Appropriately Antiracist:
The Constrained Contention of White Activists in the Black Lives Matter Movement

By

Kelley Frances Fenelon

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Approved:

Paul Speer, Ph.D.

Brian Christens, Ph.D.

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> "And, to keep it real – it is appropriate and necessary to have strategy and action centered around Blackness without other non-Black communities of color, or White folks for that matter, needing to find a place and a way to center themselves within it. It is appropriate and necessary for us to acknowledge the critical role that Black lives and struggles for Black liberation have played in inspiring and anchoring, through practice and theory, social movements for the liberation of all people."[1]
>
> – Alicia Garza, Co-Founder of Black Lives Matter

Introduction

In the final months of 2014 and first several months of 2015, a group of people – among them organizers, graduate students, professors, nonprofit workers, and pastors – came together to discuss the call to action they had been issued by the local Black Lives Matter[2] (BLM) chapter as it performed its first public protests and sought to establish itself as a local group within the burgeoning national movement. These would-be activists held in common both a commitment to antiracism and a particular embodiment: they were all white. The nascent local BLM group had asked a few of their white friends and fellow activists to assist them in ensuring that any white allies who mobilized for the group's first protests aligned with the values and goals of the movement in their attire (no masks), signs and chants (no "All Lives Matter," for example), and their interactions with bystanders, media (redirect journalists to Black protestors), and police. As the BLM movement was gaining momentum and recognition both in this mid-sized Southern city and across the United States, the values and practices of the movement sought to prioritize Black leadership in its organizations and presence at its actions while also striving to incorporate the efforts of supportive non-black persons. Given that the BLM movement continues to oppose not only specific racially unjust and inequitable outcomes, but also – and as importantly – the social norms and structures,

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[1] Garza, Alicia. "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement by Alicia Garza." *The Feminist Wire*. 7 October 2014. Accessed via http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/.

[2] Black Lives Matter, discussed in further detail below, is a movement that began in response to the death of Black boys and men at the hands of police. It has coalesced around opposition to the societal beliefs and practices that devalue Black life, instead asserting the belief contained in its moniker – that Black lives *matter* – in its protests, public education efforts, legislative goals, and movement values and practices. (www.blacklivesmatter.com)

overt and pernicious, that allow and foster those outcomes, BLM targets anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism ("What We Believe," nd).[3] In so doing, BLM gives careful attention to ensuring that its actions, values, leadership, and supporters – particularly white supporters – align with that overarching aim: breaking free of the logics, values, and norms of anti-Blackness. These factors together have made movement organizers and white supporters alike attentive to how white antiracist activists offer and implement their support.

For the group of white antiracist activists in this study, acting in keeping with those wishes and the overarching aim of the movement to displace anti-Blackness was a priority as well. These white antiracist activists held values that motivated their common concern about the deaths of people of color by police and the perpetuation of cultural norms and institutional structures that devalued Black life in America. Many had relationships with one another – whether as friends, coworkers, fellow students, or activism compatriots – that predated the white antiracists' group meetings and BLM protest participation. Moreover, they all willingly gathered in hopes of providing support for the work of BLM in their city. And yet, their group meetings were often rife with tension and complexity as the group struggled to articulate a common sense of purpose, find an animating sense of connection, and agree on how to put their values into action. This paper provides a means of understanding the white antiracists' struggle to align their identities and activism impulses with the values and goals of BLM by applying a lens of movement appropriateness (Polletta, 2005). It understands movement appropriateness generated at the intersection of movement target and goals, activist collective identity, and sociocultural and political context (Polletta, 2005). Ultimately,

[3] The Black Lives Matter website chooses to describe its target in these terms, thereby foregrounding the form of oppression it works to combat and centering its systemic and interpersonal outcomes for Black lives. Notably, the language of anti-Blackness is used instead of, for example, white supremacy. That distinction serves as a reminder that the movement's reference point is Blackness rather than whiteness, which in turn underscores BLM's upending of the white-centering norms, logics, and values of society. This paper prioritizes the language of the movement in describing BLM's target.

the white anti-racist activists sought to recognize and refuse those approaches to activism that risked displacing people of color from the focus and leadership of local BLM efforts. This paper argues that through mobilized constraint within BLM activism and prefigurative engagement in their daily lives, the white anti-racist activists worked towards determining and deploying the tactics most *appropriate* (Polletta, 2005) for members of the social identity group – white persons – at the root of the anti-Black racism targeted by BLM.

By choosing to foreground white activists in a study on the intentionally Black-centering BLM movement, this paper makes an effort to learn from the process through which these anti-racist efforts moved towards restraint in their activism that was appropriate to their privileged status within the United States' pervasive anti-Blackness. In so doing, the paper does not intend to uphold white persons as ultimate emancipators in antiracist work, but it certainly does not intend to absolve white persons of responsibility for full participation in dismantling anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism systemically and interpersonally. Instead, it seeks to understand one process by which a group of white anti-racists grappled with their white privilege and sought a white identity that fostered productive, appropriate participation in BLM and required anti-racist work beyond the movement. The activists came to understand everyday life that refuses participation in anti-Black racism as one form of appropriate activism for white antiracists. In so doing, they gained ground in their efforts to target anti-Black racism without taking over the leadership of the local movement group or centering themselves in the attention given to it (Thurber, Fenelon, & Roberts, 2015). This paper's theoretical contribution is its application of a lens of appropriateness (Polletta, 2005) to a constrained repertoire of contention, which helps to illuminate the breadth of activist choices that movement scholars might view as strategic. Here, strategic is defined as intentionally seeking movement goals (Bernstein, 1997). Importantly, this paper's understanding of intentional goal seeking includes all of those efforts, whether aligned with more instrumental or seemingly expressive

actions, that "challenge…dominant cultural patterns," with particular stress on the recognition that *any* challenge to dominant culture entails political contention (Bernstein, 1997: p. 535). Such cultural patterns include those represented by the anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism BLM seeks to disrupt ("What We Believe," nd).

While recognizing that BLM leaders do not regularly deploy the term prefigurative to describe their efforts, this paper interprets the movement as a context for white antiracist activists through prefigurative social movement literature. After all, BLM seeks a world free of anti-Blackness by fostering a countervailing reality – one that prioritizes Black leadership and experience – within its movement values and goals, organizational leadership, and tactics. Intentionally seeking a new social order and/or cultural logic and viewing the means of activism as integral to meeting its ends are both viewed by movement scholars as forms of prefigurative politics (Yates, 2015), and BLM can be interpreted as doing both. Related to the rejection of prevailing cultural logics is the creation and enactment of an oppositional identity (Taylor & Whittier, 1992), and the white activists in this study explicitly sought to redefine their whiteness in antiracist (and thus oppositional) terms. Their efforts can be interpreted within the prefigurative pro-Black, antiracist order of BLM, which requires white antiracist activists to transform their own values, actions, and, importantly, identity when they join its work. That prefigurative context exists alongside BLM's target, systemic cultural and structural anti-Blackness, which in turn serves as the context that informs the oppositional worldview and self-identity of the white antiracists. This paper will show that these contexts and the activists' own pursuit of a whiteness opposed to anti-Blackness come together to suggest why these white antiracist activists encountered mobilized constraint, here interpreted as appropriate restraint.

In its theoretical contributions, this paper will provide insight on movement outcomes that appear to be anything but and the role of appropriateness in shaping them, thereby underscoring the importance of differential forms of mobilization, including that which restrains activists' repertoire

of contention. More specifically, this paper recognizes the white antiracist activists' tension, uncertainty, and negotiation at meetings and during BLM actions as productive insofar as they sought to demarcate the logic of appropriateness (Polletta, 2005) and oppositional identity (Taylor & Whittier, 1992) governing and, ultimately, restraining the activists' repertoire of contention. For the white antiracist activists of this study, the pursuit and embodiment of a collective identity opposing anti-Black racism within the prefigurative context of BLM required negotiation. That negotiation, in turn, helped to generate the activists' understanding of appropriateness and the forms of mobilized restraint it required. By recognizing the activists' tactical limitations as in fact appropriate – and hence productive – for the prefigurative work of BLM, this paper offers an addendum to the overtly contentious activist mobilization typically rewarded by research attention, such as large protest events.

Literature Review & Explanation of Analysis

Power & Prefiguration: A Critical Theory Approach to Movements & Mobilization

Social movement theory seeks to understand how people and organizations come together to enact social change, particularly insofar as social change efforts occur beyond the typical political process (e.g. McAdam, 1999). Social movement theories provide varying explanations of how movements emerge, movement groups form, and movement goals are successfully enacted; the differences among these theories rest, in part, on their respective notions of power in society, including where and how it is held, leveraged, and effectively contested. Although early social movement research centered on how disaffected groups leveraged disruptive politics against the government rather than using conventional political means (McAdam 1999), the notions of what counts as political and disruptive have expanded in recognition of the grievances, targets, and tactics that can extend beyond the state and contest a multiplicity of forms of authority, from Fortune 500 corporations to cultural norms governing gender (Snow & Soule, 2010). When Snow and Soule write

in their primer on the subject that social movements "challenge or defend extant systems of authority," they appreciate that movements interact with both formal apparatuses like the state and corporations and less formal systems like social norms, beliefs, and cultural texts, all of which hold and deploy power in ways that govern people's lives (2010: 7). This more comprehensive understanding of movements ensures that movement scholars are better able to analyze efforts like BLM, which issues a sweeping indictment of institutional and normative forms of anti-Blackness. BLM uses a range of tactics to target a pervasive social malady that is manifested in laws, hiring policies, and policing practices as well as sidewalk interactions, maternal health encounters, and history textbooks. In short, the movement targets normative values and their societal acculturation and institutionalization. To study that work comprehensively requires attention to dominant power beyond the state.

