THE JOURNAL
FOR PEOPLE WHO
CHANGE THE WORLD.

JPIC Editorial Board

Special thanks to our recent reviewers

We would like to take this opportunity to extend a special thanks to the reviewers who contributed to the new issue. Your expertise and hard work make our journal's success possible.

Melissa Adams, Giselle Auger, Shelley Aylesworth-Spink, Tor Bang, Pam Bourland-Davis, Jasper Fessmann, Michael Kent, Stephanie Madden, Barbara Myslik, Amber Smallwood

EMPOWERING NARRATIVES IN PUBLIC INTEREST COMMUNICATIONS

KELLY CHERNIN, CODY HAYS, AND JOSEPH RADICE

WORDS HAVE POWER

Editors' Essay: Empowering Narratives in Public Interest Communications

Kelly Chernin, Cody Hays, Joseph Radice

Appalachian State University, Marketing Mission, University of Florida

From its inception, the *Journal of Public Interest Communications* has sought to merge the interests of academics and practitioners to broaden our perspectives and forge new paths in the field. After introducing new practitioner content in the last issue, we now invite you to dive into Volume 7, Issue 2, which includes both original research and a complementary practitioner interview. As we grow the field and explore new avenues for researchers and practitioners to collaborate, it is important to remember we must be mindful of the voices we represent in our work. Reading through this issue's contributions, we were reminded of Maria Bryan's words from our last issue: "I learned the importance of centering the voices and perspectives of the communities I was serving in my communications work" (Bryan, 2023, p. 6). The work in this new issue underscores the voices of underrepresented groups, navigating dynamic topics including Indigenous protest art communities in Mexico and organizations that work with human trafficking survivors.

Elevating historically excluded voices and highlighting global struggles for basic human rights is about more than simply providing a platform. As researchers and practitioners of public interest communications, we have a profound responsibility to actively listen, deeply comprehend, and genuinely respond to the needs of communities striving to transform their reality and correctly reshape their historical narrative.

While we have moved beyond the trope of giving voice to the voiceless, which implies that these groups and individuals are silent, more work needs to be done in this area. The real work lies in creating spaces where these voices are not only heard but are also influential in driving change. It involves dismantling long-standing power structures that have muted these voices and

*Please send correspondence about this article to Kelly Chernin, Department of Communication, Appalachian State University. E-mail: cherninka@appstate.edu.

replacing them with more equitable and inclusive systems. As communicators, we must continually question our methods, challenge our biases, and refine our approaches to ensure that our practice does not inadvertently reinforce the very inequities we seek to address. We seek to collaborate with, rather than speak for, these communities, helping to amplify their voices in a manner that respects autonomy and expertise.

How can we, as a discipline, foster this respect and challenge the master narratives that make these groups appear to be silent? One solution is foregrounding counternarratives to highlight the strengths and struggles of a more representative society. Public interest communications seeks to create change that transcends any single group or organization, and this issue's pieces highlight how we can center these narratives by acknowledging how those who may have been deemed silent have always had stories worth sharing. We must also recognize our own responsibility in how we have been complicit in these power dynamics.

In this issue, we offer insight into the evolving role of communications in social change. Building on critical trafficking studies and past *JPIC* work about how digital tools can help promote social advocacy for nonprofit organizations (Adams & Johnson, 2020), Rister writes about the importance of nonprofit partnerships and the role digital activism plays in supporting individuals who have survived human trafficking. While these partnerships are demonstrated to have positive impacts in training, advocacy, and support, Rister also explores how partners have the potential to derail efforts toward social change when they are misaligned with human rights approaches.

Affourtit explores public interest communications from an interdisciplinary perspective in her piece about the power of street art. Artist collectives during the Oaxaca Commune in Oaxaca City, Mexico, used street art to voice their dissatisfaction with government policies. These various artistic expressions lent movement organizers a stronger sense of community and identity, and allowed artists to reclaim political spaces as their own. Affourtit discusses the significance of growth and adaptability, showcasing the importance of female empowerment within the movement while acknowledging that this feminine presence could have been even stronger. Her analysis underscores the adaptability and growth of the movement, offering valuable insights into the intersection of art, politics, and social change.

This issue's practitioner interview highlights the work of Floyd Jones and his project centered around Black Philanthropy Month, aiming to address the systematic disparities impacting Black-led organizations in the philanthropic landscape. He showcases the need to move beyond the stereotype of wealthy benefactors at fancy galas helping the needy. Floyd emphasizes the importance of spotlighting Black philanthropy, recognizing the substantial contributions of Black communities despite limited purchasing power, and advocates for better resources to amplify impact. From a public interest communications perspective, Jones envisions how this project can be adapted to expand the movement over time, and how focusing on personal stories can help the collective effort for transformative change.

This issue also includes a book review of Caty Borum's *The Revolution will be Hilarious*. The book explores how comedy has centered different voices throughout time to destabilize the

status quo through the use of creative deviance. The review highlights Borum's analysis of 'creative deviance' in comedy, illustrating how humor can be a powerful medium for centering diverse voices and destabilizing entrenched power structures. The book is celebrated for its insightful examination of comedy's potential to drive social change, offering an intriguing perspective on the role of humor in public discourse and activism.

In conclusion, this edition of the *JPIC* represents a significant milestone in our ongoing journey to bridge the gap between academic research and practical application. Each contribution in this issue not only enriches our understanding of the complex landscape of public interest communications but also challenges us to think critically and act empathetically. The diverse range of topics covered—from the power of street art in political movements to the intricate dynamics of nonprofit partnerships in supporting human trafficking survivors—highlights the multifaceted nature of our field. These studies and interviews underscore the necessity of embracing a multidisciplinary approach to address the pressing issues of our time. The *JPIC* editorial team is excited to offer an interesting mix of original research and public interest communications practitioner voices in this issue. This body of work encourages us to get creative as we communicate with our own audiences, bring underrepresented groups to the fore, and build community in unexpected ways. Let us carry forward the spirit of innovation and inclusivity showcased in these pages, as we continue to shape the future of public interest communications.

References

Adams, M. B., & Johnson, M. A. (2020). Acculturation, pluralism, and digital social advocacy in nonprofit strategic communications. *Journal of Public Interest Communications, 4*(2), 5-31. https://doi.org/10.32473/jpic.v4.i2.p5

Bryan, M. (2023). An inclusionary wakeup call for public interest copywriters: Interview with Maria Bryan. *Journal of Public Interest Communications, 7*(1), 5-15. https://doi.org/10.32473/jpic.v7.i1.p5

PARTNERSHIPS FOR A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION'S HUMAN TRAFFICKING DIGITAL ACTIVISM, TRAINING, LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY, AND SURVIVOR SUPPORT EFFORTS

ALEX RISTER

Journal of Public Interest Communications

Partnerships for a Nonprofit Organization's Human Trafficking Digital Activism, Training, Legislative Advocacy, and Survivor Support Efforts

Alex Rister

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Article Information	Abstract
	Although partnerships are a widely used approach to combat human trafficking, little research has been done on nonprofit partnerships for digital activism on human trafficking. This paper combines the public interest communication (PIC) theoretical framework with critical trafficking studies to understand one nonprofit's digital activism strategies for human trafficking awareness. Employing grounded theory to analyze 54 pages of text, qualitative surveys, and interviews, data revealed organizational partnerships focused on the key areas of training, legislative advocacy, and survivor support. However, partners can potentially derail strategic efforts for social change if misaligned with PIC dimensions and human rights approaches to human trafficking. Based on these findings, recommendations for nonprofit partnerships for digital activism on human trafficking are presented.

Introduction

Human trafficking refers to compelling service from a human being. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 established two classifications of this crime: labor trafficking and sex trafficking. Both classifications involve exploiting others through force, fraud, or coercion. Researchers and practitioners utilize a variety of approaches to understand this issue, from classifying human trafficking as "modern-day slavery" to conflating trafficking with prostitution or smuggling (Lee, 2011; Lobasz, 2019). Regardless of the classification of human trafficking, and regardless of its construction, an estimated 21-25 million people are impacted annually, with

girls and women among the most commonly trafficked (ILO, 2017; Mishra, 2015). Many organizations seeking social change for human trafficking align the crime with violence against women; for example, the United Nations includes a fifth goal within its 17 Goals for Sustainable Development to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (UN, 2023). The UN's (2023) target 5.2 seeks to "eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation" (para. 2). Critical approaches to solving this problem align with the communication and social change work of Tufte (2017) and the recommendations for effective public interest communication outlined by Johnston and Pieczka (2019) which strive to disrupt structural inequalities and interrogate power relations for broad-based structural change.

Literature review

Public interest communications

Public interest communications (PIC) refers to a developing academic discipline focused on strategic communication for social change. Johnston and Pieczka (2019) define PIC as a blend of "the conflict, negotiation and adaptation inherent in public interest with a critical approach to communication management and public relations" (p. i). Social justice is one type of social change seeking to promote equality and fairness. Hou (2019) argues that public interest is a critical component of social change and social justice due to the aforementioned process of conflict, negotiation, and adaptation using a critical approach.

PIC encompasses theory and practice. Johnston (2023) emphasizes PIC as "a pragmatic theory of communication," emphasizing its value for communication theory but also for practical application, as a set of tools for action (p. 55). PIC aligns with what Tufte (2017) categorizes as the third generation of communication for development, the social change approach, emphasizing the communication of social problems using definitions of structural inequality and power relations for collective action and structural change (p. 17). Due to these aforementioned characteristics, nonprofit organizations may find PIC especially valuable for strategic communication efforts. For example, Adams and Johnson (2020) analyzed the digital social advocacy efforts of 13 nonprofit organizations serving immigrant Hispanic communities through a PIC lens to combat negative stereotypes and prejudices. Nonprofits focused on addressing complex public interest problems, for example climate change or homelessness, may use PIC to help audiences navigate the complexities of the problem and the challenges of problem solving (Johnston & Gulliver, 2022). Human trafficking is another such complex problem.

According to Johnston and Pieczka (2019), PIC can occur in six dimensions: 1) publicness, which focuses on communication and debate in public spaces; 2) accessibility, which focuses on information-sharing and participation opportunities for individuals to engage; 3) substantive anchoring, which focuses on the communication and language used; 4) rationality, which focuses

on providing support for decision-making; 5) inter-subjectivity, which focuses on common interests and shared understandings with the community; and 6) connectedness, which funnels those common interests and shared understandings into action (Johnston & Gulliver, 2022). These dimensions of PIC will be explored in the present study's analysis of one women's civic leadership nonprofit's partnerships for human trafficking awareness.

Partnerships for human trafficking

Because of the complexity of human trafficking, the intersections between human trafficking and other community issues, and the multifaceted needs of survivors, researchers and practitioners agree that partnerships are critical to fully and effectively addressing human trafficking. The 4P approach to human trafficking, introduced in 1998, originally included prevention, protection, and prosecution before expanding to include the fourth "P" for partnership in 2009 (U.S. Department of State, 2020). According to Busch-Armendariz et al., (2018), "Rarely have we seen multiple layers (local, state, and federal) and multiple disciplines (social services, law enforcement, and prosecutors) work so closely and collaboratively toward a shared social justice pursuit" (p. 271). For example, the U.S. Department of State partners with international organizations, nonprofits, and state and local government agencies in its efforts. Polaris, formerly called the Polaris Project, is an example of a nonprofit organization with a mission to combat human trafficking that frequently partners with other organizations. According to Foot (2016), "Most agree that the complexity of the problem and the many forms of harm to victims [of human trafficking] require collaboration across sectors" (p. 2). The present study builds on the work of Foot (2016) who examined collaboration from a communication perspective.

A variety of frameworks may be used to understand human trafficking. For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services uses a public health framework as a lens through which to communicate the problem of human trafficking (OTP, 2016). Law enforcement may rely on a law-and-order approach to human trafficking. The present study relies on the human rights framework, which focuses on the basic and universal rights of all human beings to live free and safely, rights that emerged from 1948's Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN. The terms "human rights" and "social justice" may be used interchangeably because this framework concentrates on the human rights of all people to have "equal justice, opportunity, and dignity" (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018, p. 11) as well as equal "economic, political, and social access and opportunities" (p. 12). This framework centers survivor needs in efforts to combat human trafficking as opposed to, for example, centering the prosecution of a trafficker; prioritizing the agency of survivors as opposed to envisioning them as victims in need of rescue; and recognizing the intersectionality of survivors as well as the layers of vulnerabilities survivors might experience, from experiencing homelessness to addiction to poverty to discrimination (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018; Lee, 2011; Lobasz, 2019). The human rights framework's emphasis on social justice, intersectionality, human rights, and the use of a critical lens aligns with critical trafficking studies, a critical and interdisciplinary field centering

survivors while also interrogating the broader contexts in which human trafficking occurs (Hill & Chavez, 2018). In employing these frameworks, the present study contributes to a gap in the research on communication for social change and PIC for human trafficking awareness, specifically how these critical lenses might be used to strengthen partnerships and collaborations to fight trafficking.

The Junior League's anti-trafficking work

In addition to government agencies, law enforcement, and nonprofit organizations, two groups heavily involved in anti-trafficking work include religious organizations and women's organizations (Lobasz, 2019). The Junior League is an example of one such women's organization. Founded in 1901, the Junior League is a women's civic leadership nonprofit organization with over 125,000 members in more than 295 chapters around the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. The organization's mission is to advance women's leadership for meaningful community impact through volunteer action, collaboration, and training. The Junior League, sometimes abbreviated as the League, recognizes the value of, and leverages, community partnerships for its advocacy, awareness, and direct service work.

Since its founding, the League focused on a variety of community issues, including human trafficking. The Association of Junior Leagues International (AJLI), the association which supports the nearly 300 Junior League chapters in four countries around the world, notes that over 50 Junior Leagues have contributed to anti-trafficking work in their communities. One significant accomplishment is the creation of the ABOLISH Movement, or ABOLISH, which is a digital activism campaign to raise awareness of the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Digital activism refers to social change work done with digital communication tools and technologies. Because digital activism may be classified into types, such as the usage patterns defined by Haunss (2015) or the continuum model of fully online to offline organization defined by Earl and Kimport (2011), a digital strategy may encompass a wide range of digital activism activities. The effectiveness of digital activism relies heavily on PIC concepts (Vardeman & Sebesta, 2000).

