ARCHIVING THE MOVEMENT: GENERATING SOLIDARITY AMONG BLACK MILLENNIALS IN VIRTUAL SPACES

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In this paper, I analyze the impact of the discourse #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) has on how communities frame policing practices within protests. I find that Millennials created an archive of distinct moments in virtual space through social media as a platform for performing their discourse. I examined YouTube videos of protesting the police after incidents of police brutality in three cases. First, the murder of Oscar Grant in Oakland, California, which was before the #BLM movement emerged. Second was the choking of Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York. Third is the shooting of teenager Michael Brown in St. Louis, Missouri. By expanding the collective identity, #BLM changed the discourse about police brutality from a problem within local communities to a national social issue. The #BLM movement shows that communities no longer have to struggle alone but that they can and must unite against oppressive policing. Further understanding how social media has been used as a social movement tool can help scholars see how activists use virtual spaces to perform a discourse in future movements.

"Dracula, Frankenstein, The Wolfman, The Invisible Man and Hercules don't scare me. The FBI, The Anti-American Committee, J. Edgar Hoover, President Nixon, President Johnson, Martha Mitchell and her husband or her man or her woman, Ethel Kennedy, all the Kennedys. The Bank of America, Chase Manhattan, Rockefeller. None of these people scare me. What scares me is that one day my son will ask me, 'What did you do Daddy, when the shit was going down?'" (Richard Pryor, 2005)

In the middle of a protest for Black Lives, a Democracy Now! reporter interviewed Pastor Derrick Robinson, who stated:

What's going on today is that the people in this country [are calling for] justice for all. We're tired of it not being justice for all. And so today we're here to make a stand. That either we get justice, or we're shutting the street down. {0232}[1]

This encapsulates the feeling I had years before as I walked through the streets with other protesters advocating for justice for Oscar Grant in 2009. I felt it again for Trayvon Martin. Again, when I marched in Ferguson and watched the unfolding demonstrations

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[1] Numbers within braces indicate the corresponding video found on YouTube. The complete list of videos with corresponding links can be made available upon request.

in New York. Then, of course, I felt it for #WalterScott, #SandraBland, #RekiaBoyd, #ShellyFrey, #TamirRice, #FreddieGray, #AiyanaJones, and the long, long list of others. I start this paper with a reflection on my positionality. As a Black millennial who has both organized and participated in many protests, this piece feels like a small part of a longer reflection I will have about what my generation stood for when staring down the face of oppression.

Anti-Blackness is hegemonic. Black people will continue to navigate it around the world. Policing practices that contribute to anti-Blackness are ever-evolving, but each iteration will have to be addressed by each generation. To the extent that Black millennials have contributed to the response and critique of state violence, mobilization will continue to be a tool for performing political rage. As yet, few movements have gained the national platform that Black Lives Matter has. As Briscoe argues, "As Black Lives Matter seeks to abolish racial subordination, it separates itself from a reform movement and moves towards a revolutionary moment… BLM highlights the circumstances for the abolition of white hegemony, as it asks us to reconsider every facet of the reproduction of society" (2020, p. 312). Activists using this discursive tool in their protests and on social media are examples of activities focused on developing #BLM into a multidimensional tool of discourse. However, it is imperative to remember that this discourse grew out of centuries of critiques of policing practices.

In this paper, I analyze three sets of protests focused on the issue of police practices. The first case occurred in 2007 in reaction to the shooting of Oscar Grant in Oakland, California, which was before the BLM movement emerged. The second case was the choking of Eric Garner in July 2014 in Staten Island, New York, that occurred after the shooting of Trayvon Martin. The third case occurred in August 2014 and involved the shooting and verdict of the teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and also occurred following the shooting and verdict of Martin. Although all of these incidents were followed by mobilization specific to their areas, the last two contributed to the growth of the Movement for Black Lives. Protests that occurred before #BLM emerged focused on policing issues primarily *within* their communities, whereas the protests that occurred after #BLM made connections *from* local instances *to* a larger global problem. Social media has become the platform for showcasing the political labor

millennials are committing to archive their movement. Thus, it is important to study and learn the usefulness of documenting these moments as this discourse expands and develops over time.

Traditions of Generating Discourse

White hegemonic discourse requires a specific form of evidence to make claims to new forms of knowledge. In the history of discourse critiquing the police, Black communities throughout the 19th and 20th centuries used a collaboration of personal accounts, songs, performance art, and visual art. Each generation practices using a different platform to make this case. We can think of Ida B Wells, who kept note of the lynching of Black folks throughout the South and Southwest. The *We Charge Genocide* petition to the United Nations was signed by many Civil Rights Leaders. The return to the Charge of Genocide rooted in Chicago in 2014. The various rebellions in LA, New York, Detroit, and Oakland were summed up as the Urban Crisis. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense started their national movement by policing the police (Bloom & Martin, 2012). The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) lists a few events over a hundred years of policing, offering one perspective on this history (ACLU, 2020). Scholars across multiple disciplines have documented both the existence of violent police practices in Black communities and the responses. Visual Artists such as Jean-Michal Basquiat and Hip Hop artists like Tupac, NWA, Public Enemy, and KRS-One all focus on police violence and its engagement with Blackness in their work.