One broadly applicable approach to understanding movements and their building blocks is the multi-institutional politics model proposed by Armstrong and Bernstein (2008). This model underscores the mutually constitutive nature of cultural and institutional power and the role of each in structuring society's dominant patterns and forms of authority (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008). While other scholarship has given attention to cultural components of movements and expanded the plane of the political beyond the state (e.g. Katzenstein, 1999; Isaac, 2009; Jasper, 2014), Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) aim to bridge these and more traditionally politically oriented movement theories into a holistic approach. Their approach explicitly attends to both the cultural and institutional targets of movements, thereby providing traction in studying a movement like BLM. Whether advocating for changes in specific police practices or prioritizing Black leadership, BLM targets both a culture of anti-Black racism and its institutionalization ("What We Believe," nd).

By viewing "meaning as constitutive of structure" (Armstrong and Bernstein, 2008: 83) and institutions as carriers of meaning rather than seeking to differentiate cultural and structural goals,

tactics, targets, and movements, the authors shift the conversation beyond such parsing and into tracing how power manifests in what society values and rewards. Instead, Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) argue that movements seek to change that social order by challenging both resource distribution and social classification. For example, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movement's efforts have sought to expand legal rights (thereby gaining material and legal resources for LGBT persons) as well as to change cultural norms about LGBT persons (thereby enhancing society's view of the "moral worth" of LGBT persons) (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008: 86). These structural and normative goals are inseparable: gaining legal recognition of same-sex marriage, for instance, inscribes social validation on same-sex couples and extends normative social behavior to include them even as it provides same-sex couples with the economic and legal resources that married couples may claim (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008). At the same time, such a legal victory followed years of intentional organizing, relationship building, storytelling, and local policy victories (e.g. nondiscrimination ordinances) (CITE – marriage movement site), demonstrating that cultural and institutional means and ends are intertwined. Each achievement by the LGBT movement, then, ultimately furthers institutional and cultural valuation of LGBT persons. BLM functions similarly, working to challenge societal norms as manifested institutionally and within culture.

But movements not only respond to "extant systems of authority" (Snow & Soule, 2010: 7) but also reveal what holds authoritative sway internally – the movement's own normative values – in the choices made in movement strategies, tactics, goals, and identities. For some movements and movement groups, those actions, beliefs, and decisions are made with the intent to cultivate the normative and structural change they wish to see throughout society. Such movement efforts engage in *prefigurative politics* (or prefiguration) (Breines, 1989; Epstein, 1991; Maeckelbergh, 2009, 2011; Yates, 2015), in which movements seek to embody the goals they hope to advance for the broader

society. Although – as Yates (2015) discusses – initial theories of prefiguration tended to view it as subsidiary activist activity distinct from instrumental activism undertaken to achieve overarching or external movement goals (Breines, 1989; Epstein, 1991), more recent scholarship softens that differentiation, viewing prefiguration as itself potentially strategic (Maeckelbergh 2011; Yates 2015). This trajectory mirrors that of scholarship on tactics in general, in which some scholars have come to appreciate making firm distinctions between instrumental and expressive movement work as misguided (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008). Polletta (2002), in her study of participatory democracy in activist organizations, names the how some scholarship has viewed activist decisions that prioritize form and process as counterproductive to achieving movement goals. Polletta recounts that such research interprets the prioritization of form and process by activists as, for example, "'prefigurative' *rather than* 'strategic'" with an "indifference to strategy [that] seems to doom them to failure" (2002: 2, emphasis added). Combatting this narrative, Polletta (2002) finds that form in fact breeds and allows substance and strategy, and that these in turn influence activist engagement and expression. In short, seemingly cultural or expressive activist decisions and actions often bear strategic import. That perspective is reflected in this paper's understanding of strategic, which views as strategic both instrumental and expressive tactics aimed towards achieving either institutional and/or cultural goals.

The same perspective is visible in recent theoretical approaches to prefiguration, which take a general understanding that, for some movements, the methods used to achieve goals both demonstrate and help to bring about those ends (Yates, 2015). In other words, choices made about the form and process of movement tactics, meetings, and identity are strategic decisions. As Yates (2015) delineates, there have been two primary modes of prefigurative politics recognized by movement scholars: first, movement groups intentionally cultivate a new form of sociality, such as through the movement's organizational form, the activists' intentional mode of relating, or the

movement group's approach to decision making and governance; second, movement groups refuse to separate the means and ends of their tactics, instead viewing their approach to activism as constitutive with the goal they hope to reach through it. Although scholars have tended to rely on one or the other approach to prefiguration in analyzing movements, Yates highlights how they are nevertheless connected via their future orientation to "anticipate or enact some feature of an 'alternative world' in the present" (2015: 4).

Yates (2015) uses three case studies to illustrate his approach to prefiguration, in which he notices connections among the different definitions of prefigurative politics used by other scholars. His findings reveal a compelling transposition of the academic debate about the strategic consequence of prefiguration: the activists in his study felt a tension between living into their prefigurative goals and achieving external outcomes, even when these external outcomes drew upon or were coextensive with the activists' process-oriented prefigurative politics (2015: 2, 6-7, 12). For a member of one community of activists, the slogan-adorned banners at protests were meaningless unless group members could "'live into what they [the banners] say'" (Yates, 2015: 6). The activists believed that everyday life that aligned with the movement's values was imperative to achieving their political aims (Yates, 2015: 6-8). The "desire to be 'coherent' in this way" – that is, a desire on the part of the activists to embrace and exemplify in daily life the values and aims of the movement's ultimate goals – shaped how the group's members formed their identity and participated in activism (Yates, 2015: 6). The pursuit of coherence demonstrates how the activists viewed the political as increasingly inseparable from both everyday life and the means by which they engaged in activism, including but also beyond mobilization (Yates, 2015: 8-11). Yates (2015) underscores how prefigurative politics prioritizes embodying the movement's values; that attention to values-based process and form occurs in activists' everyday lives as well as in the formation of activist identities, selection and deployment of tactics, and pursuit of movement goals.

Most importantly for this paper, Yates (2015) draws upon his case studies to describe prefiguration as a both/and rather than an either/or: prefigurative politics in movements occur as activists take part in "creating of alternatives" that are actively enacted within mobilization and/or "everyday activities" *as well as* strategically deployed for "future political relevance" (2015: 13). In other words, prefigurative politics involves the already – how activists relate to one another, mobilize, and engage in tactics – as well as the not yet, those external, societal ends activists aim to achieve. He thereby argues forcefully for the strategic, or goal-oriented and end-achieving, value of prefiguration (Yates, 2015). Moreover, he identifies the impact of prefigurative politics across the movement elements, particularly focusing on activists' beliefs and collective identity and the tactics and goals of a movement group (Yates, 2015: 14). For example, Yates (2015) points to experimentation with forms of everyday life and activism, such as squatting and communal living with shared possessions or engaging in different forms of disruptive actions. But he also posits that prefiguration includes less material approaches, such as generating new frames and perspectives or articulating "new collective norms" from activists' experiences and beliefs (Yates, 2015: 14). This prefigurative politics might involve shifting to "consensus decision-making" to uphold norms of compromise, communication, and empowerment within the group (Yates, 2015: 11), or making environmentalism visible and viable to group outsiders, thereby both actualizing the movement's environmentalist frame and working to extend it through adoption by others (Yates, 2015: 11-2). By enacting group norms with such material or social "intervention[s]," activists engaged in prefigurative politics may participate in the "diffusion" of the movement's norms and values and incrementally realize their goals (Yates, 2015: 14).

These examples underscore the role of prefiguration in shaping activists' identities and beliefs, as well as movements' tactics and goals. Ultimately, Yates argues that prefiguration intentionally contests prevailing norms rather than focusing solely on cultivating an internal

"subcultur[e]" (2015: 18). Activists invest in the content of activism and daily life because it, too, is political, not because prefiguration elides the difference between means and ends (Yates, 2015: 18). Importantly, rather than denying the tension between external goal-seeking activism and internal construction of values and norms, Yates (2015) highlights its value. In his view, activists "oscillating" (2) and "hedging" (19) among "multiple political priorities" demonstrates their participation in *strategic* prefiguration. That is, prefiguration necessarily involves negotiating the tension between embodying movement values across activist activities (including daily living) and realizing movement goals, and navigating that terrain hones activists' strategic pursuit of their aims (Yates, 2015: 19). A clear delineation of which activist decisions and activities are strategic (i.e. goal seeking) rather than expressive proves elusive: the negotiation between action and expression required by prefigurative politics is itself strategic, as activists identify and propagate new tactics, frames, and norms (Yates, 2015: 19). To understand the rubric by which activists negotiate towards strategic prefiguration, this paper will draw upon repertoires of contention and, in particular, Polletta's "logic of appropriateness" (2005: 274).

Appropriate Contentious Politics

When a movement intentionally engages in prefigurative politics, its activists recognize the political nature of the norms governing their everyday lives and contentious action (Yates 2015). This strategic engagement with the normative content of the movement's goal, strategies, tactics, values, and collective identity – and the pursuit of coherence throughout – shapes activists' decisions in seeking change. As activists work to find the point at which embodying prefigurative values fosters achieving movement goals, they are making tactical decisions. But these decisions are not made in a vacuum; instead, social movement scholars recognize that all possibilities for movements – from collective identity to contentious politics approaches and organizational forms – are not universally available and deployed at all times (Polletta, 2005). Instead, movements operate from

their repertoire of contention, selecting from that array those means of contentious politics that are available, possible, preferred, and appropriate for a given group of activists (Tilly, 1995; Taylor et al., 2009; Polletta, 2005).

