between community college and UC Berkeley, Alison lived and worked abroad in Northern Ireland. Her time there helped her reconnect with her family's bygone heritage. This connection was not lost on Alison when she decided to participate in protests to defend Ethnic Studies by committing to participation in a hunger strike.

> … It was very interesting that we came to a hunger strike as the tactic that we were gonna use, because I had lived in Northern Ireland. And a hunger strike is a really ancient Irish tradition. That hospitality is so important to Irish people that if there was an injustice that was committed, you would go and sit on a doorstep of the person who committed that injustice against you and you wouldn't eat. That would be a huge… It would shame them. There was this ancient tradition that was my tradition. That's important to me. I'm probably too cautious around appropriation issues, but I felt like I could root myself in that place. Actually, having lived in Ireland for a year and understanding the struggle there for civil rights and feeling a part of that struggle a little bit… come from there back to Berkeley… it felt like I was just standing on different ground than when I had not been in Ireland.

Alison explained that tapping into her Irish roots as a way to anchor herself in the struggle for racial justice does not thereby relinquish her whiteness, nor should that be a goal of white folks, but that it did provide a framework for understanding oppression and

the need to rise up against it in a way that is often lost on white people who have severed their connection to ethnicity and their cultural traditions.

> I feel that as white people, it's a little harder to figure out where we are standing. Where are we rooted? I felt like being in Ireland, was like, "I know where I'm rooted." It's not like that somehow because I can claim Irish ancestry, I can default out of white privilege, but it's just like, I feel there was a different way to root myself in the work. I felt like I could be… I felt like I didn't have to feel like white people often have to feel, like they have to justify themselves. They do that in really unhelpful ways. Mostly by cultural appropriation and things like that, but I felt like I could just be like, "This is who I am." Then in the 1980s there was the use of the hunger strike by prisoners in Northern Ireland and 10 men died. So, when you say "Hunger Strike," to anybody who's familiar with Irish history, if they're Irish-American or really plugged into it, you get a knot in your stomach because you just remember the devastation that the ten men who died on hunger strike how… what that was like for the community.

Step up/step back. As previously described, a major instance in which Alison stepped up while she was a student activist, was through hunger striking as part of the Third World Liberation Front movement at UC Berkeley (the second coming of it in the 90s) to defend Ethnic Studies. She felt that it was important for a white student to demonstrate through urgent tactics, that Ethnic Studies was valuable to all students. This prompted her to step up, to take up space in a particular way so as to make a statement about the importance of courses like that for all students.

> It was like me and five Chicano [students], and it felt like it was the right thing to do for me and it felt like it was a thing that I could do. And I felt like it was really important for someone who is white to say that these classes have value to all of us. It's not that… I don't wanna say that's what makes them… It's not like we have to have a white person saying they're worth something, but I feel that it's about understanding our history all together.

However, although Alison stepped up in a big way during the protests to defend Ethnic Studies, she believes she may have stepped back too frequently overall while at UC Berkeley. She reflected on why this may have been and why stepping back should never mean becoming inactive in the struggle for racial justice.

> I think my biggest problem though was this… was what happened to me in college is that… I let… I feel I didn't get as politically developed as I should've gotten. […] [I knew that] women of color need to be at the center, and so I showed that I was politically down by stepping back. The problem is I stepped too far back and got lazy, do you know what I mean? And was like… didn't take my own political development seriously enough, and find ways for me to be as active as I should've been. Because stepping back doesn't mean stepping totally back and defaulting to "Oh I'm just being down and letting other people take the leadership role."

Learning when (and how) to step up and when to step back is not always easy, and is often nuanced and contextual. Alison reflected on how when she took over as Pastor at Southside, and was being covered regularly by the local media, and thrust into the national spotlight because of her sanctuary work and activism around immigrant rights, her instinct was to do what she learned (and learned to value) while at Berkeley and center the voices of people of color any chance she got. However, she would soon realize that given the stature of her position, being *the* Pastor for *that* church, she needed to step up and be one of the voices of the new sanctuary movement and for immigrant rights.

> That's been a really difficult struggle for me here because coming out of Berkeley and especially with Prop 21, it was like when I started doing when we're working with media more it was like, who are the voices that need to be heard? It's young people of color. And so when I came here at Southside and that's always been my mentality with working with the media… is young people of color need to be front and center. And I got here and I started doing work locally, and then was getting some national, a little bit of national recognition for that work, and so people were starting to… had me do media work. And that was like, "But I'm not supposed to be the one that's speaking." And that took me a really long time to figure out. Now actually, it does need to be me; it needs to be mainline, Protestant pastors who are saying "This shit's messed up."

Alison also believes there is a time and space for white people to speak up, to show other white people that folks just like them are outraged about the way migrants in the United States are treated and that they should be too.

> And it needs to be people who look like soccer moms. I kinda look like a soccer mom. I drive a freakin' minivan and there are things that I can say that other people can't say. So there is a role for me to play and so on… it's been… it's kinda been a journey to figure out what that role is.

Alison elaborated on her approach to using her public platform to address immigrant rights, a complicated approach but one she has come to steadfastly believe is necessary.

> I think that it's counter intuitive, but I tell my story. And to me that's really counter intuitive, because I should be telling other people's stories but I don't have the right to tell other people's stories. So I tell my story and the story that I tell over and over again, and it's my birth narrative of who I am right now, it's like… is driving in Tucson with my daughter who is four now. She was eight months old and I was driving and a police officer pulled up behind me and so I did what we all do when a police officer pulls up behind me, and I checked my speed and I was fine and I relaxed. And that moment of relaxation hits the shoulders; that is white privilege at its best. For all the kind of reasons I don't need to explain to you. But what I realized in that moment was that there are undocumented… So for me, I feel like I unpack my knapsack of white privilege every single day right. Right? Because our privilege changes every day 'cause white supremacy morphs and changes and becomes something different every single day. And I feel like I'd done a lot of work my whole life, on what does it mean to be white. But it wasn't until I came here that I started to think, "What does it mean to be a citizen?" And the privilege that comes from citizenship. So I'm driving, the cop's behind me and I relax and I realize there are mothers across the city, across the nation, for whom a police officer behind them could mean being separated from their child. And for me, that was devastating to my core.

In an interview with Alison, conducted by the *Arizona Daily Star*, Alison tells a similar story about her privilege as a white mother, and demonstrates the way she centers herself in way that highlights the struggles of immigrants.

> When human lives are on the line, the only reasonable ethic is an ethic of resistance. So I understand that it's a higher level of confrontation with the government to say to somebody that you need to evade apprehension. But they need to evade death. And I just… I … as a mom, I just like… you know I'm gonna get all choked up… but I just… I imagine… you know the stories that came out of Georgia… of like four year olds being put in car seats… You know my daughter's almost four and I just think what it's like for a mom… you know when someone knocks at our door at home, like the kids want to run to the door and find out, "Who's there?" …Because it's someone coming to visit. And to think about what it's like for a mom to be able to tell her children that they need to hide is just a horrific thing to even imagine. And so I understand that people will criticize me for saying these things. But as a mom how can I not tell people, "You have to you have to defy the authorities." Because right now the U.S.

> government is in violation of their own asylum laws and what they are doing is morally reprehensible. (Arizona Daily Star. *Rev. Alison Harrington*, January 7, 2016)

Alison summed up her feelings about finding it in herself, however counterintuitive it may seem, to step up by telling her story as a way of speaking to the injustices being waged against immigrants by the U.S. government.

> And so I feel like I am very much motivated by my faith in this work but more than that I'm motivated by my sense of motherhood. And the fact that that's in my fiber of my being, that the idea that moms are taken from their children, is crazy to me. So I talk about that, I talk about realizing that privilege, and being horrified by that privilege. And so I talk about what it means for me to be a Christian, to be a mother, to be an American. And how all these things that are happening are an affront to who I believe we are. So it does become complicated, because Rosa who was in sanctuary here for 461 days, she wasn't able to do English media and so there was part of telling her story. But I really do… I centered the story on myself, which seems counterintuitive. But I feel like it's the way for me to understand… to talk about white privilege and talk about what we are called to do.

Relationship building and accountability. Alison's work is dependent on her ability to build community. She is intentional about building relationships with Southside congregants, with other clergy and the larger faith community, and with local community activists. I witnessed her approach to this firsthand, having been invited by Alison to sit in on the two meetings she had scheduled at the church following our dialogue. The first was meeting with other local clergy (and a visiting clergy member from Sicily), who were meeting to exchange notes and plan next steps for mobilizing against ICE and providing sanctuary in homes or churches. They met in her office, which was adorned with images of Jesus Christ, Oscar Romero and a poster that read "Not One More Deportation." The group spoke about what had transpired over the last several weeks and about next steps. They indicated a need to set up a pastor-to-pastor network to determine who is willing to provide sanctuary (both in churches and in congregants' homes) and to

mobilize around this. Alison offered to host a meeting for congregants who might provide sanctuary to learn about the legal ramifications of their actions.

The second meeting was with a group of undocumented day laborers, organizers, students and members of Mariposas Sin Fronteras, a local LGBTQ and undocumented immigrant organization. This network of people organizes in the Tucson under the banner of Red de Redes Protección and has been invited to meet at the church regularly by Alison. Alison (along with her children) attended the meeting in a guest capacity, to update the group on what she knew about impending raids and information about sanctuary. The group also discussed other policies for which they wanted to lobby the local government, as well as a march planned in solidarity with other organizations on the upcoming Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

Alison is accountable to the church and her congregants, and feels blessed to have their support for the work she has chosen to take up as part of her role as Pastor. She does all the 'normal' duties of a pastor one day, and the next she is blocking deportation busses. The church and its congregants continually affirm her moral calling to engage in movement work through her Faith.

> So every single Sunday I'm like, "I can't believe I get to be here." You know? It's just... Not every pastor is able to do the things that I do. Like they don't care... As long I'm doing my job... As long as I'm there for them when they need me at the hospital, they don't care that I go to DC to get arrested. They don't care that a bunch of clergy and I, three weeks ago disrupted court proceedings down here for Operation Streamline. They don't... They just know that's kind of what the pastor here is supposed to be doing, so it's a huge privilege to be in that kind of position.

Dara

Dara is living in Massachusetts. She is several years out of college and has been working tirelessly as an organizer in low-income communities of color. Most of her work is in public housing in Worcester. Welfare has just been cut severely and people are losing their benefits left and right, giving way to fear and anxiety throughout the community. Dara and those she is organizing with have their hands full, concurrently working on campaigns to raise the minimum wage, get childcare subsidies for families and expand public transportation. Dara is doing the work she wants to be doing, her passion having always been to work in solidarity with low-income communities color.

A year and a half into the job, the organization Dara works for decides to interview for a vacant position and the candidate, a Puerto Rican man, is invited to join Dara on her tours as part of the interview process. Dara's day-to-day work is organizing with Puerto Rican and Dominican women and upon meeting the candidate, the community members Dara works with get really excited; this guy is an organizer *and* he is Puerto Rican like them. Folks begin calling family members to come meet with and get to know the candidate. Dara stands aside taking this all in. She has been giving her all for two years but will never be able to impact the neighborhood the way her soon to be colleague can. He is a member of their community and that natural connection resonates with them deeply.

"Where's my community?" Dara asked herself. "I'm white and Jewish… maybe there's something there. Maybe there's a community I could be a part of like this…"

Dara felt called to work in the communities from which she comes. Soon after, she began her work with Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ), and after that for Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ), a national network of groups and individuals organizing white people for racial justice. Today, Dara is a member of the leadership team for SURJ, helping to organize white people across the country.

Plugging In

The power of doikayt. Plugging in for Dara Silverman might well be summed up by the Yiddish word, *doikayt,* the English translation being something akin to "hereness." Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ), an organization she used to work with, adopted a broader notion of *doikayt* as a guiding principle. Dara, has subsequently adopted it as a tenet of her own, and shared with me a story about Yiddish labor unions as a sort of parable about the importance of *doikayt* in organizing work.

> JFREJ has this idea; it's a Yiddish idea, this word *doikayt*. It's […] basically, "wherever you are, that's where you do the work." So when members of the

> Bund, the Yiddish Labor Unions came over to the United States and they were working in factories… at first they organized in Yiddish because most of the workers spoke Yiddish and that was the common language. But then, they started to be in mixed factories where there were Latino immigrants and there were Germans and there were… And they were like, "We can't organize in Yiddish anymore 'cause that's not the common language, we have to organize in English cause that's what everybody is struggling to speak."

She followed up with her own story of *doiykat*, of a time when JFREJ overhauled their strategy around domestic workers rights based on the people with whom they were in relationship with and with whom they had the most influence.

> So I always think about that as like organizing where you are in the population that you are with. I was like, "What does that actually mean?" And when I was at JFREJ we sort of did this shift from just showing up at rallies to actually organizing Jewish populations and turning people out in a more meaningful way. And really being part of campaigns where it's like, "What's our impact, what is it that, as mostly white Jews, mostly middle class Jews, that we can impact in terms of this work?" And right around that time we got asked by this group, Domestic Workers United, to join their campaign to pass the first Domestic Worker's Bill of Rights in the Country. And they said, "You're the only group that we know that shares our analysis and has access to employers of domestic workers." People have nannies and housekeepers and baby sitters. And the members of JFREJ who are mostly young queer people were like, "Aaah, organizing employers of domestic workers… that doesn't sound like fun; that sounds boring. That sounds like organizing my parents." But, we started to have these house meetings with synagogue members and with people who had domestic workers. And I realized that it was some of the most precious relationships, because really, what people were saying is, "I love my child or I love my parents but I can't take care of them all the time, so will you take care of them? And, I'm gonna to do the best I can to take care of you." But basically what they were saying is, "I wanna give you my heart." And so they have these relationships of "I'm giving you my heart, will you take care of it?" And then they felt incredibly indebted to the nanny or the babysitter or the housekeeper, whoever was working for them because basically they were being in that central part of their lives. You could see how people could get confused and be like, "This person is my family." … But also the difference in that was a financial arrangement, and that there were so few rules or structures around how to support them in being a part of that structure and doing well. Then it was also seeing the transformation of a lot of the employers when we would go up to Albany with them, the capitol, and lobby, and would say beforehand, "So you need to know the legislators are gonna turn to you—'cause you're going to be the white older person in the room—and say "why you are here?" And your job is gonna be to turn to the domestic workers and say "this is your meeting, why are we here?" Meanwhile, Domestic Workers United was organizing domestic

> workers [while] we were organizing the employers. We'd prepped people to go in these lobby visits. And you know, Albany… New York is a ridiculously large state […], but to get up to Albany, you have to get on a bus at six in the morning and you drive for like five hours and then you're there for a couple hours and then you drive back. That experience of like six hours on the bus and doing the lobbying visits and coming back together also really radicalized a lot of the employers because they would build relationships with other domestic workers, not just the person in their home. But then start to see them as a political body as well and be like, "Oh, yeah, yeah"…totally incredible. So from that I really got this idea that white people have a stake in racial justice work. It's a different stake than people of color, but that's the most motivating thing for white people, is that mutual self-interest of like, "What is my stake in changing the system? What are the ways in which I'm hurt by racism and white supremacy? But maybe I've never named it, or been able to articulate it before." And all of a sudden people are starting to wake up to that.

Pursuing an outlet to plug into as an organization. Dara currently serves as the National Coordinator for Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ). Much of her organizing and movement work is done in conjunction with SURJ initiatives and interventions. She describes the work of SURJ, in part, as a process of plugging into existing campaigns for racial justice.

> [I]t's thinking about where are the different populations of people who want to be doing this work and then how do we support them? Well, to plug into campaigns that are already happening locally or to be forming campaigns.

Dara shared a couple of different examples of how SURJ, as a national organization, with chapters in cities throughout the United States, approaches their work in this way.

> So one of the things that we've done is… The group in St. Louis started having Black Lives Matter yard signs. And so, we had a conversation with Alicia [Garza] and the folks from Black Lives Matter and said "Hey, can we take this nationally and give you all the proceeds from it?" And they said, "Yeah, we'd love that, sounds good. That makes sense for you all to do that." So we have about 80 groups around the country that are door knocking in white neighborhoods with Black Lives Matter yard signs.

Once SURJ finds an outlet for plugging in, they allow themselves to be fluid enough to adapt to the needs of a given city based on what is happening there. Dara gave an example of this in the Bay Area.

> The Bay Area SURJ group has been working on the Yuvette Henderson case. She was a Black trans-woman who was killed by the Home Depot Security in Emeryville. So they modified the signs and it was about justice for Yuvette. So they still had some of the Showing Up For Racial Justice signs, but it was also very specific to Emeryville where they did a bunch of door knocking and knocked on the doors of a bunch of city councilors, 'cause Emeryville isn't that big. You can cover that and there are a lot of white people who live there. So that's been another way both to develop the leadership of folks who are involved with SURJ of like, "How do you actually form the words and talk to other white people?" And what does it mean then to engage a different population of white people other than the people who are already coming to meetings and coming out to things and *blah, blah, blah* in this conversation.

Initial Awareness (Race Cognizance)

Early messaging. Dara grew up in Ithaca, New York, a college town. Her parents were both academics before moving on to careers in human service work. As a result, Dara grew up thinking that she would be a social worker. Her initial foray into social justice work was her involvement in rape and sexual assault awareness activities in high school, through which she began to facilitate workshops and trainings. When she got to college, she built upon her interest in social work and became involved with a group that was doing counseling and had a crisis line, a group for which she would eventually be asked to assume the leadership role. This was Dara's entrance in the world of organizing and social justice. Her focus was not yet on organizing, or particularly focused on race and racism, but her path would soon lead that way.

Reinforced through on the job training. Dara is the one participant who did not mention literature, academia or cultural arts as factors that reinforced early messaging about race and racism. It is likely that this kind of reinforcement did play a role in her

early education about race and racism, but it did not come up in our dialogue. What is clear from speaking with Dara, however, is that with each new project Dara has undertaken (and there have been many), she has stayed open to learning. Her cultural fluency around racial and social justice has increased with each new job.

In the summer between her junior and senior years of college, she took a job in Boston door knocking for money with a group called "Green Corps" that was an organizing-training program for environmentalists. It was this job that turned Dara away from social work and toward a life of organizing. “I was like ‘Oh, I like organizing people to make a change in their own lives. That's even better than social work; that's what I wanna do.’” After graduating, Dara worked for several different groups and participated in a myriad of political campaigns in New York and Denver, and eventually back in Massachusetts, where her openness to learning would lead to the existential moment around race, culture and community we learned about in her opening story, during the interview process that involved a Puerto Rican organizer and his connection to his community.