The genealogy of black (insurgent) performance allows echoes of the past to remain present. Each iteration of these performances must be disruptive and, by definition, countercultural. As Roach suggests, "The paradox of the restoration of behavior resides in the phenomenon of repetition itself: no action or sequence of actions may be performed exactly the same way twice; they must be reinvented or recreated at each appearance" (1996, p. 29). The Black tradition of "signifyin(g)... illuminates the theoretical and practical possibilities of restored behavior not merely as the recapitulation but as the transformation of experience through the displacement of its cultural forms" (Roach, 1996, p. 29). The maintenance of these transformations is endured by being deferential to both the cases in the past and the activists who focus on them.

To attempt to summarize the discursive contributions of centuries of generations in this paper would be to trivialize them and the labor of those who made those contributions. Each historical event has created the context for generations that advance the discourse. Millennials have been able to take advantage of virtual spaces that have no borders and operate as public spaces. This has led to the development of an archive across social media platforms, engendering a discourse to critique police practices. As this discourse evolves and changes, the practices of political performances (re)capitulate new ways to appeal to solidarity.

Black Millennials and Social Media

Social media is a resource for activists to communicate and raise opposition efficiently and effectively, which set the stage for a strong wave of political activities post-2008 (Milkman, 2017). Social media is a vehicle for information to be distributed quickly and for traditionally marginalized voices to be heard, as well as for the marginalized voices to have control and distribute the information. In 2009, millennials were ages 13 to 28, and Generation Z, if they were born, were as old as 12 (using Dimock, 2019). Thus, many in Generation Z have not lived in a world without the popularized frame of Black Lives Matter. Millennials took advantage of social media in an age where photo sharing grew rapidly across platforms (Duggan, 2013). In 2023, #BLM turns ten and still "stands as a model of a new generation for social movements intrinsically linked to social media" (Bestvater et al., 2023). Both millennials and Generation Z are likely to support the Movement for Black Lives, and teens are more likely than adults (Hurst, 2022).

Social media takes on the public square and overlaps with private space. Our social theory and scholarship now have to encapsulate the interrelationship between online political virtual discussions and "on the ground" demonstrations to understand how millennials are influencing discourse (see Schroeder, 2018). The term "hashtag activism" colloquially was a derogatory term to denigrate the collective cultural influence of internet users. However, recently, scholars have challenged derogatory understandings of the impact of online communities (Jackson et al., 2020). As millennials participate in content creation and curating online spaces for community, politics are also on display.

There are a number of political activities millennial users perform as part of their insurgent practices. According to Bestvater et al. (2023b), social media is a major political platform for many millennial users in the U.S. Roughly one-third of millennials have taken part in a group that centers an issue or cause, and 14% used social media to find information on protests or rallies happening in their area. In particular,

> Black users stand out for their activity on social media, with a majority (58%) saying they've participated in at least one of these [political] activities in the past year, compared with less than half each among White (45%) and Hispanic (40%) users. Asian users do not significantly differ from their Black, White or Hispanic counterparts: 49% say they have done at least one of these [political] activities in the past year. (Bestvater et al., 2023b)

Black users also change their profile picture more than other racial groups, which declares a political stance on topics. Users that support #BLM specifically vary in age. Social media is central to the kind of insurgency millennials will engage in, which is impacted by the discourse on political issues. Indeed, we cannot separate these hashtag movements from the local context, historical trajectories of political discourse, and the long history of insurgency and counterinsurgency.

Social media users performed the labor of attaching meaning to the frame of #BLM. Specifically, Black Twitter, as a virtual diasporic community space (Lockette, 2021; McNair, 2019; Bonilla & Rosa, 2014), promoted the hashtag and developed consistent practices for amalgamating cases into a discourse. This political labor was conducted largely on Black Twitter and has influenced how other traditional news media, activists, politicians, and scholars engage in discourse on anti-Black state violence (See Auxier 2020; Harris, 2017). Multiple writings, which include commentary and thought pieces, are included in this archive of insurgent practices. All of these activities are focused on disrupting white hegemonic discourse that invalidates violence on Black bodies and, indeed, Black lives themselves.

It is important to note that #BLM travels across social media platforms. Other scholars have explored the significance of Black Twitter as a space where users curate community. Black Twitter provides a platform for social media users across the diaspora to circulate cultural, social, and political discourse like never before (Clark, 2014; Florini, 2013). The political labor of designating "which hashtags are to be used, who is to use

them, and to what ends they can be used" is a specific, messy negotiation millennials undertake on social media (Booten, 2019, p. 183). These carefully negotiated contributions are not static today but are subject to ongoing negotiation, cooptation, reclamation, or innovation by millennial and Generation Z users across social media platforms today (Bestvater et al., 2023a). Freelon et al. (2016) track,

> for more than a year, #Blacklivesmatter was only a hashtag and not a very popular one: it was used in only 48 public tweets in June 2014 and in 398 tweets in July 2014. But by August 2014, that number had skyrocketed to 52,288, partly due to the slogan's frequent use in the context of the Ferguson protests. (p. 8)

The inclusion of deaths before and after the Ferguson moment demonstrates how Twitter users were highlighting the relevance of the historical context as a part of their analysis. The amalgamation of cases of Black deaths connected specific events to a broader discourse of anti-Black state violence because of the political labor of users on social media. Therefore, when someone uses Black Lives Matter, the meaning attached to it is an entire political discourse. #BLM serves as a stand-in for the larger context of anti-Black state violence to which people can (and will unfortunately need to) append information, events and critiques.