Activists, then, work from within their repertoire of contention, but what sets the parameters for that array of possibilities for activism? The literature on repertoires of contention understands movement actors as making simultaneously strategic and contextually and ideologically contingent decisions that inform their repertoire of contention. In so doing, activists respond to tactical opportunity and constraint. While some scholars have studied what makes particular repertoires available for activists (e.g. McCammon, 2003), a complete answer to that question must be found not only by understanding how a given approach to contentious politics is *included* in a repertoire of contention, but also what causes some strategies and tactics to be *excluded*. By explicating an instance of a contentious repertoire's limitations, Polletta helpfully describes the contextual and internal elements that lead to activists having and making "limited use of the range of strategies available to them" (2005: 273).

In her study of the rejection of participatory democracy by Black Civil Rights Movement organizations, Polletta (2005) argues knowledge, possibility, and availability are not the only elements to consider in understanding activists' repertoires. Rather than bifurcating strategic considerations from cultural concerns in understanding activists' selection of tactics, Polletta (2005) views these as inextricably linked components that help to determine what a movement's repertoire will entail. In her formulation, "symbolic associations and oppositions" (Polletta, 2005: 275) alongside ideological beliefs, movement goals, and "interactions with opponents and allies" come together with further contextual elements to shape which tactics activists might choose (274-5). Together, she argues that these elements constitute the movement group's "logic of appropriateness" (274); in her empirical

case, that logic of appropriateness governs the activists' choice of organizational form. This logic of appropriateness, however, extends to the whole of activists' repertoire of contention.

Seeking to achieve their goals, activists make rational choices to extend and limit the content of their repertoire of contention. But these decisions are not made in a vacuum; instead, activists cohere with what is most appropriate for the specificity of their context, goals, target, and ideology (Polletta, 2005). When activists perceive an opportunity for mobilization – such as the activists in this study using the Martin Luther King, Jr. federal holiday as an occasion to draw attention to continued anti-Black racism – that understanding of opportunity is filtered through the activists' operative determination of movement appropriateness (Polletta, 2005). The tactic chosen in response to opportunity is similarly governed by appropriateness; in the MLK Jr. Day example, activists chose a peaceful but disruptive protest march that culminated in a shared community meal, and explicitly evoked King's beloved community to explain the reason for the meal. These choices by activists begin to provide insight into their movement appropriateness, demonstrating attention to historical movements combatting anti-Black racism and values of community and nonviolent disruption. An outside observer may view their actions and wonder if more efficient means of achieving the movement's ends exist, but decisions cannot be made on singularly strategic or ultimately ideological terms. In fact, what activists view as strategic hinges on their worldview as well as resources, and the sum of many material and iedological parts constitutes what is understood as appropriate for the movement (Polletta, 2005). Analytically, a lens of appropriateness fosters an incisive and in-depth understanding of the content of internal movement dynamics and activist decisions. Appropriateness particularly helps to illuminate the sources and products of tensions found within prefigurative politics, as well as the elements shaping activists' repertoire of contention. Thus the contested process underlying activist decisions finds analytical footing in appropriateness: the oscillation between politicization of daily life and externally-focused activism by the movement

groups studied by Yates (2015) demonstrates an instance of working towards the group's appropriate – and prefigurative – tactical repertoire. Appropriateness might dictate the availability (or lack thereof) of specific forms of activism for a movement group.

Processing a Prefigurative Oppositional Identity

Central to both prefiguration and appropriateness is activists' collective self-understanding, which serves as a touchstone as well as target for transformation when activists enact prefigurative politics and engage in activism. Within social movement theory, collective identity is the concept that describes the politicized recognition of self-in-common of a movement group (Taylor & Whittier, 1992; Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Melucci, 1995). It is among the forces that scholars recognize as important in mobilizing movement actors, as the mutual sense of the group fosters "cohesion and commitment" to the work of the movement (Flesher Fominaya, 2010: 393). Collective identity does not spring forth *ex nihilo* or manifest in basic demographic markers, but represents something sought, often internally fraught, and certainly central as movements mobilize new members and determine their course of action. It acts as a potent force in social movements: it mobilizes new movement participants, fosters solidarity among those within the movement, helps to articulate movement values both for participants and observers, and shapes movement tactics (Flesher Fominaya, 2010). At its core, a collective identity describes how a movement's activists understand themselves internally and represent the movement to others externally – although that understanding and representation may change over time. Importantly, collective identity can prove transformational for activists (and potential activists): formation of and identification with a collective identity might entail activists undergoing McAdam's (1999) cognitive liberation, in which a group comes to recognize both that the world need not be as it is and that they are capable of changing it together (Taylor & Whittier, 1992).

This paper understands the formation of collective identity as a process (Melucci, 1995; Taylor & Whittier, 1992; Flesher Fominaya, 2010), which emphasizes the emergent and contingent qualities of collective identity in both its content and its movement impacts. Within a movement group, a collective identity is formulated collectively over time (Melucci, 1995; Flesher Fominaya, 2010). Collective identities emerge and shift in the interaction among to the identities, values, and motivations of individual group members, the context within which they are embedded, the social change effort itself, and the movement's targets (Melucci, 1995; Flesher Fominaya, 2010). Collective identities are constructed and performed as movements begin, activism occurs, and targets respond, and key aspects of activism – such as the identification of targets or selection of tactics – resonate with collective identity and impact it in turn. That perspective is particularly appropriate here, given the paper's focus on a movement group whose activism exists, in part, in the delineation and cultivation of an antiracist collective identity.

In a chapter outlining their conceptualization of collective identity, Taylor and Whittier (1992) argue that collective identity is politicized, oppositional, and boundary setting, and that it provides not only solidarity but also an ideological perspective for movement adherents. The authors (1992) emphasize three key elements in the ongoing construction of a collective identity: boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation. First, collective identities "locate persons as members of a group," but that process of delineating the meaning of group membership is itself a part of the work of the movement (Taylor & Whittier, 1992: 114). In other words, differentiating insiders and outsiders by articulating and embodying a collective identity not only emerges in the work of the movement, but also is an outcome of the movement. Rather than assembled from societal divisions based on essentialized notions of self, the boundary work of collective identity involves the social and political construction of new, counter-cultural institutions, culture, and values towards "creating a world apart" (Taylor & Whittier, 1992: 113). For example, identifying as racially Black does not

make one a part of the BLM movement; instead, adherence begins to arise with recognition of the pernicious presence of anti-Black racism and participation in efforts to disrupt and combat anti-Blackness.

Collective identity can be understood as a valuable movement resource through the authors' (1992) second element of collective identity construction, consciousness. Here again, identity does not exist as a flat attribute but as an enacted ideological perspective, or "interpretive framework," and way of being in the world (Taylor & Whittier, 1992: 114). The construction of a new consciousness among group members activates cognitive liberation (McAdam, 1999) by prompting a re-evaluation of the existing order that accounts for its structural injustices and begins to suggest how they might be transformed (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Thus consciousness does not end with ideological emergence; instead, the system of domination, now seen and understood, may be rejected in everyday life (Taylor and Whittier, 1992). This consciousness is not only externally oriented, but also geared towards self-understanding. The new ideological perspective a collective identity's consciousness provides allows movement groups to make sense of, interpret, and shape the future of their daily lives, their contexts, and their activism. For an outsider to understand activists' actions, the authors (1992) argue, she must first understand the collective identity ideology that makes them "comprehensible," or the perspective through which they understand themselves and their actions (p. 118). This aspect of collective identity construction holds clear resonance with prefiguration: the group's ideological consciousness provides a foundation for activism and lens through which to assess its efficacy.

Having differentiated themselves by creating boundaries and cultivating an interpretive framework, activists must now contend with how to embody their identity in activism and daily life. Moreover, they do so while within a context whose norms, values, and institutions may diametrically oppose those central to their collective identity. By politicizing the personal and articulating new

norms and definitions, activists deploy collective identity "as a means of transforming the institutions" that underwrite social injustice; in so doing, the activists work towards the movement's ends (Taylor & Whittier, 1992: 119). Taylor and Whittier (1992) term this element of identity formation negotiation, or the process through which "movements work to change symbolic meanings" and resist dominant norms by insisting on another identity and its new way of being in the world (1992: 118). Through boundary setting, consciousness creation, and negotiation, movement groups construct and utilize a "collective oppositional consciousness" geared towards action (Taylor & Whittier, 1992: 109).

Taylor and Whittier's (1992) conceptualization of collective identity formation locates it firmly alongside – and indeed, within – prefigurative politics and a movement's logic of appropriateness. Identity can be a site of contestation as well as impetus, as movement groups seek to determine and enact their self-understanding in often-prefigurative ways. For example, BLM as a movement prioritizes upon Black leadership as a means of embodying its rejection of anti-Black racism; in so doing, the movement demonstrates its collective identity as pro-Black and prefigures the societal shift away from anti-Black racism it seeks. At the same time, a movement group's collective identity becomes a part of the logic of appropriateness governing its repertoire of contention: how the group understands itself and the perspective it has on the world provide parameters for what forms of action are or are not appropriate. In fact, movement appropriateness might govern which aspects of identity become foregrounded or rejected in a group's collective identity, such as a labor fight heightening class consciousness in activists' collective identity. Finally, at its core, Taylor and Whittier's (1992) oppositional identity functions as prefigurative politics: activists generate a commonly held, politicized worldview that recasts both their daily lives and approach to mobilization.