Common Tendencies

Anchoring in cultural heritage. Despite growing up in non-religious home, Dara’s parents were Jewish and so in some sense; according to Dara it was still a Jewish home and a Jewish upbringing. She believes that her Jewish identity plays a significant (even if background) role in her organizing and anti-oppression work.

> … I think as much as I say I wasn’t raised Jewish, like I think a lot of my ethos and a lot of what I believe in comes from Jewish culture and Jewish values even if my parents were like, “Ah religion, it’s the opiate of the masses.” They were Sociology professors but I was still steeped in it. And steeped in, you know, there’s generational trauma that happens from… They’ve done these studies now mostly about the Nazi Holocaust, they don’t really do it about, you know the slave

> trade, events related to Africans. But you know, my family's history is escaping the pogroms and so I think there's a piece of that in there. But I think also a piece where I really realized that I have this learned experience of oppression, which is very different from a lived experience of oppression. I didn't experience anti-Semitism on the day-to-day. Like, I learned about that theoretically and there may be pieces of me that have that fear […] but that's very different.

Dara believes strongly that her sense of connectedness to the struggle for racial and social justice is deeply rooted in her sense of Jewishness. She underscored this point by quoting Rabbi Hillel in the middle of a story she was sharing with me.

> *If I'm not for myself who will be for me?*
> *If I'm only for myself what am I?*
> *If not now, when?*

Dara then offered that the quote was incomplete without a fourth question, contributed by renowned lesbian, feminist, Jewish poet, Adrienne Rich.

> *If not with others, how*? [Rich, 1966]

Dara, agreeing with Rich, shared her belief that working against oppression together, because oppression affects all of us, collectively, is a Jewish value, one inherited through tales of oppression taught in Jewish homes and felt multi-generationally in Jewish communities.

> I mean for me it is so interesting around the self interest part because I feel like a lot of people who aren't Jewish but who are white, they don't get that stake. […] They don't get the learned oppression and so the idea of their mutual interest is much further away for them because they don't feel like they're going to die all the time or feel like someone could come and get them. […] So it's a bittersweet luckiness, right? Cause there's also a lot of hard things about that lived, learned experience of oppression but I think it also gives my whiteness some context, for me, about the tradeoff that was a part of assimilation.

Step up/step back. Dara shared stories about some of the apprehension white people demonstrated during the beginning stage of SURJ, and how their initial attempts to organize white people demonstrated the problematic ways that white people can step

back too much, or more specifically, that too often they wait for direction from people of color about how precisely to how to step up.

> [SURJ] was founded in 2009 after Obama got elected. Basically, a lot of white people thought in that moment everything was gonna be different… post-racial society, Black president, etcetera, etcetera. Of course, it wasn't and things got worse. […] So, the founders of SURJ like Pam McMichael from the Highlander Center and Carla Wallace who had started the Fairness Alliance and other groups in the South said we're gonna do this. So they formed SURJ and there was an initial petition that I think a thousand people signed onto, and then there was an internal struggle around what direction to go in. Some people said, "Well, we have to just wait for people of color to tell us what to do." And others of us, including me, were like "No, we actually know that they want us to organize white people; let's go and do that." What we were moving towards was doing base-building trainings for white people and basically how do you organize other white people? And, so we had an internal struggle about it and we ended up winning and so we did a weeklong training for about 25 organizers or […] people from organizations around the country. And those ended up being some of the people who, sort of, moved into leadership within SURJ in the next phase. So, on one of those other calls, [a Black leader that we work with] said to the group, "Your anxiety about trying to get it right has nothing to do with Black liberation." And that's been so powerful just to share with people and be like, "You know what? It's not really about you right now. It's not about me and it's not about you, but we have to do something." Like I remember being on a call with a group of people in one major city who were thinking about starting a SURJ chapter, and they're like, "But a person of color hasn't told us to do it." So I started 'facebooking' while I was on the phone with [a friend] who's a long time Black organizer in Boston. And he was like, "Yeah, we need them to do stuff." And so I said [this] to the group, and they were like, "Well, can you get them on the phone with us?" And I was like, "Okay." So he got on the phone and he said, "Yeah, we need you to be doing actions. We need you to be fundraising. We need you to be doing so many different things." And then he got off the phone and they were like, "Well, he didn't tell us exactly what to do." And I was like, "Arggh." "You're killing me." And literally, people are dying in the streets.

Relationship Building and accountability. Dara demonstrated above, with the story of domestic workers and employers, one of the many creative ways she has gone about fostering relationships between not only herself and others, but between members of her community. There are all kinds of ways for white people to build relationships authentically, and to be in community with people of color in ways that also hold them

accountable. Dara spoke further about the process, and of the importance of building relationships and being accountable, both as an individual and from an organizational standpoint. Many of her individual relationships with people of color come from her many years of organizing in multi-racial settings, settings where they collaborated on campaigns while also having intentional dialogues about what it means for white people to be part of racial justice movement work.

> So I'd say I really got immersed in communities of color through organizing. Like being in Denver and working in public housing… being in Worcester… living in Boston, which is incredibly segregated. And through doing that work, building relationships with the people I was organizing with who are often people of color. And I was involved in something called the National Organizers Alliance which was a network of organizers in the late 90s and early 2000s, and they sort of furthered a lot of the analysis of Colorlines and Race Forward, of like how do we do organizing in a more multiracial way where it's not like white people coming into communities of color. And it was a mixture of union organizers, of community organizers and they had some whole ideas about like the sacred rules of organizing like coming out of soul and skin sort of that style of organizing and they were like, "there is a different way to be" that has an analysis about identity politics that is not separate but is integrated into the organizing. So I got mentored by a lot of people within that. And I was on the board and ended up building a lot of strong relationships with people of color, you know, that continue today and that are a big part of my accountability.

Dara also shared the ways SURJ, a largely white organization, is intentional about building relationships with leaders of color as a way of being accountable, and as a practice of effective organizing.

> So, everybody who's on the leadership team of SURJ, which is like the board, has about eight or ten people, who are people of color, who are committed to organizing people of color, but also see the importance of white people organizing white people who they are accountable to. So about every three to six months we do a major check-in with all of our people. Then organizationally, we have an accountability council which right now, is mostly Black and African American, but we have informal relationships with a lot of other people of color and we check in about what we're doing, and about the work, and about how we're developing campaign accountability relationships, but we've mostly been doing shorter term actions, so we haven't done that as much. And then with our local chapters, one of the things that we're building out right now is what is a local

accountability structure. Some people in the Bay Area, [for example], have a lot of relationships already, so they can do individual check-ins. But how do you make those organizational relationships and not just individual, and how to not have it be overly burdensome of like "Tell us what to do now!"

Amy

Amy is nine years old and watching a fire blaze on the television news. Reporters say children were in the house when the Philadelphia police dropped a bomb on it. The newscaster says Black radicals lived there; there was a shootout. Amy asks her father why the police would do this if families lived there. Her father acknowledges this is awful, but says the police did what they had to do.

Plugging In

The art (and action) of storytelling. Amy Sonnie is a purveyor of stories. She deals in stories both literally (Amy is a Librarian), and through her organizing philosophies and strategies. Plugging in, for Amy, is about story telling and relationship building. All her work is interwoven with her ability to frame and tell stories, to help others do so, and to use those stories as an outlet for taking action. Amy is or has been, among other things, an organizer, a journalist, a researcher, an historian, an author, a journalist, a media specialist and a librarian. She spoke about the power of information and of sharing and shaping stories in movement work.

> I believe that information is political, and I believe that the ability to shape the stories that are told — about our present, about the future that we want and about our past — is political. As someone who's deeply committed to racial justice that means that it's my life's work to surface stories that give us a sense of the legacies we have to build on. And so, whether it's through journalism or researching and writing books about U.S. history, or editing books about contemporary queer youth movements [Revolutionary Voices, Alyson Books, 2000]... Or whether it's doing work and programming at the library and working with youth leaders to make sense out of who they are as leaders, and thinkers, and actors and agents in the world, so they can shape their own stories … This work is my calling.

Amy's story, in and of itself, is an example of the multitude of ways to engage in movement work. Since her move to the Bay Area in the late '90s, she has established or pursued many different outlets. She has gone on a book tour for her book, *Revolutionary Voices: A Multicultural Queer Youth Anthology*, facilitating dialogue and community building along the way. She has worked for an organization called We Interrupt this

Message, an organization that focused on media justice and the reframing of stories, a position she describes as her dream job, "the perfect blend of my politics and my journalism and media background." She has worked as a paid organizer/activist for the Center for Media Justice. Currently, Amy works for Oakland Public Library. Given the breadth of her experiences, Amy has had the opportunity to plug into movement work in very different ways, and to reflect on the different approaches that come with different roles. She shared some of her thinking about this, again returning to storytelling as the constant in the many different outlets she has pursued.

Different outlets require different approaches. Amy is trying to find her way as a librarian after having been a paid activist for so long, a role that had afforded her the freedom to constantly approach racial justice action in new and creative ways. But she continues to find outlets in her new role (in addition to plugging in through support roles outside of work) as a Librarian and is encouraged by the potential for moving the work from her new position.

> People are talking about institutional racism in government as something that government has historically been responsible for and continues to be responsible for, even if unintentionally. So there are doors open to that conversation in a way that I feel really impressed by. […] There's a place for some of my colleagues who share a racial justice orientation, and there's a place for someone like me to say, "I'm still learning too; I don't really know what city governments are supposed to be doing, given the fact that we are also an arm of the state, but here are some things that we can do better that we haven't been doing that actually will lead to more immediate equity in the city. Let's talk about our role in gentrification, in the digital divide, in educational disparities. Here are people we should be listening to that we haven't been listening to."

Initial Awareness (Race Cognizance)

Early messaging. Amy grew up in the suburbs just outside of northeast Philadelphia. Her grandparents (on both sides) had lived in the city but left during the

period of white flight, the GI Bill and other New Deal opportunities afforded to white families at that time. Amy was raised in the suburbs (her mother was raised in Levittown, PA) in a predominantly white, mixed class environment. Her family situation undulated between middle and working class, struggling at times to have sufficient resources. Her dad's side of the family is Irish and Swedish, second-generation immigrants. Her mother's side has multiple generations in the United States, from England, Scotland and Wales. She described her upbringing, in part, as atypical to the standard suburban narrative and her home as being rooted in conservative values.

> We didn't have a lot of resources, especially after my parents got divorced ... So we were not your typical suburban family with a picket fence. We had a nice middle class house for a few years and that privilege shaped me. Then we lost the house and that experience shaped me too. It changed how I saw the world. I started to notice contrast around race, class and gender. Disparity started to be obvious to me during high school as I saw my mom struggling and also when I made friends whose wealth really stood in stark contrast to what I had at home. I worked to buy my own food and clothes. Meanwhile I had friends whose parents paid for everything. So, my personal experiences with classism and sexism started to open my eyes, and I started to acknowledge racism and white privilege as well. Since I grew up in a mostly conservative family, my family's explanations for these disparities really made no sense. If I had to categorize my family, I'd say my maternal grandparents were staunchly conservative, you know Pat Robertson-loving… my mother was kinda apolitical and my father leaned libertarian. So, I grew up with quietly and overtly conservative values being reinforced all over the place. Over time, the bootstrap ideology just didn't add up. I started to seek out my own answers.

Amy's family story is representative of many white families in the United States, one of immigration, assimilation (into whiteness) and then segregation (through white flight). She shared with me some research she did into the Levittown developments and William Levitt. She was interested in that history because her grandparents lived there and her mother had been raised there. This research gave her insight into her family and her own upbringing.

> The Levittowns were racially exclusive communities built after World War II. One of the things I found online recently was fascinating; it was William Levitt saying [paraphrasing], "Look I'm not racist, but I want to sell houses and it's not my job to dictate to the people in these communities what they should and shouldn't feel [about Black people]." He was making an anti-censorship argument, like: I'm not going to censor what they think and feel, and what they want in their communities. If what they want in their community is exclusionary zoning or segregation, then it's not for me as the builder to get involved. This is a fascinating form of capitalist white supremacy... Businesses get to claim neutrality while literally building white-only spaces. It was just fascinating to read. That's where my mom grew up […] And my grandparents definitely ascribed to those beliefs. They left West Philly as part of white flight, and didn't look back. They were among those who wanted the suburbs segregated and yet still wanted to be seen as respectable people. Everything about my life is shaped by my family's active participation in and benefiting from this kind of racism.

Reinforced/disrupted – Literature/academia and cultural arts. Amy's interest in punk rock music and culture served as an early, anti-racist, queer, feminist political education.

> In 9th grade I met people who were into a political subculture within punk called straight edge. Overlapping with that community was an emerging feminist scene called Riot Grrrl. Both of those things exposed me to politics in a new way and inspired me to see myself as an activist.

Amy began to seek out more information about her fledgling political beliefs. In high school she actively sought out literature (stories) that addressed racial and feminist themes.

> The conservative beliefs of my family left me with a sense of unanswered questions about what I saw in the world, and then the politics in the punk scene really gave me permission to answer questions for myself. The DIY ethos fostered intellectual curiosity as well as critical thinking. So in high school, I always sought out the things that were the most challenging, or controversial. If we had a choice of ten books, I was the one in the class that argued to make my own list and said, "I wanna read Ralph Ellison." Or, "I'm gonna read Alice Walker." I read *The Color Purple* in 10th grade — at the suggestion of a great history teacher — and it really set me off on a course of learning more about Black history, resistance, Black feminism and civil rights. I felt lucky to have had teachers who handed me these books, and – really – my father too. He encouraged me to explore the world of ideas. We often vehemently disagreed, but he taught me to think for myself and to value inquiry and debate.

Having begun the process of disassociating from her family's conservatism (and racism), Amy went off to Syracuse University and began Women's Studies classes and campus activism. She knew she wanted to be a Journalism major, but thought she would go the way of focusing on International Relations. After taking one Women's Studies course, she quickly realized that it was a much better fit for her and chose that as her major.

> In some ways, I think that I was searching. I was searching for the words and foundations to make sense of my world view or my value system or whatever. By the time I got to college and learned about feminist theory I had already been shaped by intersectionality and women of color feminism through fiction … So when I started reading theory it put these stories and my personal experiences with being queer and mixed-class and a white woman in a broader context. I was suddenly like, "Okay, that sounds right!" ... I read bell hooks. I read Suzanne Pharr. I read Maria Mies and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. I read Marx, and Edward Said during — all during my freshman year. They built on things that felt true for me or challenged me in ways I'd really been seeking.

Amy also enrolled in African American Studies courses. In her second semester, she took a class called *Feminisms in an International Context*, a Marxist Feminist course. It was these courses (and the professors who taught them) that helped Amy continue to explore her political values.

This reinforcing and disrupting of early messaging is not a linear process and not always easy. Amy recounted stories of times when she thought she had 'it' all figured out, only to have professor call her out for deficiencies in her cultural knowledge.

> I was getting pushed in different places, for sure, including around some of my own blind spots. …[In one class] we were reading about race in the early 20th century, and I used the word *Negro* in a paper because that was how people were written about in the class material we read. I was mortified. My professor challenged me to be thoughtful about language and to begin looking at the limits of my own knowledge. So those types of experiences started to help push me around the fact there was just this whole set of things that, even though I considered myself very progressive, humbled me. I started to think, "There's a whole learning process here that you need to embrace and accept. And it's not always gonna be other people pointing it out for you. You have to do this work

> yourself. These are not things that you were taught; these are not things that you know already. You're gonna be learning, and you're gonna be embarrassed as you learn, but that is your job. It's your job to do that, and to get comfortable with the idea of being challenged."

Common Tendencies

Step up/step back. Amy's undergraduate thesis would eventually become her first book, *Revolutionary Voices: A Multicultural Queer Youth Anthology* (2000), a book that has been banned by conservative institutions in several locations in the United States. Amy shared the growth she went through while acting as editor and compiling and curating the pieces in the book. Amy's story about working on the book provides insight into the confusion and apprehension that sometimes occurs while white people navigate the decision of when to step up and when to step back, and how they go about negotiating their power and privilege, the amount of space they take up and how their agency affects the agency of others.

> I grappled a lot with my role and agency [as the book's editor], thinking that I wasn't the one in charge, that I was just a facilitator of a project, and really getting challenged by friends who pointed out that, as editor, you are exerting influence, authority and power. There's no way it's not actually gonna be your stamp on this. [The book will] be a representation of you and your strengths and also your limits and your privilege. So just do that with your eyes open and own it. I did some growing through that process. I was like, "Oh, no. Right!?" As an editor, you are the ultimate authority. It's a leadership role, right? So, then what does it mean to be a thoughtful leader? What does it mean to be a deliberately inclusive leader? And then what does it mean to then also take responsibility for the fact that as a leader you are still going to exert limits onto the project? That kind of stuff. So I think I learned that from that project. I went all the way through journalism school, right? Challenging my journalism school around the fact that I didn't believe that objectivity existed, but somehow it still didn't fully click for me. Theoretically, I got the idea that as a journalist you're still never neutral. … But years later, working on my own projects, I was still wrestling with what that really meant in terms of my own agency, and my own privilege, and my own leadership. I struggled with the idea that having privilege means you need to shrink back, or you need to exert less or pretend to be fair and neutral. Sometimes it is absolutely necessary to do so. And sometimes, responsible leadership also looks like saying, "I have something to offer and I can do that as an active, vocal

> ally." I guess there were other people asking me too. Don't shrink away from your agency. You have a book contract. Do it, but do it mindfully, and keep learning. So it was a real leadership development process among peers for me to work on that project.

Relationship building and accountability. Amy stressed the importance of relationship building and the making of life-long friendships as central to effective movement work. The friendships she made upon moving to the Bay Area in the late '90s and immediately plugging into social justice spaces are the same relationships that continue to sustain her in her work all these years later.