To gain an understanding of how the Junior League employed digital activism strategies for human trafficking awareness, the following research questions guided the larger project of which this paper is one part:

RQ1: What digital activism strategies for human trafficking awareness are used by the Junior League?

RQ2A: How do those digital activism strategies align with social justice approaches to human trafficking?

RQ2B: How do those digital activism strategies translate to offline action?

Method

This paper, and the larger project of which this paper is one part, employed grounded theory to analyze 54 pages of textual data, a survey completed by eight participants, and four semi-structured interviews. Grounded theory's value for qualitative analysis and critical research, detailed and step-by-step structure, and focus on practice made the method ideal for this project (Charmaz, 2014; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Oktay, 2023; Vogt et al. 2014).

First, qualitative surveys were distributed to the members of AJLI's human trafficking workgroup, which included more than 85 leaders affiliated with over 36 Junior League chapters. The survey was distributed three times in May, June, and July 2021 in an attempt to solicit responses from as many of those 36 participating Junior League chapters as possible. Qualitative survey questions sought to understand formal organizational strategies around human trafficking, such as position statements or strategic plan goals; definitions of "human trafficking" used by the organization and who constructed those definitions; how informed organizational members were about the issue of human trafficking; digital activism platforms and actions employed for human trafficking awareness; and content-creation questions including sources of information.

Follow-up, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all survey participants indicating their willingness to further participate. Interview questions sought to understand how the Junior League reached its decision to get involved in human trafficking and where Junior League's definition of "human trafficking" came from, including whether that definition overlapped with other community concerns or with social justice frameworks. Interviews also questioned Junior League's calls to action and goals for human trafficking awareness efforts.

The collection of textual data was necessary to fully explore the study's research questions. As such, textual data was collected from three sources: AJLI's public-facing website on human trafficking (18 pages copied and pasted into a word processing application), the internal AJLI document "League-Wide Human Trafficking Program Information" (12 pages) and the websites of all Junior League chapters involved in human trafficking awareness as outlined in the AJLI document. The websites of all Junior League chapters were copied and pasted into a word-processing application comprising 30 pages.

RQ1 on the digital activism strategies for human trafficking awareness used by the Junior League most closely align with the PIC concepts of publicness, which examines how the Junior League uses its public digital platforms for discussions about human trafficking, and inter-subjectivity, which wonders whether the digital activism strategies foster a community of shared understanding of human trafficking and common interests on how to raise awareness and further combat the crime.

RQ2A, which addresses how those digital activism strategies align with social justice approaches to human trafficking, most closely aligns with the PIC concepts of substantive anchoring, which examines the communication used and whether that communication focuses on social justice and equity in the context of human trafficking, and connectedness. This question

explores whether Junior League digital activism strategies promote actions aligning with social justice goals in combating human trafficking.

RQ2B on how the Junior League digital activism strategies translate to offline action most closely aligns with the PIC concepts of accessibility, which examines if online information-sharing translates to offline engagements and activism, and rationality, which examines whether information shared online translates into informed action offline. Arguments could be made for expanding the PIC dimensions aligning with each research question; however, the aforementioned alignment of two PIC concepts per research question, spanning all six PIC dimensions, would most closely connect the research questions as operationalized in this study.

To analyze the data, grounded theory's stages of initial, line-by-line open coding, cycles of coding and memoing, and in-depth coding were followed (Charmaz, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Related to the study's research questions on the digital activism strategies used by the Junior League to raise awareness of human trafficking, how those strategies aligned with social justice approaches to human trafficking, and how those strategies translated to offline action, results and a discussion of findings are presented below.

Results

Partnerships were one key digital activism strategy used by the Junior Leagues for human trafficking awareness. AJLI's (2021) website explains: "For more than 15 years, [individual and statewide coalitions of] Leagues have joined forces with [partners] to raise public awareness on the hidden world of human trafficking, advocate for the passage of anti-trafficking legislation and support survivors" (para. 2). Junior League chapter websites, and survey and interview data also supported this strategy; for example, the Junior League of Atlanta's (2021) website read: "Over the next several years, the JLA will be working with both its current community partners as well as developing new partnerships in order to meet our ultimate goal – to eliminate the sexual exploitation and human trafficking of women and children" (para. 2).

The Junior League communicates partnerships to combat human trafficking as partnerships for training—to train Junior League members and to train the community—as well as partnerships for legislative advocacy and partnerships for supporting survivors of human trafficking. Partnerships rarely align with social justice approaches to human trafficking, although the Junior League mission and the qualitative survey and interview data from this project highlight the potential for alignment in the future. Those partnerships rarely translated to offline action, missing a key opportunity to link digital activism with action.

Partnerships for digital activism

Data revealed the Junior League relied on organizational partners for digital activism in three areas: first, to define "human trafficking"; second, to create or co-create anti-trafficking social

media content; and third, to serve as experts on Junior League anti-trafficking websites. For digital activism on social media, survey results indicated six Junior Leagues relied on community partners for creating anti-trafficking content. This included using partner definitions of "human trafficking," using partner content for social media campaigns, or co-creating campaign content with partners. Partners referenced were primarily anti-trafficking nonprofit organizations and task forces. For example, the Junior League of Greenville partnered with a local anti-trafficking organization for a social media campaign, and the Junior League of Huntsville partnered with the North Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force to raise awareness on Facebook Live.

AJLI's (2021) emphasis on partnerships with "critical and influential community change-makers" was another social media strategy (para. 2). The Junior League of Nashville asked influencers, described as local community women with large followings, to promote anti-trafficking content. Three Florida Junior Leagues partnered with one another and with community leaders to develop a digital activism campaign for January's Human Trafficking Awareness Month.

Facebook and Instagram were cited by seven Junior Leagues as platforms used to raise awareness of human trafficking, with only one of those seven organizations also using Twitter. Five survey respondents reported that compared to a typical Junior League organizational social media post, human trafficking awareness content "gets about the same level of engagement." One respondent reported that this type of content "gets more engagement," and one respondent reported that this type of content "gets less engagement" than a typical social media post. When relying on partners for social media content and/or collaborating with community partners on social media content, a deeper understanding of this data may be needed.

Junior Leagues frequently highlighted partners on anti-trafficking websites, publicly displaying partnership as a digital activism strategy not only on social media but also on organization websites. Typically, names and descriptions of community partners were listed with links to partner websites. For example, the Junior League of Birmingham, Michigan (2021), linked to Hope Against Trafficking describing the organization as "a 24-month residential program that provides restorative housing and comprehensive services focused on physical, mental, emotional and economic transformation" (para. 5). Websites also highlighted Junior League task force participation. The Junior League of Daytona Beach's (2021) "Human Trafficking Initiative" website began with the following: "The Junior League of Daytona Beach is a proud member of the Freedom 7 Human Trafficking Task Force (Volusia, Flagler, Putnam, and St. Johns counties)" (para. 1). Web links to direct readers to learn more about human trafficking also relied on community partners. Links ranged from government agencies such as the U.S. Department of State and Department of Justice, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and UK's National Crime Agency to nonprofit, NGO experts in anti-trafficking such as Polaris and Anti-Slavery International. Some links were specific to faith-based NGOs like Shared Hope International. Some were locally focused, such as the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation or GEMS Girls in New York.

Partnerships for training

Aligning with the Junior League mission, training was another key role of partnerships: training League anti-trafficking committee leaders and members, training the organization's general membership, and collaborating with Junior Leagues to train the community.

Survey results asked respondents, "On a scale from 1 (not informed) to 5 (very informed), how informed would you say your [Junior League] members are about the issue of human trafficking?" The average of 3.5, with only one respondent ranking their Junior League members at 5 (very informed), may indicate that while training is prioritized due to the Junior League mission of training women as civic leaders, membership as a whole may not be well trained on this community issue. The reason for this is unclear.

Collaborating with partners to train the community was noted in the data, including film and documentary screenings, community forums, and formal trainings. For example, the Junior League of Baton Rouge highlighted its partnership with the nonprofit Trafficking Hope to show the documentary *Nefarious: Merchant of Souls* to the community. The Junior League of Long Beach (2021) partnered with their local school district and parent teacher association to host a symposium "aimed at keeping young people safe from the world of human trafficking" (para. 1). The Junior League of Napa-Sonoma (2021) in partnership with the Sonoma County Human Trafficking Task Force, "helps to organize periodic forums and rallies on the topic" (para. 1). The Junior League of Wilmington hosted a training for members featuring an assistant district attorney with experience on human trafficking cases. If, as the survey indicated, Junior League members do not have the level of knowledge necessary to inform the community about human trafficking, relying on community partners for their expertise is critical. The community partner may benefit from Junior League marketing and visibility as well as volunteer service to plan and hold the event with or for the partner.

Junior Leagues relied on partners to train their organization's members, who would, in some cases, train the community. The Junior League of Birmingham members were licensed by the Guardian Group, a training-focused nonprofit organization. The Junior League of Huntsville reported, "Over the next several months, we will be partnering with our local Human Trafficking Task Force to train our committee to give awareness presentations as part of a speakers bureau" (AJLI, 2020, p. 6). The Junior League of Sioux City "partners with the Siouxland Coalition Against Human Trafficking to train area hotel and motel employees on how to recognize and respond to the signs of human trafficking" with participants receiving "a plaque notifying the public that the establishment has participated in the training" (AJLI, 2020, p. 10). The partners for this training included police and the district attorney. The Junior League of Orange County, New York partnered with the nonprofit Safe Homes of Orange County on a prevention training program for parents and children. Without the support of partnerships, Junior League members may not have possessed the knowledge of human trafficking to train others.

Collaboration with partners on offline awareness efforts to train the community was noted in a few cases. For example, the Junior League of Eugene, Oregon, partnered with local police on a

brochure distributed to law enforcement, medical and transit personnel, schools and parent groups, and nonprofits. The Junior League of Santa Barbara partnered with the county District Attorney's Office on an awareness campaign involving the distribution of anti-trafficking pins (AJLI, 2020). Absent were digital activism strategies connected to offline efforts.

Partnerships for legislative advocacy

Junior League websites prominently features partnerships for legislative advocacy, emphasizing the high value placed on this strategy. AJLI's (2021) website read: "League coalitions have worked to pass more than 25 different pieces of anti-trafficking legislation, primarily at the state and local level" (para. 2). Efforts included community partners and partnerships with statewide Junior League chapters called State Public Affairs Committees (SPAC). Partnerships with survivors on legislative advocacy were absent from the data.

SPACs appeared on AJLI's website under "The Work of the Junior League" in human trafficking awareness. Stories included the work of SPACs in California, Florida, and Georgia, sharing those SPAC organizational partnerships as prioritizing human trafficking and supporting specific bills with those partners. In addition to statewide Junior League partnerships, SPACs and individual Junior Leagues partnered with other organizations to advocate for legislation, such as Georgia SPAC's partnership with the United Way of Greater Atlanta on Safe Harbor Yes, a campaign "which advocated for the creation of the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund via amendment to the state constitution" (AJLI, 2021, para. 9).

Junior Leagues used websites as tools for awareness of SPAC work and to encourage legislative advocacy. For example, the Junior League of Charlotte shared its 2012 position statement on human trafficking that "opposes human trafficking in all its forms. The Junior League of Charlotte (2021) supports programs and legislation aimed at preventing the importation and detainment of children, women and men for the purposes of exploitation" (para. 4). Under the position statement, the Junior League of Charlotte shared that its membership approved support in March 2012 for North Carolina Senate Bill 547 and the creation of a North Carolina Human Trafficking Commission. Below this membership-approved public stance was a "What Can You Do To Take Action?" section focused on explaining North Carolina House Bill 855, providing the names and contact information for the state Senate Judiciary Committee members, and encouraging readers to "please contact our local law makers [*sic*] and ask them to consider HB855" (JL Charlotte, 2021, para. 9). This information had not been updated since 2013-2014. In carefully analyzing the website, beyond the call for members to call their legislators to ask them to support HB855, further information about the bill was not provided. Although rare, as a result of legislation passing, some Junior Leagues took offline action in the awareness space using partnerships. For example, after Alabama legislation required certain businesses to post human trafficking posters, the Junior League of Huntsville partnered with the Junior League of Birmingham to hang signage in airports and bus stations. Overall, while digital

activism publicized legislative advocacy, current and ongoing ways to support those efforts did not exist as often as summary statements of prior, and often outdated, actions.

Partnerships for survivor support

Some Leagues partnered with organizations to volunteer in direct support of survivors and most often in direct support for girls and women survivors of sex trafficking. For example, the Junior League of Greenville's (2021) website read: "The JLG is partnering with Jasmine Road and SWITCH. Both of these organizations have been pioneers in helping to address human trafficking in our community. The Human Trafficking Impact Committee is providing trained and skilled JLG volunteers to support these organizations" (para. 1). The website provides links to resources and partners. Importantly, the Junior League of Greenville highlights the term "trained and skilled volunteers," emphasizing the League mission. In theory, this approach works well for human rights approaches to human trafficking. AJLI (2021) highlighted the partnership between the Junior League of Des Moines and Dorothy's House, "a local home campus that provides a safe place for the practice of life for those teen and youth girls whose lives have been interrupted by sex trafficking and sexploitation" (para. 19). To elaborate on what Junior League brought to the partnership, the website noted that Junior League members volunteer and fund "the development of an urban garden co-op with the goal to provide girls with a work environment that teaches healthy food relationships, business and life skills that will help them be successful when they transition to independent living" (AJLI, 2021, para. 19). This description included language about how Dorothy's House and the Junior League "provide" survivors with services as opposed to partnering with survivors.

Two additional examples showed the partnership's focus on residential treatment for survivors of sex trafficking. For example, the Junior League of Northern Westchester "has partnered with The Gateways Program, an intensive specialized residential treatment program for girls aged 12-17 who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking" (AJLI, 2021, para. 26). The Junior League of Orange County, California (2021), partnered with "the Lighthouse, an Orangewood Foundation program providing housing for victims of sex trafficking" (para. 14). The Junior League of Fort Worth (2021) partnered with law enforcement under UnBound Fort Worth, described as supporting survivors in "three ways: prevention and awareness, professional specific identification training and 24/7 crisis response and support for survivors" (para. 1). Then, the following phrase was used to describe UnBound Fort Worth: "to help meet the immediate needs of victims when they are rescued" (para. 1). While law enforcement would understandably use the term "victim" when a crime has been committed, the rescue narrative is problematic when it fails to consider survivors' personal agency or put survivors' needs first (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018; Lobasz, 2019).