Data & Methods

The white antiracist activists in this study evinced training, experiences, and values in keeping with antiracist activism, responded to the rallying cry of the local movement leadership group, and supported a movement that quickly demonstrated its own extensive and creative mobilization. And yet, they experienced tension, uncertainty, and negotiation as they took part in BLM actions, debriefed their participation, and sought to articulate how to best support the movement. To understand this disparity, this paper argues that BLM's prefigurative context and an antiracist whiteness oppositional identity became sources of appropriate constraint as the group members worked to determine how to participate in the movement. By analyzing the group's prefigurative movement context (BLM), its target (anti-Black racism), and its emergent and contested oppositional collective identity (antiracist whiteness) as markers of movement appropriateness, this paper identifies key factors the group used to gauge the appropriateness of different forms of contentious politics and mobilization. The white activists' prefigurative movement efforts required the development of an oppositional, prefigurative identity: antiracist whiteness. The norms and activities suggested by that oppositional identity and the prefigurative politics of the local and national BLM movement context led to a reduction in the activists' repertoire of contention, casting an appropriate restraint upon the activists as they sought to generate and embody antiracist whiteness in support of BLM. The constrained repertoire of contention that resulted was born of appropriate restraint rather than problematic limitation as the activists negotiated towards forming their oppositional collective identity and generating an understanding of movement appropriateness. Ultimately, this paper will show that appropriateness might lead to restraint by movement groups, and that such seeming limitations might hold productive value for a movement or actors within it.

The primary sources of data for this study are the activities of a group of white antiracist activists in a mid-sized southern city working to support their local BLM chapter. The research team

collected data through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, field notes, and audio recordings. All research team members were movement group members and participated in the group. The key sources of data were a series of group meetings held by the white antiracist activists to debrief actions and plan subsequent support for BLM. These meetings were all audio recorded, and those research team members present took field notes. Participant observation also included BLM protest events, for which research team members produced field notes. Semi-structured interviews were held with six consistent members of the white antiracist activist group; these interviews were used to supplement and confirm analysis of the group meetings and protest events. Data also included review of movement documents and cultural artifacts, some produced and/or collected by the white antiracist activist group and others collected for research purposes.

Data analysis used qualitative coding techniques and understood this study of the movement group as a case study. Open, recursive coding was used in analyzing the meeting recordings as well as any field notes about the meetings. That recursive coding process drew upon Cathy Charmaz's (2014) approach to grounded theory. Relevant coded segments were arranged first by general topic, then by the function they served in group meetings, such as negotiating identity or voicing tensions. Within these categories, segments were analyzed for their relationship to the group's movement context, the activists' emergent identity, the group's tactical repertoire, and other apparent sources of appropriateness for the activists. The findings drawn from analysis of these coded segments are used alongside confirmatory analysis from additional data sources to present a case study analyzing how oppositional identity and prefiguration influence the appropriateness of a repertoire of contention. It does so first by providing a general sketch of both BLM's prefigurative context and the anti-Black racism it targets, then by presenting its findings from an in-depth analysis of the meetings held by the white antiracist activist group.

Movement Context: Contesting Normative Culture and Institutions

Making Black Lives Matter

The Black Lives Matter moniker has spawned a widespread movement for racial justice in the United States. It began when organizers Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi felt that they must formulate a response to 17-year-old Trayvon Martin's death at the hands of George Zimmerman, particularly in light of those who insisted on examining Martin's life to justify his death (Garza, 2014). Over subsequent months, the assertion "Black Lives Matter" gained momentum and extensive use through the public's heightened awareness of repeated tragedy: the deaths of black men at the hands of police. What began as a rallying cry to protest an environment in which too many Black lives seem to be disposable has spawned a movement with chapters across the country (Black Lives Matter, 2015). These movement groups hold regular protests alongside other forms of activism to seek cultural and institutional change and upend the anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism embedded in U.S. norms, policies, and practices and evinced in interpersonal biases (Black Lives Matter, 2015).

One aspect of BLM's activism focuses on making visible the cultural and institutional realities of racism and anti-Blackness, from their pernicious daily normalcy to their overt violent incursion in the lives of Black Americans ("What We Believe," nd). But BLM not only calls out, it also calls towards, advocating for new structural and daily realities that repudiate anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism ("What We Believe," nd). In fact, in the language the movement's website uses to describe BLM, its focus staunchly affirms moving towards a different world rather than giving any space to the words 'white' or 'supremacy,' thereby describing its target as that which is antithetical to the movement's goals and using terms that continue to center the Black focus of the movement ("What We Believe," nd). BLM seeks a reimagined society that emerges in interpersonal interactions without bias, is structured in law and institutions without racism, and offers an affirmation of the

worth and value of *all* Black lives ("What We Believe," nd), even highlighting those whose lives have been "marginalized within Black liberation movements" ("About," nd). With a stance that is "unapologetically Black," BLM's leaders and members have "committed to struggling together and to imagining and creating a world free of anti-Blackness, where every Black person has the social, economic, and political power to thrive" ("What We Believe," nd).

Even in the face of actions by societal actors and institutions that suggest a society that believes otherwise, BLM focuses on promoting and embodying its insistence that Black lives *do* matter. In so doing, the movement targets systemic anti-Black racism, entangled in U.S. discourse with white supremacy. BLM views anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism as the primary sources of the norms, institutions, and behaviors that undermine the valuation of Black life by U.S. society, and pursues dismantling the dominance of those worldviews to disrupt their enactment. Because BLM strives to reject anti-Blackness holistically, it initiates that project internally. Thus the BLM movement contests anti-Blackness even in how it structures its leadership, deploys its tactics, and articulates its values. For example, BLM insists on foregrounding Black leaders, voices, and experiences; in so doing, the movement seeks "to have strategy and action centered around Blackness without other non-Black communities of color, or White folks for that matter, needing to find a place and a way to center themselves within it" (Garza, 2014). The focus on Blackness as centered and prioritized runs counter to the hegemonic norms of anti-Blackness; as such, it requires white antiracist activists who wish to support the movement to acknowledge the coercive and constraining influence of anti-Blackness and negotiate a new norm for their whiteness.

When BLM targets anti-Blackness, it does so by disrupting its embedded societal dominance and its structural and interpersonal effects, in part through prefiguring antiracist, pro-Black values and actions. Bree Newsome (2015), a racial justice organizer who gained recognition when she climbed the South Carolina statehouse flagpole to remove the Confederate flag it held, names the

institutionalization of anti-Blackness pervasive in the U.S. as well as the values that prompted her action: "When oppression is the status quo, disruption is a moral duty" (2). Newsome (2015) wrote powerfully in defense of stripping the South Carolina flagpole, and key to her account was an extended excerpt from a study detailing how entrenched and pervasive the institutionalization of white supremacy had become in Ferguson, Missouri: zoning laws, differential application of subsidies, neighborhood agreements that excluded Black ownership, racist taxation practices, and more functioned to enshrine anti-Black oppression in the laws and practices of the city and state. These realities were features of the environment in which unarmed teenager Michael Brown was killed by a police officer, a shooting that would become a tipping point in Black Americans' frustrations coalescing into a potent movement moment (Newsome, 2015). Newsome rejected the timeline created by the South Carolina legislature's deliberation over whether and how to remove the Confederate flag. In so doing, she disrupted an anti-Blackness that found waiting on the unfolding political process acceptable,[4] even in the aftermath of the horrific massacre of nine Bible study members by a white supremacist. Moreover, she prefigured a new reality, one without the trappings of the Confederacy, at the South Carolina Capitol Building.

In short, BLM cultivates the beliefs, values, power relations, and interactions within its movement that it seeks to foster throughout society. Its approach involves holding a critical perspective on society as well as embodying and articulating new norms, both within daily life and through its contentious politics In so doing, BLM functions as a prefigurative movement (Yates, 2015). Its actors are rooted in "affirm[ations of] our humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression," which serves both as a rejoinder to societal denial of Black lives' worth and as a model for a society without anti-Blackness. Thus BLM pursues

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[4] not to mention an anti-Blackness that had acceded for 150 years to continuing to fly the flag of defeated separatists who defended the brutal ownership of persons based on morphological features for the sake of economic gain (but who's counting)

institutional and policy change and rejects interpersonal anti-Black racism by prioritizing Black leadership, communities, and values ("What We Believe," nd). Many of its mobilizing tactics involve disrupting the status quo – e.g. blocking interstates, interrupting political events, forestalling holiday shopping at the mall – to demonstrate both the disruptive impact of anti-Blackness on Black persons daily lives and the urgent need for a new normal. BLM thus takes a both/and approach to prefiguration, with a critical perspective that both impacts daily life *and* orients activists' mobilization practices and systemic goals (Yates 2015). Prefiguration thereby provides a useful analytical tool to study white antiracist activists involved in the BLM movement.