> Two weeks after I moved to San Francisco I was at the *Young, Loud and Proud* queer youth conference and I was in a workshop. There was one workshop around challenging white supremacy for white folks stuff. And there was another one on Mumia [Abu Jamal]. There was such a small group of people in each of the workshops that they merged them. So it became this big abolish the prison industrial complex, solidarity with political prisoners, multi-racial learning session. In that workshop I met several folks who would eventually become both friends and political inspiration. I felt like, "Wow. I made the right decision moving here." […] Soon after I saw a flyer in coffee shop for the *Challenging White Supremacy* workshop, which is the predecessor to the Catalyst Project and the Anne Braden Program. So I moved here in July and by September, I was in that program […] All of those sort of key political relationships for me unfolded as soon as I got here.

Amy believes white people today are being presented with problematic messages about accountability and allyship. Too much attention is given to ally as identity, and accountability has become convoluted and confused. White folks who are committed to racial justice, according to Amy, need to engage in the struggle for racial justice alongside and in relationship with people of color (and other white people). Being an ally is taking action and not assuming some pre-defined, static identity.

> So there's ally politics around what white folks who support racial justice are, and are supposed to be and do. And being an ally is important, and what that means is *Ally is a verb*. It's not something you say and sit around saying about yourself. It's not something you wait for someone else to designate you as. You do it regardless of whether or not anyone ever acknowledges you're doing it. You do it

> and you'll fuck up sometimes and get told you weren't actually being an ally in that moment, but you just do it. You do it and sometimes stick your foot in your mouth... But it's a verb. It's also not the only role for white folks in racial justice work, and it's not the only thing we need to be preparing and training young folks for who care about racial justice. I prefer the word accomplice, which is much more active. Still neither of those words gets at the fact that this is a lifelong commitment that we make. Neither of those words feels strong enough for what's really meant and required. Young white folks who care about racial justice don't just need to be trained to be allies. Taking leadership direction from and sometimes standing directly beside leaders of color, means occupying your own leadership as well. To be an accomplice is to be a leader who is moving in a trusted partnership with folks that you have deep relationships with that you cultivate over years.… Relationships deepen when people have struggled together; they worked together. Young activists need to develop both a sense of urgency and a deep integrity and patience.

There is not a set of rules to being accountable. Different people, different communities and different situations call for different approaches. Amy explained that she is constantly refiguring her own approach to being in relationship with and accountable to others in the midst of movement work.

> I think that's a hard set of things to explain or advise someone who's new to the work and I don't think I have it all worked out just because I've been doing it. In fact, in some ways, I feel I'm starting over all the time. So I don't know the answer to that question, but what I do know is that I show up, and that I don't just show up as an ally, I show up as my whole self, as somebody who's committed to the struggle over a lifetime. What that has looked like in the past is work in multiracial organizations. What it looks like most recently is solidarity work in support of Black Lives Matter [e.g. Amy helped run media for the shut down of the Oakland Police Department in 2015 and has been providing peripheral support for the Bay Area Solidarity Action Team]. So I plug in and I keep learning.

Jamie

Jamie is four years old and thrilled to be visiting his grandfather in Denver. His grandfather is a larger than life figure to Jamie, his hero. The two of them are driving through Denver in his grandfather's truck and Jamie looks out the window in awe of the city blurring by.

Jamie and his grandfather pass through a Black neighborhood and Jamie holds up his little hands looking at them curiously and thinking, "Wow, what's going on here? Why does everyone look so different from me?" Before Jamie can vocalize a question, his grandfather turns to him abruptly. "Jamie, this neighborhood is dangerous. Put your head down and don't pick it up until I tell you."

For a long time after Jamie was afraid of Black people, often waking from nightmares of Black men trying to break into his bedroom. Young Jamie had received the message loud and clear; Black and Brown people are 'other' and should be distrusted and feared.

Plugging In

Filling a gap: Plugging in where there is need. Jamie Utt plugs in by finding gaps that he can fill. Jamie is an educator, blogger, and speaker/trainer, and these days, a doctoral student. He travels to schools around the country, talking to youth (and sometimes adults) about issues of race and racism, bullying, sexual violence and other related issues. He writes prolifically about issues of social justice, and uses his outlet to amplify the voices of others engaged in racial, gender and social justice action.

One of the more pivotal experiences in Jamie's life, an experience that would lay the groundwork for him finding his personal connection to racial and gender justice work, was when he first attended a workshop by a man that would come to have a major influence on Jamie and the trajectory of his work. In high school Jamie was selected to participate in a leadership and service-learning program for students from around the country. While there, he participated in a workshop that addressed issues of racism and sexism. It had a deep impact on Jamie. The man who facilitated the workshop would become a mentor to Jamie, later inviting him to return at 18 years old and co-facilitate the

workshop. When his mentor passed away during Jamie's junior year of college, Jamie not only felt the loss deeply, but also felt the world had lost someone who was doing work that was desperately needed. When he died, shared Jamie, "that was a really big wake up call for me to start doing [that kind of work] more, and to see it as my responsibility with other white people."

After college, Jamie taught in a Chicago high school for several years but the work his mentor had left behind continued to call to him.

> […] I remember when he died I was like "That's one less person to call on white people like myself to think differently." And so I started doing [the workshop he had trained me to do] more because I felt like there was suddenly this gap in the world of this person that was really good at calling on white people in a loving way to think more critically about our identity. And so, I started doing that more, and that's when I was like, "I think I could probably do this for a living," and I transitioned into doing what I do now. And I really loved it and I really all along I was like, "Yeah, I'll probably go back to teaching, maybe next year." And then I just kept enjoying what I was doing. And I feel like it's more in my nature to be working at a bit more of a macro level, like working with a school as opposed to a classroom. That's something that I feel like is more my calling or my speed.

Jamie had identified issues of racism and sexism (among others) as problems he wanted to address. Jamie's personal connection to those issues was instilled in him by his mentor and deepened when his mentor passed away. His experience as a high school teacher made him realize that there was much work to be done in schools, with students and with teachers, but he came to understand that the classroom was not his outlet. He was an educator but was called to contribute to movement work in a different way. He decided to leave the classroom and pursue a career as an independent contractor and as a writer/blogger.

Finding his footing: Learning what outlets work. Plugging into movement work in this new way was not easy at first. Jamie had to work hard to find his way as

speaker/trainer/consultant. During the initial year of trying to do social justice work as an independent contractor, he stumbled through it all. “Like I said, I wasn’t [initially] trying to do it for a living, so it was weird,” shared Jamie. “I’d started blogging, just as a way to get some of my ideas out there, and it was a small blog that nobody read back then,” shared Jamie as he chuckled at the memory of his early writing. He stuck with it though, and he spoke further about feeling a calling to do this work.

> I really feel like my calling is, in that kind of work, is working with schools… I’ve worked with a lot of schools in like rural South Dakota, rural Washington, rural New York, schools that are not having conversations about race. And something about me feels trustworthy, and they allow me to come in. And I tried… I’ve created a series of lesson plans that schools can take advantage of after I leave; to try to make sure that it’s not a one-and-done thing.

Trojan horses and ‘colorblindness’. Jamie has learned that plugging in looks very different for each school he enters. Different schools and varying cultural geographies require different approaches. Sometimes schools want and are willing to have Jamie come in and explicitly identify and name the marginalization and oppression being propagated in the halls and classrooms. Other times Jamie has found that he needs to employ what he calls a “Trojan horse,” initially couching issues of institutional racism and sexism in a topic that is less polarizing, like *bullying*. To determine what approach he is going to take, Jamie first listens to members of a particular institution or community, about what it is they think is happening in their school or organization.

> I’ve tried to do a listening session with students to hear where they're at, and what they want. And spend time with them before I would ever do an assembly program, or something like that. And so, part of it is trying to hear where the school's at and where the students are at. And a lot of it […] because of the hackles that go up, when you come straight at the conversation about race… The question is, "Okay, so what can be our Trojan horse into race?" So in a lot of cases, we tell schools it's bullying. And then you can unpack why bullying looks the way it does. And then that opens the door into systemic racism.
> But then other schools... I got to work with a school in New York City, that the...

> It was a private school. […] It's a mostly white school, it's very rich, very elite and most of the students of color who are there, who are a small percentage, are on scholarship. It's so messed up. In order to have their scholarship, they had to clean their own lunchroom. And its like, "Come on, seriously?" None of the white students had to clean up after themselves. And so […] the students of color are the ones who asked me to come. And they specifically were like, "We need you to take off the gloves and come out and correct about whiteness and about race. […] "We're hoping that you can push the boundary out to here, so we have a little more room 'cause right now, we're like trapped right here, we need you to push the boundary out for us a little bit…"

Jamie spoke further about the need for a nuanced approach to working with different schools and named the performance of colorblind ideology as one of the key impediments to fruitful dialogue in certain schools.

> And so, it varies a ton to get to the question about how you [approach this work in a] "post-racial society." Regionally, it can even be really different. It's different in the South. When I work in Tennessee, it's just different because the students are talking. I honestly think it's easier to have these conversations in the South… White liberals in the northwest and the north and so on like to pretend that everything is terrible in the South, and it's so racist, but the kids are so much more nuanced a lot of times, in talking about race. Because it's out there and they're engaging it, and they're engaging it in really fucked up ways a lot of times, but at least they're engaging in it to where... It's just a totally different conversation in Tennessee or in Kentucky than it is in Washington state, or South Dakota, or California… It depends on where in California.

These days Jamie is clear about his role in movement work. He knows what his interests and talents are and he chooses his outlets accordingly. But Jamie also sees it as his responsibility to elevate the voices of other people and other social justice campaigns. This is particularly true when it comes to blogging. Jamie has thousands of readers through his own blog and his submissions to *Everyday Feminism*.

> I'm not an organizer, and I don't pretend to be, mainly because I just don't think I'm very good at it. I've countless times, in my activism and in my career, had to put my foot in my mouth because I'm just not very good at being an organizer. It's really hard. And I love and admire organizers and I'm like, "I love you." But I am not one and never will be. So it's more like being an engaged community member and trying to support and asking people like, "I know this is happening what do you need? I'm happy to use my platform to amplify or to distract or

> whatever you need," rather than leading and that sort of thing. I'm not good at that; it's not my role. So it's a lot of just trying to listen and show up when needed.

Initial Awareness (Race Cognizance)

Early messaging. Jamie grew up in Grand Junction, Colorado, a town he described as "incredibly conservative" and "a hotbed for white supremacist recruitment." His grandfather exposed him to overt racism from an early age, and he was also exposed to what he now understands to be "conservative colorblindness" by his parents. His family was wealthy, and Jamie attended elementary and middle school in private, Catholic institutions that were predominantly white. He attended a large public high school, which was far more diverse than his previous schools, and yet still very segregated, a phenomenon that escaped Jamie's attention for much of his time there.

> Despite being a more racially diverse high school, how segregated it was within the school and how tracked I was into classes where it was only with other white people except for like maybe a student here or there who wasn't white. When considering that it was 20% or 25% Latino to have next to zero classes with Latino people… And at the time, I didn't even notice. I didn't even think about it until probably I was a senior in high school and then I started waking up, so to speak, and looking around a little bit in my school and be like, "What's going on here? This is really weird. The only class that I have with anybody who isn't white is gym."

Jamie was exposed to overt racism from his grandfather, as we read in the story shared at the beginning of this section. But the racism in his community extended well past his grandfather. Some of what he knew to be true about the community in which he grew up has been reinforced through stories his father has shared.

> My dad is a physician and he does a lot of physicals for the Oil Fields that are around my hometown for the workers who come in and have to get their physical before they can start work. And he's like, "You'd be surprised at how many guys come in and they have to take off their shirt and they're covered in white supremacist tattoos in this town." So that just lays a little bit of the context of my

> environment. But my family was... They're conservative […] but we just never talked about race really.

For the most part, however, 'colorblindness' was the ideology to aspire to for many of the people Jamie knew growing up, including his own family. Any mention of race was conspicuously avoided in his home. Jamie shared a story from when he was in middle school as indicative of his family's performed colorblindness.

> [N]o one would talk about race in my circles and in my family we never talked about race and I actually have this really distinctive memory that's really strong of being in, probably in middle school, and getting a really clear message from my mom that we weren't suppose to talk about race because she was praising my sister for parroting sort of like a color blind, race-neutral ideology when her coach for cross-country... Or maybe it was soccer, I don't remember... was Black and there are very, very few Black people in Grand Junction. And so it would make sense that when you're trying to point out who your coach is, you would name their race and she went out of her way to avoid naming race. And I remember my mom would tell that story with pride like, "Look at how good of a job we did raising our kids not to see color" …And that story to me feels like a perfect description of my childhood. […] The reason I think it impacted me so much is that it felt so counterintuitive. You know what I mean? To be like… Why wouldn't you name when you're trying... Why are you going, "He's like kinda muscular, he's the one who's got some shorts on" …There's like 20 people who are muscular and have shorts on and you're avoiding saying that person's race. And I just remember that being such a clear communication about how I was supposed to act.

Reinforced through literature and academia. Jamie entered his first year of college eager to explore more about the social justice values that were instilled in him through the national youth program he attended in high school and by his mentor who had led the workshop that had made just a lasting impact on him. In college, Jamie would find out pretty quickly that it was not enough to simply declare oneself to be against injustice, but that as a white man he needed to tackle the self-work of exploring his unearned privilege and power, and the way he occupied space. He shared a little bit of this journey of self-discovery.

> I was fortunate to have some professors and other students who would call me on sort of like the paternalism that I was bringing to thinking about these issues and help me start thinking about asking the question, "What is your stake?" And then, I remember that question from a professor who was really strong like, "Don't tell me what you're doing for other people. What skin do you have in the game?" …was a huge question for me early on in college. It was the professor of a class that was called, *Human Nature and Social Change*. But it was sort of outside of the class. This professor took me under his wing probably 'cause he was like, "This kid is going to do a lot of damage if somebody doesn't help to like..." …I think that's part of it is he saw me being really vocal and out there but in a way that often happens when people of privilege immediately go into movements. And so he really called on me to think more critically.

There was another professor that also influenced Jamie's growth. She encouraged students that took her course to get their nose out of the books and see how the injustices they were learning about were all around them, in close proximity to their college campus.

> [She] really challenged me a lot to start thinking about in the context of the university, what my values were? And she would take us, she would be like, "Okay, so we're going to walk around campus and look at the opulence of this campus. And then we're gonna get in cars and we're gonna drive a mile and a half to this neighborhood that's being decimated by environmental pollution that's just right down the road. And low-income people who have... their rates of cancer and asthma are just through the roof because of the neighborhood." You know what I mean? She was that kind of person who was forcing us to confront, not in abstract ways but in very concrete ways. Yeah. So, that's one of the things that makes me wanna eventually teach teachers… is being able to call them in in those ways to think about race in not so… such abstract ways.

Common Tendencies

Relationship building and Accountability. Underlining the importance of relationship building and being accountable, Jamie shared a story from college about a time when he and a group of well-intentioned white students tried in earnest to engage in racial justice work, but did so without being in relationship with or consultation from student groups of color. It did not go well and the group subsequently caused emotional damage to the very communities they were trying to support.

> I remember learning about and hearing about racial caucusing […] and being like, "Wow, we as the white folks here could probably really benefit from some sort of that." So we just organized a white caucus without engaging the people of color on campus at all, and then people of color were like, "What the fuck?" You can't just do it without some level of accountability. And so then it got shut down and then it turned into a different organization […] It was good learning experience for me to be like, "Oh yeah, white people need to be in relationship. Not just doing our thing over here, by ourselves; we need to be held accountable."

Jamie recently moved to Tucson and left many friendships and community partnerships behind back in Minneapolis. He spoke briefly of strategies for connecting with people in his new community.

> I try really hard to listen and like network and so I'll just start asking, as I start to figure it out who is engaged I'll just be like, "Hey, can we get a coffee? I'd like to buy you a coffee and like hear what you're up to and see if I can support, and I'd love to…" And spend a lot of time like getting coffee with people and listening and trying to hear what's up. So yeah, and then I think that… And then obviously just showing up even when it's hard to show up, like the [protests against] Illegal Pete's, which is a burrito place here in town.

Step up/step back. A big part of Jamie's work is to go into schools and address issue of race, racism and racial justice. As a white man doing this work, Jamie links together the concepts of *accountability* and *stepping back* during instances when he feels it is not appropriate for him to occupy certain spaces or to accept certain speaking and consulting jobs.

> I think another one of the accountability things that I try really hard is to really hear what the school's like, what the community's like and what the need is, and recognizing when I'm not the best fit, and then referring to people who *are* a good fit.

He shared a story of a time when he found an offer to come speak as problematic and antithetical to what he is trying to accomplish.

> I wrote an article in the spring that went super-viral in *Everyday Feminism*, that was about Baltimore, and the shit that was going down in Baltimore, and I had a college that was like, "We really want you to come and talk about Baltimore," and I was like, "No, I'm not coming; did you even read the article? You kind of missed the point." So then I referred them to some local Baltimore activists. I

> don't know if they hired them, but I was like, "You shouldn't be bringing a white person to have this conversation. This is not a white person's conversation to have." So those kinds of things I have to really try to hear what they want.

Other times, the decision of whether to step up or step back is not as clear. Those instances often require him to not only research the job and to understand the circumstances the school that has invited him, but also to check himself internally, asking himself what his motivation is for taking the job.

> [T]here have been a couple of times where I've talked to schools… they wanted me for an assembly the week of MLK day, and I've only taken a few of them, because they were ones where I was like, "I don't actually want you to hire a Black person because that person's gonna walk into [a hostile situation]." …And maybe that's not my decision to make, but in the sense where I'm like, "Maybe I can lay a foundation..." […] I can lay a foundation in this school hopefully that will… maybe in time you can hire somebody where's it not gonna be like actively hostile to that Black person who speaks some truth during MLK week. You know what I mean? So that's a big part of that accountability for me, is trying really hard to check in with myself about, "Am I wanting to take this because of the money or am I wanting to take this 'cause I'm the right fit?"

Meghan

Fifteen-year-old Meghan is sitting around with her brother and sister in their home in Battle Creek Michigan when their mom comes into the room excited to let them know she has signed them up for a pow-wow that is taking place a few weeks later, and that the three of them will be taking a bus to get there. Meghan and her siblings are horrified at the idea. “You're not putting us on a bus to a pow-wow! What?! You're not coming with us? And what even is this?"

…Meghan and her siblings did not end up going to the pow-wow, having convinced their mom to take them off the list of attendees.