While the brunt of the political labor took place on Twitter, YouTube became a parallel archive of videographic content of protests, news coverage and commentary. The YouTube archive is less explored by scholars, but I argue that these archives interact–even though hashtags were not a feature on YouTube until 2018 (Perez, 2021; Southern, 2021) – because the discourse used by the protesters in the cases of Eric Garner and Michael Brown mirror the language on Black Twitter.

Discourse and [Black] Solidarity

Thus far, I have argued that I am describing a discourse. Discourse does not mean that there are no material consequences to historical moments. Instead, discourse and the production of knowledge constrain the material aspects of a topic. This means that as Black communities continue to critique police practices, they create an insurgent narrative that informs, inspires, and stimulates political activeness. According to Hall (2019):

> Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But it is itself produced by a practice: 'discursive practice'--the practice of producing meaning.

> Since all social practices entail *meaning*, all practices have a discursive aspect. So, discourse enters into and influences all social practices. (p.155, *emphasis in original*)

Millennials use social media to curate the production of Black political solidarity. The discourse of 2009 and 2015 looks different on every social media platform as millennials continue this political labor, and as a result the political activities governed by these discursive practices also change. We should see #BLM as a multidimensional tool of discourse; however, this should not diminish centuries of nuanced critique of policing. Black millennials carved online spaces for collective grief and solidarity. Social media gives us the opportunity to give old issues a new light while broadcasting them in a new way.

In order to categorize discourse before and after the influence of #BLM during protests, I name different types of solidarity cultivated by protesters. I suggest the terms *positioned solidarity* and *dilated solidarity* to lay out the ways protesters in periods between 2009 and 2015 distinguish between different strata of community. I use these labels to compartmentalize the types of analysis, details, and events protesters emphasize throughout their discourse. *Positioned solidarity* is used when protesters narrate their grievances based on the collective identity of their local communities. Specifically, protesters in Oakland focused on the ongoing trial of the officer responsible for Oscar Grant's death, and they archived the details of Oscar Grant's death as evidence of anti-Black state violence. *Dilated solidarity* is a demonstration of protesters thinking beyond place in their analysis of those included within their community. Protesters in New York and St. Louis contributed to the amalgamation of names listed in the index of Black death that contribute to anti-Black state violence. In both types of solidarity employed by the protesters, the political labor included negotiating the development of a discourse to critique police practices.

Methods

I conducted a content analysis of YouTube videos documenting protest events (see Dale, 2017; Paek et al., 2010). I include three sets of protest events focused on addressing police violence against unarmed Black men. I use one case before the creation of #BLM (Oakland) and two after (New York and Ferguson). I have 82 videos

that document events in the San Francisco Bay Area (28 videos), New York City (22 videos), and St. Louis Area (32 videos). I selected videos based on the place of the protest for each region. So, for the Oscar Grant protests, I looked only at videos that show protests in the SF-Oakland Bay Area. For the Eric Garner protests, I looked at videos that show protests in New York. For the Michael Brown protests, I only looked for videos that show protests in Ferguson or St. Louis. This eliminates videos in honor of these three victims from other parts of the country or videos of opinions or rants. The content in the video needed to display popular social insurgency tactics (i.e., marches, vigils, die-ins, riots, etc.) to be included.

The videos vary dramatically in length and quality. The shortest video to date is 1:30; the longest video is 3:28:13.[2] The dates on the videos that I have coded reflect the date the user posted the video. The earliest video that I have for Oakland is dated January 7, 2009, and the latest video is November 14, 2010. The earliest video I have for Ferguson is dated August 10, 2014, and the latest video is August 13, 2015. The earliest video I have for New York is dated December 3, 2009, and the latest video is July 18, 2015.[3] I separated the videos into three different tiers. The first tier is videos strictly filming protest events. The second tier is videos that include what I call "Street Journalist/Journalism," which I define as community members filming and interviewing other protesters about the events. The third tier is videos from local or national news organizations, such as MSNBC, CNN or Fox News covering a protest event.

Using the search video function in YouTube, I found videos by using a combination of key search words. For example, if I were looking for a video of protest events happening in Oakland, I search "Oscar Grant," "Oscar Grant protest" or "Oakland protest Oscar Grant." Each of the videos was found with a combination of similar search words respective to the case on which I was collecting data. I gathered the videos into a

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[2] In recent years it has become easier to upload longer videos onto YouTube. Thus, earlier videos are shorter not because of importance but because of technological advances.

[3] The videos cluster temporally around the initial incident of police violence and then followed by the verdict by the courts for each of the officers. Oscar Grant protests aimed at the incident focused on him being shot in the back while being handcuffed. When the verdict was announced, community members began protests aimed at the verdict. Eric Garner protests highlighted the use of force by the officer that resulted in his death. In the Eric Garner case, the protests targeted the lack of indictments. The Michael Brown protests around the incident focused on how Michael Brown was not resisting arrest or threatening the officer when he was shot. The subsequent protests were aimed at how the Grand Jury did not file charges.

playlist, using my personal account on YouTube. Before completing the coding process, I first viewed the content of the video to make sure that it adhered to the criteria stated above.