BLM recognizes that it must contest the power and normality of anti-Blackness, whether located in daily interactions or institutionalized in legal, economic, political, educational, and social structures. In prefiguring and calling for structures and interactions that reject anti-Blackness, the movement targets the acculturation and institutionalization of dominant social norms that foster anti-Blackness and center whiteness. BLM leaders and activists and the antiracist white persons who hope to accompany and further the movement all operate within the very social context they seek to target and change. As the white antiracist activists in this study delineated an oppositional collective identity and negotiated towards an appropriate repertoire of contention, they sought alignment with the prefigurative values of BLM, but needed also to contend with the anti-Black racism within which they were embedded and by which they were implicated. Thus understanding the white antiracist activists requires tracing briefly the origins and widespread effects of the anti-Blackness BLM works to target and overcome.

Anti-Blackness: Centering the Power of Normality

Finding a means of rendering comprehensible a seemingly all-encompassing structural and cultural target like anti-Blackness benefits from a theoretical tool; this paper employs critical theory to enable the study of anti-Blackness racism's impact on activism. Here, anti-Blackness is

understood to function as a social logic, ideological belief, and legal and institutional system that privileges whiteness as a marker of what is normal, moral, and competent, in significant part by devaluing people of color and imputing to non-white persons, spaces, ideologies, and practices markers of deviance, immorality, and defect (Foucault[Macey], 2003; McWhorter, 2009). One potent approach that has been used to demonstrate the origins and content of systemic and interpersonal anti-Black oppression is Michel Foucault's genealogical method (Foucault[Macey], 2003), particularly its use by philosopher Ladelle McWhorter (2009) in *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy*. Foucault focuses upon what he terms "the how of power" (2003: 24), or an understanding of power that views it not as an asset but as an exercise that can be seen in enactment, struggle, conflict, and resistance. By including both structures and norms in his assessment of power, Foucault demonstrates how material arrangements, institutional systems, legal orders, and social discourses alike serve to enact power. Norms cultivate a sense of right and truth that is, in turn, codified in policies, laws, and institutions, effectively producing social order and repressing those who act or are embodied beyond those norms' limitations (Foucault[Macey], 2003).

McWhorter (2009) leverages Foucault's notion of power and genealogical approach to trace the origins of racial oppression in the United States. Her rich sociohistorical account demonstrates how specific legal codes were enacted to create a cleavage between white indentured servants and Black enslaved persons, effectively legalizing an understanding of race based on morphological features to legitimize the enslavement of those with a particular skin color. By fostering differentiation based on physical features, the colonial land owners began to provide poor white Europeans with a "stake in the status quo" and its morphological racialization (McWhorter, 2009: 72). What has become a social fact (Durkheim[Lukes], 2013) – race – is thereby revealed to have emerged in its American form from vested economic interests (McWhorter, 2009). That social identity was further cultivated as scientific theories about race popularized morphology and biology

rather than lineage as explanations for racial difference (McWhorter, 2009: 78-9). As a biological notion of race became entrenched, biological and social scientific research furthered their societal legitimacy by ascribing causes and outcomes to race (McWhorter, 2009).

Two types of coercive and enabling forces come into play in furthering these racial ideas and actions. First, as argued by Foucault, norms do not operate only through official and institutionalized channels. Instead, daily habituation and acculturation foster their general application throughout society. This insight is further substantiated by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2011) notion of "racial grammar." According to Bonilla-Silva, racial grammar functions "to normalize the standards of white supremacy as the standards for all sorts of everyday transactions," a process that has the consequence of "rendering domination almost invisible" (2011: 174). One example Bonilla-Silva (2011) uses to illustrate racial grammar is the media attention given to missing white women, an attention that tends not to extend to missing Black women – and a discrepancy that often goes unnoticed because unexceptional. The coercive influence of anti-Blackness is extended throughout society in often-unremarked ways that nevertheless reinforce its dominance.

Second, Foucault helps us to recognize that norms are not accidental: instead, institutions invest in particular norms and actively seek to uphold a given social order (Foucault[Macey], 2003). From the infamous Three-Fifths Compromise, a measure that wrote slavery and the devaluing of Black lives into the United States Constitution, to the codification of discrimination in the Jim Crow south, to a new era of mass incarceration and a "War on Drugs" that disproportionately criminalizes and imprisons Black and brown persons, the United States has institutionalized the hold of anti-Blackness – and, thus, whiteness – over American society (Alexander, 2010).

Ultimately, an anti-Black understanding of race in the United States has become viewed as natural and inherent rather than socially and historically produced. Moreover, the promulgation of white morphological features and the lives of those who possess them as somehow superior has

fostered the reality and content of anti-Blackness and its oppressive, violent reality today. That reality is only furthered through the economic advantages enabled by the definition of Blackness as less than whiteness. Finally, the legal, institutional, and ideological dissemination of whiteness as standard, normative, and good has sweeping impacts. Such is the systemic and interpersonal context targeted by Black Lives Matter, a context within which white antiracist activists have been steeped and from which they must pursue differentiation. As this paper will show, they do so through the contested formation of an oppositional collective identity and negotiation towards an understanding of movement appropriateness for their support of BLM.

Findings

Appropriateness & Opposition: Constructing an Antiracist Whiteness

This study traces the first six months of meetings held by a group of white antiracist activists as they sought – and struggled – to determine their purpose and role in supporting the work of the Black Lives Matter movement and its local chapter. It does so to illuminate the process through which these white antiracist activists worked towards an oppositional collective identity and an understanding of movement appropriateness. These foci emerged for the paper because of the activists' experience of constraint in their repertoire of contention: given that the group enjoyed extensive knowledge of and experience in movement tactics, other factors must explain the limitations the activists encountered. In fact, by joining BLM, the activists experienced variation in their context, moving from a context of anti-Blackness to a prefigurative environment that sought to disrupt and displace it. Moreover, they experienced changes in their collective understanding of whiteness and the role of white people in the movement. Those changes provided parameters by which the activists gauged the appropriateness of different forms of contentious action for the group. The activists regularly considered a range of mobilizing, consciousness raising, educating, and organizing tactics, carefully processing each within the context of BLM and their own whiteness and

experiencing tension in discerning whether and how to act. By analyzing the activists' assessment of their presence at local BLM actions and discussion about their purpose as a group, including possibilities for current and future activism, this paper demonstrates how the prefigurative politics of BLM and the activists' pursuit of an oppositional (and itself prefigurative) antiracist white identity served as sources of appropriate constraint for the activists. This section will provide an overview of the activist group meetings that comprise the data for the study followed by illustrative examples of both types of meeting activity: debriefing BLM actions and discerning the antiracist white activist group's purpose and future activities.

After providing an overview of the meetings, the following analysis will describe each meeting topic (debriefing actions and deliberating purpose) in turn. The emphasis at meetings unfolded in that order (debriefing followed by deliberating) as well, given initial rapid mobilization by the local BLM group followed by an abeyance in its planned actions as the BLM group created its leadership structure and determined its internal processes. When the local BLM leadership team turned to internal assessment, the white antiracist activist increasingly did so as well, seeking to identify and refine an appropriate repertoire of contention, particularly group purpose, group form, and types of action. The analysis will show the activists used an antiracist whiteness collective identity, BLM's prefigurative politics, and their specific movement context as rubrics for assessing the appropriateness of actions and decisions. At each meeting, activists sought individual and – perhaps more so – group accountability to remain within the boundaries of their identity as white antiracists, to maintain the oppositional consciousness of that identity and the BLM movement's prefigurative politics, and to enact that identity and the movement's worldview appropriately. Clear decisions and forward motion often felt unattainable as the meetings embodied the oscillating tensions of prefiguration (Yates, 2015): activists struggled to balance process/product, accountability/action, everyday life/external activism, and following/mobilizing. Ultimately, the

activists negotiated within the constraints of oppositional identity and prefiguration towards their most appropriate forms of group formation and action.

Overview

The white activists initially came together in response to a request for assistance with white supporters at actions by Black friends, colleagues, and fellow activists in the local BLM leadership team. Following the first actions, the white activist group realized that space and time to assess their experience of the actions and discuss how they might support the movement could prove valuable, and so independently decided to meet on an ongoing basis. Meetings initially focused on debriefing past and anticipating future BLM actions. Even at these first meetings, when fodder for debriefing and refining their supportive presence existed, the activists began to negotiate the group's purpose and activities; as local BLM actions waned so that its leadership team might engage in their own group formation and leadership development, the white antiracist activists increasingly foregrounded their deliberations over group purpose, formality, and independent actions. While some of the activists cycled in and out of the group, a core constituency maintained a consistent presence across the meetings and they along with some of those who joined after a few meetings became key players in the group's ultimate formalization as a chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice,[5] or SURJ.

Meetings were held in activists' homes, rotating among the living rooms and couches of volunteers, and were facilitated by similarly rotating volunteers. Each host offered snacks and beverages to the group, and meetings always began with casual conversation followed by introductions and ice-breaker check-ins (e.g., "What is something good that's happened to you over the last week?"). These stage-setting gestures created an atmosphere of friendly congeniality and, for some, imparted a sense of caring to the group dynamic. Initially created at the start of meetings from

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[5] SURJ, a network organizing – as its name implies – for racial justice, focuses its attention on transforming and mobilizing white people. (www.showingupforracialjustice.org/about.html

the contributions of those present, agendas became proposed by members on a shared online document in advance of meetings but remained subject to revision and addition at the behest of the attendees when read at the beginning of each session. Minutes were taken for each meeting and added to the shared online folder, making them available to any unable to attend a given meeting, and activists frequently recounted the content of previous meetings or their conversations with local BLM leadership team members to ensure that everyone had the same information. Because some activists had preexisting relationships with members of the BLM leadership group and/or one another, including in relevant spaces like white antiracism discussion groups, they regularly offered historical context on local antiracist efforts or willingness to communicate with those guiding local BLM actions. All told, the activists made deliberate efforts to create and maintain relationships and cultivate a relaxed context for the meetings even as they encountered tension in deliberating the group's purpose and the appropriateness of their engaging in actions independent of the local BLM leadership team.