As is the case with many white families, race and ethnicity were not topics commonly discussed in Meghan’s home, surfacing only when the mainstream media called their attention to a major racially charged incident. The pow-wow idea was the symbolic effort of a well-intentioned mother who was trying to figure out how to bring culture and diversity into the segregated environment in which her children were being raised.

Plugging In

Plugging into the academy. Meghan Burke has found a home in the academy. She is a tenured faculty member, an author and mentor to many students on campus at Illinois Wesleyan University. For Meghan, plugging in means being a deeply engaged campus community member who entrenches herself in the work of racial justice in and out of the classroom. Much of her work is focused on educating white students and supporting them in recognizing their privilege, and in understanding racism and white supremacy. Her interest in whiteness and racism also transcends the boundaries of the campus through her authorship, having now written two books on related topics.

Meghan believes being a professor is an effective approach to educating minds and changing hearts because of the time she is able to spend with students in class and office hours over a sixteen week period. Illinois Wesleyan is a predominantly white institution and as is common with racial and social justice educators, Meghan receives a lot of pushback from her white students about the content in her courses, particularly

when readings and lectures name their complicity in racism. Meghan explained that having a whole semester with students affords her the time she needs to make breakthroughs with her students around issues of whiteness, power and privilege.

> I always say that I feel like I'm really lucky because there's a whole semester for it to soak in, whereas... And I try not to do too much of this, challenging someone on Facebook. Or like these committees I was talking about where they're like, "We need to educate the faculty about whatever." And so here's an hour workshop on a Thursday. Like, "How the hell do you do that?" Yeah, so, there is resistance. I think I really work hard at the very beginning of the semester to tell them that resistance is welcome… that we make space for resistance… that the goal of my classes is never to tell you the right thing to think, and especially, the right thing to say, 'cause color blindness, political correctness… same thing, doesn't really do much for us. […] To take an hour at a time, for three hours a week, for fifteen/sixteen weeks just to give pieces of the puzzle that can snap together in a way that helps them see 'cause I think a lot of the resistance we get […] It's like people think that they're being told if they occupy some form of privilege… That it doesn't mean that you're not a hard worker or a smart person.

Engaging Diversity: Introducing whiteness to white students. In addition to teaching, in 2010 Meghan helped start a special orientation program at Illinois Wesleyan for white students, that is one of the only of its kind in the country. The program, called Engaging Diversity, was created to introduce White identified students to issues of whiteness, power and privilege before they begin their four-year (or more) academic journey at the university. Engaging Diversity is a way for Meghan to pursue an outlet beyond the classroom, meeting and dialoguing with students before they ever attend a class. The value of the program is that it starts the conversation that Meghan hopes to have with students in her classes over the next four years. The program was the brainchild of Kira Banks, an African-American Psychology professor who Meghan had become friends with because they addressed similar issues in their work. Dr. Banks approached Meghan and said, “Hey, I want to do this weird thing. I just got tenure.” […] "Do you wanna help? You want in?" Meghan quickly agreed to help.

Meghan explained the impetus for starting an orientation program specifically for white students.

> It's all centered around this recognition that if we partake [in this work] on a predominantly white campus, if we wanna shift the culture to make it a better experience for students of color, we've got to work with the white students. And so there has, like on a lot of campuses, historically been pre-orientation program for MALANA students, that's how we lingo our domestic students of color. And one that doesn't have quite as long as a history, but is growing in its importance is a required pre-orientation program for international students. And so, she came to me and said, "Well, what if we made one for white students?" And so, we developed it together. We ran it together for a few years. She still came back up after she left the institution, and would do it with me sometimes. But the goal of that program is to, in just two-and-a-half very intensive days, do some work with incoming freshmen. And they do this even before the day one of freshman orientation to really get them to think about their position as a white person on this campus and figure out what it might look like for them to be an ally for racial and social justice. And for us, for me, that has to mean really critically interrogating white privilege, which most of them don't even know is a thing at that point 'cause our high schools do such a bad job with that generally. And also, building actively, some relationships across the color/culture line, so that the incoming international and MALANA students have some real connections as well.

Although she did not employ Jamie's term for it, Meghan explained that the use of a somewhat diluted name for the voluntary orientation program was done so as a kind of "Trojan horse."

> And of course, we have to call it "Engaging Diversity" 'cause recruiting for the program is always a challenge. Because once the door shuts, we'll lock them in the room, and we're gonna hit 'em over the head with white privilege. But it's like, that doesn't sound fun.

The program has proven to be effective. Meghan and a student did some assessment of the program and found that students who participated in Engaging Diversity revealed a decline in colorblind racial attitudes and an increase in in cognizance of white privilege. Meghan explained that they were not, of course, able to disaggregate the impact of the program from other "diversity" activities and course curricula, but that she believes that

the program plays a big role in those increases. Meghan shared the story of one student that stands out in her mind as emblematic of the positive outcomes of the program.

> And then, just anecdotally… we see a number of [the students who participate] go on to be actively involved around these issues on campus. […] There's this one person who comes to mind. She graduated last year. So she was in one of the very first groups we had. And she was crazy resistant the whole time. She came from a Polish family in Chicago, which is still a relatively segregated community up there… working class family… did not like hearing about this white privilege thing at all. And it's funny, I had thought of her as sorta one of the ones we didn't get, which happens. Whether it's in the classroom or these kinds of spaces, the success rate of 100%, however we wanna measure that, is not usually a thing. But around she comes again in her junior year, and she signs up for my Race and Ethnic Relations course. And she's like, "Oh, I'm interested in this because of Engaging Diversity." And I'm watching and thinking, "Okay." And then, she got super fired up and passionate about it and became one of our biggest advocates by the time she walked out the door. And so, it's tricky for people like her. How much can you really say the explanatory power is? …But they talk about it that way. […] And the students who go through it are really protective of the program; they're really big advocates. They start coming around right [around early January] wondering who I'm going to hire … So, I pay a few students to come back and serve as mentors, facilitators in the following year, [who come around asking me], "What are you going to do for Engaging Diversity?" They love it.

Initial Awareness (Race Cognizance)

Early messaging. Meghan grew up middle class in Battle Creek Michigan, which she describes as "not quite suburban, not quite rural, definitely not urban; just this little town." Although the town has increased in racial and ethnic diversity markedly since she was a child, it was a predominantly white city while Meghan was growing up there. She does not recall very many conversations about race taking place in her home.

> I can't recall a ton of conversations about race in either direction. I think it was like a lot of white families, didn't feel [it was] a big issue for us unless things were going on in the world and we would definitely talk about things going around in the world. [My mom] I think, was in some ways, this well-meaning, kinda sorta liberal, though they're both pretty moderate, sorta white lady. […] But race certainly never felt like a prominent thing for me growing up. I think like a lot of white people, I understood my race pretty neutrally, and it was invisible to me the ways that the race of my family and the race of my community and my school and

> of course, myself as an embodied person in that setting shaped my life in any way.

It would not be until college that Meghan began to think about issues of race and racism, and other issues of social justice.

Reinforced/disrupted through literature and academia. Meghan wanted to be a teacher for as long as she could remember. As a little girl, she 'played school' often, saving up her allowance to purchase a 'grading book,' something she finds funny and ironic now given that she abhors grading as a professor. Because she loved math, she entered college as a math major, intent on becoming a middle or high school math teacher. Issues of social justice were mostly off her radar at the time. But through conversations with new friends, Meghan was exposed to new information and it began to shift her interests.

> [S]ome of the friends I made [my first year in college]… [There] was one particularly influential roommate[.] She and I started to have a lot of conversations about social justice. And it was so funny. She and I still joke about this to this day, too, because I came in also… I strongly identified as a Republican and knowing nothing about Southern history, of course. I'm like, "Well, they freed the slaves." And I remember when I finally learned about how the parties kind of shifted roles back in the day, I was like, "What?

Meghan's relatively sheltered and segregated upbringing had shielded her from a lot of the country's history (and current events) of injustice. Through these new friendships and being exposed to new information in college, Meghan began her foray into campus activism.

> I really see myself as someone who marched along with these well-meaning principles, but was like so many people and certainly some of the students that I talk to today, really uninformed about the history and how all that worked. But getting into some social justice activism, first, kind of peaked me to sort of that... I think it touched that place in me that wanted good things for the world, but then, really started to kind of wake me up, and a big sort of shift came for me where I would be... I was actively involved in Students for Free Tibet, the USAS…

> Students Against Sweatshops Movement, and other kind of related things. So we'd have some organizing meeting at a coffee shop until 11 o'clock at night, and then, we'd be kind of packing up our bags, and my friends would be like, "Oh, I gotta go read Marx." Or, "Oh, I gotta go read about sexism and racism." And I'm like, "Oh, I have to go do proofs."

Meghan's increasing interest in issues of social justice was further solidified through coursework.

> I started taking a few sociology courses and was just hooked. That really, I think, it was the intellectual piece that that discipline eventually brought for me, which now I do professionally, kind of coupled with that growth in social justice work in college that really started to make it click for me. And a couple other things that kind of occurred to me to say about that is that I remember just being really pissed. Once I started to really learn about our history, particularly our history around racism in this country, I was like, "Why am I just now getting this as a junior or senior in college?" And frankly, I didn't get a quality race and ethnicity course until I was in graduate school. And so, it was like, "Well, why is this news to me now?" And it's only news to me now because I sort of stumbled into the social justice work, and then got into coursework where this was actually being explained to me. I remember being really upset that this isn't common knowledge.

It would not be until graduate school (Sociology) when Meghan began to learn explicitly about race and ethnicity in her coursework, and even then most professors centered their social theory analysis almost entirely in social class. She did have one professor, however, who taught a course about race and ethnicity and Meghan was invited to serve as a teaching assistant for her for a few different semesters. This was really the tipping point for Meghan around issues of race and racism and would eventually lead her to her dissertation topic about racial ambivalence in diverse communities, which would then become the basis for her first book.

> And so, I sat through that course a few times as her TA. It just keeps soaking in more and more, and that was happening kind of alongside some graduate level work that finally was talking about race in some more developed ways. […] I felt like once I really got the racial and equality piece, and then, of course, the centrality of how whiteness and white privilege fit into that. And then, started to really notice people around me and some of the blindness that remained, and remains within a lot of people still doing that work.

Common Tendencies

Step up/step back. Meghan spoke briefly about the process of stepping up, particularly for White people who are newer to racial justice work. She coaches her students around stepping up, and cautions that it will not always go well, that they will make mistakes and yet they should keep at it.

> It can be easy to have that first experience of stumbling, which I think we all do as white people when we're talking about race because most of us, myself included, don't come from environments where that is going on in meaningful ways all the time. And so, acknowledge that you're gonna be bad at it at first, and then, it'll be a while before you're good at it, and that you will always need development. I'm still talking to students about blind spots that I become aware of, and try to share that process with them 'cause I think sometimes, I'm 15, or by now 20 years older than a lot of them, and they see me as someone because I'm in a role to teach them, who gets it, and to acknowledge that you're never gonna have it all figured out. That it's always a work in progress, and that we're always gonna have our blind spots, and so, to stay with it, though, 'cause I think people start to experience that and they get so fearful about the labels or the pushback or potential shame in early that they give up and run away. So, don't give up and run away. Stay with it, which has to also mean staying vulnerable and being open to feedback, and having a space for people to push you on your blind spots.

Relationship building and accountability. Meghan believes that her ability to build strong relationships with students of color is partially a result of working on a small college campus where there are small numbers of people of color and very few people visibly engaging in racial justice work.

> One is that I think I'm lucky I'm in a small space because I usually develop real relationships with the students of color. Not all of them. But particularly, the ones for whom race is really salient for them, who hang out in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and have made that a home for themselves on campus. I almost always know the students of color and they know me. There's classroom experiences I have with them. There's activist experiences that I have with them. They're on some of these same committees that I serve on, and we develop kind of a mentoring and a friendly relationship. They'll come by to tell me about their new boyfriend. So it's a comfortable relationship and I think that helps, at least in terms of trust building. Same thing with colleagues; I have so few colleagues of color that certainly, I know and work with those for whom this is an important issue, which, again, is not all of them, but for the ones that are, we're working just

> as actively in comparable sorts of ways. And I think that makes it easier than it would in an environment that was just bigger and more… I almost want to say more intense, but the smaller spaces can be more intense because that's where you can really drill down.

With regard to relationship building and accountability, Meghan recalled some of her early involvement in social justice action while in college. As previously mentioned, much of Meghan's early activism was around issues such as the anti-sweatshop movement. She and a group of other white students were organizing passionately around this issue but they did so without the necessary concurrent self-work of examining their whiteness, power and privilege, and taking stock on how they were showing up in certain spaces.

> But if I looked back on where I was at that place at that time, I recall USAS meetings, the sweatshop meetings, where we'd be like, "Well, why aren't the Black kids coming our meetings? Don't they know that this is about them? That it's people of color that are doing this low-wage work, and why aren't they here? Meanwhile, we weren't at all interrogating our own whiteness, and we weren't showing up in their spaces and as allies for them. And so there was a ton of growth that had to take place. So yeah that was kind of the first real different organizing experience that I had or move-in building. I wasn't doing that much campaign organizing then, I was just kind of learning what was a bunch of stuff.

Meghan uses stories like this one to remind herself about the importance of building authentic relationships and being accountable to communities of color while doing this work, and also as parables to students she teaches and mentors.

Caitlin

Caitlin, twenty-one years old and just out of college, drove her beat up Saturn from Ohio to Tennessee, a state she had never before visited. Everything she owns was with her in the car. It is a confusing time for Caitlin. She is pissed off about what is going on in her life and in the world, and having a difficult time making sense of it all. Caitlin arrives at what will be her home for the next three months, the Highlander Center.

The Highlander Center is hallowed ground for organizing and movement work in the United States. Rosa Parks received training there ahead of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was founded there. It served as the principal education program for Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Caitlin has brought with her a passion for organizing and social justice, but also her confusion and frustration. She is in need of guidance. Suzanne Pharr is a long-time organizer, white anti-racist activist and political strategist on issues of social and economic justice, *and* the first woman and openly queer Director of the Highlander Center. She sits with Caitlin and asks her how far she is willing to take this work… inviting her to take the plunge and delve in deeply to a life of movement work.

That moment, and Suzanne's (and others) mentorship helped Caitlin begin to think about the possibilities for confronting systemic harm through organizing. She had come to Highlander for a three-month internship. She left three years later, having been hired as a staff member, assisting the youth organizing program and eventually running their intern program.

Plugging In

Caitlin Breedlove is a seasoned organizer who sees opportunities for plugging in all around her (all around us). She describes these opportunities as "origin points" or "lanterns of work," that are shining markers calling us to do the work that utilizes our personal connections and instincts.

> It's actually as simple as looking around and finding out what and sometimes who is inspiring you. What's really like you feel like... Really you see as origin points for powerful organizing and then figuring out how you can support that work. And I think there's... We're living in a time where some of that work is happening everywhere and I think [it's about] going towards that, those kind of lanterns of work, figuring out how you can support it and then being willing to not have it be about you. Have it be about what needs to get done, being willing to go and listen. I would challenge even to put chronology on that. I wanna go to these meetings, take notes, bring food, help out, do child care, do whatever needs to get done first.

> I'm gonna tell myself for six months "I'm gonna do that, just gonna do that, I'm gonna see, I'm gonna see if any relationships develop. I'm gonna see if I feel like I can be of use." And I think one of the other SONG founders, she said to me, I was laughing with her the other week, she said this to me every week for five years, she would always say "Where there's a need fill it. Where there's a need fill it. Where there's a need fill it." It was just the simplest thing and I was always like "I know Mandy, you told me" And now I think about that all the time, it's so simple but it's so true.

As Caitlin mentions above, once lanterns of work have been identified, the next step is listening to better understand what is needed and then (or simultaneously) filling in at the source of that need. This notion of plugging in is applicable to both individuals and organizations. Caitlin shared an example of this with regards to Southerners On New Ground (SONG), an organization of which she was part for many years.

Listening to learn—taking action to fill a need. SONG, which was founded by a multiracial group (three Black and three white) of six queer women (including Suzanne Pharr), is an intersectional organization that puts LGBTQ rights at the center of that work, but works on campaigns against a variety of issues of injustice. Leadership at the Highlander Center, along with these founders of SONG had taken an active interest in mentoring Caitlin and Paulina Helm-Hernandez, another young member of the Highlander Center staff. Together, Paulina and Caitlin left Highlander and transitioned into work with SONG. They spent a lot of their time continuing to work with Suzanne Pharr and with Black elders from around the South, who Caitlin described as being "incredibly generous with us every step of the way."

> A lot of those relationships we started building and this was also post-Katrina so we spent a lot of time in the delta right after Katrina hit. Not just in New Orleans, but in Mississippi and Alabama, Mobile. I mean we just kinda were around. We spent a lot of time just on the road. Yeah, so when we left Highlander we went to SONG. And SONG at the time was trying to figure out to continue to exist or not, sort of influx, like, "Are we still needed?" So we came on to do a 100-person listening campaign to just talk to LGBTQ folks across race about if SONG still

> needed to exist. Which seemed like a really... In retrospect, I still think that was a good idea. I wish more organizations would do that. You know, at the time we were like, "Ooh" but it felt like the right plant. And people resoundingly said, "Yes. We need SONG and we need SONG for a really specific purpose." And the question we were asking at that time is, post-Katrina, what would people have wanted in place in the South the day before Katrina hit. And people said, "A stronger set of intersectional organizers across race, across sexuality, across class, in the South, connected to each other." Somehow they put the number 125 on it. So we thought, "Well, we have no idea how to do that, but the people we respect most are asking us to do it. So I guess we'll go try to figure it out!" And we had very little resources. […] So we went and found the money and we started a traveling little, tiny organizing school. Just intro to organizing, we started training up LGBT people across race and class, and cross-gender too. And that was kind of how SONG hit its restart button. So we reached that 125 and I think today SONG has 4,000 core members, 130,000-person list and it's a much bigger organization than it was.

SONG, as an organization, had followed the *lanterns of light* throughout the South, in a time of great urgency (just after Hurricane Katrina), leading them to people who told them what was most needed, the outlets that they believed SONG should plug into, and the needs that required attention. This was listening as action and then taking action based on what they had learned.