I coded videos until I reached a point of saturation of the discourse used by the protests that I analyzed for my coding. This method follows the work of Levi-Strass (1966) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). There were two indicators in my data that I had reached this point. The first was that the protesters were not discussing new themes during their protest. The second was that the calculation for the proportions of my coded data was not changing. Once a video was selected for coding, I added it to a Microsoft Word file and numbered the videos by case and viewing order. A complete list of the codes I used can be found in Appendix A and visualized through tables.

Exhibiting the Archive

I analyze the discourse used by protesters before and after #BLM. Analyzing the discourse used by protesters before and after #BLM, my findings support a difference in the way protesters frame the issue of police practices. Table 1 visualizes the collection of codes I gathered for both types of solidarity in their respective communities. This table summarizes a difference in the discourse that was used from Oakland to the New York and Ferguson movements.

Table 1: *Solidarity Codes Within Protest by Count and %*

Code	Oakland N %	Ferguson N %	New York N %
Positioned Solidarity	196 (80)	105 (42)	68 (33)
Dilated solidarity	49 (20)	143 (58)	143 (66)
Total Codes	245	248	211

Understanding these posts of videos as an archive highlights what social media users consider to be important about each of these movements. Social media has become the platform for showcasing the political labor millennials are committing to archive their movement. Thus, it is essential to study and learn the usefulness of documenting these

moments as this discourse expands and develops over time. A complete list of codes used to understand both types of solidarity is located in Appendix A.

Oakland: Before #BlackLivesMatter

The weather in Oakland, California, is typically mild. I can tell this protest was held on a warm day because most of the protesters were wearing t-shirts. The crowd is huddled together at Fruitvale BART station, which is in East Oakland, where the murder of Oscar Grant occurred. The whole crowd is facing the kiosk, which commuters use to pay their fare to get onto the platform. On the right of the screen, there is a glass box that typically holds an employee of BART who watches this station. Right now, this glass box is empty. Many people are holding up signs depicting violence on Black bodies and slogans that represent an objection to police violence. The person recording is out of view, presumably holding their phone high in the air in order to record over the crowd. The chants are so loud the audio is cracking as the protestors scream. At the front, near the kiosk, there is a person holding a microphone announcing phrases to rally the crowd. Because of the distance of the phone and the acoustics at the station, I can only make out every other word. However, it is clear that this person is helping the crowd elucidate their anger.

The death of Oscar Grant was also captured on many mobile devices. His death was public as he was killed on a platform in front of a stopped train full of people. It is still possible to find witness footage, from many different angles, of the interaction between him and the officers. After the footage of what happened that night was publicized, the movement for justice for Oscar Grant and his family began. The case of Oscar Grant, when combined with the video of his death, was so extreme and severe that it enraged the community of Oakland. The discourse of these protests focused on ways law enforcement agencies within Oakland impact this specific community. The specificity of language that is being used in Oakland exemplified the way the protesters make a strategic appeal for positioned solidarity. Examples of code I selected to understand positioned solidarity were phrases such as "this community" and the victim's name.

The case details of Oscar Grant's death were a prominent theme throughout each of the videos. These details include the way the officer changed his original story

from it being an accidental shooting to his mistaking his Taser for his gun, the position Oscar Grant was in, the number of officers that pinned him down, and the actions of each of the other officers. During a protest speech in 2009, Too $hort, a well-known Oakland Hip Hop artist, attended some of the protests surrounding the death of Oscar Grant in Oakland. He talks about having pride for the Oakland community, no matter how poorly the sports teams are doing. He says he "wants to show the world that Oakland, California, is a place where we stand up." In an interview with Davey D (a Hip Hop journalist), Too $hort talks about the details of the case and his reasons for protesting:

> Davey D: You know, what's your feeling about Oscar Grant and his murder? How do you feel about being here all of these years and knowing the history of Oakland?
>
> Too $hort: I feel [as if] it was just, 'it is what it is.' I mean, even if the guy shot him on purpose, he still was supposed to immediately make a statement saying, 'that was an accident, and I thought I was going for my Taser gun.' He was supposed to say that, that day. I just feel like it's gone on so long where no officer anywhere out here has to answer to anything they do, you know? They probably just felt like well, we'll deal with this later.
>
> Like this [is just] paperwork, close the door on the media, whatever. And I think that's why… people are calling for murder charges, because that's how they play it, man, you know what I'm saying? When I read an article a young guy who was killed in Oakland, and his father came out to see if that was his boy on the ground and the police officer turned violent on him. When I hear about stuff like this, it makes it seem like some of these law enforcement officers are operating as gang members, you know?
>
> So I just feel like, man, I understand that this crowd could be out here tearing stuff up. I came out here so I can say, 'Look where we are, y'all, we got the whole world looking at us; let's handle this in a very intelligent way. Everybody knows we ain't no punk-ass city. Everybody knows folks out here ain't scary, and what they'll do.' {0127}

Here is an example of a video shot by a professional interviewer who does not work for a traditional news organization. In both the question that is posed and the response by Too $hort, the focus is on Oakland and how this community has continued to deal with violence conducted by police officers. Too $hort begins his interview by referencing an understood carelessness of police officers when it comes to community relations and

the police devaluing Black people in Oakland. He even gives an example of another unnamed case in Oakland where police turn violent toward another victim's family. This discourse exemplifies positioned solidarity as protesters critique police violence through a specific case.