Only one Junior League—in Portland, Maine—discussed partnerships in support of survivors using a human rights approach. The survey response read:

> We are working to move beyond 'raising awareness' to providing tangible support to survivors and individuals involved in the sex trade. We rely on community partners who also take a human rights based [*sic*] approach in their anti-trafficking work. (2021)

This survey respondent was later interviewed. When asked about this work, she said, "We've since had other opportunities to work with organizations that take more of a human rights approach, and so now we're getting a little bit more nuanced explanation about what trafficking is and that you need to attack the root causes of it." She elaborated in the interview:

> We're talking with community partners that we work with. My Place Teen Center Preble Street is the only federally funded anti-trafficking program in the state. They also take a human rights approach, but because they accept federal funds, they have limitations on their speech around decriminalization and that sort of thing. (2021)

This was the only interview to discuss decriminalizing sex work. Decriminalization focused on legalization and regulation as one end of a policy approach, with criminalization on the other. Research indicates the pros and cons of each approach; advocates of decriminalization see consensual sex work as "an inevitable component of the social order" (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018, p. 257) and seek to regulate that work for participant protection. Opponents claim decriminalization and legalization may increase demand and increase human trafficking (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018). This was the only Junior League member engaging in the nuances of policy approaches to sex work, indicating another avenue for training that may benefit Leagues working in anti-trafficking spaces.

Indirect support for survivors was noted in a few partnerships. For example, the Junior League of Long Beach, California (2021) partnered with the Long Beach Human Trafficking Task Force to publish and distribute "a comprehensive resource guide to assist service providers who are on the front lines helping trafficking survivors" (para. 1). Leagues partnered with organizations on survivor supply drives; for example, Junior League of Orange County, California hosted a donation drive in partnership with a nonprofit to collect items for survivors. The digital activism strategy noted on its website was a link to that nonprofit's Amazon wish list along with encouragement for community participation. While the Orange County Junior League used its website as a digital activism strategy to promote one survivor-focused effort—its supply drive—most offline actions were not connected to an anti-trafficking or digital activism strategy. Connections between digital activism and offline action to support survivors were infrequently employed.

Discussion

Types of partnerships

In citing partnerships to combat human trafficking, organizations must consider an overreliance on one type of partner. Research critiques partnerships as "often focused narrowly on the prosecution of traffickers and the 'rescue' and service provision to survivors" (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018, p. 272), and this was confirmed in League construction of partnerships from the data collected for this project. Many Junior Leagues highlighted prosecution-focused partners including law enforcement and district attorney's offices. AJLI's website, for example, listed law enforcement as the first partnership type. Law enforcement partners may not promote human rights approaches to human trafficking, especially in places where these entities "have been involved in trafficking enterprises or place a very low priority on addressing problems experienced by marginalized people" (Gulati, 2012, p. 50). Organizations including the Junior League might incorporate a variety of partnership types in their digital activism efforts such as their anti-trafficking websites or social media campaigns. Another critique of partnerships is that trafficking survivors "should be at the center of collaborative efforts and partnerships" but are often absent altogether (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2018, p. 272). While partnerships with nonprofits providing services to survivors were present in the data for this project, partnerships with survivors themselves were noticeably absent.

In considering the six dimensions of PIC, ensuring survivors have access to the information being shared about human trafficking and have access to participate and engage in anti-trafficking work is key. For a variety of reasons, survivors may opt not to participate; however, their inclusion in this work remains of vital importance for meaningful social change. In addition to the accessibility dimension of PIC, connectedness is key for the evaluation of partnerships. Without a shared understanding of human trafficking and an agreeance on the action needed, partner incompatibility may occur. Foot (2016) acknowledges that this alignment in partnerships for human trafficking may be challenging; however, those tensions must be discussed for the PIC dimension of connectedness to be effective.

Critical trafficking studies interrogate the definitions of human trafficking that may "extend law-and-order agendas, rather than human rights initiatives" (Luibheid, 2018, p. 307). Critical trafficking studies align with the critical focus of PIC (Hou, 2019). A critical trafficking studies perspective might encourage human rights initiatives to be prioritized above law-and-order agendas. Leveraging the expertise of nonprofits with a human rights focus and ensuring the voices of survivors are considered in anti-trafficking efforts may work well for applying this perspective. The PIC dimension of publicness, or focusing on the public communication and debate around why the critical trafficking studies approach may be the best fit for anti-trafficking work, is key—as is accessibility for all individuals who want to engage in the conversation. The expertise of community partners may also be considered when Junior Leagues evaluate anti-trafficking content and audience engagement. Finally, an evaluation on whether critical and

influential community change-makers help or hurt awareness efforts may be necessary. While these change-makers may or may not have expertise in the area of human trafficking, their high-status, high-power positions in their communities, including online communities, was a rationale for the partnership. Social media influencers may increase the audience of who sees human trafficking awareness content, but if those influencers are not experts, message content must be even more carefully crafted or curated. While influencers who are government officials such as state senators and city mayors may have a marketing team dedicated to their social media, individual influencers may be solely responsible for their content, increasing the risk of disinformation. This speaks to the PIC dimension of substantive anchoring, the communication and language used by the influencers, and an evaluation of alignment in that communication.

Additionally, power dynamics inherent to partnerships must be considered. Foot (2016) used the term "platforming" as a way of understanding power: "When a leader from a higher status sector, such as a business, platforms a leader from a lower status sector, such as a nonprofit, the power of the lower status sector increases, at least for the duration of the event" (p. 65). When collaborating with a more powerful, high-status partner, the Junior League increases its legitimacy in anti-trafficking efforts. For example, a description of partnerships by AJLI (2021) included the phrase "critical and influential community change-makers" (para. 2). AJLI communicates that its organization partners with respected, powerful entities for anti-trafficking work. However, these partnerships are not one-sided; for the partners, the Junior League may be appealing because of the organization's brand and membership base, which may increase volunteer hours, money, and/or votes for anti-trafficking efforts. Because of its mission, the Junior League has an opportunity to bring an intentional social justice approach to its partnerships, adding value to those collaborations. With the human trafficking work group, AJLI may guide Junior Leagues on how to better communicate their contributions to partners. These contributions can be included on Junior League anti-trafficking websites. Other nonprofits must also carefully consider their mission, brand, and reputation; what they bring to a partnership; and how power dynamics have the potential to influence their organization's anti-trafficking work.

Finally, the way partnerships are formed, evaluated, and ended must be considered alongside organizational capacity. Although not explicitly stated in survey or interview data, Leagues may likely take a more ad hoc approach to forming, rotating, and/or ending partnerships. AJLI may provide guidance or best practices on the types of partners to look for and why; this may be especially helpful if Junior Leagues lack the capacity for implementing a thorough partnership research and vetting process. Other organizations may strategically consider prospective, current, and past partners while evaluating power dynamics to ensure the advancement of their mission. PIC's dimension of rationality, concerned with support for decision-making, allows organizations to do this partnership formation, evaluation, and conclusion work in an informed and logical fashion, especially considering the aforementioned PIC dimensions of substantive anchoring and connectedness, which may also be used in the partnership evaluation process.

Digital activism

Among the aforementioned concerns, when considering digital activism efforts specifically, Junior Leagues must consider the website links shared, how those links impact audience awareness of human trafficking, and whether that information might connect with organizational strategies for offline action. According to Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2018), an organization's media strategy "is not only a cultural attractor, drawing like-minded people together to form an audience, but also a cultural activator, giving that community something to do" (p. 209). The advice from Jenkins at al. (2018) mirrors the sixth dimension of PIC, connectedness, which focuses on guiding shared interests such as anti-trafficking into community action. Junior Leagues missed opportunities to strategically use digital activism to connect audiences with offline action. For a self-motivated audience interested in increasing their awareness of human trafficking, Junior League websites may be a valuable step. However, the distance between human trafficking awareness and offline action may be even more obscured in linking to partners' homepages, resulting in the need for multiple clicks before even a highly motivated audience member might find ways to help that align with their personal wants and needs. According to Tao et al. (2021), "Information sharing and seeking, as publics' active communications, are fundamental to raising societal awareness of and behavioral support toward causes advocated by nonprofit organizations" and are "essential to cultivating positive nonprofit-public relationships" (p. 2). Digital activism must consider the partnerships between the Junior Leagues and the audiences engaging with anti-trafficking social media posts and website pages. In addition, if anti-trafficking partners use other social media platforms, that consideration must be explored by Junior Leagues that reported relying most heavily on Facebook and Instagram.

Finally, the PIC study of nonprofit digital social advocacy directed by Adams and Johnson (2020) found nonprofit engagement on a continuum of "soft" and "hard" efforts, with soft digital advocacy focusing on connections, community-building, and positivity, and hard digital advocacy focusing on direct, explicit calls to action such as protesting or voting against bills (p. 20). Adams and Johnson (2020) argue that "notions of digital social advocacy should be expanded beyond the call for direct action (use of social media for mobilization) to consider the role of soft advocacy done by nonprofits representing marginalized individuals in society" (p. 21). Specifically related to this study, soft advocacy to represent survivors of human trafficking may be just as critical as the Junior League's hard advocacy efforts, especially to address the noted gap of partnerships between members and survivors.

Training

With respect to training, the Junior League relied on the support of partnerships to train its members and the community. The Junior League mission facilitates an organizational culture in which training is valued, expected, and supported by members. This value may benefit community partners who seek to construct "human trafficking" in a particular way, because

untrained members may take those partners' constructions as truth. Lobasz (2019) argued, "American abolitionism carries a distinctly evangelical Christian tone reflective of the growing influence of evangelicals within US politics at the end of the twentieth century" (p. 16). Government agencies or law enforcement may construct human trafficking using a law-and-order message. Without internal organizational knowledge of human rights approaches to human trafficking, the Junior League misses a strategic opportunity to discuss the multitude of approaches to human trafficking and prioritize one approach with its members; hopefully, the construction prioritized aligns with the organization's mission. This advice is also important to organizations working in anti-trafficking that may not have the time and/or funding to effectively train all staff and volunteers on the various constructions of human trafficking and why care must be taken to adopt a certain framing of the issue. Finally, ensuring a public debate on the construction of human trafficking aligns with the first dimension of PIC, publicness, which focuses on communication and debate in those public spaces like an organization's meetings and trainings.

Due to survey results noting Junior League members' lack of expertise in the area of human trafficking, partnerships may increase organizational credibility. That lack of member expertise also lends itself to reliance on the partner's lens to construct human trafficking. Lobasz (2019) points out that any definition of human trafficking is political, so as a best practice, organizations should research and discuss multiple definitions of the issue before deciding which one(s) to endorse and share internally and externally. Most importantly, the definition of human trafficking selected for use should align with an organization's mission. For example, the Junior League's origins in social justice make a human rights approach to human trafficking much more ideal than a law-and-order approach. Again, this advice mirrors publicness, the first dimension of PIC defined by Johnston and Pieczka (2019). Further, engaging in this training process internally before training others gets at the heart of both the Junior League mission and existing PIC theory: the critical and open communication, cooperation, and adaptation in an organizational setting to advance meaningful social change (Hou, 2019; Johnston & Pieczka, 2019).

Leagues may also want to better understand the effectiveness of their trainings. Project data did not clarify the reason for an average ranking of 3.5 on a scale from 1 (least informed) to 5 (most informed) about human trafficking. Leagues often work on multiple issues at the same time; for example, the Junior League of Tampa, Florida has 1,900 members and lists human trafficking alongside several other community projects and programs including food insecurity, foster care, literacy, and mentoring and motivating girls among others. Providing training throughout the year on multiple topics may result in some members gaining deep knowledge on the community issue of their choice, such as human trafficking. On the other hand, providing trainings on multiple topics may also result in a shallower understanding of community issues. With complex problems like human trafficking, Junior League training alone may not be enough to move membership knowledge from a generally informed 3.5 to a very informed 5.

This level of fundamental training about human trafficking extends to training for the average citizen. Citizens may encounter myths about human trafficking such as the summer 2020

viral social media claims that the online furniture and home goods company Wayfair was involved in sex trafficking children (Polaris, 2020). Another common human trafficking conspiracy theory dates back to the 2016 presidential election, as false rumors claimed Hillary Clinton and other politicians and famous people were operating a human trafficking ring out of a pizza restaurant, with this rumor now closely tied to the QAnon conspiracy theory movement (Polaris, 2023). With viral conspiracy theories such as these causing confusion about the realities of human trafficking, training and awareness efforts must be as clear and accurate as possible, must actively seek to dispel myths, and must rely on available data. Trustworthy organizations such as Polaris Project may be relied upon for training materials, especially with the work of Polaris in recent years to research the harms to survivors caused by conspiracy theories.

As Junior Leagues and their partners focus on training, they should also communicate how audiences can participate in these trainings Although some trainings are hosted exclusively for League members, these events can be an opportunity to recruit new members. Using simple language and a redirect to a "Join" webpage may be the only action necessary on Junior League sites: "If you are interested in gaining formal training and hands-on experience to become a civic leader in the area of preventing human trafficking, join us!" Other trainings focused on the community, and Junior Leagues can use their websites to point interested community members to ways to participate in those trainings. While Earl and Kimport (2011) discuss the inexpensive nature of a strategy such as this one, Junior League volunteer time must be considered. If Junior League volunteer member capacity limits constant webpage updates, the recommendation of simple language and a redirect may be helpful for interested community members. In this case, if Junior League social media is updated more frequently than websites, audiences may be pointed there. This recommendation aligns with the resource mobilization advice of Earl and Kimport (2011) on virtual participation in social change movements and again with the dimensions of PIC from Johnston and Pieczka (2019). Other organizations, especially nonprofits who face the same challenges of staffing, time, and funding, may also consider this advice.