> That's how we started (traveling around to do trainings) and then we sort of realized it wasn't exactly an organizing school. It was kind of like an intro to community building, what is organizing, little school. And so we learned as we grew, but eventually to make a very long story short, we realized that we needed to be doing more than just only training or political education, so that's when we started flanking campaigns. Local and state primarily and working in coalitions and alliances.

The organization would go onto flank campaigns led by #Not1More, an immigrant rights group, and later, Black Lives Matter.

Initial Awareness (Race Cognizance)

Early messaging. Caitlin's initial awareness about race, racism and issues of social justice came early and often. Caitlin's father comes from a white working class family, a family of men who built and worked on the railroads. Her mother is an

immigrant from Central Europe, born to Polish and German parents. Theirs was a home that included Caitlin, her parents, her grandfather (who was from Poland), her sister and brother (her brother was adopted and is ethnic Tibetan), her cousins, and off and on, her Aunt when she was home from sailing expeditions. There was a rule in Caitlin's home that the family had to eat dinner together every night. Caitlin's descriptions of her family provide some colorful insight into her childhood and what those dinner table conversations may have looked like.

> My mom was a staunch, sort of anti-armchair liberal. She basically said, "You're no good to me if you're gonna end up an armchair liberal." I don't know how much you know about politics of Eastern Europe in particular but it's very, very different political kind of expectations from politicized families, from that part of the world. Yeah, very intense but it's that kind of... "This is what you... This is what I wanna see. This is the kind of work I wanna see, around race and class." […] So the thing I would say about my mom is that she prizes that politic, that level of humility of that politic above all else, right? Is that you actually... You get in there with people. You're not just so quick to judge and have an opinion about what other people do, and what other people are choosing.
>
> My dad is no fading flower. He's very political in his own ways. […] My dad weighed in on things. My dad was doing disability rights, advocacy, and activism at the time. And so he also had a vibrant kind of work life outside of the house, and [my mom]… He really let her kind of run the political education and the kind of the raising part of us, though he was very involved with us.
>
> My grandfather came out of total poverty. Polish white guy; was a mercenary in the US Army to get papers and money. Big army tattoo… [wears a] wife beater twenty-four/seven. He lived with us most of the time I was growing up. Very conservative, very anti-gay… and a completely transformative crucial force in my life. Because he's taught me everything about class. He could read and write… he could read the paper, he couldn't write very much. He could add and subtract. He loved to play the Lotto. But like in terms of any education beyond, formal education beyond that, he completely had none.
> […] My grandfather was very, very quiet. So he had his political line, but he also was very... He just had a very generous loving side and he was... Even though she was very left of him, he was extremely proud [my mom]. To him it blew him away that his daughter was a lawyer. That was just... That she went to high school… that she went to college… that she went to law school. None of those, not even high school, was something in his sort of purview.

> My ‘baby auntie,’ so my mom's youngest sister who was eighteen when I was born, lived with us most of my whole life. And her boyfriend, different boyfriends, particularly one lived with us, sometimes in and out. And she was fantastic. She is fantastic. She was a sailor by trade, so she would go on these long sailing trips, and she dabbled some in community organizing. She never was that interested, but she's great at it… great at it. So she used to do these like... She did this one project that I absolutely loved where folks with developmental disabilities in the community, she would help organize to help them be integrated socially. […] So the one of my favorite projects that she worked with this young guy named Dave, and all he wanted to do was ice fishing. Ice fishing is a huge thing in Madison among working class men, white and Black, and some of the folks who are among […] She spent the winter helping to integrate Dave into the ice fishing community at this one lake in Madison, and it was totally successful. The dude's an ice fisher to this day.

The diversity of culture and ideology that could be found in Caitlin’s home was in and of itself, a rich and colorful education about the world. However, the outside perception of her family by some was quite different. Caitlin recalls her neighbors’ not so friendly treatment of her family.

> [W]e're that family who are living in a two or three bedroom house, and there were seven of us. And the neighbors had more money than us, and I remember them saying to my mom, "How many kids do you have? How many people live there? Why are all these cars in the yard?"

Meanwhile, inside their home, Caitlin’s family were growing and learning together, and Caitlin was receiving an upbringing that would provide her with a much deeper analysis of race and class than that of her neighbors, an analysis that she has carried with her into her organizing work.

> And so, when I think about working with white people, and I think about race, it's very deeply informed […] it's very deeply informed by “which white people are we talking about? Why, how, for who?” And by a class analysis, where my brother was a young man of color, I was trying to come out as gay but mostly just hooking up with other young women and not talking about it. 'Cause I had some trials going on. My brother was in and out of gang affiliation. My sister was little. My grandfather was sitting at the table being like, "Let's talk about Fox News." My parents where trying to figure it out, my cousins where in and out. And we just had a flow of people in and out of our house and in and out of our lives that were going through a lot of different stuff.

Caitlin reflected quite a bit in our dialogue, about what she learned growing up in her home, from her mom, and from being part of such a diverse household. The lessons and politics profoundly shaped her politics and approach to movement work.

> When I look back on it, did I think about, "Oh, there were a lot of people of color and a lot of poor people and a lot of people with disabilities in our lives"? No, I didn't think about it. It didn't feel curated I guess is what I'm trying to say. It didn't feel curated, it felt like, that was just what the deal was. So here I was in a mostly white household with very specific instructions to lie to the police if they came to the door. To never let the police in our house. You know what I mean? Like that was sort of the political education. My mom, she was a lot more do than talk. So that was... When I think about for example how that plays into my organizing life I think, I don't feel any dissonance with like lying to the police or... I don't feel uncomfortable with those kinds of confrontations. And I think that has everything to do with ethnicity, and class, and proximity to violence. And also probably just who she was and how she ran that household.

I asked Caitlin to explain a little more, about why her mother taught her children to distrust to the police and be suspicious of the law. “Was it only because of her brother being undocumented?” I asked; “or was there more to it than that?”

> It was mostly her being protective of him. But also, any of his friends… anyone that was in the house particularly, young men of color. She just very early on had an analysis, way before it was common, or way before your average kind of spiritual or religious or political white folks were taking that line that the police didn't see any preciousness of life for a young man of color, and so that, therefore they were not allowed in our house because... It's interesting she never said this, but I think this is how I would... We couldn't always change what was happening outside of our house, but we could change what was happening in there. Even if that meant, not doing what was "legal". She was just fundamentally very suspicious, which is interesting as somebody who was a public defender and had worked very hard. Nobody was putting her through law school. When I was little she was a secretary in this horrible room-less [place], a law filing clerk kind of secretary. So she didn't love the law. What she loved was making interventions. […]But I the interesting thing…was that it was like, you make an intervention where you can; you don't have an opinion… your opinion's not very relevant if you're not doing something. So I think she felt like she wanted to create a lawless but politicized home space so that we had an understanding of how deeply unimportant adhering to some of that was compared to doing what was right.

Reinforced through academia and literature. The academic reinforcement of early messaging was not so much academic as it was applied learning. Caitlin attended Antioch College in Ohio, a work-study college that places students in practicum that exposes them to organizing work. She described some of experiences while enrolled at Antioch.

> So I did a variety of different things during that time, and I got to just like be part of different groups. So I was doing some community work with folks who had incarcerated family members. At the time, my brother was also incarcerated here in the States. And we had limited connection to some of what the experiences of other folks, particularly folks of color experiencing that, but I got involved in Madison with some of that work, working alongside older women of color that knew what they were doing a lot more. Where else did I go? I went to North Carolina and did campaign finance reform organizing with rural white and Black communities primarily, just getting a taste of it working as an intern. […] I did some work around, research around, disproportionate minority confinement, anti-sexual assault stuff, and then I eventually ended up at the Highlander Center.

Common Tendencies

Anchoring in cultural heritage. As previously mentioned, Caitlin's mom, an immigrant from Eastern Europe (who has lived in the United States since the 1960s), heavily influenced her political views. But Caitlin would have an opportunity in the latter years of her youth to have a closer look at the political landscape from whence her mom came.

> I spent my childhood in Madison and then my adolescence in Eastern Europe, primarily in Prague and that was during a time that that place was changing a lot and for most Eastern European people, our sense of the time we're living in is very different than what you kind of find with the way that white folks are thinking about, what their moment is in movement life cycle. That was the mid '90's so socialism had only ended in '89. It was the Velvet Revolution. '93 Czechoslovakia became Czech and Slovak Republic. So that was a very politicizing time to be living there. So, that shaped me a lot and then when I was eighteen, I came back to the States. It was a hard call in a lot of ways, having to make that choice. It's not one I regret, but I do think my work would have looked really different if I would have stayed because the politicizing forces were very different. Eastern Europe is, if you take half a continent… and it's working-class

> white people. So the conversation of working-class white people looks pretty different in that kind of sphere.

While in Europe Caitlin had the opportunity to get in touch with her roots, while also engaging in political practices that differed from the way movement work is done in the United States.

> And then I also got involved with the Quakers. So some of my family was in Germany, and then the folks on the Polish border, and then I also applied to be an exchange student 'cause I wanted to be in Prague more essentially. So I stayed with a family, just like traditional exchange student, but was back and forth with my cousins and they came there and et cetera. So, it was an interesting time 'cause I got to know people that weren't my blood family, I got to know my family better, and I got a little bit involved in the kind of very basic high school education work they were trying to do around anti-racism through the Quakers in Prague, which was so completely different than a lot of how that work goes here. Because even in student bodies, people were incredibly opposed… there's just not the same kind of liberal rhetoric around race.

Step up/step back. Caitlin's acumen around knowing when to step up and when to step back is well thought out. Her philosophies around this are engrained in her organizing principles. She spoke a lot about stepping back in really nuanced and intentional ways. For Caitlin, the notion of step up/step back is not simply about white people being mindful of the space they occupy (which is definitely part of it), but more than that it's about knowing which of the two (*step up* or *step back*) is the most effective (and appropriate) strategy in any given moment. She spoke at some length about her strategies for mentoring eager young organizers on this topic, while running the internship program at the Highlander Center.

> When we were at Highlander one of the things I used to do with the interns that they would hate was that, they were all coming out of these liberal arts colleges and so what they'd done was… their muscle for critique was very strong, but their problem solving was really not very strong at all and so I would do this thing they hated where I would ask them not to talk in the organizer meetings until they had suggestions. So they could say something critical but to had to bring a suggestion. And sometimes they wouldn't talk for three weeks because they didn't have

> anything to say except to pick things apart and then they'd be really pissed at me. But some of them became excellent organizers because not only... Of course what happened was that these organizers would come back from Mississippi or Alabama, they'd be exhausted and they'd tell their story and the newbie would say, "I'm wondering about this… it seems like a gap; my idea is this." And then the organizers would say, "Well that idea's shit and would take it apart" and the person would go back and have to think some more… or would say, "That's an interesting idea, why don't you come with me and we'll go try that out. You think that's such a good idea, let's go give it a whirl." And so the dialectic process, to be a total nerd, was very shifted because the input output was different between the parties and that was what we did. A lot of our white organizers who are excellent now, they just stayed in the game. They just were like, "What do y'all need me to do? Okay, Someone needs me to do this, okay, let's try it out. Shit, that fell apart." Well staying in was seen as important.

Caitlin, herself, received mentorship around stepping up/stepping back. She recalls advice she was given by Suzanne Pharr.

> O]ne of the things Suzanne Pharr used to say to me all the time is, "Smart white girls in the South are a dime a dozen. You can find a white girl who went to college with an opinion. Don't be that person. Be helpful. Do something else." And literally I would go to churches for months I would sweep, I would put up chairs, I would help cook the food, I would put the food away, and I would just listen. I would just get a lot from listening. And I think this over-emphasis on validation and being accepted means that a lot of white people, the first thing they lead with is, "I need to show you how smart I am. I need to ask the right question I tell you." And actually I think that we need to explode this. So many white younger people wrestle, especially with class privilege, against the idea that maybe we should shut up a little bit and just do some stuff and listen some more. And question, pontificate, and interrogate it later.

A few years ago Caitlin was heavily involved with #Not1More, a campaign for undocumented immigrant rights. The campaign found her working to support immigrants in exercising their right to stay in the country they call home. She worked daily alongside folks united in the struggle for immigrant rights, and yet Caitlin rarely publicly mentioned that her mother was an immigrant, and that her brother, who is Tibetan and was adopted by her parents, is undocumented. Not speaking publicly about this despite the obvious relevancy to her work with #Not1More was intentional; it was a form of

stepping back, at least vocally. It was a way of de-centering her narrative, the narrative of a white woman, even if that narrative was intertwined with the narrative of immigrant family members.

> I've made a political decision that I very rarely ever talk about my own connection because of the way that so often in immigrant rights work, from what I understand, it's like, if you have a white person who… Just like the tendency to prioritize the white spokespeople, particularly because I've been one of the only people involved with #Not1More who's white, who also wasn't an immigrant.

It is not that Caitlin's family (her brother specifically) was not a factor in wanting to immerse herself in undocumented immigrant rights work. On the contrary, she shared one story about her brother that she believes had a lot to do with why she was drawn to #Not1More.

> Maybe four or five years ago, [my brother] was picked up again. I'm trying to remember the series of events 'cause sometimes he had different warrants or issues with his PO or whatever. But he ended up in an ICE detention tank in rural Minnesota. And my sister was a newly minted lawyer. She's now a public defender just like my mom… my little sister. […] So here she is just out of law school. She's in debt, and my parents [were out of the country for a couple of months (which meant their mom, who had successfully gotten him released from detainment, was not able to help this time)]. And my sister and I were like, "We're gonna figure out a way to get him out of there." And we had no idea how to do it. I mean… we just would be on the phone every night like, "What do we do? How do we do this?" And we hit this point where, we had exhausted every legal and organizing option we could think of. This was before I ran into the Not 1 More. […] It was like auspiciously right before. It was like a year before I made contact with them. I had no idea they existed. I didn't know anything really. We didn't have any resources to help us. And we hit this point where we had no idea what to do. And we just said, "Well, we can't give up." So we have no idea what the next step is. We're just gonna walk into any next step we could find. So anyway, long legal story short, after that kind of leap of faith, we ended up finding a way, like some bizarre loophole with a different attorney. We ended up being able to get him out after he spent six months in there.

Gong through that experience had a profound impact on Caitlin and she quietly carried that experience with her when she joined #Not1More a couple of years later. But despite her very intimate connection to the struggle of undocumented immigrants, to the story of

her own brother, Caitlin was resolved not to let her identity as a white, citizen, family member of someone who is undocumented to become the story. Caitlin believes that race and racism are what influences the criminalization of immigrants and it was important to her to step back from being the focal point of the narrative about the struggle of undocumented immigrants.

> But the private truth was that one of the reasons I got so involved with #Not1More personally was because I knew that if I had met them when I was going through that, they would have helped me. And there was no other movement, for us; there was no one else that I was working with that would have been willing the way that they were willing. So, to watch, to watch that play out... Yeah it was very personal. It is very personal for me. But I don't talk that much about that publicly because I think that... I think so much of what's happening around the criminalization of immigrants is just so squarely about race. And I think that it's actually a misnomer. You know my mom had questionable documentation status. At times it was like no one knew where her birth certificate was, or her passport, she wasn't born here, but because of her whiteness it just didn't matter. So I've always wanted, in everything that I've done that's been around deportation and detention, I've always wanted to play a background role. I don't always believe that's the right role for white folks, but in that, I think the tendency's just too much to be like the lowly white voice who's like, "You know my Mom was undocumented too." You know, it's just like; I think it's strategically the wrong play. I think we need to keep it focused on, race and class.

Caitlin shared a story about her what might well be her biggest step back moment, one of those occasions when stepping back is actually stepping up. Caitlin worked as Co-Director (along with a woman of color who she has worked and been friends with for many years) for Southerners on New Ground (SONG) for almost a decade. SONG is a queer liberation organization that is made up of people of color, immigrants, undocumented people, people with disabilities, working class, rural and small town LGBTQ people in the South. For many years, the organization was about 50 percent white and 50 percent people of color. More recently the organization has grown its Latino base and Black folks are in the majority. Caitlin believes this shift in demographics of the

organization is important because it is indicative of the shift she believes is happening (and needs to keep happening) in the movement for queer liberation. Feeling this shift, Caitlin began to recognize the need for making changes in the organization but was not sure how exactly that needed to look. She wanted to do some soul searching and so she took a sabbatical to think things through. She shared what transpired next, a very personal story about the decision to step back.

> SONG is a political organization, but it's also very much a cultural and spiritual one. And so, I think Paulina and I sensed… We hit year nine of our co-directorship, and we talked about "Where are we going? What's happening? What's happening in the movement? What's happening in SONG? And then she and I both took sabbaticals, and so she went on a sabbatical the first part of last year, January to March, and it was very challenging. When Paulina came back, I went on sabbatical and I thought, I'm gonna know. I'm gonna know what I need to do. I'm gonna know what needs to happen, in my heart." And I didn't know. It was three months, and it was two months, and then I had two weeks left, still didn't know. I was [here in Phoenix] spending time with [my partner] and I drove cross-country twice by myself. I drove on the way out here, I drove there, and I stopped in New Orleans, and took counsel with a lot of people that I love there, and then on the way back. So, I'm coming back. I still don't know. Then I'm going through Texas; I don't know. And I get to Atlanta, and I have six hours left of my sabbatical, I still don't know. And I'm sitting around drinking a beer, and Malachi Garza […] is sitting there and he's like, "What are you thinking?" How's the sabbatical going?" I'm literally saying to him "I don't know." And Mary, our organizer walks in, and she sits down, she cracks open a beer, and she starts telling me everything about the Cleveland convening, the movement for Black lives, cause she took lead for us on that for SONG. She's telling us everything she learned and she's saying, "I would like it if you would look at my notes and see where you think some of this is going." And I just looked at her face and I had literally 15 minutes left on my sabbatical, and I was like, "I know she needs to be the new co-director of SONG. She needs to take my place." So it was very much a spiritual story, to tell you the moral. It was more a spiritual moment where I felt it was just clear. It was just something when she sat down that I just knew. So that was very, it was very interesting. It was very interesting. The next morning I was having breakfast with Paulina, and I said to her, "I think this is what needs to happen." And she burst into tears, and I said to her, "You're crying 'cause you know I'm right."