While the Oscar Grant case was at trial, protesters spoke in detail about the night of the shooting. At a protest during the trial, Davey D also interviewed protesters outside of the Oakland courthouse. One of the interviews was with a protester named Paula:

> Paula: Well, day three was the day for the defense, and so they brought forth their witnesses. But, whereas the witnesses for the prosecutor were all consistent with what happened on the tape, the witnesses for the defense have been inconsistent. The testimony has been inconsistent, and that's a good thing.
>
> Davey D: What are some of the inconsistencies that you heard or have been talked about?
>
> Paula: Well, inconsistent accounts of what happened. Whereas the prosecutor's witnesses everything that they saw even if they saw it from this angle or that angle- and these were people that didn't know each other, were from different parts of the [San Francisco] Bay Area- all of their accounts of what they saw were consistent. {0122}

In a different interview by Davey D, he interviews an Oakland activist named Tony Coleman, who discusses a witness of the Oscar Grant shooting who had video evidence from a video camera that was confiscated by the BART police the night of the shooting. He said that officers approached this person and said:

> Coleman: 'Ooo, can we make a copy of that? Could you come with us to the office?' And the brother said that he felt fearful so they confiscated his camera.
>
> Davey D: They never gave it back to him?
>
> Coleman: They never gave it back until [the prosecution] subpoenaed it. So it took 45 days- past 45 days for them to actually get this evidence back. And they showed it yesterday in court.
>
> Davey D: Did [the defense] change anything?
>
> Coleman: They didn't change anything.
>
> Davey D: So what was shown to the court?

> Coleman: It was a very clear shot that hasn't been released to the public. That nobody else has seen and when they showed it yesterday in the courtroom, the whole courtroom just gasped. Cuz it was just a clear, direct shot- so clear that the officer-
>
> Davey D: Oh, so it wasn't fuzzy or anything?
>
> Coleman: It wasn't fuzzy or nothing; it was just clear. And it was a clear, direct shot showing that the officer reached for his gun and shot him. Cold-blooded. Cold-blooded murder *is* cold-blooded murder. {0128}

They discussed more details about the trial and the demeanors of the people within the courtroom. Then Coleman gives more information about one witness in particular who took the stand in defense of the officer who shot Oscar Grant:

> Coleman: They had one witness today-
>
> Davey D: The police officers had a witness?
>
> Coleman: Yea. It was a police officer, but he didn't say openly that he was a police officer, but when they started questioning him you could tell that he came from a law enforcement background. And he even tried to say that the fight was a brawl- a twenty-minute brawl- from Lake Merritt station to Fruitvale, and anybody that [rides] the BART from Lake Merritt to Fruitvale knows that's only one stop. It's like under five minutes. {0128}

In both the interviews by Paula and Coleman, community members are closely watching aspects of the trial, discussing discrepancies, and questioning the validity of the defense's case. The amount of detail discussed in these interviews embodied the investment and an effort to stay informed about the case made by the Oakland community. This attention to detail was political labor by protesters to broadcast any possible injustices that could occur as a result of the trial.

I used the code "the system" or references to a "structural" issue to help distinguish dilated solidarity. Although systems themselves can be local and regional, they are not isolated but rather connected to sociohistorical mechanisms. One example from Oakland, where activists describe "the system" being the issue, is a street journalist who interviewed two men during a protest at the Fruitvale BART Station, where the murder of Oscar Grant occurred. They discussed one of the men's negative

experiences dealing with the BART Police and Oakland Police. After one of the men gives his account of police harassment, the street journalist responds with:

> If you're the wrong color- to [the Oakland Police], not to me- it's the racist system, you know. It's the way that the system treats us as people of color. They perceive us as the people of the wrong color, bro. And when they see us on the streets, they treat us like shit. {0126}

This discussion highlights how this protester is thinking about the connection to systemic problems with the way police officers treat minorities. Another example is during a protest in downtown Oakland. Protesters were standing in the middle of the street with signs; a young man uses a megaphone and speaks directly to the police officers:

> Then they want to look all smug and smile at us. And like, 'oh, they are just protesting.' It's not funny, officers. It's much deeper than that. You're working for a system that has a lack of regard for the majesty of human life. That is a problem. You blindly endorse and perpetuate that system. Wake up. {0114}

He describes the system to convey the magnitude of police practices and how policing as a system is used against people. He does this in order to demonstrate how their lives do not matter and can be taken by police officers with impunity.

In both of these examples, protesters are describing systems and systemic problems but do so in a vague way that does not invoke other examples from other places. This use of positioned solidarity allows protestors to see their example, the death of Oscar Grant and the politics surrounding the controversy, as a platform to discuss police violence. In the next section, we will see the change in discourse that occurred after #BLM, where the discourse appeals to dilated solidarity.

Ferguson and New York: After #BlackLivesMatter

One cool night in 2015, protesters in New York gathered in the streets of Manhattan. The streets around them are still busy with cars and buses going by, but it is clear this demonstration effectively impeded traffic flow. One tactic common in both New York and Ferguson was "die ins," where protesters would lay their bodies on the ground to dramatize the cruelty of the Black death. In this video, about 20 protesters are shown participating. Many of them are wearing black with scarves draped around their necks and shoulders. Behind them are makeshift caskets with the names of victims killed by

police now familiar with protesters in the movement. One protester is wearing a t-shirt that says, "Don't make me another hashtag." Protesters are also holding up large signs that read #BlackLivesMatter. I can see megaphones being held by people who presumably were leading chants moments before. Some of the popular chants in both New York and Ferguson were "I Can't Breathe" and "Indict the System." However, the audio of this video is full of the noise of traffic as each of the protesters takes a moment of silence to grieve.