As the activists debriefed their role at BLM actions, considered the motivating purpose of the group, and discussed the antiracist activism to undertake, they assessed the appropriateness of each in relation to a few primary factors. By gathering as white people in support of a Black-led movement aimed at laying bare and eradicating anti-Blackness, the activists prioritized articulating and embodying an antiracist whiteness and distinguishing it from other forms of whiteness, such as a liberal – but not radicalized – whiteness and an anti-Black whiteness. They also sought to situate themselves appropriately within the larger BLM movement's prefigurative politics, such as by deferring to Black leadership, and to respond appropriately to requests and instruction from the local leadership group. Finally, the group worked to balance embodying BLM's prefigurative ethos and the call of local leaders for space and time with their own impulse to act. They felt particular urgency around holding accountable, educating, organizing, and mobilizing other white people, an

impulse that arose both from the activists' response to the repeated anti-Black tragedies of the current moment and from their experiences in other activist and antiracist efforts.

Debriefing Actions

The white antiracist activists convened their first meeting specifically to process and assess their presence at recent local BLM actions; the primary actions discussed were a disruption of holiday shopping at a local mall in an affluent neighborhood, a march through and disruption of the tourist-centric, busy downtown area, and an alternative Martin Luther King, Jr. Day march that intentionally intersected with the kickoff of the city's official MLK Day March. While in later discussions some activists would highlight that BLM leaders had never asked the group to meet but only to assist in specified ways with actions, those present at the initial meeting agreed that debriefing would be an important use of time both for the sake of internal processing and in order to improve for future actions. Their discussions were responsive to the activists' initial directive "to help organize other white people at actions;" in other words, to be attuned to the presence and activities of other white supporters, white bystanders, and the influence of whiteness at the action, including their own embodiment of antiracist – or other forms – of whiteness.

The activists spent time identifying what had gone well, such as Chloe affirming the mall action as "really powerful, and it was powerful for many people who were there, shopping, it was moving" and Maria professing how the march had made her feel very "moved and empowered." Even as they spoke of positive moments at actions, the activists remained aware of race and its role in creating the context within which the action unfolded. Prior to the mall action, members of the group of white activists convened a group meeting of all white people mobilized to participate in the protest while people of color gathered in another space to confirm the agenda and ground rules for the action. The group agreed that separate spaces preserved Black leadership for the event, allowing Black organizers and supporters to determine when and how they wanted white protesters to join

specific aspects of the action, such as the die-in, and ensured that white supporters had an opportunity to hear the requests of Black leadership and receive some training prior to the action. Even so, Chloe acknowledged "not all of them [white supporters] were there to play the role that we had kindof anticipated them playing," suggesting along with others in the group that future actions might benefit from a somewhat more extensive and better organized education and expectation-setting session for white people beforehand. For example, some white supporters responded to bystanders with hostility, drawing attention to themselves and undermining the nonviolent – but disruptive – approach desired by the local BLM leaders. By intentionally respecting opportunities for Black ownership of and leadership in the action alongside creating spaces for grounding white supporters in the values and embodiment needed for the action, the activists participated in BLM's prefiguration and the cultivation of an oppositional whiteness for the movement's white supporters.

At that same action, Maria recalled how an impasse – mall security blocking and shutting down escalators to deny protesters access to the second floor – was overcome when "someone texted…'Allies, go up' because they were letting shoppers go up, but not protesters." Another activist, Chloe, wryly interjected "which meant white people," underscoring the guards' use of skin color to distinguish 'disruptive' protesters from 'normal' mall traffic. Susan took up the narrative: "we folded our signs up, and stuck them in our jackets" and proceeded up the escalator, the activists now 'disguised' as mall shoppers by virtue of the color of their skin. As the white protesters on the second floor began to join the chanting of the activists below, another white activist defied the security guards and changed the direction of the down escalator, enabling "a flood of people" to travel to the second floor.

The activists demonstrated self-awareness of the different opportunities afforded by their skin color, such as blending into those shoppers permitted up the escalator and risking directly undermining the efforts of the security guard by tampering with the escalator. Such strategic

deployment of whiteness in response to direction from action leaders (e.g. responding to a texted directive, hosting a brief training for white supporters prior to the action) or in order to displace undue risk of arrest or violence from Black protesters (e.g. changing the escalator direction) embodied forms of whiteness with which the activists expressed comfort and confidence. But even in the midst of these strategic uses of whiteness, the activists remained aware of occasions in which white protesters had acted in opposition to the desires of the action's Black leadership. For instance, the activists recalled another white activist who shoved a security guard in passing, causing the group to wonder, again, whether more nonviolence training might prove necessary.

The white antiracists' debriefing did not reserve critique for other white protesters, additionally attending to their own shortcomings in upholding the prefigurative oppositional antiracist identity advanced by BLM and frequently identifying with all the white supporters who joined local actions. In particular, some amount of ambivalence arose when activists found their or other white participants' actions centering whiteness or supplanting the Black activists rather than supporting their leadership and efforts. Such concerns included Wyatt's encouragement "to keep thinking about our message as white people," especially those messages propagated for pithy signs at protests. "What," he wondered, "is a healthy message that doesn't supplant 'black lives matter'?" Wyatt identified the importance of white antiracists finding their place and voice in support of BLM's work in a way that upheld the movement's prioritization of black lives, experiences, and leadership. Such questions presaged an extensive and pressing subject for the group as they discussed their presence at actions as well their unfolding purpose: how might white antiracists best engage in solidarity with BLM, participating in the collective liberation offered by antiracism while rejecting any efforts that might supplant its Blackness?

Similarly, Chloe pushed the group to plan for white supporters who lost sight of that message: "how are we going to talk to people who forget what solidarity looks like?" Compellingly,

she had her own story of doing just that at a protest, illustrating the activists' willingness to interrogate their own ability to embody the prefiguration of BLM and respond to course correction. Over time, the through line of the group's conversations became discerning white persons' appropriate embodiment of solidarity with BLM. In this instance, she recalled how she and two other members of the group of white antiracists – David and Stephan – came together to confront another white protester they dubbed "mustachioed man" while the protest disrupted traffic in a busy roadway. The "mustachioed man" had begun to exchange verbal barbs with a driver stalled by the protesters who had left his car to better scream at them, and the three white antiracist group members descended with the intention of pulling mustachioed man away. As they moved towards the pair, Chloe explained, "an African American woman I don't know came over and was like 'disengage' and realizing that we aren't really charged with security, we're playing now a **visible** role, around this, trying to be a buffer between this mustachioed man…and this outside person, but in doing that we're drawing attention to ourselves." By immediately assuming responsibility for controlling the problematic whiteness of both the bystander and mustachioed man, the antiracist activists embodied another version of problematic whiteness themselves, undermining Black leadership and centering white persons. Here the best of intentions resulted in the white antiracists becoming a focal point of the protest, diverting attention and energy from the key work of the moment: the nonviolent disruption of holiday traffic on a busy shopping thoroughfare that highlighted the violent disregard given to Black bodies through the use of a die-in tactic in the middle of the road.

Following that tactic, the group massed and used a people's mic to decide the next step to take, specifically whether or not to illegally cross the road again and risk the arrest warned by the police gathered around the protest. One activist, Kathryn, gave voice to an illustration of the push-pull the white antiracists experienced in learning to parse how to appropriately embody oppositional

antiracist whiteness. Kathryn recalled the moment, having been unsure and discomfited by the sudden request to participate in a democratic vote to determine the group's next step. "[H]ow do I honestly really feel about that for myself," she wondered, "how do I feel about voting at all, given that the organizers are people of color, and that…[they are] going to most likely get arrested?" She recalled feeling divided by the prospect, her desires warring between trepidation at the prospect of arrest and affirmation for the importance of mitigating the arrest of Black protest participants: "I can't let other people get arrested and not be a part of this, but, you know, I don't want to get arrested!" The irony of Kathryn's account lies in her simultaneous disavowal of any form of leadership role in deciding the group's next step and recognition of the importance of stepping into a form of participation that, by being on the front lines, might risk arrest. Solidarity and embodying an oppositional white antiracist identity would not, it seemed, be simple or without contradictions. As Nathan and Kathryn together discussed at a later meeting, a tension existed between stepping up and stepping back as the prefigurative politics of BLM frequently made *both* demands of white antiracist activists, intensifying their need to discern situationally and contextually.

The impulse underlying Kathryn's uncertainty rests in part in the fundamental importance of following Black leadership for the prefigurative politics of BLM. In their meetings, the antiracist activists spent time highlighting moments of following as well as instances that revealed the difficulty thereof. At its most basic, part of Kathryn's discomfort arose because, as she identified, "that was a moment when I was like 'I don't know what to do.'" Not knowing what an action's organizers had planned, what next step the protest might take, or even whether an action meant to raise consciousness or focused on particular demands at times proved difficult for the white antiracists, most of whom had been involved in – and, generally, leaders and organizers for – previous movement efforts.