Legislative advocacy

With respect to legislative advocacy in the United States, Gulati (2012) said policymakers have placed "almost all of the attention […] on the trafficking of women and children for the purpose of sexual exploitation" (p. 49). Based on this project's data, the legislation promoted by the League followed in that same vein. According to Vanek (2015), "The solution [from a human rights approach] is to restore the rights of victims [of human trafficking] or advocate for their rights as the central response" (p. 63). Legislation promoted by many Junior Leagues may not align with human rights approaches. In particular, Junior Leagues must be cognizant of whether legislative advocacy relies too heavily on the "P" for prosecution. Daniels (2016) reminds us that criminalization of perpetrators and incarceration is "insufficient to address the problems of systemic sexual violence (across differences of race, national context, and gender identity)" (p. 51). Building on the work of Winett et al. (2021) on PIC and advocacy, during our current

politically polarized climate at multiple levels of government, equity-based messages that "resonated *across* political ideologies in the general public study" may work well for the Junior League (p. 68). If the Junior League wishes to form partnerships that make long-term, sustainable change in the area of human trafficking, more education and training on the types of legislative advocacy that best align with this goal may be necessary. Organizations participating in legislative advocacy must also carefully review bills before engaging with legislators to influence public policy.

With legislative advocacy, the Junior League's mission of training members as civic leaders misses a valuable opportunity to consider collective impact through collaboration with fellow Junior Leagues and with community partners. Junior Leagues could rely on partnerships to train members on what human trafficking is, best practices for anti-trafficking legislation, current legislative efforts and how to evaluate those efforts, how to advocate for specific legislation after critical evaluation, and how to engage the community in advocacy through digital activism and offline action. These recommendations align with the dimensions of PIC but especially with substantive anchoring and its focus on communication choices and language used.

Legislative efforts in partnership with survivors should especially be prioritized, as this important area of collaboration is missing from currently communicated League efforts. Sullivan and Porter (1997) argued, "Justice is realizable only when people have access to the mechanisms of policy and decisionmaking [*sic*]. Access means accessibility of technologies in the technical sense, but is also means accessibility of the social frameworks for group decision making" (p. 115). If Junior Leagues doing anti-trafficking work in the legislative advocacy space have partnerships to support survivors, the organizational mission of training women as civic leaders can and should extend to survivors themselves. Junior Leagues can leverage training by their partners or conduct their own trainings to ensure survivors have access to mechanisms of policy and decision making if they choose to engage in legislative advocacy efforts. While this advice may not be applicable to all organizations, those who do engage directly with survivors may consider survivor needs and whether those needs allow for survivors to, now or in the future, take part in legislative advocacy efforts. An important consideration with this work returns to the findings of Winett et al. (2021) who note that narratives, such as a survivor's narrative about their trafficking experience, may be an effective tool of persuasion or may backfire. Future research on strategic narratives in general, as noted by Winett et al. (2021), as well as strategic narratives about human trafficking may be helpful for future PIC and human trafficking scholarship.

Survivor support

With respect to supporting survivors, collective impact must also be considered and implemented. The "Community Impact" section of AJLI's website highlights the mission—training women as civic leaders—as the key element of organizational success in making an impact and in ensuring long-term change on a variety of issues, including human trafficking.

According to Busch-Armendariz et al., (2018), collective impact is an "emerging approach that identifies social problems as complex and interrelated" and believes "independent action and isolated initiatives are not successful as the primary avenue toward social change" (p. 276). Instead, a focus on meaningful and intentional collaboration may bring about more lasting change on issues like human trafficking that are complex and intersect with a variety of other community issues such as poverty. However, collective impact must consider five key attributes according to Kania and Kramer (2011): a shared goal or vision for change; a shared idea of how to measure success; constant coordination on activities that mutually reinforce one another; constant communication and frequent meetings; and support from a strong infrastructure and processes. Incorporating a collective impact strategy in establishing and maintaining partnerships and ensuring collective impact goals are articulated when training others would allow for more intentional partnerships that make a more in-depth impact. This advice not only centers a human rights approach to human trafficking but also allows for the implementation of all six dimensions of PIC defined by Johnston and Pieczka (2019) for meaningful social change.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, the lower-than-expected response rate to qualitative surveys and interviews was not anticipated. While the collection of additional textual data aided in addressing the study's research questions, a follow-up study with increased Junior League member voices may provide more information on the gaps in the data, such as ideas around audience engagement with anti-trafficking social media content, the reason for League member knowledge on human trafficking averaging 3.5 on a scale from 1 (not informed) to 5 (very informed), and other areas. As this study was conducted in 2020 and 2021 during COVID-19, future research may naturally increase human subject participation due to a lack of those external stressors caused by the global pandemic.

Second, the research focused on Junior League member participation and did not include data from community partners. The inclusion of partners is a natural next step for this work. Finally, this project analyzed only one nonprofit organization working in the anti-trafficking space. Additional data may be collected on various nonprofit and NGO partnerships for a more complete picture of digital activism for social change on the community issue of human trafficking. Despite these limitations, this study builds on existing PIC scholarship while offering a foundation for an exciting new direction on communication for social change in the area of human trafficking.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both human trafficking research and practice recognize the 4P approach to human trafficking, emphasizing partnerships as the fourth P and a critical strategy. This project used

grounded theory as a social justice-oriented methodology to analyze the partnerships of the Junior League for digital activism in human trafficking, how those strategies aligned with social justice approaches, and how those strategies translated to offline action. Overall, partnerships did not align with the six dimensions of PIC, did not include survivors or prioritize social justice approaches to human trafficking, and did not consider opportunities for collective impact. Leagues must be cognizant of partnership types and how those partners affiliate with and influence League members in a variety of ways. This advice extends to any organization working in the human trafficking awareness space but especially to nonprofits with similar constraints as the Junior League.

Because many Junior League chapters engaged in training, advocacy, and survivor support, a model for effective organizational infrastructure that incorporates these elements in human trafficking awareness is possible and beneficial for individual chapter anti-trafficking efforts and the collective impact of the Junior League organization as a whole. This paper, and the larger project of which this paper is one part, sought to provide recommendations for the Junior League, but more broadly, lessons learned can be applied by any organization and especially any nonprofit organization working in human trafficking awareness.

References

Adams, M. B., & Johnson, M. A. (2020). Acculturation, pluralism, and digital social advocacy in nonprofit strategic communications. *Journal of Public Interest Communications, 4*(2), 5-31. https://doi.org/10.32473/jpic.v4.i2.p5

Association of Junior Leagues International (AJLI). (2020). League-wide human trafficking program information. Internal document: Unpublished.

Association of Junior Leagues International (AJLI). (2021). ABOLISH movement and human trafficking. https://www.ajli.org/?nd=p-do-comm-ip-human-trafficking

Busch-Armendariz, N., Nsonwu, M., & Heffron, L. C. (2018). *Human trafficking: Applying research, theory, and case studies.* SAGE Publications.

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Daniels, J. (2016). The trouble with white feminism: Whiteness, digital feminism, and the intersectional internet. In S. U. Noble & B. M. Tynes (Eds.), *The intersectional internet: Race, sex, class, and culture online.* Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Earl, J., & Kimport, K. (2013). *Digitally enabled social change: Activism in the internet age.* MIT Press.

Foot, K. (2016). *Collaborating against human trafficking: Cross-sector challenges and practices.* Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group.

Gulati, J. (2012). Representing trafficking: Media in the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. In A. Brysk & A. Choi-Fitzpatrick (Eds.), *From human trafficking to human rights: Reframing contemporary slavery* (pp. 44-70). University of Pennsylvania Press.

Haunss, S. (2015). Promise and practice in studies of social media and movements. In L. Dencik & O. Leistert (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on social media and protest* (pp. 13-31). Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd.

Hesse-Biber, S. (2014). *Feminist research practice: A primer* (2nd ed.)*.* SAGE Publications.

Hill, A. & Chavez, K. (2018). Introduction: Inciting communication across queer migration studies and critical trafficking studies. *Women's Studies in Communication, 41*(4), 300-304. https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2018.1544000

Hou, J. Z. (2019). Understanding the public interest puzzle in China's public relations: The role of balance and counterbalance based on Confucian Great Harmony. In J. Johnston & M. Pieczka (Eds.), *Public interest communication: Critical debates and global contexts* (pp. 153-171). Routledge.

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2017). Global estimates of modern slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf

Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2018). *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture.* New York University Press.

Johnston, J. (2023). Public interest communication: A pragmatic approach. In G. Gonçalves & E. Oliveira (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of nonprofit communication* (pp. 55-65). Routledge.

Johnston, J., & Gulliver, R. (2022). *Public interest communication*. University of Queensland. https://uq.pressbooks.pub/publicinterestcomm/

Johnston, J., & Pieczka, M. (2019). Public interest communication: A framework for systemic inquiry. In J. Johnston & M. Pieczka (Eds.), *Public interest communication: Critical debates and global contexts* (pp. 9-31). Routledge.

Junior League of Atlanta, Georgia. (2021). Commercial sexual exploitation of children and human trafficking. https://www.jlatlanta.org/csec_ht/

Junior League of Birmingham, Michigan. (2021). Community impact. https://www.jlbham.org/community-impact/

Junior League of Charlotte, North Carolina. (2021). Human trafficking. https://www.jlcharlotte.org/human-trafficking/

Junior League of Daytona Beach, Florida. (2021). Human trafficking initiative. https://daytonabeach.jl.org/community/community-impact/human-trafficking-initiative/

Junior League of Fort Worth, Texas. (2021). Community projects. https://www.juniorleaguefw.org/community-projects

Junior League of Greenville, South Carolina. (2021). Human trafficking impact. https://www.jlgreenville.org/community-programs/human-trafficking-impact/

Junior League of Long Beach, California. (2021). Human trafficking. https://www.jllb.org/community/advocacy/position-statements

Junior League of Napa-Sonoma, California. (2021). How we help. https://www.jlns.org/how-we-help.html

Junior League of Orange County, California. (2021). Human trafficking. https://www.jlocc.org/human-trafficking

Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review, 9*(1), 36-41. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

Lee, M. (2011). *Trafficking and global crime control.* SAGE Publications.

Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods.* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Lobasz, J. K. (2019). *Constructing human trafficking: Evangelicals, feminists, and an unexpected alliance.* Palgrave MacMillan.

Luibheid, E. (2018). Heteronormativity: A bridge between queer migration and critical trafficking studies. *Women's Studies in Communication, 41*(4), 305-309. https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2018.1544001

Mishra, V. (2015). *Combating human trafficking: Gaps in policy and law.* SAGE Publications.

Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTP). (2016). The power of framing human trafficking as a public health issue. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/report/resource/publichealthlens

Oktay, J. S. (2012). *Grounded theory.* Oxford Scholarship Online. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199753697.001.0001

Polaris. (2020). Polaris statement on Wayfair sex trafficking claims. polarisproject.org/press-releases/polaris-statement-on-wayfair-sex-trafficking-claims/

Polaris. (2023). Human trafficking rumors. polarisproject.org/human-trafficking-rumors/

Sullivan, P., & Porter, J. E. (1997). *Opening spaces: Writing technologies and critical research practices.* Ablex Publishing.

Tao, W., Li, Z. C., Chen, Z. F., & Ji, Y. G. (2021). Public responses to nonprofit social media messages: The roles of message features and cause involvement. *Public Relations Review, 47*, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102038

Tufte, T. (2017). *Communication and social change: A citizen perspective.* Polity Press.

United Nations. (2023). Sustainable development goals—Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/

United States Department of State. (2020). Human trafficking. https://www.state.gov/policy-issues/human-trafficking/

Vanek, J. (2015). *The essential abolitionist: What you need to know about human trafficking and modern slavery.* Daliwal Press.

Vardeman, J., & Sebesta, A. (2020). The problem of intersectionality as an approach to digital activism: The Women's March on Washington's attempt to unite all women. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 32*(1-2), 7-29. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2020.1716769

Vogt, W. P., Vogt, E. R., Gardner, D. C., & Haeffele, L. M. (2014). *Selecting the right analysis for your data: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.* Guilford Press.

Winett, L. B., Niederdeppe, J., Xu, Y., Gollust, S., & Fowler, E. F. (2021). When 'tried and true' advocacy strategies backfire: Narrative messages can undermine state legislator support for early childcare policies. *Journal of Public Interest Communications, 5*(1), 45-77. https://doi.org/10.32473/jpic.v5.i1.p45

STREET ART AS A DISCURSIVE SITE FOR NEGOTIATING PLURICULTURAL GOVERNANCE: A CASE STUDY ON THE OAXACA COMMUNE

LORRAINE J. AFFOURTIT

Journal of Public Interest Communications

Street Art as a Discursive Site for Negotiating Pluricultural Governance: A Case Study on the Oaxaca Commune

Lorraine J. Affourtit

Appalachian State University

Article Information	Abstract
	The Oaxaca Commune, a popular uprising that grew into a broad-based movement for social justice, erupted in June 2006 in the capital of the state of Oaxaca in southern Mexico. In this article, I analyze various forms of street art created in the Oaxaca Commune, including graffiti and print media, to examine how these formations created a matrix of visual discourse mapping the political terrain of the Oaxaca Commune onto the spatial terrain of Oaxaca City. Artist collectives mobilized the aesthetics of Mexican graphic agitprop, revolutionary iconography, and religious traditions to create a site for dialogue and negotiation among civil society about key issues of the movement, the development of a popular assembly, and the future of Oaxaca's democracy.

Introduction

In this case study, I analyze street art created by artist collectives during the Oaxaca Commune, an uprising and social movement that erupted in Oaxaca City, Mexico, during the summer of 2006. I examine how graffiti and print media created a matrix of visual discourse mapping the political terrain of the social movement onto the spatial terrain of Oaxaca City. Presenting this case study as such offers a timely argument for exploring the interdisciplinary and global scope of public interest communications (PIC) as vital for analyzing social movement visual culture in the Global South. If PIC pertains to "strategic communications with the goal of significant and

sustained positive behavior change or action on an issue that transcends that of any single organization" (Christiano & Niemand, 2017, p. 38), then PIC analysis is particularly germane to visual and material culture emerging from broad-based social justice movements. Further, its implementation in analysis of material outside of the European-U.S. context proffers ongoing opportunities to expand the breadth of PIC methodologies on a global scale.[1]

Toward that imperative, this study aims to bridge the fields of Visual Studies and PIC through a methodology that roots analysis of visual and material culture from the Oaxaca Commune in the overlap and integration of these two theoretical frameworks. Like PIC, Visual Studies is an emergent field and inter-discipline that draws from diverse academic areas to address the complexities of multiform human communications and expressions along with their effects. This article brings the fruitful cross-pollination of these two fields together. The result is an investigation of the ways in which artist-activists in Oaxaca mobilized strategic public communications in the form of street art to launch a call to action and to galvanize Oaxacan citizens around building an inclusive, consensus-based space for grassroots political participation.