The discourse used by protesters in New York and Ferguson appeals to positioned solidarity. This change emphasizes the need to change law enforcement agencies at the national level and address state violence globally. This allowed protesters to be able to frame the injustice of police practices around a number of instances of the death of Black people. Protesters in New York and Ferguson explicitly named other victims and commonly referenced the other protests. These cases also gained more attention from celebrities, civil rights activists, and mainstream media. Cornel West, for example, was arrested during a protest for #BLM. Both CNN and Fox News have videos of protesters disrupting their news coverage and being accused of lying about what was happening during the demonstrations.

Street demonstrations about the outrage of Mike Brown's death began before the acquittal of the officer responsible for his death. The death of Eric Garner, which occurred in the same week as Michael Brown, intensified the attention. Protesters within New York and Ferguson turned to using #BLM as a symbol to rally around. The narrative produced by the protesters has a different emphasis on the ways in which they used their evidence to diagnose the issue of police practices.

This discourse emphasizes a community that does not share direct experiences and only connects through indirect experience. Examples are references to systems, discussions around the harmful effects of police practices towards Black people, and names of other victims in other states. This demonstrates the difference in discourse in the New York and Ferguson protests after #BLM. Protesters began to emphasize how incidents in their communities were part of a system of police practices.

As a comparison to the language used by Too $hort before #BLM, Nelly, a Midwest St. Louis-based Hip Hop artist, attended a 2014 protest surrounding the events

of Michael Brown in Ferguson. He is shown walking around, speaking to the protesters, and giving a speech using a megaphone. In his speech, he talks about the Brown family losing their son and the pain brought to the family. However, this is the only detail that he gives about the case. He does not discuss the manner by which Michael Brown was killed or how this incident is reflective of the way Ferguson police interact with the community overall. While speaking to the crowd, he warns the protesters not to riot or cause property damage. However, much of what he talks about are the next steps. He states:

> The only reason that they [the police] are doing this is because there ain't no punishment being handed out when they do it. So you have to make sure that you get a punishment for this so the next officer will think twice before he pulls the trigger. There is no punishment. That's the reason we keep getting the same result.

In his speech, it is not clear which officers he is describing. He does not reference the community of Ferguson. His language is much more general, and talks about making sure these events do not happen again.

The explicit mention of other cities was present in the New York and Ferguson protests. Protesters are connecting the violence of police to other places and, in many instances, name victims from other places. In New York, an Acronym TV journalist spoke with Carl Dix from Stop Mass Incarceration Network:

> Acronym TV: Why, I mean- and on the heels of Mike Brown- why is this outrage and this many people in the streets happening at this particular moment in time?

> Dix: Well, I have to thank the people of Ferguson for that, basically, because the murder of Michael Brown by the police with his hands in the air was nothing new. That happened all the time. But, when people stood up in Ferguson and took to the streets and in the face of tear gas, rubber bullets, and everything thrown at them, they stayed in the streets night after night, more than 100 days now and counting. That reached out to people all across the country. So I credit that for getting it going, and then with the Eric Garner case coming right behind Michael Brown, it was kind of an LA rebellion kind of thing where people thought, well this one we got on video. So we know they're going to have to do something about this. And then the system told you no we don't have to do anything about it. {0322}

Since these cases are occurring at the same time, the references to each other make sense. Additionally, Dix discusses Ferguson and connects this current moment to the Rodney King riots in LA in the spring of 1992. Connections to other cases highlight the protesters beginning to aggregate evidence as part of their discourse to critique police violence.

The New York and Ferguson protests were not narrated with the same amount of detail for their specific cases. The details commonly expressed included the victims being unarmed and the statements (gestures) that each of the respective victims were making. However, there was less conversation about the information in the trial, less about the legality of approaching suspects or the climate in the cities around policing. For example, protesters did not discuss the other officers who were involved in the choking of Eric Garner, the officers being plain-clothed, and how that affected the interactions or accusations of harassment. In the videos, there was no conversation about why Michael Brown was approached by the officer or the legitimacy of the stop. Instead, the videos recorded in Ferguson and New York emphasized Michael Brown holding his hands in the air when he was shot. This was a pivotal moment that stuck with activists both in the New York and Ferguson protests.

The discourse in both New York and Ferguson emphasized systems within the context of macro-level conversations about police practices. In a video by VICE, which recorded protests after New York City announced that it would not indict the officer responsible for Eric Garner's death, a reporter interviews an unnamed Black man at the protest:

> Reporter: I think a lot of people expected things to be different because there is video- video evidence of it.
>
> Protester: Right. So you hear Obama, you hear like the policymakers talking about giving police body cameras… I don't think that's going to make a difference. There's systematic problems that need to be fixed. It's just… It's so sad. It could have been me, it could have been my mother, it could have been anyone. {0301}

The discussion of police using body cameras was a large part of the political discourse occurring during this time. Although many other reforms to policing were proposed, many of the protesters in both Ferguson and New York describe this as not being

enough. They used the evidence of Eric Garner and other protesters who also had violence from police officers recorded on camera. The sharing of these videos was made easier by social media, where activists could share videos quickly with a wide audience.