But the group also found occasion to mark their success in following the local BLM chapter's Black leadership. That they noticed such instances underscores how doing so required an intentional shift in their perspective and presence at actions: the activists needed to unlearn habits from and assumptions about movement solidarity, becoming followers within activism rather than organizers of it. Moreover, the group was aware that other white supporters needed to make similar transitions even if they lacked movement experience, given the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism and the presumed rarity of their encountering Black persons in positions of authority within their daily lives. Chloe celebrated seeing that shift embodied by the supporters gathered prior to an action: "what I was noticing was a lot of white people being who just seemed relaxed, about, like, being **led,** by this group [of Black leaders] – like clearly some people are in charge and we're just gonna wait and be told what to do and then we're gonna do it!" She and the other activists at the meeting acknowledged the relative absurdity of highlighting such a seemingly simple development, with Chloe joking about being led as something "white people don't always do well" to the general laughter of the group. In so doing, they pointed to the preposterousness of a society in which being led by a person of color might be abnormal, uncomfortable, or worth remark. And yet, remarking upon it demonstrates Chloe's recognition of the pervasiveness and perversity of anti-Black racism and of the importance of celebrating small victories towards inhabiting an oppositional consciousness.

Sometimes the antiracist activists came to recognize their lack of knowledge and responsibility by instinctively assuming a momentary leadership role, such as when Kathryn noticed – and Chloe approached and confronted – a white man repeatedly "sticking his camera into people's faces" at one protest. Having learned that the local paper had dispatched him to cover the protest, Chloe's sense of responsibility met an impasse: "I feel like I should communicate that with somebody else, so others know this [inaudible] man has a role, but I don't actually know who the

organizers, like the lead organizers, of this event are." After acting in the role a leader might take, Chloe was confronted with the fact that she was not, in fact, a leader of the action, and lacked familiarity with its organizers. Even so, she had gained useful information, and while her sense of responsibility might emerge from having played a leadership role at similar protest, her pivot into seeking a Black leader to tell demonstrates the both-and nature of supporting the movement without supplanting its prefigurative prioritization of Blackness. She and other group members reflected on the importance of building relationships with the local BLM group and recognized that it, as a nascent local movement organization, lacked structure, using the incident as a reminder to build rapport with the local BLM organization to better understand how best to be in solidarity with it.

On other occasions, however, the white antiracists' lack of information translated into a less generous understanding of the local BLM actions. Even as the activists recognized the importance of following Black leadership, at times they expressed ambivalence about doing so, particularly when questioning tactical and strategic decisions made by the local leaders. They often approached such topics with trepidation and discomfort, torn between critique of the Black leaders' decisions and understanding of the importance of following. Such complications rose to the fore when actions did not go 'well' or align with what the white antiracists expected. One activist in particular regularly pressed the need for concrete demands from the local BLM group, seeing consciousness raising as of limited effectiveness and staying power in turning out supporters and leading to lasting change. Other activists spoke of "suspending disbelief, suspending judgment" in seeking solidarity with the BLM leadership group or wondering "when am I willing to follow?" At times, the cognitive dissonance of being asked to follow was intensified further, as when the Black leaders of one disruptive action asked Betsy to help with its planning and guide its trajectory as the march unfolded. Betsy spoke of feeling that the march had been rushed and, as a result, was overly reactive and disorganized; and yet, she emphasized, "it was powerful at times." Such concerns remained an

open question for the white antiracists, who struggled to determine how best to support the Black organizers' work without supplanting their leadership role.

In fact, the question of how solidarity with the movement might at times *limit* the efforts of the white antiracists rose to the fore once again in their discussion of the MLK Day March. That protest served as a counterpoint to the city's official MLK Day March, and at one point joined the official event at its kickoff stage. As the BLM group moved towards the stage and gathered crowd, Kathryn recalled it feeling "disruptive," assessing those present for the official march as "mostly people of color, mostly black people" while in the BLM group, white people were more represented than Black. That difference in crowd makeup forced her to question "you know, what is my role **here**," disrupting an event largely attended by people of color. Maria, too, recounted the emotional shift she experienced over the course of the protest:

> And then that felt weird…I mean everything that we did, the die-in, the chanting, the moving the park, the read - you know like, everything was **beautiful**, but that, that dissonance, was (incoherent), and I'm not sure what to do with that. What does, what **does** solidarity look like? Does it mean showing up en mass for an event like that, to the point where there are more white people than people of color, or does it look like something else?

The white antiracist activists had committed themselves to solidarity, but the contours of inhabiting that role were revealed as increasingly complicated: even their very presence as white persons might undermine how observers viewed an action and, in turn, the movement. As the group assessed their presence at BLM actions, the regularity and consistency of their meetings – particularly in contrast with those being held by the local BLM leadership group – took on additional significance, illustrating how white progressives in the city possessed time, space, resources, and experiences that facilitated their mobilization. Faced with the realization that they must not supplant the local BLM group's Black leadership but keen to participate the fight against anti-Black racism spurred by the momentum of the national movement, the group began to spend more time discerning how to support the movement beyond attending BLM actions.

Group Purpose & Activities

Even as the white antiracists held their first meetings to debrief the actions and their role in them, they felt drawn to discussions of purpose and possibility. As Chloe reminded the group at one meeting, "there was a specific request" from Black organizers that prompted the group forming and meeting at all, which oriented her towards prioritizing "what's the role we're being asked to play…and then to have a space to think about how are we doing with that?". For Chloe, as for many of the others, the touchstone for the group's existence was found in responding to Black leaders and parsing their own actions, both at protests and in embodying an antiracist whiteness in daily life. As the group debated what it might become and how it might act, Chloe in particular stressed "the first clearest thing is follow leadership of people of color in [our city] who are organizing around anti-racism, and if there's a group mobilized, that's where I should be, if there's an invitation for me to be there."

In keeping with that initial reason for convening, one strain of the activists' conversation about purpose centered on the importance of intentional reflection and mutual accountability as they supported BLM actions and sought the conceptual shift necessary to embody its prefigurative role for white people. But as Nathan reminded the group, accountability did not signal ease: "There is some value to a space that's not just safe, in that you can unload like your guilt or something, but more than that maybe, like accountability and sharing and talking through." In fact, the activists wanted to move towards something new rather than finding comfort in camaraderie. Jonah compellingly articulated the activists' self-aware pursuit of change when he invoked their need to "be a little decentered" as they worked to "hold each other accountable during actions and also figure out how we can begin to create a new culture in our individual lives, to do that consciousness raising." The embodiment of antiracist whiteness needed to occur beyond participation in a protest, and would require a conceptual shift accompanied by behavioral change. Nathan agreed, seeing the importance of "maintaining spaces like this where there can be intentional reflection that maybe you

couldn't do in the same way, at least in one of the big organizing meetings with other persons of color organizers." Many of the activists felt the need for accountability and conversation towards conversion into a new form of whiteness, and hoped this group would offer that space; Nathan recognized the importance of meeting that need without allowing it to decenter Black lives and leaders by occurring in the multirace meetings of the local BLM chapter.

The activists also spoke of providing education towards that oppositional consciousness, both for themselves and for other white people. Maria emphasized the educational aspect of "self-interrogation" and "mutual consciousness raising," acknowledging that, in addition to its value as a foundation for antiracist activism, "I kinda feel like I would find that conversation valuable in itself." By engaging in educational conversation towards another way of thinking and embodiment, she and the activists participated in a key form of prefigurative politics, particularly insofar as they connected the renegotiation of their worldview with both activism and everyday life. An activity Maria led at one meeting illuminated how each of those present was wrestling with how to implement the conceptual shift in their daily lives as well as within the movement. Although meetings generally focused on past and future contentious action, the activists easily identified, discussed with a partner, and recounted for the group a recent struggle with race or whiteness in their daily lives. As they did so, the impact of the movement on their identity, habits, and relationships became apparent; previously, most evidence of their shifting consciousness had emerged in discussing their presence at actions rather than their embodiment of daily life. The activists shared experiences ranging from Wyatt's difficult Facebook interaction, a heated exchange debating race as a social construct or a lived experience, to Tori's struggle to help a friend overcome shyness to confront racial injustice. The latter example found commonality with others' experiences, sparking a discussion among the group about the difficult necessity of balancing "really aggressive" calling out with "gentle connection" to maintain relationships while insisting on antiracism. The activists' responses to this

activity demonstrated that the group might be understood, as Jonah remarked on another occasion, as "just people who realize that we need to do work, and part of that work is on myself, and holding myself accountable."

Although the white antiracists recognized the importance of space to process towards the conceptual shift needed to embody an oppositional white identity and participate well in the prefigurative work of BLM, they wanted more. The group felt that they could contribute, and began to discuss how they might move beyond support at Black-organized actions without supplanting local BLM work or its Black leadership. At one of the group's first meetings, Betsy voiced what would become a central concern for the group: "as we mobilize white people, how can we keep the emphasis on POC led movement?" The group recognized that their efforts would be best used in support of the movement by reaching their fellow white people, but that they would require careful discernment to navigate supporting the local Black leadership without detracting from or dominating BLM's work. The activists' ideas for additional tactics fell into a few general categories, such as "using these [actions] as direct organizing spaces for [white people]" by getting contact information from white supporters, producing educational materials to distribute at the actions and beyond, and engaging with white persons who do not identify as antiracist.

Some even expressed that the group needed more of an action-oriented purpose to feel like a legitimate use of time, as when Tori worriedly conveyed that she would not "feel super comfortable about my role in the group if I don't know the purpose of it." Similarly, Nancy wanted to ensure her time was being well spent in a group geared towards making change, given that, as she told the group, "I spend so much time in my other life reflecting on race, I don't need another space with white people to talk about my feelings and my interactions like we did the last meeting. I'm really just interested in, are we going to organize? How are we going to do it?" These activists felt the urgency of the movement moment and wanted capture it, to move forward, rather than, as

Susan put it, the group existing as "separate space just for us to reflect on the actions." Instead, she said, "I want there to be another train moving."