Johnston and Gulliver (2022) describe PIC as "fundamentally about finding ways to work through issues of social justice, manage public problems, and enable public debate" (p. 7). They advocate for thinking of PIC as a "dialectic…where it is as much about the process of debating and discussing interests and issues as it is about finding the best solution or outcome" (Johnston & Gulliver, 2022, p. 8). Artist collectives supporting the Oaxaca Commune created a PIC dialectic enabling public debate by mobilizing street art as a discursive space. They marshaled the aesthetics of Mexican graphic agitprop, revolutionary iconography, and religious traditions in graphic artwork to create a site for dialogue and negotiation among civil society about key issues of the movement, the development of a new model for participatory politics, and the future of Oaxaca's democracy.

The Oaxaca Commune

The Oaxaca Commune began as a popular uprising responding to the state governor's attack on an encampment of striking teachers. Oaxaca's Local Section 22 of the national teachers' union, Mexico's *Sindicato Nacional de los Trabajadores de la Educación* (SNTE)[2], is one of the largest and most active union locals in Mexico (de la Luz Arriaga Lemus, 2015; Dillingham, 2021; Rincones, 2008). Section 22 is also part of a dissident union faction, the *Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación*[3], which stands in opposition to the SNTE's corporatist union model and its entanglement with the Mexican government since its inception. Section 22 has

---

[1] This research began as a section of my doctoral dissertation and has been expanded and edited for the current volume (see Affourtit, 2020b).
[2] National Union of Education Workers
[3] National Coordination of Education Workers

been at the forefront of a strong nationwide Democratic Teachers' Movement since 1980, marshaling a three-pronged plan to democratize the teachers' union, national education, and ultimately the country (O. Olivera Espinosa, personal communication, October 3, 2018).

Section 22 organizes an annual teaching strike during the summer months, with sit-ins and encampments in Oaxaca's central plaza and the surrounding streets. Strikes had historically ended when the state responded to the teachers' demands with incremental adjustments for living wages and increased resources for students (Magaña, 2017; Norget, 2010). On June 14, 2006, however, instead of negotiating with the union, Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz (hereafter Ruiz Ortiz) sent in paramilitary police units in the middle of the night to evict the teachers from their encampment using tear gas and brutal physical force (Arenas, 2011; Norget, 2010).

The response to the governor's repressive attack was swift. More than 300 Oaxacan civil society organizations gathered with Section 22 to agitate for the Ruiz Ortiz's deposal, forming the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (APPO)[4] in just three days. With the strength of APPO, the Oaxacan people finally had the opportunity and the means to express their dissent against Ruiz Ortiz and to address long-standing sociopolitical inequities in the state. On the national scale, political rhetoric in Mexico promised a transition to democracy after the country's long period under a one-party regime. The *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI)[5] had come into power at the end of the Mexican Revolution and then consolidated a dictatorial one-party state ruling Mexico from 1929-2000. The election of President Vicente Fox in 2000 ended 70 years of PRI rule, but the promise of progressive changes proved empty for the country's most minoritized citizens and strained against the reality of continuing government corruption and impunity. And although the PRI had been ousted from national government, in the state of Oaxaca, Ruiz Ortiz was overseeing the eighth decade of PRI monopoly.

APPO galvanized Oaxacan citizens to develop their own democratic transition from the grassroots, proposing what I term *decolonial democracy*: participatory democratic politics based in Indigenous[6] communal practices, self-governance, and forms of resistance to colonialism and its heirs—imperialism, global capitalism, and neoliberalism. I have introduced this term and definition (Affourtit, 2019) with inspiration from Mignolo (2011) and his discussion of the Indigenous Chiapas-based Zapatista National Liberation Army project to decolonize democracy; Kelley (2015), Davis (2010), and Lipsitz (2004) in their varied interpretations and invocations of W. E. B. DuBois' (1998/1935) conception of abolition democracy; Rafael Magaña's (2020) invocation of decolonial anarchism to describe APPO; and Oaxacan scholar Esteva's (2007) description of APPO as a form of radical democracy. What each of these terms have in common is an attempt to consider alternative models of governing in the context of what is now widely considered a global crisis of democracy (Applebaum, 2020; Przeworski, 2019; Runciman, 2018; Slaughter & Isakhan, 2014; Urbinati, 2016). This case study on the Oaxaca Commune

---

[4] Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca
[5] Institutional Revolutionary Party
[6] I capitalize the term Indigenous when referring to political and historical peoples and communities, as well as their cultures, societies, practices, and lifeways.

investigates the inner workings of one such alternative model and how it was built by the Oaxacan people.

Street art

I argue that APPO's model for decolonial democracy was envisioned and shaped through its visual culture and media. The very first visual culture project that APPO supporters introduced into the public sphere was street art, including graffiti and print media. Oaxaca already had a thriving community of *talleres*[7] prior to 2006, which was in large part due to the influence of Shinzaburo Takeda, a Japanese-born printmaking instructor at the *Universidad Autónoma "Benito Juárez" de Oaxaca*.[8] Takeda taught many generations of artists during his more than 30 years at the university and claimed to have brought the very first woodblock printing tools to Oaxaca when he arrived in the 1970s (S. Takeda, personal communication, August 28, 2013). Mario Guzman, who studied with Takeda, explained that many of Takeda's alumni started their own print workshops in Oaxaca and developed political consciousness both through their teacher's urging and based on the long history of Mexican graphic agitprop stretching from the Mexican Revolution on (M. Guzman, personal communication, September 2, 2013).

Therefore, graphic artists already working together in *talleres* when the Oaxaca Commune began were able to expediently respond to the social movement with street art. Street art offered the unique ability to produce visual forms of public discourse rapidly and cheaply, and to create endless repetitions and combinations of images and slogans with spray paint, stencils, and print media on craft or tissue paper adhered to city walls with wheat paste. Artists were able to create palimpsests on city surfaces, incorporating and extending one another's works into new compositions and attesting to the scope of collaborative action by artist assemblies uniting under APPO.

In what follows, I consider various forms of and approaches to street art created by artist collectives supporting APPO. During the Oaxaca Commune, public art proliferated to an astounding degree. The images I have chosen to analyze represent but a small portion of the street art that was disseminated, but I have taken care to select works that attest to the diverse forms that street art took in the Oaxaca Commune, the breadth of visual discourse generated through street art formations, and the range of pressing issues around which street art carved a space for dialogue and debate.

---

[7] print media workshops
[8] "Benito Juarez" Autonomous University of Oaxaca

Reclaiming public space and establishing ungovernability

A key aspect of the Oaxaca Commune and the struggle against the governor's repression was the reclamation of public space. Not only had Ruiz Ortiz brutally evicted the teachers from their sit-in, but privatization and control of public space had been part of the governor's political strategies since his inauguration in 2005. Within his first hundred days, the governor had launched an initiative, without consulting city residents, to renovate Oaxaca City's *zócalo*.[9] Ruiz Ortiz relocated government offices from the central buildings around the *zócalo* to suburbs outside of the city center, converted the government palace and other buildings into museums, removed trees that were hundreds of years old, and replaced sections of cobblestone with concrete (Poole, 2008). Many city residents saw the renovation as indicative of increasing privatization of the city's historical and cultural heritage. Further, they believed that the governor's principal aim was to discourage the political dissent that had historically taken place outside of the buildings that housed state representatives (Poole & Rénique, 2008). Ruiz Ortiz's violent eviction of the teachers from his newly renovated *zócalo* transformed the city's public spaces into sites of struggle.

Figure 1

Montage of Graffiti Denouncing Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006

Note. Photographs by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

---

[9] public square

Works of street art that appeared in the first days of the Oaxaca Commune were denunciations of Ruiz Ortiz and the paramilitary police he had sent to suppress the strike (Figure 1). The graffiti featured representations of the governor as odious animals, such as a rat, pig, donkey, or raccoon, often accompanied by slogans: "¡*Fuera Ulises*!"[10] and "¡*Ulises Asesino*!"[11] This first resounding "NO!" to Ruiz Ortiz's repression in the form of street art was critically important for the solidarity necessary to cohere APPO.

To succeed, APPO had to bring together a dissident teachers' union that was often unpopular with the general public due to its radical tactics, diverse groups from all over the sociopolitical spectrum, and citizens who had not previously participated in local politics. Initial graphic interventions underscored this vital coalition-building based on a collective rejection of Ruiz Ortiz's authority. Moreover, the graphic denunciations supported APPO's campaign to depose Ruiz Ortiz by establishing a state of ungovernability in Oaxaca City, the condition allowing for citizens' legal right to call for the governor's removal. According to Muñoz:

> Literature on governability in Latin America defines it as the maintenance of governmental/ institutional stability (Abente Brun, 1996; Coppedge, 1996; Foweraker, 1998). Governability is often contrasted with ungovernability, characterized by social chaos or political power vacuums demonstrated in cabinet crises, legislative stalemate, violent protest, armed rebellion or military coups [...] Coppedge advances a broader definition, linking governability to the relationships between 'strategic actors' with the capacity to 'disturb public order or economic development.' Such actors include political parties, state-powers, and various social actors such as indigenous [*sic*] people. (Muñoz, 2004, p. 426)[12]

The extralegal nature of graffiti in Oaxaca, backed up by laws designed to protect the city's status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, bolstered APPO's campaign to establish ungovernability by highlighting the governor's lack of authority and control over his jurisdiction (Arenas, 2011).

---

[10] "Ulises Out!"

[11] "Ulises Murderer!"

[12] Many sources are now capitalizing the term Indigenous when it is used as a proper noun, as I do in any sections of this text that are not from direct quotes.

Figure 2

Two-Part Stencil Graffiti Piece by Arte Jaguar, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006

Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

In the call and response of their inscriptions, Oaxacan artist collectives made use of the dereliction and decay of the surfaces on which they installed their graphic works. This street art piece by the collective *Arte Jaguar* (Figure 2) employs a hole in the plaster façade of a city building, revealing the brick underneath. The two-part stencil piece combines a denunciation of Ruiz Ortiz with a declaration of ungovernability. Ruiz Ortiz as pig observes his paramilitary police-robot with helmet and broom, poised to clean city streets of dissidents and their graffiti. The irony of a grotesque pig demanding militarized political repression and sanitation, delivered through the very form of graffiti that signifies the dissent the governor remains inept at preventing, is the precipitating message of this piece.

Mattern (2016) draws on Wright (2010) and Holloway (2010) to analyze how forms of popular art, including graffiti and street art, "exemplify anarchist principles and commitments that, taken together, prefigure deeper forms of democracy than those experienced...in today's liberal democracies" (p. 1). Figure 2 provides a visual paradigm for Mattern's provocation that the anarchic prefiguration of democratic futures takes place in the cracks and interstices of capitalist formations. According to Mattern:

> Pursuing an interstitial strategy entails identifying existing cracks and fissures [in dominant institutions], while opening new ones where possible. Over time, these cracks and fissures can be widened, drawing new and more participants into them...This strategy focuses on the present, but with an eye to the future of gradual emancipation. (Mattern, 2016, p. 5)

Street art's exploitation of super-structural surface inconsistencies—the figurative and literal cracks in the dominant order and the structures that contain it—ultimately exposes how architecture deemed sacrosanct both by the United Nations as cultural heritage and the Mexican

state as means of tourist revenue accumulation stand as the material evidence of the ongoing and unyielding entanglements of colonialism and capitalism.

Advancing collectivity through visual grammar

While the first works of graffiti denouncing Ruiz Ortiz appeared on city walls without attribution to specific artist collectives and assemblies, street art evinced growing internal cohesion and organization under APPO in the months following. As this happened, graphic art also demonstrated internal practices of collectivity in artist assemblies that mirrored the ethos and principal structure of APPO, in turn actively adapted from Indigenous communal governance as a central goal of the movement. Members of the *Asamblea Revolutionaria de los Artistas de Oaxaca* (ASARO)[13] explained:

> Our structure is not vertical but horizontal. This manner of organizing ourselves is based on the APPO's example, an example which itself retook the model and method of organization of the indigenous [*sic*] communities of Oaxaca. For us, this way of organizing ourselves works in the following way: when there are important issues to discuss, a meeting is convened and all members who can participate come to our workshop and sit in a circle. In order to make our jobs easier, we have formed commissions who are in charge of various tasks inside ASARO. The principal commissions are those of organization, press and propaganda, political formation, and finances. In general, someone from these commissions convenes the assembly. Once together, information is shared topic by topic and what to do and how to do it is discussed for each issue. At the assembly, everyone has a right to speak and to give their opinion until, in the end, when all proposals for a particular issue have been opened up, we vote for each proposal and the one that has the most votes defines our subsequent course of action. Whether a new or old member, each vote counts equally. Decisions made are thus those of everybody and the resulting art is everyone's—that is one of the reasons why the art is signed as ASARO and not individually. ("ASARO, Art by the People and for the People," 2008, n.p., in Arenas, 2011, p. 351)

This passage clearly delineates how the social organization of artist assemblies like ASARO closely followed that of the larger assembly, APPO, forming smaller-scale models for the decolonial democracy that APPO was building. Artist groups thus operated collective action via street art formations as a mode of assembly and an example of the movement's in-process goals.

Oaxaca city artist collectives that had already been established prior to the Oaxaca Commune were able to adapt their practices of sharing space, equipment, and resources to the assembly model under APPO. In effect, street art in the Oaxaca Commune visually testified to the collaborative work of artist assemblies in horizontally organized collectives whose membership was heterogenous and inclusive. Images produced by the artist assemblies incorporated visual markers of shared resources and collaborative production. The repetition of

---

[13] Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca

logos, stencils, and slogans provided points of visual convergence formulating a collective message while also revealing how collective work in popular assemblies offered strategies for creative political dissent.