Caitlin had made up her mind that SONG needed new leadership that represented and could nurture this shift that had been taking place in the organization and the movement

for queer liberation. Mary, the new Co-Director of SONG, a working poor, Black woman and mother of a young child had worked tirelessly from the time she had been recruited into the organization several years earlier. Caitlin saw her as the perfect choice and as soon as she made her decision, she knew it was the right one. There were, however, some questions about Caitlin's decision. Caitlin was well liked and she was a known entity to the organization, having worked as its co-leader for so long. Caitlin addressed these questions returning to this idea that the movement was shifting and SONG needed to transition with it, and that not only was Mary the right person for the Co-Directorship, but she was well prepared to be successful in that position. The transition required a lot of soul searching and a lot of preparation work, but Caitlin was committed to stepping back, knowing the time was right.

> [Mary had] accelerated in a way that, I think, that she is able to take on the role and not be set up to fail, which is, I think, the other thing that people often do to working class and working poor women of color, is say, "Oh, sure, yeah. I'm ready to transition. It's gonna make me look really good if you're in a job. But I'm not gonna do everything it's gonna take to transfer the skills that you need, and give you the support you need to succeed." So we've spent a lot of energy on the racial dynamics of this transition. It's been one of the most transformative experiences around race that I've ever had, and a lot of people said, "Well, didn't you have… I mean… you've been organizing as a white woman in Southern communities, primarily communities of color, for your whole adult life. You spent years at Highlander. Why is this different?" And I think it's partially cause this moment is different, and I think it's requiring different things of us as white folks.

Caitlin finished telling the story by explaining what she meant when she said "this moment is different."

> I understood enough to understand what it would mean for our growing Black constituency to see Mary be the one, that she came out of the ranks, that she is one of the bravest people who comes out of poverty that I see in movement right now. And I actually think she doesn't have enough profile and there's a reason for that, because I think the media still doesn't know how to deal with people who refuse class ascension and class closeting. I mean… she is a person who was

> raised in foster care, came out of welfare, and unapologetically sort of against respectability politics. And so, those folks don't play that well [in the mainstream media]. They play really, really well right now in terms of, I think, inside of Black Lives Matter movement. People have a great deal of respect for Mary, but the media wants to pay attention to who's the glossiest, right? I think this particular decision I've made which is still very fresh, I think will continue to raise a lot of questions about why that move? Why when there's all these other things that need to be done and people very much are like, "The LGBTQ stuff's not done" And it's not but I think it's the intersectional parts of it that are gonna be central.

Relationship building and accountability. Stories about the importance of building relationships and coalitions, and being accountable to people you work with and the communities you serve, are riddled throughout the transcript of my dialogue with Caitlin. We have seen how she forges coalitions, learns from constituents about the work they want to see and her wherewithal to step back in the name of accountability. To put a quiet exclamation mark on her experiences with this pattern, I would like to call readers attention back to when Caitlin was first getting started at the Highlander Center. Not only were those first months and years in Tennessee key in her development as an effective organizer, but also the time during which she formed friendships with, and was mentored by those who would she would organize side by side with in movement work to this day. It is a good example of the importance laying a foundation rooted in strong life-long relationships on which one can begin to establish or pursue outlets for plugging in.

> I came in working in the youth program and the person who was directing the youth program at the time had been involved with Highlander from the time she was 16. Paulina Helm-Hernandez, who later became the co-director of SONG with me. So that was always the joke, that I came in as her intern and we started a work marriage of sorts that has lasted a long time at this point. So we were very, very young and we were kind of… Suzanne put us together which in some ways, in many ways was one of the most, biggest gifts she gave me 'cause we were kind of figuring it out together. So that was interesting. She was primary, the people who were the six founders of SONG were all involved in our lives in some way in the early years and still to this day and they were. SONG is sometimes misunderstood as primarily an LGBTQ organization. It's actually an intersectional organization that chose to work in its latter years with an LGBTQ

constituency. But the six women that founded it, three Black and three white, were all out lesbians, were all very involved primarily in racial and economic justice as out lesbians. So that's Suzanne Pharr, Pam McMichael, Mab Segrest, are the three white folks. Pam McMichael is still the Director of Highlander. So the three of them and then Joan Garner, who's now the County Commisioner of Atlanta. Mandy Carter, who is synonymous with building Black lesbian visible presence in the south. She was one of the 1000 women that won the Nobel Peace Prize. And then Pat Hussain, who's still really involved in SONG, African-American, lives in Atlanta. So all six of them came together to start SONG. So the reason that relates is because they were all around kind of when we were coming up, to different degrees. And we knew them and we knew about their work and a lot of what it was essential in that period was just getting to sit in a room with people.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS OF THE DATA AND IMPLICATIONS

A Problem, a Purpose and a Pilgrimage

To begin this final chapter I return to the two quotes that ushered readers into the beginning of the study. The first quote is from Ariel, something he shares with audience members at the beginning of his play, *Amnesia.*

> "Research itself, is a pilgrimage."

I was inspired by this idea when I heard Ariel share it at the beginning of his performance. But now that I have undergone a research process of my own I understand, soulfully, what he meant. Perhaps I knew all along—from the time I selected my topic—that this was as much a personal journey (in search of Self) as it was an educative study. I have learned a great deal during the research process, about myself and about the topic. I am inspired by the work of the participants in this study and I am honored to share with others what I have learned from them.

The second quote is from Amy, who, as we learned in her section, approaches plugging into racial justice from the standpoint of storytelling.

> "I believe that information is political and I believe that the ability to shape the stories that are told about us, about our present reality, about the future that we want and about our past, are political."

Amy's quote serves as a response to the *problem* I posed in the study's introduction, and underscores the *purpose* of sharing stories about white people around the country who are engaging in racial justice action. Although the field of critical whiteness studies has grown rapidly over the past couple of decades, there are still relatively few studies about white people who are significantly engaged in racial justice action. This leaves white

people who may be trying to find their way in movement work—those who are trying to find their outlet for "plugging in"—without positive examples of what that looks like for white folks.

Information *is* political and we need to combat and (re)shape the stories that are told to us about what it means to be white. White people are taught that their (our) existence is normative and that everyone else is 'other.' They are taught to fear or look down upon people who are not white. And they are taught to perform colorblindness as if racism is a relic of a troubled past and not an oppressive system that functions today. Storytelling is one way of disrupting this messaging.

The stories in this study fill a crucial gap in critical whiteness studies literature. The segment of that literature that focuses specifically on the activism or movement work (as opposed to privilege, identity development theory, etc.) of white people is relatively sparse. Additionally, although a small portion of that literature *does* focus on the everyday work of white racial justice action/activism (O'Brien, 2001; Thompson, 2001; Murray, 2008; Warren, 2010; Crass, 2014), little to no research has been conducted specifically on the praxes of those who grew up and came of age politically after the Civil Rights Movement and Jim Crow racism. Other studies are either focused on activism during the Civil Right Movement or are multi-generational in scope. But according to O'Brien (2001), "whites need more contemporary answers to the question 'What can I do?' than their ancestors who fought for abolition and desegregation can give them" (p. 10). O'Brien's suggestion for filling this gap in the literature was to "go to the source—today's white anti-racists" (p. 10). This study answers that call and focuses on contemporary movement work in this era of colorblind racism. This study also explores a

range of approaches to movement work so as to complicate the one-dimensional image of activist as "placard-carrying protesters attending rallies and demonstrations" (Thompson, 2001, p. xxvi). In addition to highlighting the work of community organizers whose exhaustive (and creative) behind the scenes work goes into organizing those rallies and demonstrations, I also included cultural workers/artists, religious workers and educators in my research. The purpose of this was to provide information about different ways to contribute to racial justice action beyond (or in addition to) the image etched into most people's imaginations of marching and protesting as tantamount to movement work.

As detailed in chapter one, I approached this study using a neo-reconstructionist framework. Although I understand (and respect the idea behind) the neo-abolitionist stance on whiteness, as a developmental educator I am unable to push the neo-abolitionist agenda forward until I can answer the question I posed in that first chapter: "If white people opt out of whiteness, then who, what and where are they in the world?" I believe that white people need to be part of the struggle for racial justice and without a viable answer to my earlier question, I feel called (at least for the time being) to engage in the political work of "shaping the stories" (and possibilities) about what it means to be white in the United States, and to assist white people in their exploration of more racially just ways of being en route to taking action in support of racial justice.

A final note on the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study, something I commented on earlier but which bears repeating. Sharing these stories about white racial justice action is not intended to negate or overshadow the stories of people of color, nor is it meant to diminish the ways in which people of color have long struggled for their own freedom and for the collective liberation of us all. White people should

continue to learn about the history (and current stories) of struggles for racial justice undertaken by people of color. I do, however, see value in white people being able to look to other white people as role models and as sources of inspiration. It is my sincere hope that this study contributes to that process.

Exploring the Major Themes and Associative Patterns

Initial Awareness: Early Messaging and Reinforcement/Disruption

The participants in this study came to consciousness around race, racism and racial justice in very different ways. Jamie for, example, was exposed to the overt racism of his grandfather and the colorblindness of his mother and immediate family. Caitlin grew up in a household with many personalities and opinions, but it was her mom whose voice reigned the strongest, and who encouraged Caitlin to rail against oppression ("You're no good to me if you're gonna end up an armchair liberal"). Kevin and his brother were latchkey kids and he was often left alone to figure out the world around him. His first observations were of socio-economic disparities, before later realizing the intersections of racism and classism, a realization spurred along by the hip-hop music he so coveted. There is no one, unifying thread that ran through the participants' childhoods that will explain how they came to be involved in racial justice action. They grew up in different cities and regions around the country, with different family make-ups and with different political views in their homes. What was consistent, however, was the role of literature, academia and, in some cases, cultural arts as elements that reinforced or disrupted early messaging about race and racism.

Reinforcement occurred when messaging around race was positive (anti-racist); disruption when that messaging was negative (overtly racist) or 'colorblind.' The

disruption side of this dichotomy is consistent with Warren's (2010) findings. "Seminal experiences," one of six major themes explored by Warren, are instances that create cognitive dissonance for white people, between the values they were raised with and the "reality of racial injustice" (Warren, p. 213). This certainly mirrors the disruption I found amongst participants who grew up around overt and/or colorblind racism. What Warren's "seminal experiences" do not account for is the reinforcement of early positive (racially just) messaging. The same way negative messages can be disrupted, subsequent experiences can also reinforce positive (anti-racist) messages about race. For those who were exposed to a more anti-racist environment while growing up, reinforcement (through academia, literature and the arts) provides the inverse function of cognitive dissonance, and serves to strengthen early developed notions of racial justice.

Common Tendencies

Anchoring in cultural heritage. For participants who have ties to an ethnic identity (their cultural heritage before/despite being raced as white), the anchoring in that cultural heritage seemed to provide a framework for acknowledging and understanding oppression, and in some cases provided inspiration for racial justice action. *Anchoring oneself in culture heritage* occurred when there was some kind of awareness on the part of certain participants, of the culture from which they come; when participants' families engaged in an ongoing celebration or appreciation of their culture while they were growing up; or in Alison's case, by getting back in touch with her ethnic roots through travel.

Ariel, Dara and Kevin, in different ways, have been influenced by their Jewish identity, and have carried that with them, while engaging in artistic expression (Kevin

and Ariel) or in their movement work (all three of them). Dara grew up in a home that did not really adhere to any strict Jewish beliefs or traditions (we recall her parents ethos of "Ah religion, it's the opiate of the masses"), and yet she still believes her life was influenced by generational trauma. She did not experience much anti-Jewishness of her own, but Dara describes her connection to Jewishness as a "learned experience of oppression." Ariel's learned experience of oppression became up close and personal when he and his brother traveled to Lubcha, the Eastern European town from where their family had emigrated to the United States. After finding that the cemetery where their ancestors were buried had been desecrated, they were devastated and upon arriving back home in the Bay Area, they worked to get it restored. The pain and healing that came out of that experience for Ariel is something he holds onto, serving as an emotional bridge to his work with others who are defending sacred native burial grounds in the Bay, and his participation in the organizing of the Indigenous land trust.

Anchoring themselves and their work in their Jewish identity they way these participants do, is reminiscent of Brodkin's (2004) work on Jews and whiteness, in which she describes Jews (those who are white) as having, "a kind of double vision that comes from racial middleness: of an experience of marginality vis-à-vis whiteness, and an experience of whiteness and belonging vis-à-vis blackness" (p. 2). In a different context (speaking about Jews in Israel), Friedman (1995) discusses the "Holocausting" of the [Jewish] psyche as problematic, believing that it relegates them to being "inheritor[s] of the traditional Jewish role of victim, whose fate, like that of all Jews in history, is to dwell alone" (p. 280). In the context of participants in this study, it appears Friedman's analysis could not be further from the truth. It is the shared experience (even if learned

and not lived) of oppression (the "Holocausting" of their narrative) that provides Jewish participants in this study with a deeper connection to the oppression of others and serves as an anchor for their racial justice action.

Step up/step back. Having acumen around when to step up and when to step back was central to the work of all the participants. Some of them expressed their philosophies around when and how to step up or step back, and others, like Caitlin, discussed strategies for mentoring younger organizers around this (we recall Caitlin asking interns at the Highlander Center not to speak up until they had solutions to contribute). One sub-pattern of *step up/step back*, spoken about by a few of the participants, was the idea that there is a time and place for white leadership. Ariel—after prefacing that the idea of a kind of charismatic, white male leadership could be triggering because such leadership has led historically to the oppression of women and people of color— professed that at times there is a need for white people to step up in big and outspoken ways. Alison spoke of not stepping up enough while in college (despite her participation in the hunger strike to defend Ethnic Studies) because she wanted to fall in line behind leadership of color and not take up too much space. She would discover later that there are ways, particularly in her role as Pastor for Southside Presbyterian Church, that she can and should occupy space in a bolder manner. Dara also addressed the problems associated with too much apprehension by white people when it comes to taking action, and the tendency for white people to not step up without receiving explicit instructions from people of color about where, when and how to do so. We recall those early conversations Dara shared about the early days of SURJ. Some were saying, "Well, we have to just wait for people of color to tell us what to do." And others, including Dara

replied, “No, we actually know that they want us to organize white people, let’s go and do that.”

All of the participants expressed the need for white people, both as individuals and as organizations, to be accountable to communities of color. But there was also this concern expressed by several of them, that too much stepping back, constantly waiting for concrete instructions, and looking for the perfect moment to jump in and step up was not helping the cause. We recall the statement of a Black community organizer to white people on a national SURJ call. “Your anxiety about trying to get it right has nothing to do with Black liberation.” The wherewithal to know when to step up and when to step back is an important instinct to have for white people engaged in racial justice movement work. The participants in this study shared their philosophies and personal experiences with stepping up and stepping back, many of them trying and failing on their way to finding that balance. They shared that it takes practice and mistakes will be made, but also underscored the importance of keeping at it and developing this soft skill when participating in racial justice movement work.

Relationship building and accountability. All of the participants in the study spoke to the importance of relationship building. Some of these relationships were of a mentor/mentee nature. We recall Caitlin being mentored by Suzanne Pharr, who asked her if she was “ready to take the plunge” and delve deeply into a life of movement work. Suzanne and the other founders of Southerners on New Ground were often around, serving as role models and mentors to Caitlin. Other relationships helped lay the foundation for major community organizing projects and mobilization around that organizing. We recall that Kevin had established relationships with hundreds of youth

while conducting spoken word workshops around Chicago, and built on those relationships to bring youth together from all over the city for *Louder than a Bomb*.

Relationships are also tied to accountability. Several participants spoke about the ways they stay personally accountable to communities of color, as well as their accountability strategies for predominantly white organizations like SURJ. The participants' belief in the importance of accountability to communities of color echoes what other scholars have written. "Accountability matters," writes Calderon and Wise (2016). They speak to this in their *Code of Ethics for White Anti-Racist Allies.*

> When [white people] engage in antiracist efforts, be they public or private, we should remember that it is people of color most affected by racism, and thus, they have the most to gain or lose as a result of how such work is done. With this in mind, we believe it is important to seek and obtain regular and ongoing feedback from people of color in our lives (friends and/or colleagues), as a way to better ground our efforts in structures of accountability. (Calderon & Wise, *Code of ethics for antiracist white allies*, n.d.)

It became clear from speaking with participants, that accountability is made possible through relationships built over time while doing the work of racial justice. We recall Amy sharing the idea that relationships can for formed in a matter of days, during really intense campaigns (like when she was organizing against the California ballot initiative, proposition 21) or over months and years. In one of his blog posts for Everyday Feminism, Jamie writes, "You can't be an ally in isolation." In that same blog post Jamie explains the importance of relationships and accountability.

> To a certain degree, it is entirely possible for someone to stand in solidarity with a group of marginalized people even if they have no relationships with said people. At a surface level, you can support the cause and advocate in your community for equal rights or speak out against oppression. But solidarity in total isolation lacks one vital thing: accountability. This is particularly important for people of privilege, but really any person who wants to act in solidarity needs to recognize that allyship cannot exist in isolation. This is not to say that your *"one Black friend"* legitimizes all of your actions and self-professed *"allyship."* In fact, some

> of the most important accountability comes from relationships that are *not* friendships. But without a diverse community to engage with and without other activists to hold you accountable, your understanding of *"solidarity"* can very quickly become paternalism or, worse, outright recreation of oppression. (Utt, *Things allies need to know*, November 8, 2013)

Jamie reminds us of the lesson Meghan learned about accountability and inclusive organizing. We recall that in college she and a group of mostly white students involved in United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) wondered (and were frustrated by) why students of color did not join there efforts, and later came to the realization that they had not interrogated their whiteness or made an effort build multi-racial coalitions. We also recall Jamie's own cautionary tale about the time he and a group of well-intentioned white students decided that it would be a good idea to organize an all white caucus on campus to tackle issues of racial injustice. They did so without first educating the campus about the purpose of the group and their intentions, and also did so outside of any sort of relationship with student groups of color. The result was pain and anger from students of color on campus.

Dara spoke of the ways that as an organization, SURJ, has built accountability into its work. She explained that board members are in regular, intentional communication with eight to ten people of color, who have agreed to be thought partners with them, and that the organization as a whole has an accountability council made up of organizers of color. It was clear from my dialogues with all the participants, that plugging into racial justice action was never a solo endeavor. Doing so occurred with the aid of mentors and in relationships built through action overtime. Participants were cognizant of being accountable to communities of color and often built accountability measures into their projects or their organizational structures.