But others in the group pivoted from such assertions back to the group's origins, as when Chloe reported feeling that same "urgency of now" towards the local Black-led actions rather than what they, as white antiracists, might add. She worried that planning and executing their own parallel activities might prove distracting, and wanted "to lend my little spark to [the Black-led actions]," which might mean pausing any other tactics. Jonah agreed, seeing in the group "a chance here to **be** something different, where you focus on relationships, as opposed to being another group that **does** things, if that makes sense." He recognized the opportunity for the group to define itself intentionally, taking the example of BLM by prefiguring a different approach to activism that entailed "finding new answers." Neither activist precluded action by the group; instead, they encouraged patience and careful discernment in determining what they could become. Even so, their reminders frustrated those in the group who sought concrete, outwardly focused contentious engagement for racial justice.

In the midst of their consistent desire for action, the white antiracists were similarly consistent in their effort to refer to Black leadership as a rubric by which they might gauge the appropriateness of their ideas for contentious politics. For the activists, following Black leadership often translated in their conversations into seeking explicit guidance or permission for proposed activities, particularly when unsure if an activity might cross the line from providing support to supplanting Black efforts. But the activists soon learned that even pursuing explicit permission might not release them from their dilemma. They found themselves caught between recognizing the importance of upholding BLM as a movement that centered Black leadership and wanting to act on their motivation to engage in antiracist contentious politics beyond their requested role at BLM's actions. Speaking from experience in activism and recognition that anti-Black racism could pervade

even progressive politics, Betsy turned to her friends among the local BLM leaders to reassure them as well as seek direction from them.

> I was like I need help knowing what our role is. We have this really mobile group of white people that want to be in this with you, with their bodies, with their hearts, with their souls, like, we, we want to be in this, and we don't know how…we've seen white people take over black and people of color spaces and don't want that to happen, and think it's, I said, I think it's great to have something structured and in place so that can't happen, and I will go, and, like hold up the back of the line, or make revolutionary lotion bars, (laughter), or whatever you say, but give us guidance, on what our role is right now. And Mary was the first to speak, and she just said, we need patience.

That request for patience became one pole in the oscillation that pervaded the rest of the activists' deliberations towards a purpose. Nowhere was this oscillating tension more apparent than when the activists recalled the words of the local BLM organizers and struggled with how to accede to the leaders' request while fulfilling their own desire for activity that moved beyond support at actions, group reflection, or mutual accountability. Even as the Black organizer's words became a mantra within the group – "Part of being patient is not to scale up," Chloe suggested in response to one suggestion – the activists felt that the antiracist whiteness they sought to embody required more than waiting for instruction. Even so, they recognized that finding appropriate tactics would require creativity, seen in Susan's reply to Chloe's admonishment: "I meant being more creative than that." Others quickly chimed in, with Kathryn highlighting the "day to day work" the group might do in their everyday lives to bring greater awareness to racial injustice, and Stephen concurring: we are "just being people finding new people." By the next meeting, multiple activists could report on actualizing their intention to focus on everyday antiracism. With a commitment to seek occasions to enact antiracist whiteness in their daily routines, the activists furthered their prefiguration and deepened their oppositional consciousness.

And yet, that form of contentious politics, too, fell short for many of the activists, who wanted more organized and formalized forms of antiracist work – and so the tension and oscillation continued. The group remained focused on educating, organizing, and building capacity with other

white people, but did not want to direct energy away from the local BLM group. As specific ideas were proposed and discussed, members of the group continued to invoke the Black organizers' request for patience and the BLM prioritization of Black leadership and experience, working to determine which forms of action might appropriately further their antiracist identity without undermining BLM's prefigurative approach. Chloe illustrated the group's discussions:

> I'm remembering that a couple times in our meeting last time, [we] were like, 'right, ok we got to slow down,' and then, like 'but maybe we should make a webpage,' (several: laughter) and 'maybe we should-' then we were like, 'oh wait, no wait,' so there was some tension around what organizing white folks means.

Some activists saw in these calls for patience a need to "run [ideas for actions] by them [the BLM leaders]," while others felt presenting a litany of suggested activities would directly contradict the Black organizers' request. Again, proposals to perform white-specific organizing met with concerns about "pulling energy away" from the local BLM group. Meeting their goals came to feel impossible: they needed to determine an appropriate repertoire of contention while learning to embody an oppositional antiracist whiteness, all within the context of BLM's prefigurative politics and the anti-Black racism pervasive in society. Should white antiracists support BLM by responding only to direct instruction by Black organizers? Could they offer additional activities within BLM's contentious action, such as educational handouts at protests, letters to the editor in support of the movement, or building capacity for mobilizing white people in support? Or should any action beyond that directed by local BLM leaders be clearly distinct from its efforts with care not to duplicate or draw attention away? Tori was not incorrect when she wearily summarized the activists' discussion of group purpose and future as "going around and around and around." The activists felt unsure of the appropriate actions to take: they were simultaneously invested in respecting Black leadership and committed to embodying their oppositional consciousness in external, organized efforts. In many ways, however, that very uncertainty made deliberation central to the group's meetings and served to further their negotiation towards an understanding of movement appropriateness.

Conclusion

This paper details how the introduction of key factors – a developing oppositional collective identity and a movement context of antiracist prefiguration – limited experienced activists' repertoire of contention to that which was appropriate. However, it does not suggest that the white antiracist activists, because of such constraint, would have been right not to act at all, ceding all responsibility because stymied by unfamiliar territory. Instead, it highlights the importance of their tension, struggle, and oscillations *towards* action: in fact, the group persisted in its efforts to recognize how best to be in solidarity BLM – that is, how to identify an appropriate repertoire of contention. Deliberation towards appropriate contentious action became a feature of the activists' understanding of antiracist whiteness, and soon after the final meeting included in this study, the group became a local chapter of the Showing Up for Racial Justice, or SURJ, national network. Having so thoroughly explored and deliberated the appropriateness of different forms of action, when yet another anti-Black, racism-motivated loss of Black lives sparked a fresh wave of national outrage, the white antiracists were ready.

They had come to recognize that, while they risked supplanting local Black leadership if acting within the auspices of BLM, other networks oriented towards engaging white people in racial justice work might provide a perfect partnership through which to direct their energy. They had also continued to foster relationships with local BLM leadership and to follow the Black organizers' request to be patient. The antiracists drew upon these relationships and resources as they planned a meeting for anyone interested in joining local antiracist efforts, intentionally inviting white people to discussion, education, action, and planning, and extending the invitation to any people of color who wanted to participate as well. Ultimately, the group voted to become a chapter of SURJ and continue to work in parallel with the Black-led BLM chapter. That development allowed the activists a platform from which to augment the antiracist, prefigurative work of BLM without supplanting it. It

did so by focusing the group on education, accountability, mobilization, and capacity building for white persons while prioritizing its members' support for people of color led movements. The group's conversations thereby proved productive and important as the activists sought to define appropriate solidarity within the BLM movement, the group's social context, and its developing oppositional identity.

The group moved towards an antiracist whiteness, a self-understanding the activists could draw upon as a delineating and anchoring oppositional identity (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). In debriefing their role at BLM actions, the activists used their sense of antiracist whiteness to distinguish moments in which they problematically centered whiteness; a similar process occurred when activists debated how taking some forms of action might supplant BLM's efforts rather than supporting it. The meetings served as space for the group to recommit themselves to the embodying antiracist whiteness and to continue exploring its contours as they negotiated their identity and practice. Ultimately, by providing the activists with shared norms and desire to pursue a new worldview, the group's oppositional identity fostered productive pursuit of appropriateness.

But that identity took shape and expression in context. BLM's overtly prefigurative politics – its valuing of Black lives, experiences, and leadership in the midst of pervasive anti-Black racism – grounded the activists and provided values that helped to shape how the group gauged appropriateness. Those values received local specification as the activists engaged in relationships with the movement's local Black organizers. As they sought to uphold the prefigurative politics of BLM and wishes of the local organizers, they worked to avoid furthering anti-Black racism. These movement and social contexts did not provide an easy or explicit path for the activists, but gave further substance to their negotiated pursuit of appropriate contention. In the midst of uncertainty, living into antiracism and up to BLM's prefigurative politics served as a centering anchor for the group, even as they occasionally resisted the local leaders' requests.

These factors – an oppositional antiracist identity, their local and national prefigurative BLM movement context, and anti-Black racism in society – together limited the activists' repertoire of contention to that which was appropriate. In many ways, the group's goal became constructing and embodying – prefiguring – that oppositional identity at BLM actions and in identifying the group's purpose and activities. Their negotiation of those constraints mirrors the oscillating tension experienced by the activists in Yates' (2015) study. Here, as with the activists of Yates' study (2015), the group desired external action in overt pursuit of movement goals but upheld the importance of pursuing a new way of being in the world, even if it might limit those actions. By identifying the process involved in activists ascertaining appropriateness, this paper demonstrates that deliberation and constraint can be productive for movement groups. Moreover, it documents how oppositional identity and prefigurative politics, both shown as rubrics for appropriateness, may function both to enable *and constrain* forms of contentious action. The normative and enacted influence of prefigurative politics and oppositional consciousness shift the content of activists' repertoire of contention; by tracing that process, this paper illustrates sources of appropriate constraint.

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