Figure 3

ASARO Logo Grafitti, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2007

Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

ASARO's logo appeared in their street art, pamphlets, flyers, and prints (Figure 3). The logo is a strategy of shared attribution, signaling the importance of collective work by upending the tendency to tag works with individual artists' names. The logo's design also sends a powerful message about ASARO's methodology, collective work, and alliance with APPO. The logo features the barrel of a gun pointed at the viewer with a finger on the trigger. However, the gun is loaded not with a bullet but with a symbol of APPO—a red star, as if it will imprint the viewer with the APPO icon. While the Oaxaca Commune was a primarily nonviolent movement, the aggressive visual logic of the logo provocatively employs symbols of violence but inverts the message to suggest combating state violence by weaponizing art (i.e., using art as a tool to fight back). The logo invokes the dual meaning of making an impression as both the act of creating a visual impression through the print media process and the concept of impressing upon the viewer the ideology of APPO. It therefore portends the viewer's allegiance with APPO through the symbolic act of donning the red star. In creating a logo for the artist assembly that imprints the viewer with the APPO star, ASARO situated itself under the umbrella of the larger popular assembly, poised to galvanize APPO members, not necessarily ASARO members.

ASARO and other artist assemblies also repeated images, slogans, and concepts across a wide range of graphic work, creating a visual grammar for APPO's movement and attesting to internal organizing principles of collectivity and collaboration. These street art pieces by ASARO (Figures 4-7) each feature an enigmatic figure crouched on the ground. Individually, the

images are ambiguous, but read together they speak to the vulnerability of individuals and the strength of groups in solidarity, particularly in reference to the minoritized populations that APPO brought together for collective action. Upon first glance, a viewer might wonder—are these figures crouching down or about to get up? For the most part, their gazes are cast downward and their expressions wistful. They seem at rest on the ground and yet somehow relegated to that posture outside of their own control.

Figure 4

El Revolucionario Verdadero,[14] ASARO, 2006

Note. Courtesy of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, Archive 26721. Photograph by the author.

Figure 4 is a four-color stencil print on craft paper, a test print for a stencil graffiti piece that was spraypainted on Oaxaca City walls in 2006. In the print, a young boy in street clothes and sandals appears to be drawing something on the ground in front of him with an outstretched finger. A young girl behind him is pointing to the words stenciled above her head in red lettering: "*El revolucionario verdadero esta guiado por grandes sentimientos de amor*,"[15] one of Argentine Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara's most famous sayings. Below that floats drippy white stenciled lettering spelling out "ASARO." The spacing and depth of the composition,

---

[14] The true revolutionary
[15] "The true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love."

along with the intermingled shadows of the two figures, suggest that they are situated in an outdoor space next to a wall bearing the stenciled message. Thus, the theme of graphic intervention and social movement messaging is doubled in this graffiti piece within a graffiti piece.

Figure 5

Street Art by ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006

Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

A variation of the previous stencil, here spray-painted directly on the wall of a city street in Oaxaca, features just an image of the boy (Figure 5). His posture and downward gaze are nearly identical, but his right finger is no longer extended in a gesture of drawing. The omission of the extended finger changes the significance of the image. No longer involved in a specific action of inscription, the crouching boy gazes inexplicably downward. It is unclear whether he has been struck to the ground and is potentially hurt, or if he is resting, waiting, or about to rise from the ground with a rock in his hand.

Figure 6

Street Art by ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006

Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

In the next variation (Figure 6), the squatting figure is legible as an Indigenous woman, probably from the Mixe region of Oaxaca, based on her clothing, *rebozo* shawl, and *huarache* sandals. A bandana covers her nose and mouth and she carries a bag over her right shoulder. With her right elbow on her right knee, her posture at first appears as one of restful pause in a stooped position. However, the woman's downward gaze seems mournful and her posture reads as doubled over with the weight she bears on her back. She has the appearance of a mother figure mourning something lost, perhaps a child or spouse. Both the shawl and the type of bag she holds are often used to carry infants. In this case, both are without human cargo, which supports the tone of loss.

Figure 7

Street Art by ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006

Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

A final variation (Figure 7) presents another Indigenous female figure, a young woman identifiable as *Tehuana*[16] in a traditional flowered dress with a pocket at the front and a bandana covering her nose and mouth. Sitting on the ground with her legs behind her, the figure supports her weight with arms on either side of her body. She faces away from spray-painted letters that read, "*14 de Junio no se olvido*"[17] a reminder of the violent repression of the teachers' encampment that started the uprising. Haphazardly and unevenly sprayed white zigzagging lines overlapping her figure propose a movement or dynamism that is antithetical to her posture's stasis, creating an uneasy tension.

Given that Figures 4-7 appeared at varying but close-in locations throughout the small capital city and with likely overlaps in the time and duration of their installations, it is useful to consider the accretion of meanings in the nuances and variation of details among the images. The figures in these pieces, as isolated and individual figures, appear to be crouching down in suspended animation, burdened abjection, or sorrowful longing. If we look at the figures instead as a not-yet-assembled group, they might read as both ducking down *and* about to arise. The figures' action of rising up suggests participation in collective resistance, while the tension of stasis and dynamism in the compositions presents potential energy about to explode into kinetic.

Visualizing *el pueblo*:[18] Unity in diversity

Oaxaca has 16 officially recognized ethno-linguistic groups, each with many subgroups, amounting to an estimated 10,000 Indigenous communities across the state. In order to be as diverse as the state it aspired to galvanize, APPO had to coalesce its membership across social, political, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, gender, age, and class differences. Unity in APPO had to be shaped and promoted as unity in diversity. This message was solidified in street art establishing the demographic APPO hoped to bring together in the movement as "the people," while actively cohering that community in a fluid, flexible, and ongoing manner. One of the first strategies manifesting APPO's unity-in-diversity was street art messages with repeated movement slogan variations about who was being convened as the people of Oaxaca. Slogans such as "*somos uno*,"[19] "*somos pueblo*,"[20] and "*todos somos APPO*"[21] alongside images highlighting solidarity effectively visualized APPO's aspirational membership.

In Spanish, the term *el pueblo* means both "people" and "village/ town," both a social entity and its place of residence. Arenas (2011) considers how spatial practices of social movement mobilization interpellated *el pueblo* as a collective political subject: "The community of *el pueblo* is constituted primarily through the direct embodied relations and performative rituals of assemblies, marches, sit-in strikes, and barricades" (p. 129). Arenas' analysis follows new social

---

[16] from the Istmo de Tehuantepec region of coastal Oaxaca
[17] "Don't forget the 14th of June."
[18] the people
[19] "we are one"
[20] "we are the people"
[21] "we are all APPO"

movement literature, which stresses that one of the key modes of social mobilization is the creation of collective political subjects or collective identities (Jasper, 2001; Melucci, 1989; Polletta & Tourain, 1985).

Figure 8

Somos Pueblo,[22] *ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006*

Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

A woodblock print by ASARO (Figure 8), wheat-pasted on a city wall as street art, suggests unity among the different entities involved in the Oaxaca Commune by hailing APPO as the collective political subject of the people in a simplified cartographic representation of the urban space of Oaxaca City. The print features the dominant lettering "*somos pueblo*"[23] floating above a matrix of gridded city streets. Lettering carved inside the lines of one of the highways represented on the map urges, "*no te pierdas—todos somos APPO*."[24] A closer look reveals that the print actually presents two superimposed maps. The foreground is a zoomed-in and crudely rendered cartography of the city center where it meets the highways connecting to the rural areas and Indigenous communities of the state. This map also includes some of the salient features of the rural geography—lines marking hilly or mountainous terrain across the top of the print and wavy lines for bodies of water at the bottom left. The background offers a zoomed-out map

---

[22] We are the people
[23] "we are the people"
[24] "do not get lost—we are all APPO"

perspective: in the central portion of the print, an ominous eye peeks out from behind the grid of city streets and a faint outline of Central and South America, cut off approximately where Mexico meets the United States, floats in the dark undefined spaces underneath the more concretely rendered edges of the city. The map-print is festooned with tiny dots, representing perhaps the people who inhabit these lands and spaces or some evidence of their presence there.

Given that the Oaxaca Commune was an urban-based movement, this two-part scale of the map is a key suggestion that APPO's movement had reach beyond not only the state of Oaxaca but also beyond the borders of Mexico, stretching across Latin America to anywhere people identify as "*el pueblo*." The wording in the phrase "do not get lost—we are all APPO" renders a call for widespread communities to remember the symbolic unity and solidarity that they already possess as the people, and to further anchor that connection to allegiance with APPO. With visual cues related to assembling under common goals, ASARO's map-print suggests that the collective political subject of the people in the Oaxaca Commune crystalizes in the collaborative political work of building APPO. Further, the map gestures to the idea that this imagined community has a much broader historical and geopolitical scope, preceding the Oaxaca Commune and stretching far beyond the borders of Oaxaca and of Mexico to other Latin American communities in struggle.

If Oaxaca Commune street art consolidated the political subjectivity of "the people" in APPO, but with ancient roots and extensions well beyond the local, it also constructed this subject across other boundaries more specific to the region of Oaxaca through a visual focus on the intrinsic diversity of Oaxacan citizens.

Figure 9

La Comuna de Oaxaca,[25] *ASARO, 2006*

Note. Courtesy of ASARO. Photograph by the author.

---

[25] The Oaxaca Commune

Figure 9, another woodblock print, is one of the most reproduced images from the ASARO archive, and it presents diversity as the strength of APPO. A crowd of people advance in a mega-march seen stretching far into the background. The most legible figures in the foreground read as people of various sexes and age groups, indicating a diverse demographic across the entire march. One figure holds the side of a banner reading *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*, while another foreground figure holds an APPO flyer with the signature star. The text across the top of the print reads, *La Comuna de Oaxaca 2006*.[26] Another figure reading as older and male in the foreground carries a torch, while far off in the distance behind him a banner reads "*Venceremos!*"[27]

The naïve, unpolished style of this print speaks to the range of technical skill in the artist assembly ASARO, which in turn posits Oaxacan artist collectives as spaces for diverse voices and visions in APPO coalition-building. One of ASARO's core principles was to focus on the political expediency and activist possibilities of print media rather than overt concern for precision or aesthetic virtuosity. Therefore, seasoned graphic artists and novices worked together to create political graphics. This mixture of technical know-how and emergent talent in ASARO and other artist collectives prioritized the potency of the political message and the momentum necessary to disseminate the work in public spaces, where the uprising was taking place.

Unpolished graphic art disseminated with collective attribution alongside more sophisticated artworks bespoke the inclusivity of artist assemblies. Far from being spaces of elite culture or exclusive training, art collectives convening under APPO brought together all the creative people who wanted to use art to express their demands, grievances, and goals as part of the social movement. Graphic art that was popular in style and diverse in aesthetics, while still cohesive and legible as the work of the collective, developed a visual language for the social movement that evinced some of the key principles of APPO, namely horizontality through non-hierarchical organization and heterogeneity through diverse membership and participation.

---

[26] The Oaxaca Commune 2006
[27] "We Will Overcome!"

Figure 10

ASARO Flyers, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006


Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

This installation of several prints attributed to ASARO on the same public wall (Figure 10), displayed as wheat-pasted flyer reproductions with superimposed slogans and ASARO logos, created continuity across this broad selection of works with different visual styles and ranges of technical proficiency, with equal attention to both seasoned and emergent styles.

Negotiating Indigeneity and gender

While diversity in APPO membership was in some ways an intrinsic outcrop of the demographics of Oaxaca itself and the assembly's incorporation of many different sociopolitical groups, it was also in active construction and deliberation throughout the Oaxaca Commune. Two particular aspects of fierce critique and negotiation were Indigenous inclusion and gender equity.

Figure 11

La Marcha,[28] *ASARO, 2006*
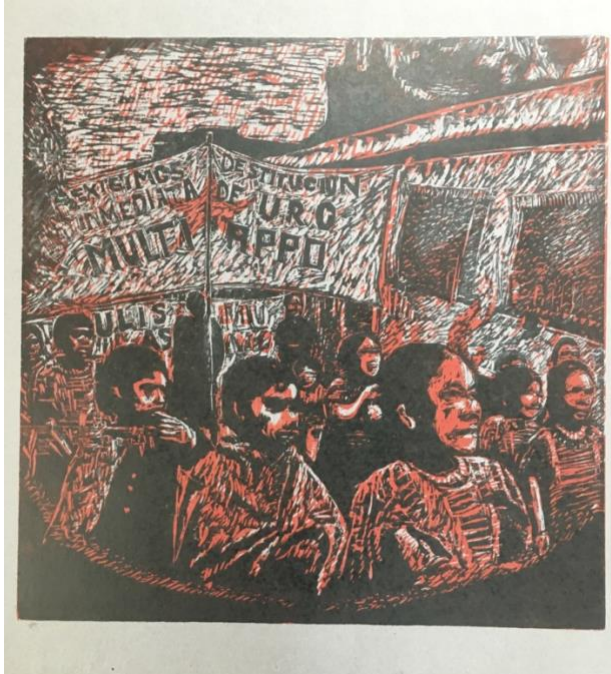
Note. Courtesy of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, Archive 28755. Photograph by the author.

In this woodblock print by ASARO (Figure 11), a small crowd of people, many of whom clearly present as Indigenous in their style of dress and hair, march with a sign bearing the red APPO star and reading: "We demand the immediate removal of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz! MULTI. APPO."

According to Stephen (2013), The *Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui Independiente* (MULTI)[29] is a regional organization of Triqui peoples, an Indigenous community from the southwestern Mixteca Baja region of Oaxaca. MULTI formed in 2006 in the wake of APPO's movement as an independent offshoot of the *Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui* (MULT),[30] a primarily land-defense organization that had been active in the Mixteca regions of Juxtlahuaca, Tlaxiaco, and Putla in Oaxaca since the 1980s. MULTI formed to agitate for Indigenous rights and autonomy for the Triqui municipalities. They participated in the APPO Mixteca, a regional APPO assembly representing several Indigenous communities, which took part in the larger APPO forums during the movement (pp. 210-215). The figures represented as marching under the banner in ASARO's print bear markers of Triqui culture. This is most notable in the female figures, with their long braids tied back and Triqui style *huipiles*.[31] The

---

[28] The march
[29] Independent Movement of Triqui Unification and Struggle
[30] Movement of Triqui Unification and Struggle
[31] a loosely fitting tunic garment that is traditionally worn by women in Indigenous communities

print attests to urban-rural collaboration and pan-ethnic Indigenous organizing within APPO, under the umbrella goal of Ruiz Ortiz's removal. MULTI was instrumental in bringing Indigenous communities into partnership with APPO and in modeling Indigenous women's organizing in APPO.