In New York, Dennis Trainor from Acronym TV interviewed Glenn Martin from the organization Just Leadership USA, who stated:

> I think that this movement has life, unlike many other movements that we've seen, and unfortunately, when you look at the videotape on the chokehold on Eric Garner, the truth is that it is a symbol of the chokehold the criminal justice system has had on poor people and communities of color for hundreds of years in the United States. Do we need a new commissioner? I would argue that we do. But at the same time, it's an entire system that's out of control and so losing one person isn't going to change that system. And unfortunately, systems change people long before they change systems. And so, I think it's a radical overhaul not just at the very top, but the entire culture of NYPD in particular, and in law enforcement in the United States as a whole. {0322}

By pointing out that it is not just a person who can change, he suggests the need to change the system of policing. Conversations about "radical overhauls" demonstrate that protesters are continuing to think beyond the narratives of reform often pushed by policymakers and law enforcement agencies. This awareness of other communities being equally affected by racialized policing is a part of how activists were appealing for dilated solidarity.

In an interview with Democracy Now! Linda Sarsour with the Arab American Association of New York, who was in Ferguson, makes connections between the value of human life in America and Gaza:

> The kind of lack of remorse that we have for looking at dead babies in a place like Gaza and continuing to justify government action to people resisting [is] the same thing that we are doing here in Ferguson. Bringing out the military against our own people for resisting a brutal murder of an unarmed young man and the continuing of systematic racism that we continue to commit against people of color in the U.S. {0232}

This protester is one example of the international context for how state violence is used against oppressed peoples, which was expressed in the protests after #BLM. Many other protesters referenced African countries such as Ethiopia and Somalia. Describing

state violence on a global level was part of what pushed protesters to think beyond reformist strategies.

Actor and activist Jesse Williams was also interviewed by a Democracy Now! Reporter. Williams discusses the need for communities not to be isolated and the need for accountability for law enforcement:

> Reporter: Jessie, why are you in St. Louis?
>
> Jesse Williams: Um, because I couldn't get here sooner because I had to work, but I got here as soon as I possibly could. I think we need to stand up and show some support for an incredible weekend of resistance. People coming from all over the country to say enough is enough and we're not going to be strung out in isolation anymore. Recommit ourselves to finding unity, to finding common ground, finding what's common to all of us, and that is really a desire to survive and not be killed in a community. To have those who have taken an oath to serve and protect us to, on occasion, serve and protect us. To be held accountable for our actions-everyone we know and love is held accountable for breaking the law. So those who break the law, if they happen to be wearing a blue shirt with a button-up we paid for, they should probably be held accountable also. {0232}

Williams perfectly explains the shift that #BLM has made and its effects on the discourse of police practices. He references local communities creating a collective identity in order to encompass all members of the imagined communities.

Protesters using the language of "Black lives" became highly visible in New York and Ferguson, which is absent from the Oakland protests. I group this language with Black people and Black youth to include times when Oakland was discussing the larger imagined Black community. A group of protesters in Ferguson being interviewed by a Democracy Now! reporter stated:

> Protester 1: At the end of the day, Black lives don't matter to them. At the end of the day, Black lives don't matter to these cops, man. We are locked up more than everybody, and this is our own community. You know what I'm saying? Get charged real quick, everything. We get false things put on us and everything. These cops are grimy. Everybody on this police force needs to get fired. Including the captains, all the way down to whoever. Rubber bullets. Rubber bullets onto women and children. Peaceful protest. No, they don't care about no Black lives. Let's be 100. Black lives don't matter.

> Protester 2: Black lives don't matter to nobody but Black people, so we are going to show y'all how we feel. {0205}

Here is an example of protesters reacting to the frame of BLM and demonstrating how this does not fit with their current experiences with the police within the community of Ferguson. The protesters make connections not only to their own lives and experiences of repression by police but what that means for the dilated solidarity of Black people within the U.S.

In New York, a protester was interviewed discussing how the lives of Black men are affected by police practices and shared how her personal story connects to the larger community. She states:

> People are finally tired of the repeated killing of unarmed Black men. I am. I am. My brother was killed in Boston by a policeman who's still collecting his paycheck. It's just what happens in this country. You know- and it's been really devastating for my family, and just every time this comes up. It's not just my brother. It's not just Trayvon. It's not just Michael Brown. People act like it's a one-off, but it's a systematic thing that happens in this country, and nobody gives a shit. No, I won't say nobody gives a shit. It's really encouraging that all these people out here giving a shit.

When compared to the way Oakland protesters discussed systemic issues, the use of statistics to describe the consistency of this issue was not present in the videos. However, in New York and Ferguson, many protesters relied on national states to describe the vastness of police violence. Using each of the cases, *The Guardian* also interviewed protesters during a New York protest, which shows how protesters are aggregating the number of incidents to support their argument for police practices being a systemic problem:

> I'm here today because young Black men are dying at an unproportionately high rate. Every 28 hours, a young Black man is killed by police, and almost 2% of police are indicted, and those numbers are crazy and telling young Black men that their lives don't matter and that their deaths can just be passed over.

An example of this in Ferguson is an interview by Kwame Thompson:

> I think that this was the pinnacle of injustices that have been going on for years. A Black young man has been murdered at a rate of 2 per week by white officers over a seven-year period. So you are right; Ferguson is a microcosm of what is happening in the United States. And so, hopefully,

> this will help us organize, empower ourselves, and make improvements,
> and execute the plans that all of our organizations are working on.