Plugging Into Racial Justice Action

Plugging into racial justice action emerged as the central theme around which the participants' narratives orbited. *Plugging in*, as readers have read about in chapter four, is an amorphous and fluid approach to becoming (and staying) involved in racial justice action. The profundity of plugging in is its simplicity. Anyone is capable of plugging in, particularly because the approaches people take to plugging in are those that are available and instinctive to them. In other words, people plug in by utilizing their knowledge, passion, interests, talents, relationships, resources or location (physical and social). Plugging in is a non-linear (meaning this does always happen in a particular order or on a particular timeline) three-step process which includes: 1) Recognizing an injustice, 2) drawing a personal connection and 3) establishing or pursuing an outlet through which to plug in. Because plugging in is based upon what is available and instinctive to a particular person (or in some cases organizations), each of the participants in this study plugged into racial justice action in unique and nuanced ways. At the beginning of the *Plugging In* portion of each participant's individual section in chapter four, readers were introduced to that participant's approach, which I summed up using a phrase or concept that proved to be a consistent thread throughout their work.

Plugging in for Ariel, for example, is when people discover (and act upon) their "**unique offering**," what he described as "the thing that fills you with light, with power, with love [and] with energy that you can contribute to the movement, [to] the social change [we want] to see and to the world we're trying to build." Ariel's unique offering is performance based activism, and community organizing using performance as an outlet. Kevin's outlet for plugging in is **hip-hop and the spaces it provides** for cultural

arts expression and youth organizing. The **church** and her **faith** serve as Alison's outlet for plugging in. Dara's approach to plugging in might well be summed up by the Yiddish term, ***doikayt***, which means 'hereness' or in this context **"Wherever you are, that's where you work."** For Amy, **storytelling** is a powerful form of plugging in. She believes information is political (and powerful) and the shaping of that information through storytelling is central to movement work. Jamie's intersectional approach to plugging in is a process of **filling in gaps** for movements against injustice. Meghan's outlet is **the academy**, where she plugs in by educating others (**in and out of the classroom**) about whiteness, power and privilege. Caitlin believes there are outlets for plugging in all around us. She describes them as **"lanterns of work,"** or "origin points for powerful organizing." She believes that people need only "look around and [find] out what and sometimes who is inspiring [us]," and then to plug in by supporting it or them through action.

These philosophies about and approaches to plugging in do not together form some sort of best practice or formula for white racial justice action. On the contrary, the participants' approaches varied greatly in scope and strategy. What is constant, however, is that plugging in is always a process of recognizing injustice, drawing a personal connection and establishing or pursuing an outlet. The what, why, when, where and how of that process is going to be dependent on what is available and instinctive to any one person trying to find their way in movement work.

White Racial Justice Action in the Era of Colorblind Racism

The central question of my study was a question about the role of white racial justice activists in the era of colorblind racism. Colorblind racism (and colorblind

ideology) was the backdrop for this study. The research participants that I selected to be in the study were born and grew up during the so-called era of colorblind racism. I conducted my research with the assumption that colorblind racism is the socio-political milieu through which the participants engage in racial justice action. The data suggests that to varying degrees, the participants *were* shaped by colorblind ideology and *did* take colorblind racism into account when approaching their work.

Jamie introduced the idea, for example, of using a "Trojan horse" when facilitating dialogues and trainings. Many of the white students (and educators) he works with are resistant to talking about issues such as institutional racism because of their investment in (performing) 'colorblindness' and their (feigned) belief in a post-racial United States. One example Jamie shared of a "Trojan horse" is using *Bullying* as the central topic for a dialogue or training knowing that when the issue is 'unpacked' conversation will inevitably turn to institutional racism and systemic oppression.

Similar to Jamie's "Trojan horse," Meghan talked about how she and her colleague chose the relatively muted name of *Engaging Diversity* for the university's orientation for white students which covers issues of whiteness, power and privilege so as not to make students (and their parents/guardians) apprehensive about signing up for the voluntary program.

Colorblind ideology was also a mainstay in the homes of several of the participants during their childhood. We read Jamie's story about the time his mom praised his sister for "not seeing race" when she went out of her way to use any descriptor other than *race* to describe her track coach, a Black man in a mostly white school. Several of the participants' parents who ascribed to colorblind ideology and

modeled it for their children (and which was reinforced by living in a segregated community), avoided the conversation of race almost entirely, speaking of it only when a racially charged event was given coverage by the mainstream media, making the topic of race and racism unavoidable. One can imagine that in those scenarios where they were 'forced' to talk racism, it was likely that the "good/bad binary" that DiAngelo (personal communication, March 13, 2015) talks about, was used to make sense of it. Not all the participants grew up in colorblind environments. Several of the participants grew up around overt racism and explicitly racist family members. Others grew up with parents who not only named racism, but also encouraged their children to rail against it and other forms of oppression.

Whether or not participants grew up in a 'colorblind' household, and regardless of the extent to which they have intentionally implemented tools and strategies for combatting the 'colorblind ideologies' of white people, colorblind racism has been the backdrop, the predominant racial milieu, both legally and socially, in the United States for the past several decades. As we read in chapter 3, DiAngelo (2012) defined colorblind racism (or "new racism") as "the ways in which racism has adapted over time to modern norms, policies, and practices resulting in similar racial outcomes as those in the past, while not appearing to be explicitly racist" (p. 106). Similarly, Bonilla-Silva (2010) writes, "Jim Crow racism served as the glue for defending a brutal and overt system of racial oppression in the pre-Civil Rights era, color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era" (p. 3). It is on this colorblind terrain that Kevin organizes against 'race-neutral' policies that are criminalizing youth of color under the "ideological armor" of 'gangs' and

'loitering.' It is on this colorblind terrain that Dara and SURJ rail against the "ideological armor" of the 'cultural poverty' narrative about African-American communities that allow for police brutality with impunity. And it is on this colorblind terrain that Alison combats racism and xenophobia against Latino immigrants, oppression that is wrapped in the "ideological armor" of 'national security.'

The point I am building up to is this. I sought out to understand the role of white racial justice action in the era of colorblind racism. I *did* uncover stories of the way colorblind ideology shaped some of the early racial messaging for certain participants. I *did* uncover strategies that participants use for combatting colorblind ideology. I *did* find colorblind racism to be a central feature in the lives of all the participants, albeit in different ways and to varying degrees. And yet at the end, what I really discovered in talking to this group of eight participants is that in many ways, while it is important to understand how colorblind racism (and ideology) operates in the law and through social interactions, colorblind racism, ultimately, no matter how you dress it up, is racism.

This point is underscored by Ariel's response when I asked him specifically about the role of colorblind racism in his work. "Yeah, I don't think I spend a lot of time specifically addressing that paradigm," shared Ariel, "because I feel like as soon as you get to the specificity of history in our experience, it cuts right through." Put another way, colorblindness, white supremacy's "ideological armor," can be pierced by naming systemic racism. Or said another way, racism by any other name is still racism. Ariel's point is that racism ceases to be covert when the facts about institutional racism are given their due attention. Ariel gave a couple of examples of what he meant by "getting to the specificity of history in our experience."

> One of the first things I do when I'm facilitating a white caucus is I have people… we go around in a circle and I have everyone name whatever European ethnicities that they know are in their family. […] And one of the things it does is that it just immediately breaks open this idea of whiteness 'cause we're all white, right? …We're in a white caucus and yet you listen to folks and there's Irish, and Jewish and German, and Italian, and Austrian and it just explodes the homogeneity or the [social] construction of it, and I think brings into all of the things [made invisible] when you just call us all white. And sometimes people don't know. They're like, "I'm an American mutt," or "I'm whatever, whatever," and then they get to sit with that… like yeah, "you don't know where your families come from, and how does that feel right now? So, that's a part of it. And also talking about the specificity of the Homestead Act and genocide and land theft. We're talking about the specificity of ICE raids and the private prison center. They're called detention centers, but they're prisons for undocumented folks. In my experience, it just cuts through the colorblind argument. You just can't hold onto that very long when we're talking about who is documented and who isn't. In my workshop around Amnesia… I go through a brief history of citizenship, and who has been legally allowed into this country and who isn't, and when, and very quickly it's clear that it's always been racial, and that it is a political construction of literally which country and what part… which continent is citizenship legalized… and migration legalized, and which isn't.

To imply that the strategies of "specificity" that Ariel is talking about are a cure all for colorblind ideology (which is not what Ariel was trying to say) would be an oversimplification. As we learned in chapter two, colorblind ideology has overtime, been folded into policies and laws, and has been enacted socially by those who (feign to) believe in a post-racial society. To disavow the existence of colorblind racism (and its machinery) altogether would be problematic, as it is important that we understand the way race and racism has morphed and functions now in laws, in policies and in society writ large. It is important to understand 'race neutrality' as the shell casing for today's white supremacy. And yet Ariel's point (and strategies) is well taken. Racism by any other name is in fact, still racism as it always was. But strategies about cutting through the paradigm of colorblind ideology, as it turns out, were not Ariel's main point. He shared something else that I was not expecting; the idea that we might be moving through

colorblind racism toward something else. Perhaps colorblind racism is giving way to a new era.

A "Crack in the Windshield" of Colorblind Ideology

This study was originally conceived of a few years ago when I was a lot earlier on in my doctoral studies and a lot has changed in the United States since that time. It was before a wave of police murders of Black and Brown men and women began to be captured regularly on video, making state sanctioned violence visible to the general public. It was before Black Lives Matter emerged as arguably the most prolific racial and social justice movement in my lifetime. It was before the rise of the racist demagoguery of Donald Trump and his ascendency to being the Republican nominee for President of the United States. The socio-political landscape has shifted incredibly from the time I began this project and Ariel spoke to this to these changes.

> I think the age of colorblindness might be shifting, or going dormant or something. I feel like since Ferguson… I feel like it's less… The visibility of white police officers murdering black people has kind of really punctured a big hole into that whole thing that I think even folks who want not to talk about it or brush it away or whatever; they're gonna have to have a new story. So I feel like that whole moment where we… When Obama got elected, we were post-racial, we're colorblind; a Black man could do anything because "look they're the president." I feel like we're… I feel like that moment might be over. And historically, the right wing does this dance. They get explicitly racist for a while, and then whitewash it and they get… The policies are consistent. You look at the impact of policies… they're white supremacist throughout, but the face of it, strategically the way they craft and frame their messages; there's an ebb and tide a little bit of how explicitly racist… and Donald Trump, man… is not fuckin' around. […] We're in a moment of increased clarity or increased visibility or increased polarization or… I mean the terrible thing is that it's self-perpetuating. The police just keep doing these horrific murders, and so it's like… And there's a certain way *that* feeds the news cycle. So the media is pimpin' all of it, and they're this hungry beast that eats up Trump and eats the murder… and it just grows, right? So, in some ways, they're gonna… They're doing their part in sustaining the activism around it because they're keeping it in front of people's faces over and over again. And folks are stepping up all over the country.

I was so focused on studying white racial justice action in the era of colorblind racism that I had not stopped to consider that with everything going on in the country—with the wave of police murders of unarmed Black and Brown people, with the Black Lives Matter movement inspiring and mobilizing thousands of people, with uprisings happening in cities as a response to racism and police brutality—perhaps the socio-political landscape had changed or was in the process of changing. Ariel was only the second participant I dialogued with during the course of my research so it was an early enough moment for me to raise my antenna in subsequent dialogues to this idea that "colorblindness might be shifting" to something else.

I am not proposing that colorblind racism is suddenly gone from our policies, laws and social interactions. As we learned in chapter two, after the Civil Rights movement and Jim Crow, the right to discriminate based on race was ostensibly legislated away. Racism began getting coded into law and was "dog whistled" to voters by politicians while colorblind ideologues began touting the idea of a post-racial society (propped up even more by the election of a Black President). Ariel was not at all denying the pervasiveness of colorblind racism, but he was indicating that there might be a 'crack in its windshield' (as I have come to describe it).

I began to look for evidence of this idea in the stories of the other participants. I did not change my initial question; I asked what I had asked Ariel, something to the affect of "How do you approach to this work with regards to colorblind ideology?" Several of the other participants, as it turned out, did address the idea that we may be entering a new moment (or movement) in the history of race and racism in this country.

Dara spoke about the death of Mike Brown and the rash of police killings (covered by the mainstream media) as a catalyst for waking white people up to the pervasiveness of structural racism, the resultant growth of membership in Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ), and the general uptick of white racial justice action.

> Up until a year and a half ago, white people were like, "Why do I have to care about racism? Why do I have to do anything?" And then after Ferguson and Mike Brown got killed, all of a sudden white people are like, "What the hell can I do? Tell me what to do!" And it's like it's this interesting thing and it doesn't mean… Because so much of the training around race that I feel like we've gotten in the United States in this era has been around if you name racism then you're racist and racism is only interpersonal. It's not anything institutional or systemic and sort of taking away that bigger analysis. So then, I feel like people are really grappling with, "Oh, this is structural." And what does that actually mean? And then what's my responsibility? […] So [SURJ has] been doubling pretty much every three months. We've been doubling because of the movement for Black lives, because of the uprisings in Baltimore, and Charleston, and Chicago, and Cleveland, and Minnesota. Like every time something happens and we do actions, our list doubles. And now we have all these other populations too. So we have like SURJ families, which is organizing kids and parents to move into action for racial justice. We have SURJ Queer and Trans, and SURJ Rural, and we have a nascent SURJ Students thing happening. […] So after the burning of the Black churches, the nine churches down south; after Charleston, all these white faith leaders were like "What can we do?" And we had this call with 450 white faith leaders, and we were like giving people steps. "You can give money. You can form a partnership with a Black church or a Muslim mosque. You can… here's five things you can do." And they were just like, "Yes!" And they just wanted more of it, like, "Can you connect us to a Black church?" "How do we build this relationship?"

Caitlin spoke to the dangers of and damage caused by colorblind ideology. Her framing of colorblindness as "[hiding] harm [caused by] white supremacy" is reminiscent of Bonilla-Silva's "ideological armor" metaphor. But Caitlin also spoke to this unique moment in the United States, and shared that she believes colorblindness is being exposed for what it really is.

> I think one of the biggest dangers of colorblindness is that it seeks to hide harm and the bleeding points of white supremacy. And I think that what we're seeing now is an exposure of that. I think we're at a really different moment. I think this

> is one of the most exciting moments that I've been a part of. Not me as an individual, but that I get to be alive for. And I think one of the reasons is that I think it's breaking open the idea of the politics of respectability. And I think colorblindness feeds on a politics of respectability. Because colorblindness needs the food of that, that sort of keeps people in their place. It keeps the queer people acting a certain way. It keeps the women acting a certain way. It keeps the people, you know, in the sort of traditional set up of Black and white churches. It keeps everyone in line and then white people get to rely on color blindness because it's like, "Well, I can't be doing wrong if I don't see this." Or, "I can't be doing wrong if I don't look at this in a particular way." So I think that we're at a really exciting time because I think those things go hand in hand to opening that up, and I think it's also just literally the refusal of people most directly affected to allow the bleeding points to not be seen. And that's why I think when we look at some of the direct actions, like of malls, for example, it's very interesting, the kind of shutting down of business as usual.

This not the first time there has been a crack in the windshield of the dominant racial milieu of a given historical period in the United States. On the contrary, according to Taylor (2016), every so often a moment or movement comes along that disrupts the oppressive, business-as-usual racial order in the United States. There are, according to Taylor, "periodic ruptures in the US narrative of its triumph over racism as a defining feature of its society" (p. 9). Taylor goes onto name some of these other "ruptures." "The Black freedom struggle of the 1960s, while the United States was simultaneously waging a war in Vietnam (supposedly in the name of freedom), exposed the country-as-a-whole as deeply racist and resistant to Black equality or liberation" (p. 9-10). Taylor also calls attention to ruptures that have occurred more recently. "[T]he Los Angeles Rebellion in 1992 reignited a national discussion about the persistence of racial inequality" (p. 10). And in 2005 "the Bush administration's shameful response to Hurricane Katrina," writes Taylor, "momentarily submerged the glowing self-appraisals of American society at a time when the country was, once again, locked in war and occupation, this time in Iraq and Afghanistan, respectively, in the name of freedom and democracy" (p.10). Those

latter two moments were fleeting, but they provided a glimpse into what a crack in the windshield could look like. Like Ariel, Dara and Caitlin, Taylor sees *this* moment, the one we are in right now, as being yet another "rupture" in the era of colorblind racism.

> Today, the birth of a new movement against racism and policing is shattering the illusion of a colorblind, postracial United States. Cries of "Hands up, don't shoot," "I can't breathe," and "Black lives matter" have been heard around the country as tens of thousands or ordinary people mobilize to demand an end to rampant police brutality and murder against African Americans. (p. 10)

The answer to the question of whether or not this moment (and this movement) will be short lived, and of whether the crack in the windshield of colorblind racism will become many cracks and ultimately shatter the racial (racist) paradigm of today, remains to be seen. But it is clear that this is indeed a unique moment. Politicians running for President of the United States have been made to address structural racism, at the very least in their rhetoric. Hillary Clinton, on stage at a Town Hall meeting while campaigning for the Presidential primaries, when asked if "all lives matter (the resentful colorblind response to the Black Lives Matter movement) or if "Black lives matter," answered, "Black Lives Matter." Bernie Sanders, the other leading candidate in the 2016 Democratic primaries, proclaimed the same. Secretary Clinton, at the January 17th Democratic Candidate Debate, also said this: "There needs to be a concerted effort to address the systemic racism in our criminal justice system" (Ollstein, Clinton and Sanders call out America's racist criminal justice system, January 17, 2016). I am not taking the position that oral affirmations of Black lives matter or admissions to structural racism are tantamount to a shift in laws and policies. However, it is practically unheard of for candidates from one of the two main political parties to explicitly name and underscore the pervasiveness of institutional racism (including policing and the criminal justice system) in the United

States. This movement for Black lives is a force to be reckoned with and it has spurred new political rhetoric, if not yet political revolution.

There has also been a wave of mobilizing for racial justice. Dara mentioned the monumental growth of SURJ, an organization made up of white people around the country organizing against racism. We have seen 'ordinary, everyday people' take to the streets in the thousands, to call out racist policing and a corrupt criminal justice system. College athletes and students around the country have had university presidents removed from their positions because of their inability to address unsafe campus climates for students of color, and had the names of longstanding buildings changed because of the racist history of their namesakes. Respectability politics have been cast aside and highways have been shut down for hours at a time with chants of "Black Lives Matter" and "What do we want? Justice, When do we want it? Now!"