Graphic art in the Oaxaca Commune also delivered messaging about APPO and the social movement to multilingual communities and populations with variable literacy. Expedient messaging in the visual realm, accessible to those who spoke an Indigenous language and did not also speak Spanish, was vital for securing Indigenous support of and participation in APPO. Indigeneity in Oaxaca is a pervasive, undeniable reality, in the sense that the majority of Oaxacans have Indigenous ancestry, including those who live and work in Oaxaca City. However, indigeneity also remains a complicated class issue. Rural Indigenous peoples generally make up the peasant classes, surviving either through immersion in the communal practices of mutual aid and farming in the villages, remittances from family members who have migrated for work, or, in the case of communities closer to cities, hours-long travel by bus every day to the urban area to work as domestic staff or in the margins of the tourist trade, selling trinkets, artisanal crafts, food, or begging for money in the streets. Lighter-skinned Oaxacan *mestizxs*[32] generally live in the city and hold wage-earning jobs.

A Section 22 teacher (O. Olivera Espinosa, personal communication, October 3, 2018) explained that jobs in primary and secondary education offer rare opportunities to cut across the raced and classed lines between Indigenous survivance and wage-earning professions in Oaxaca. Teachers' union membership allows for instructors in Indigenous communities to teach in their own rural villages, make a decent wage, and have the possibility for advancement. But the teachers' union has had to fight to hold on to these rural schools and teaching positions in the face of increasing standardization of education and lack of fundamental resources to keep the schools going, a struggle that was also integrated into APPO's goals in 2006. Union teachers' presence in every Indigenous community across Oaxaca state supported APPO mobilization in rural areas. However, Indigenous communities' participation in APPO was complicated by the geographic isolation of their villages and their lack of access to urban-based events, news, and assembly meetings.

Gender inequities in Oaxacan politics and in Section 22 of the teachers' union were initially reified in APPO as well. According to one of the women who eventually participated in a feminist transformation within APPO to increase women's leadership in the movement, although women made up the largest demographic of teachers, APPO's rotating leadership was initially male-dominated. She also reported that APPO meetings overwhelmingly featured the voices of men until women began to demand more active roles and to agitate for equal representation (I. Santiago Galacia, personal communication, July 5, 2016). The vital role of women in the Oaxaca Commune was officially cemented in August 2006 when a group of APPO women occupied the Oaxaca state radio and television station, CORTV (Affourtit, 2020a). In the months leading up to this historic transformation of gender roles within APPO, street art had a critical role in the

---

[32] of mixed Indigenous and Spanish heritage

debates about the entrenched gender stereotypes in Oaxacan society and the need for gender equity and parity in the developing popular assembly.

Figure 12

Sexo Debil?,[33] ASARO, 2006

Note. Courtesy of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, Archive 26719. Photograph by the author.

In a stencil print on craft paper by ASARO (Figure 12, a practice print for street art stenciling), two female figures wearing long skirts, braided hair, bandanas over their faces, rifles on their backs, and ammunition crisscrossed over their chests are flanked by wording along the edges of the print: "ASARO" on the right side and the provocative rhetorical question on the left side, "*Sexo Débil?*"[34] At its most basic level of messaging, this image targets critics or doubters of feminine political power and confronts them with the spurious nature of the assumption that women are not strong enough to be revolutionaries. The subtler messaging of the print operates through its representation of the historical figures of *soldaderas*[35] from the Mexican Revolution, the country's first major peasant and working-class insurrection starting in 1910.

---

[33] The weak sex?

[34] "The weak sex?"

[35] female soldiers

The term "*soldaderas*" was given to the women who followed revolutionary soldier camps, taking care of the domestic tasks of the camp as a contribution to the struggle and assistance to their fighting lovers, husbands, and brothers (Mendieta Alatorre, 1961; Salas, 1990). *Soldaderas* also frequently engaged in armed battles when all available militia were required at the frontlines (Arce, 2016; Soto, 1990). But as Arce (2016) points out, *soldaderas* "mark the limits of the rhetoric of the nation state and their very nomenclature debases the real worth of female participation in the war" (p. 41). The representation of *soldaderas* first in the photographic record and then across a wide range of popular culture, Arce says, highlights "the very paradoxical nature of the soldaderas' historical invisibility and yet figural ubiquity" (p. 41). In other words, despite the fact that women did fight alongside men in the revolution, their contributions were distilled into tropological caricatures such as the "adoring Adelita" waiting for "her Juan," i.e., the "idealized female companion of the Mexican revolutionary soldier," or as a catch-all "symbol for women's participation in different struggles...far beyond the Mexican border" (Linhard, 2005, p. 91). It is the *soldaderas'* appearance in the cultural-visual imaginary that renders her a "slippery signifier" and a "palimpsestic figuration" of a real historical phenomenon (Linhard, 2005, p. 91). ASARO's stencil print tarries in the very same terrain of female revolutionary tropes in visual culture, trading on its legibility and familiarity to throw light on the actual issue of gender roles and stereotypes in the Oaxaca Commune. Therefore, it is also a reflection, I would argue, of ASARO and APPO's own shallow, perfunctory, and underdeveloped approach to gender inequity at the beginning of the movement.

At the start of the Oaxaca Commune, the membership of Oaxaca City artist assemblies was almost exclusively male even though they were ostensibly open to female artists. Even now, Oaxacan artist collectives are still notoriously dominated by young, politically left-leaning men, and can be, based on my own observations and reports by others in Oaxaca's art community, unsafe spaces for women and LGBTQ+ individuals—due to *machismo*, or more infrequently, blatant homophobia, misogyny, and sexual harassment or violence. ASARO incorporated the growing dialogue about gender inequality in Oaxacan politics and in APPO into their artwork, but what the images reveal is both the nascence of that dialogue and the need for a more radical feminist movement within APPO, led by women.

Figure 13

Cuando una Mujer Avanza… No Hay Hombre que la Detenga,[36] *ASARO, 2006*

Note. Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research, Archive 2010-005, Drawer 93, Folder 3. Photograph by the author.

This ASARO woodblock print (Figure 13) appeared later in the Oaxaca Commune, likely after the women's media takeover, though the exact date of its creation is unknown. In contrast to the earlier stencil print that queries, "The weak sex?," this print makes a strong and definitive statement inspired by the feminist movement within APPO: "*Cuando una mujer avanza, no hay hombre que la detenga.*"[37] The print itself is carved in an emergent, unrefined style, but its message is powerful. The central female figure leans forward with her back to the viewer, using her weight and strength to physically detain a gigantic black boot poised to squash her underneath it. Her resistance is symbolized in the carved lines radiating out from her hands as they push against the sole of the boot; these extend into lines of light radiating all around her. The shadow she casts in this light does not double her figure; instead, it appears as an outstretched arm and raised fist of solidarity, suggesting that the figure does not act alone but as part of a collective of women.

From the stencil in Figure 12 early in the uprising to the print in Figure 13 several months later, the dialogue around gender inequity and women's leadership in APPO's movement had been transformed. ASARO's graphic art both reflected and disseminated these sociopolitical changes as APPO achievements. ASARO took its place in shifting the dialogue by mobilizing street art and print media as broadcast tactics and strategies of public dialogue. However, in Figure 13, the protagonist's sheer dress and oddly over-defined buttocks beneath it create a

---

[36] When a woman advances…no man holds her back

[37] "When a woman advances, no man holds her back."

strange incongruence. The message of female strength is somewhat diluted when it is imaged via eroticized feminine embodiment. In this way, Figure 13 reflected the unfinished nature of the feminist transformation within APPO and the ongoing need for changes regarding gender norms in the Oaxaca Commune. Highlighting these inconsistencies was a crucial contribution of the dialogue ASARO's graphic art created, whether intentional or not.

From revolutionary icons to religious iconography

While the inclusion of revolutionary icons like the *soldaderas* in street art would have been legible to most sectors of Oaxacan society, the associated message appealed more to radical leftists than it did to slightly-left-of-center progressives. But the latter were just as crucial to the survival of APPO and the potential for its installation as a permanent governing body. Therefore, alternative means of engagement in graphic art and street art were required, involving images and messages that would motivate other sectors of society to participate in building APPO. To this end, and in deference to the Catholic traditions that undergird Oaxacan society, artist collectives engaged with religious iconography, transforming Catholic symbols into powerful imaginaries of political change.

Figure 14

Virgen de las Barrikadas,[38] *ASARO, 2007*

Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

---

[38] Virgin of the Barricades

The "*Virgen de las Barrikadas*"[39] (Figure 14) was introduced through street art as one of the patron saints of APPO's movement. She is a modified version of Mexico's patron saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe. Head bent forward and hands in a gesture of prayer, the APPO saint wears a gas mask on her face and a cloak decorated with burning tires, fastened by a length of barbed wire crossing her neck. The visual depiction of an ethereal glow radiates from all sides of the saint, but it also resembles sharp spikes, suggesting protection from outside threats. The virgin is presented as a saint capable of watching over APPO members at the barricades, who are in turn dedicated to protecting the city and its citizens. At the bottom of the print, the text reads: "*Protegenos Santisima Virgen de las Barrikadas.*"[40]

During the Oaxaca Commune, over one thousand barricades blocking the interior roads of the city center went up every night for nearly six months. They were created using cement blocks, bricks, tires, wood, and other scavenged objects, lit with bonfires, and guarded by neighborhood residents supporting APPO (Arenas, 2011). The barricades served many purposes during the movement—barriers preventing police or military vehicles from entering the city, watch points for citizens to alert one another of potential dangers, spaces of discussion and organization among movement participants, and social environments of conviviality for the various sectors of Oaxacan society participating in APPO (Arenas, 2011). Thus, the patron saint imaged here serves as a protector for those who took on considerable personal risk to guard the barricades at night. However, as Serna points out, ASARO missed an opportunity in its quotation and adaptation of the Virgin of Guadalupe for anything that we might consider a feminist critique:

> Such male-defined political iconography emphasizes anticapitalist, antiracist resistance, but does not always liberate La Virgen's icon from heteropatriarchal constraints. For instance, although the artists depict [the virgin] with the visual attributes of combatants (the bandana and gas mask), [she] keeps her hands posed in gendered supplication and prayer, thus representing a 'revolutionary' female figure that functions within her socially prescribed role as a caretaker and desexualized mother. These activist iterations of La Virgen do not challenge the heteronormative gaze that dominates in male-defined social movement rhetoric or in the uneven division of gendered labor within social movement activism. (Serna, 2007, p. 59)

Despite these limitations in advancing critiques of gendered and heteronormative imagery in religious iconography, ASARO's Virgin of the Barricades became an important icon of the movement and has appeared repeatedly in graphic art and print media since its creation. The creative adaptation of the Virgin of Guadalupe opened a space of public dialogue that acknowledged both the importance of traditional Catholic iconography and the necessity to revolutionize from all sectors of society for collective action, solidarity, and protection during the Oaxaca Commune.

---

[39] "Virgin of the Barricades"

[40] "Protect us Holy Virgin of the Barricades"

Conclusion: APPO as a public space for building new democratic options

Oaxaca City's *zócalo*, as the frontline in APPO's battle to contest the rights to and regulation of public spaces, was a vital location for street art installations that would agitate for civic dialogue around APPO's movement.

Figure 15

El Grito,[41] Stencil-Based Street Art by Arte Jaguar, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006

Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

Figure 16

"El Grito," (Detail), Stencil-Based Street Art by Arte Jaguar, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006

Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

---

[41] The cry

A large-scale stencil-based street art piece by the collective *Arte Jaguar* (Figures 15 and 16, detail) framed key dialogues that were taking place within APPO around its development of a new form of democratic governance for state politics in the urban sphere. The piece features a depiction of nineteenth century Mexican Catholic priest Father Miguel Hidalgo in the moment of his historic *grito*[42] for Mexico's independence from Spanish colonial rule on September 16, 1810, in the town of Dolores, state of Guanajuato. The event is now celebrated annually as Mexico's Independence Day. In *Arte Jaguar*'s rendition, Father Hidalgo stands on the balcony of the church ringing the church bell. He addresses a large crowd of people depicted, in the tradition of legendary Mexican graphic artist Jose Guadalupe Posada, as a sea of *calavera*[43] faces, with the battle cry: "*Muera el PRI!*"[44] In the background, banners read "*Fuera Ulises Ruiz de Oaxaca!*"[45] and "*Viva la lucha Popular!*"[46]

 Arte Jaguar installed this piece on an exterior wall of Oaxaca's Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption (built in 1535). Often referred to as the Oaxaca Cathedral, it is the center of religious life in Oaxaca City and sits in the middle of the *zócalo*. In invoking the nineteenth century call for revolution against the Spanish, *Arte Jaguar* re-sited the historic struggle by superimposing it with the Oaxaca Commune's call to depose Ruiz Ortiz and placing it on the exterior wall of the Oaxaca Cathedral. The image suggests that the Oaxaca Commune was another site in the long history of popular struggle against tyrannical rule, and that Ruiz Ortiz and the PRI government, while internally appointed, operated with oppressive tactics tantamount to those of an external colonial invader.

Figure 17

El toreador,[47] *Stencil-Based Street Art by Arte Jaguar, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006*

Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

---

[42] cry
[43] skeleton
[44] "Death to the PRI!"
[45] "Ulises Ruiz Out of Oaxaca!"
[46] "Long Live the People's Struggle!"
[47] The bullfighter

Another *Arte Jaguar* piece (Figure 17) installed on an exterior wall on one of the main streets in downtown Oaxaca enlists humor and lightness in a satirical depiction of the struggle between the popular power of APPO and the repressive governmental power of Ruiz Ortiz and the state. In this elaborately detailed stencil-based street art piece, Ruiz Ortiz is imagined as an absurdly flamboyant and hubristic bullfighter. Dressed in the attire of a Spanish *toreador*,[48] Ruiz Ortiz contorts his figure, with his body facing the bull and his enormous head turned toward the viewer as if to show off his skill and virility, seemingly unaware that the bull is about to catapult him into oblivion with two fierce horns. In the background, large blue letters spell out "APPO." Aler, one of the three main artists in the collective *Arte Jaguar*, explained that the bull represents the Oaxacan people (personal communication, July 14, 2016). The stencil piece suggests that APPO's movement is not just an ideological struggle; it is a physical fight against oppressive powers. The Oaxacan people must activate their bodies as one united body in order to oust the governor and his "*mal gobierno*."[49] Ruiz Ortiz, cast as bullfighter, is once again aligned with the oppressive colonial interests of Spanish invaders. He also fatally underestimates his enemy. The people of Oaxaca, brought together in APPO, are the strong, stubborn bull.