These protesters are also using statistics of the social problem of police practices. This was something that happened after #BLM. Activists used these statistics in order to talk about the injustice of racialized policing in the U.S.

The aftermath of #BLM included a broader critique of policing practices that connected multiple communities into their discourse. This highlighted the way activists were thinking through these issues as they made connections across cases and used similar tactics and language to demonstrate their political activities. As these videos are being uploaded onto social media, users are curating the archive of the movement so others can have access to these performances. This political labor is anchored in an amalgamation of examples used to demonstrate their critique.

Conclusion

Millennials use social media to make an old claim in a new way. This large, diverse cohort created its own distinctive stake in this long-standing issue of police violence in Black communities. Oakland described the problem of policing practices through a specific case, which highlighted the problems of their communities as connected to a history of violence. I use positioned solidarity to categorize the appeals made through this discourse. Both New York and Ferguson use similar language and discursive practices to demonstrate that police practices are a systemic issue needing to be addressed alongside state violence. I use dilated solidarity to categorize the appeals made through this discourse. Generating a discourse involved negotiating the performance of political activities and the political labor of archiving a movement. Millennials who worked to create the archive of both distinct moments in virtual space used social media as the platform for performing their discourse.

Our continued presence on social media platforms will be influenced by our collective past of politics on display. The inception of #BLM was an inspirational moment that grew out of a time of grief and has now ignited a global movement. The ability to collectivize a struggle without borders gives millennials the power to include marginalized voices as powerful influencers of a discourse. It is hard to imagine a future movement not being (at least partially) collaborative with activists on a social media

platform. As scholars, the social theory we produce will need to include the interaction of the "on the ground" activities with the stirring discourse online.

Properly placing #BLM in a tradition of political performance allows us to learn from the past. As this current discourse will inevitably lose its meaning and significance, we can trust there will eventually be a new (re)capitulation of old problems. Thus, eventually, our discourse will move past the discursive practices of #BLM and generate a new appeal toward solidarity. I recognize my mapping of these strategies for academics makes this genealogy both more legible and (perhaps, therefore) cooptable. Nevertheless, I feel this small reflection is participating in solidarity and delivers "a shot in the dark to other Black scholars" (Briscoe, 2020, p. 321). I hope to act in concert with the archival work many other Black millennials have contributed to, which furthers insurgent political activities.

It can be tempting to lean into one discourse over another through the distinguishing of these two types of solidarity. However, the act of articulating police practices as an anti-Black project has a long history of strategic incorporation of arguments, modes and acts of signifying. A lot of political labor has affirmed and described the totality of this problem. The many shifts and negotiations of boundaries help us to understand the tradition of political labor that continues to signify in new ways. Instead of deciding which strategies work better than others, we should focus on the genealogy as a whole.

Understanding the arch of the critiques of policing practices illuminates the need to put pressure on the structures that uphold and permit violence onto Black communities. The stakes are high. The refusal to deal with police practices as anti-Blackness is to act in concert with white hegemonic discourse. In other words, Black activists should not be required to provide more clarity in their discourse, instead we have an ethical responsibility to address the many calls to action. I echo the tradition of voices which require us to seriously consider the political imaginaries and ramifications of leaning into abolitionist communities that see beyond carceral practices of state violence. If Black lives are to matter, it will have to be in a future that imagines the violence they endure as intolerable and inescapably engendering political action.

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Appendix A

Table 2: *Positioned Solidarity Codes within Protest by Count and %*

Code	Oakland N (%)	Ferguson N (%)	New York N (%)
This community/ the community/city/neighborhood name	49 (25.00)	30 (28.57)	17 (25.00)
Our community/our youth	6 (3.06)	12 (11.43)	0 (0.00)
Our streets	8 (4.08)	3 (2.86)	0 (0.00)
Our police/city police	15 (7.65)	15 (14.29)	3 (4.41)
People of/from () city	1 (0.51)	1 (0.95)	1 (1.47)
Name of victim	45 (22.96)	19 (18.10)	23 (33.82)
People of/from () state	2 (1.02)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Cops name/this officer	16 (8.16)	12 (11.43)	6 (8.82)
Lawyer name	1 (0.51)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Case details	53 (27.04)	13 (12.38)	18 (26.47)
Total Positioned Solidarity Codes	196	105	68

Table 3: *Dilated Solidarity Codes within Protest by Count and %*

Code	Oakland N (%)	Ferguson N (%)	New York N (%)
The system/structural issues	7 (14.29)	16 (11.19)	26 (19.40)
The police	20 (40.82)	21 (14.59)	19 (14.18)
The government/ the country/US	4 (8.16)	26 (18.18)	4 (2.99)
Black people/Black lives/Black youth	10 (20.41)	48 (33.57)	23 (17.16)
Oppressed/police brutality	0 (0.00)	6 (4.20)	6 (4.48)
People of color	6 (12.24)	6 (4.20)	7 (5.22)
Details of another case	0 (0.00)	1 (0.70)	8 (5.97)
Criminal justice system	1 (2.04)	4 (2.80)	13 (9.70)
Names of other victims in another state	1 (2.04)	7 (4.90)	19 (14.18)
Other city	0 (0.00)	8 (5.59)	9 (6.72)
Total Dilated Solidarity Codes	49	143	134