If ever there was a time for white people to put some skin in the game and find their way in movement work for racial justice, now seems to be that time. There is a crack in the windshield of colorblind racism and people are being forced to give up notions of a post-racial United States. If the momentum continues, the movement continues. If the movement continues then perhaps that windshield will shatter and expose white supremacy for what it is, without the cover (or "ideological armor) that 'colorblindness' provides.

Implications for Future Action, Education and Research

Implications for Future Action and Education

Plugging in has potential to be used as a theoretical model for individual white people who are trying to find their way in movement work, or by educators as part of a

curriculum that focuses on issues of race, racism and racial justice. There are outlets everywhere through which white people can plug in. We are in a unique time in this country's history. Black Lives Matter is the most profound social and racial justice movement in several decades and groups like Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) are mobilizing to support that work. The sanctuary and immigrant rights movements have found resurgence, and churches like Southside Presbyterian in Tucson and Pastor Alison Harrington are stepping up to plug into those movements. Readers were 'introduced' to Alison as she gathered with five other hunger strikers and hundreds of other protesters to defend Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley. Guided by her faith, and feeling personally connected to the cause because of what Ethnic Studies had meant for her own learning and personal growth, Alison plugged into that moment and that movement. The struggle continues. Those very same kinds of battles are being fought right now, on campuses and in communities across the country. Just this morning while I was writing, an emotional message was posted on social media by a friend and fellow educator urging people to come out and support hunger strikers who have once again been forced to organize under the banner of the Third World Liberation Front at San Francisco State University. Facing devastating budget cuts to the department, the students were compelled to rise up and defend Ethnic Studies. Those who have a personal connection to, or simply want to support programs like Ethnic Studies can plug in and support.

White people have only to look for what Caitlin calls "lanterns of work," or origin points from which to start plugging in. The participants in this study found there way into movement work by 1) recognizing injustice(s), 2) drawing a personal connection and 3) establishing or pursuing an outlet through which to take action. White people who want

to do the same should ask themselves what injustices are taking place in their communities and pursue outlets for addressing that injustice using what is available and instinctive to them. In other words, how can they utilize their knowledge, passion interests, talents, relationships, resources or location (physical or social) to take action?

Educators who teach white students and whose courses include issues of race, racism and racial justice could potentially develop curricula that include exercises that get at the questions I posed above. What injustices are going on in the students' communities or surrounding locales? What is their connection to those injustices? What approaches to getting involved are readily available or come instinctively to them? The stories in this study are powerful examples, and are also worth including as part of a broader curriculum about race and racism. There are still relatively few stories about white people significantly engaged in racial justice movement work (historically and currently). It is important for white people to learn about other white people who are engaged in those struggles, and about the many and varied paths they took to get there.

As previously mentioned, reducing the complexities of movement work to a small, academically digestible model is not meant to imply that plugging into (and staying in*)* racial justice action is quick or easy work. Again, I draw readers' attention to the stories of the participants in this study. All of them have spent years learning and unlearning about race and racism. They have formed life-long friendships and mentorships that they lean on when mobilizing against injustice. They have participated in multi-racial coalitions and have built into their work, ways of being accountable to communities of color. They have tried and failed and tried again. There is no *plugging in*

finish line or arrival point. As Amy pointed out, when you plug into racial justice action, "it's your life's work; you just find a way to do it no matter what you're doing."

Using Guided Dialogue as a Qualitative Method

Subjectivity: The foundation of this methodological approach. Critical whiteness studies (my theoretical framework), despite centering majoritarian subject matter (whiteness and white people) does so in ways that address issues of privilege, power and oppression. This positions CWS as a social justice interpretive framework in qualitative research. Critical whiteness studies is meant to explore, and if done 'correctly,' to *counter* narratives of whiteness as normative or dominant, and is therefore obstinately *subjective* by design, as is this study. It is my belief that to some extent, 'objectivity' (in qualitative research) upholds the status quo and serves as the gatekeeper for scholarly establishmentarianism. It was not a goal of mine to be objective and to strictly demarcate the lines between researcher and participants (positivist/post-positivist). On the contrary, I believe it impossible to separate researcher from participant or researcher from research topic (everyone comes to a topic with predisposed opinions/worldviews) during the generating of data and so I did not try. Instead, I aligned myself with contemporary grounded theorists (though this study is not grounded theory in a strict sense) and engaged in what Birks and Mills (2011) call a "narrative interaction," whereby the two parties (researcher and participant) "give and take from each other" and co-construct rich, depth filled data (p. 56). To be objective when engaging in qualitative research that addresses (and counters) power is something of the academic equivalent to Audre Lorde's quote, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984). This study was about dialoguing with white people who are significantly

invested in dismantling white supremacy and working toward racial justice, and to hear and record their truths about this process. It was my hope going into the project that their stories would filled with emotional attachment to their views, and that they would see my own emotional investment in the struggle(s) for racial justice. It is from that place that the participants and I co-constructed the data from this study.

Guided dialogue: What's in a name? I do not pretend, with my use of *guided dialogue*, to have created a new form of interviewing. Rather, I simply (re)named an approach to 'interviewing' and co-constructing (or generating) data with research participants in order to call attention to a methodological philosophy that values subjectivity and intentionally breaks down traditional barriers between researcher and participant, as well as researcher and research topic. "Interviews are not neutral context-free tools," writes Birks and Mills (2011); "rather, they provide a site for interplay between two people that leads to data that is negotiated and contextual" (p. 56). The use of *dialogue* (in guided dialogue) is meant to embrace that "interplay." It is intended to create an environment that allows for a free flowing, authentic exchange of ideas, and to give agency to the participants during the process so that they might take the interview/conversation in a direction of their choosing, a direction the researcher may not have conceived of prior to the interaction. The use of *guided* is also intentional. Despite every effort to facilitate a space that allows for participant agency, it is still the researcher doing the facilitating (or convening) of that dialogue. It is important to name power where and when it resides, and *guided* is an indication that the researcher is ultimately the architect of the study.

Guided dialogue in practice. I have included implementation strategies and suggestions below for those who may want to approach qualitative interviews as guided dialogues. This may be particularly useful/appealing for researchers who are engaging in social justice interpretive frameworks.

Explain your style and format to participants. When I initially emailed participants or potential participants, I used the term *dialogue* rather than *interview* when asking for their involvement. It is a subtle distinction when used without further explanation of the methodology, but it begins to set the appropriate tone. When I met with participants, I did my best to convey to them, before ever turning on the recording device, that my style was 'loose' and conversational, and welcomed them to shift the dialogue in directions of their choosing when and if they felt moved to do so. I also shared with them that it was my sincere hope that they would get something out of the experience as well, and that it would not be a one-sided extraction (researcher from participant) of information, but rather a free flowing conversation and co-construction of ideas.

Commit your dialogue questions to memory. Before meeting with each participant I reviewed my dialogue questions and committed them to memory. There was a set of questions I wanted to ask each participant so that data generation had a uniform base from which I could analyze it. I hoped that the absence of a sheet of paper or an electronic device (phone, tablet, etc.) with the questions on it would contribute to a less clinical, more conversational environment.

Know which questions you are willing to let go. I decided ahead of time which questions were imperative to ask and which questions I could 'let go' should the dialogue

go off in a different direction, either because of impromptu follow-up questions I was moved to ask, or because the participant had different ideas about what they wanted to talk about. That latter reason is important because the main impetus for guided dialogue is to provide agency for the participant in the data construction process. I knew that 'letting go' of certain questions could present some challenges later on with the coding process, but that was a tradeoff I was willing to make. I was gambling on the idea that if a participant was moved to speak about a topic of their choosing, the data that would emerge from that 'digression' was likely to be relevant, depth-filled and rich.

When that moment of digression comes, allow for it. At one point during my second dialogue (Ariel), before I had much practice with guided dialogue, I began to transition from one pre-set question to another. Ariel stopped me and said that before moving on he wanted to tell me about his latest project. He had just started helping organize around the indigenous land trust and was excited to share information with me about the project. I remember being cognizant of/concerned about the time, knowing that we had to end the dialogue soon, but then thinking, "No, him cutting me off to tell *this* story is exactly what I hoped would happen." I feel confident that Ariel's section is richer for having that story in it.

Share your own story. I decided ahead of time, that if a participant shared a story that I related to or that moved me I would let them know that I did or it had, and perhaps share a piece of my story in return. I found that when I did this it led to richer, more complex data about a particular topic, while also prompting recognition from the participant that I was well informed. When a participant knows that a researcher is well informed about topics in the discussion, they may 'go deeper' (provide more nuanced or

technical details), knowing that the researcher will be able to 'keep up' or follow what it is they are trying to convey. I did this fairly frequently throughout the eight dialogues. For example, my knowledge (and love) of hip-hop came out naturally over the course of my conversation with Kevin, and as a result he did not seem to hesitate when making references to hip-hop artists or moments of historical significance in hip-hop. Letting participants know that a story they had shared moved me, or interjecting with a story of my own, also appeared to build emotional trust between the participants and me, which I surmise may have also led to more open and honest overall dialogues.

Final thought. I believe that researchers who employ social justice interpretive frameworks should continue to blur the lines between researcher and participants, and between researcher and research topic. For scholars who are committed to social justice, research is often personal, and not a purely academic endeavor. I offer *guided dialogue* as a different approach to qualitative interviewing.

Implications for Future Research Studies

Plugging into racial justice action. Plugging into racial justice action, the central theme that emerged from the data, is a simple approach to framing the many and varied ways white people (can) engage in racial justice movement work. The eight examples found in this study are only scratching the surface and the problem I posed in chapter one remains; there is still a void in critical whiteness studies literature about racial justice action being taken by white people today. Critical whiteness studies and its readership would benefit from more studies about white racial justice action.

Anchoring in cultural heritage. I am personally curious about this phenomenon amongst some of the participants in this study. How do white people hold onto the

cultures or ethnicities that were central to their identity before their family's assimilation into whiteness in the United States? How do they use their sense of cultural identity, cultural practices or traditions as a framework for understanding race and racism, while at the same time continuing to name and claim their whiteness (and thus their complicity in white supremacy)? Ariel believes this to an important part of the journey for white people who are exploring issues of race and racism. We recall his wisdom around this notion from our dialogue together.

> And when we claim our roots, it breaks down the monolith of corporate American white identity. And opening, hopefully opening a space and inviting others to share their immigration stories wherever they're from, and articulating a clear call for justice for the families who are being targeted, imprisoned, deported… all of the kind of atrocities that are happening in this country right now…

This particular research angle in future studies about whiteness would be compelling and a potentially powerful educational tool for white people trying to understand their racial identity and their role in movement work.

A crack in the windshield. This idea, that we are perhaps moving through the era of colorblind racism, into a new historical period of race, racism and racial justice in the United States is wide open for more research. Colorblind ideology has been at the center of racial analysis in education, critical whiteness studies and other academic disciplines for the last couple of decades. If we are moving, or have already shifted to something else—if the "ideological armor" of colorblindness is giving way and exposing white supremacy for what it really is—it will be important for researchers to explore and document this phenomenon.

There has also started to be a wave of literature emerging about the Black Lives Matter movement. Much more research is warranted about this unique moment (and

movement) in the nation's history. The resurgence of the sanctuary movement is also an area of study that deserves more attention. How are clergy and community members working together to create an underground railroad for undocumented immigrants who are at risk of being deported and separated from their families? How are undocumented immigrant groups, like Red de Redes, organizing themselves? With regards to drawing parallels to my own research, future studies could explore the role of white racial justice action in the Black Lives Matter and sanctuary movements. Chris Crass, for example, has already begun the work of exploring white peoples' role in Black Lives Matter in his book, *Towards the 'Other America': Anti-Racist Resources for White People Taking Action for Black Lives Matter* (2015).

Conclusion

To close out this study I return to my original goal, to explore the ways that white people engage in racial justice action in the age of colorblind racism, and to inform and inspire others who may be trying to find their way (or further their involvement) in movement work. I cannot know if I have met that latter part of my goal. The stories in this study will affect readers in ways known only to them. What I am certain of, however, is that the study reveals that there are many and varied ways for white people to come to consciousness around race, racism and racial justice and there are an equally multitudinous amount of ways for white people to plug into movement work. Plugging in, as a model, involves a process whereby people 1) recognize injustice(s), 2) draw a personal connection and 3) establish or pursue an outlet through which to plug into racial justice. The examples we have learned about through the participants' narratives were often interdisciplinary (e.g. a performance about land stolen from native people, that

connects to an annual event about indigenous struggle, that connects to organizing and fundraising for an indigenous land trust) and intersectional (e.g. SONG, an organization with LGBTQ rights at the center of its mission working on issues of immigrant rights or plugging into the Black Lives Matter movement). The participants in this study found outlets through which to take action by utilizing their knowledge, passion, interests, talents, relationships, resources and location (physical or social), or more simply stated, through what was available and instinctive to them.

Some of the participants were raised in homes where race was conspicuously absent from conversation. Others witnessed family members using racist language and engaging in racist behaviors. Each of them, however, had whatever messages they did receive reinforced and/or disrupted through literature, through academia and/or through the arts. The thread that runs through each of the participants' stories is that they ultimately found their way into racial justice movement work. That is the underlining message I hope readers will take away from the study. Outlets for plugging in are everywhere and we have only to find them and plug in, or as Caitlin phrased it:

> We're living in a time where some of that work is happening everywhere and I think [it's about] going towards that, those kind of lanterns of work, figuring out how you can support it and then being willing to not have it be about you.

This is not meant to imply that plugging into racial justice is easy or happens overnight. As we learned through the participants' stories, relationships can be formed over the course of a weekend or take months to develop. Knowledge and racial fluency is gained over time, through life experiences, sometimes positive sometimes negative, and other times in far more nuanced ways than a positive/negative dichotomy would suggest. That knowledge may initially be reinforced or disrupted through literature, academics and

art, but learning is a life-long process. Not only is there always more to learn, but also issues of injustice and strategies for addressing those issues are constantly changing. There is a certain amount of luck and serendipity that accompanied participants in this study on their journey to find their way in movement work. But even luck is not exactly accidental. There are key people and organizations that have been engaged in the struggle for racial justice for decades, and that have been monumentally influential on the lives and works of many people. Some of these people and organizations were spoken about repeatedly during dialogues with different participants. Names like June Jordan (poet, author, educator) surfaced again and again. One participant took a class with her and it changed his life, another was influenced by someone who had taken her class, and so on and so forth. Suzanne Pharr was another one these influencers. When readers 'met' Caitlin at the beginning of her section, she was deep in conversation with and receiving mentorship from Suzanne Pharr at the Highlander Center in Tennessee, while at around that same time Amy was at Syracuse University being influenced by Pharr's writing assigned to her in a Feminist Lit class. The Highlander Center, as we learned, was heavily involved with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Southerners on New Ground (SONG). Alicia Garza (one of the founders of Black Lives Matter), who may be a household name now, but in actuality has been in community and organizing with a couple different participants in this study for many years. There are key people and organizations that left their mark on several of the participants in this study and it is no coincidence that they did. Movement work is not accidental or an overnight phenomenon. The participants in this study spent years learning, trying and failing, trying and succeeding and starting all over again when

necessary. And they accessed people (through literature and the arts, or in person) and organizations that heightened their awareness and further entrenched them in action. There are years of collective wisdom in the participants' stories found in this study.

As I close, however, I want to return once more to the underlining message of this study, the fact that anyone is able to plug into racial justice—to find their way in movement work. As a final emphasis on this point, I want to ask readers, particularly white readers, to engage in a bit of a mental exercise. Picture the front door of your childhood home. What does it look like? What material is it made out of? What color is it? Who approaches it? Who knocks on it or rings the doorbell? Who comes and goes through that door? What goes on behind that door and what happens when you leave through it? Hold onto the image of that door for a moment while I shift our attention to two other doors, both of which we have already been discussed in this study.

The first is the front door of Caitlin's parents' home in Madison, Wisconsin, the home where she grew up. The second is the front door of Alison's home in Tucson, Arizona. Both doors, like all front doors, serve the same purpose; family members in each home come and go through those doors. But the lessons learned behind that door, the messages conveyed about what it means to answer that door when someone knocks, or how one is instructed to carry oneself after leaving through that door vary considerably.

A knock on Caitlin's door was heard with cautious and suspicious ears. If it was the police, they were not to be let in. Caitlin's mom was very clear with her children and all those who lived in their house; the police were not to be trusted or invited into the house under any circumstances. The purpose of the front door for Caitlin's family, first

and foremost, was to keep danger out and to keep those inside safe, safe from arrest, safe from deportation, safe and together. The narrative about that front door shaped Caitlin's political views, views she still carries with her in her work as an organizer.

When the doorbell rings at the Harrington household in Tucson, Alison's daughters abandon whatever they are doing and run to the door to find out who's there. "Who has come to visit?!!" It's exciting for them. Alison is aware that her children are privileged in this way. She leaves through that door daily to fight for immigrant rights, and to warn other mothers who are undocumented and whose children are undocumented, not to answer their front doors for fear of an ICE raid. But Alison's daughters are protected from that fear.

Two front doors. Two very different narratives about those doors. Behind one door there was fear of a knock. Behind the other are the gleeful footsteps of two young girls racing to that door to find out who has come to see them. And yet both of these homes are the homes of white people who have plugged into racial justice action. Caitlin grew up with a mother who educated her early about racism and corruption of the government, and who warned against opening the door to let in those who would take away her brother and his friends. Alison's daughters, although free from the burden of that same cautiousness, will receive a similar education from their mother who fights daily for immigrant rights. Other white children, behind other doors, are being raised by parents that fear or mistrust people of color. Still others are being raised to understand racism as a phenomenon that is largely in the past, and to perform 'colorblindness' when they interact with others outside of their home. But regardless of how someone is raised, there will always be opportunities to develop a more "positive white identity." There is

no one tried and true way to come to consciousness around race, racism and racial justice. There is no one upbringing or set of childhood experiences that leads to a life of racial justice action. There is no one door that white people can walk through to find their way into movement work. The paths are varied and the outlets are many. There are “lanterns of work” everywhere, waiting to guide white people who want to join the struggle.

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