A showdown between a bullfighter and a bull is in the first place a contest for territory. *Arte Jaguar*'s piece appeared on what is generally considered the final official day of Oaxaca's uprising, November 25, 2006, which culminated in an hours-long standoff between APPO and federal police. Ruiz Ortiz had "declared that he was initiating the operation of a plan which would obtain control of the city before the first of December," and it ended when federal police forces brutally suppressed the APPO with paramilitary tactics, resulting in "165 political prisoners, tens of disappeared, hundreds of wounded and injured, as well as several deaths" (Davies, 2007, pp. 190-193). Street art confronted repressive state authorities and called attention to their blockading of public spaces as inimical to political expression. *Arte Jaguar*'s bullfighter image registers APPO's strength, even in the face of this repression, in struggling to reclaim Oaxaca City, its public spaces, and its governance as the domain of the people. The piece establishes this struggle as an embodied fight over the rights to territory—both physical (public space) and political (democratic space)—and above all, claiming the dignity of mattering in those spaces.

Thus, the foreclosure of public spaces, including eviction of the teachers' encampment from the city center, paramilitary occupation of the city, and sanctions on public art, also reflected the obstruction of a more immaterial form of public space—a space of political participation accessible to all citizens. Street art, graphic art, and print media created as part of the Oaxaca Commune recuperated and reclaimed contested rights to public space. Installing stencil-based wall and street artworks on UNESCO-protected colonial architecture, disseminating prints that negotiated the terms of APPO's popular assembly model, mobilizing revolutionary icons and historic struggles, and transforming religious icons into models of creative resistance, artist collectives opposed state regulations mobilized to tamp down dissent.

---

[48] bullfighter

[49] "bad government"

APPO's incentive to develop an inclusive and diverse political space, inspired by the horizontal, consensus-based processes of Indigenous communal governance, was couched in the argument that Oaxacan state politics had not made space for diverse voices, participation from minoritized citizens, or opportunities for democratic transformation. In 2006, when the PRI was still in power in Oaxaca, this struggle was immediate, pressing, and had a tremendous amount at stake, given the state's ethnic diversity, desperate poverty, and significant Indigenous population. The repressive tactics of PRI Governor Ruiz Ortiz transformed the rife frustration over the lack of access to a true democratic process into all-out ire.

This case study provides an effective example of PIC in action. Christiano outlines five elements of effective PIC campaigns:

> 1. They're visual, and even when the tactics they use are not explicitly visual, they rely heavily on visual metaphor to communicate core concepts. 2. They connect with the values of their target audience. 3. They use stories that engage new constituents in their cause. 4. Their calls-to-action are concrete, focused, and have an obvious connection to the goal. 5. They make use of emotion in surprising ways. (Christiano, 2017, p. 12)

As demonstrated through this analysis, APPO's graphic art initiatives employed all of these strategic elements. Street art in the Oaxaca Commune denounced the governor for his appropriation and misuse of public spaces and his inability to properly govern his people. Graphic art promoted the popular assembly and the movement to install it as reclamation of these threatened public spaces toward the creation of a new public space of participatory politics. This meant imaging APPO as a diversely composed movement and a proposal for a new form of politics capable of better serving the people, which in the context of Oaxaca meant in particular the inclusion of women and Indigenous peoples. Artist assemblies operating under the umbrella of APPO's movement channeled their critique of the state toward APPO's proposal for a different kind of governing at the level of grassroots. In broadcasting the political and ideological debates, dialogues, developments, and fault-lines of APPO's movement, PIC in the form of street art sketched the space that APPO offered for renegotiating the operation of political power.

References

Abente Brun, D. (1996). Paraguay: Transition from Caudillo rule. In A. F. Lowenthal & J. I. Dominguez (Eds.), *Constructing democratic governance: Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990s* (pp.118-132). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Affourtit, L. J. (2019). Visualizing decolonial democracy: The teachers' union and the People's Guelaguetza in Oaxaca, Mexico. *Journal of Labor and Society*, *22*(1), 77-102. https://doi.org/10.1111/wusa.12385

Affourtit, L. J. (2020a). Televising the revolution: Oaxacan women on CORTV. *Third Text, 34*(1), 22-36. https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2019.1657290

Affourtit, L. J. (2020b). *Visualizing Decolonial Democracy in the Oaxaca Commune* (Publication No. 28093801). [Doctoral dissertation, University of California Santa Cruz]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5vw1c163

Applebaum, A. (2020). *Twilight of democracy: The seductive lure of authoritarianism.* Doubleday.

Arce, B. C. (2016). *Mexico's Nobodies: The cultural legacy of the soldadera and Afro-Mexican women*. State University of New York Press.

Arenas, I. (2011). *Rearticulating the social: Spatial practices, collective subjects, and Oaxaca's art of protest.* [Doctoral dissertation, University of California Berkeley]. Escholarship.

Christiano, A. (2017). Forward: Building the field of public interest communications. *Journal of Public Interest Communications*, *1*(1), 4-15. https://doi.org/10.32473/jpic.v1.i1.p4

Christiano, A., & Neimand, A. (2017). Stop raising awareness already. *Stanford Innovation Review*, *15*(2), 36-41. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/stop_raising_awareness_already

Coppedge, M. (1996). Venezuela: The rise and fall of partyarchy. In A. F. Lowenthal & J. I. Dominguez (Eds.), *Constructing democratic governance: Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990s* (pp. 3-19). The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Davies, N. (2007). *The people decide—Oaxaca's popular uprising* (First Edition). Narco News Books.

Davis, A. Y. (2010). *Abolition democracy: Prisons, democracy and empire*. Seven Stories Press.

de la Luz Arriaga Lemus, M. (2015). The Mexican teachers' movement: Thirty years of struggle for union democracy and the defense of public education. *Social Justice*, *42*(3/4 (142)), 104-117. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24871329

Dillingham, A. S. (2021). *Oaxaca resurgent: Indigeneity, development, and inequality in twentieth-century Mexico*. Stanford University Press.

DuBois, W. E. B. (1998). *Black reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. Free Press. (Original work published in 1935).

Esteva, G. (2007). Oaxaca: The path of radical democracy. *Socialism and Democracy 21*(2), 74-96. https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300701388146

Foweraker, J. (1988). Transformism transformed: The nature of Mexico's political crisis. *Essex Papers in Politics and Government No. 46*. University of Essex.

Holloway, J. (2010). *Crack capitalism*. Pluto Press.

Johnston, J., & Gulliver, R. (2022). *Public interest communication*. University of Queensland.

Kelley, R. D. G. (2015, April 15). *Ending war?: Decolonial democracy against neoliberalism*. [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/-BuluasxjRQ

Linhard, T. A. (2005). *Fearless women in the Mexican revolution and the Spanish Civil War*. University of Missouri Press.

Lipsitz, G. (2004). Abolition democracy and global justice. *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal*, *2*(3), 271-286. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477570004047906

Magaña, M. R. (2017). Spaces of resistance, everyday activism, and belonging: Youth reimagining and reconfiguring the city in Oaxaca, Mexico. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, *22*(2), 215-234. https://doi.org/10.1111/jlca.12218

Magaña, M. R. (2020). *Cartographies of youth resistance: Hip-hop, punk, and urban autonomy in Mexico*. University of California Press.

Mattern, M. (2016). *Anarchism and art: Democracy in the cracks and on the margins*. State University of New York Press.

Melucci, A. (1989). *Nomads of the present: Social movements and individual needs in contemporary society*. (Keane, J., & Mier, P., Eds.). Temple University Press.

Mendieta Alatorre, A. (1961). *La mujer en la revolución mexicana*. Talleres Gráficos de la Nación.

Migñolo, W. D. (2011). *The darker side of Western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options*. Duke University Press.

Muñoz, A. A. (2004). Explaining the politics of recognition of ethnic diversity and indigenous peoples' rights in Oaxaca, Mexico. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, *23*(4), 414-433. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27733688

Norget, K. (2010). A cacophony of autochthony: Representing indigeneity in Oaxacan popular mobilization. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, *15*(1), 116-143. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1935-4940.2010.01065.x

Polletta F., & Jasper, J. M. (2001). Collective identity and social movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *27*, 283-305. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.283

Poole, D. (2008). Affective distinctions: Race and place in Oaxaca. In D. Walkowitz & L. M. Knauer (Eds.), *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race, and Nation* (pp. 197-225). Duke University Press.

Poole, D., & Rénique, G. (2008). The Oaxaca Commune: Struggling for autonomy and dignity. *NACLA Report on the Americas, 41*(3), 24-30. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2008.11725406

Przeworski, A. (2019). *Crises of democracy.* Cambridge University Press.

Rincones, R. (2008). The context of teachers' democratic movements in Mexico. In M. Compton & L. Weiner (Eds.), *The Global assault on teaching, teachers, and their unions: Stories for resistance* (pp. 217-220). Palgrave Macmillan.

Runciman, D. (2018). *How democracy ends.* Basic Books.

Salas, E. (1990). *Soldaderas in the Mexican military: Myth and history*. University of Texas Press.

Serna, C. (2017). Locating a transborder archive of queer Chicana feminist and Mexican lesbian feminist art. *Feminist Formations, 29*(3), 49-79. https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2017.0030

Slaughter, S., & Isakhan, B. (2014). *Democracy and crisis: Democratizing governance in the twenty-first century*. Palgrave MacMillan.

Soto, S. (1990). *Emergence of the modern Mexican woman: Her participation in revolution and struggle for equality*. Arden Press.

Stephen, L. (2013). *We Are the face of Oaxaca: Testimony and social movements*. Duke University Press.

Touraine, A. (1985). An introduction to the study of social movements. *Social Movements, 52*(4), 749-787. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40970397

Urbinati, N. (2016). Reflections on the meaning of the "crisis of democracy." *Democratic Theory, 3*(1), 6-31. https://doi.org/10.3167/dt.2016.030102

Wright, E. O. (2010). *Envisioning real utopias*. Verso.

CENTERING BLACK PHILANTHROPY: CRAFTING COMMUNICATIONS THAT CHAMPION INVESTMENT IN DIVERSITY

FLOYD JONES
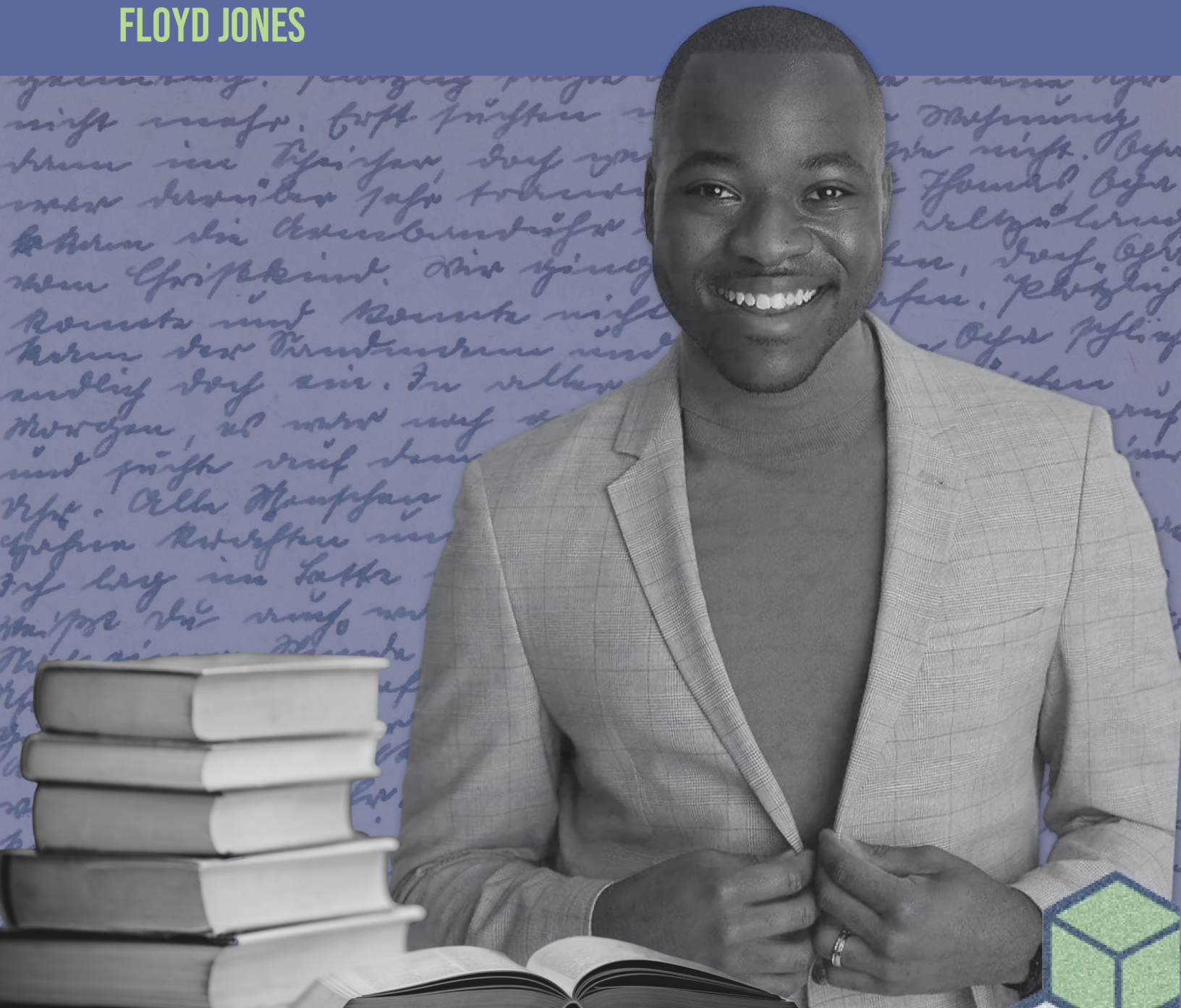
Practitioner Q & A

Centering Black Philanthropy and Championing Investment in Diversity

Interview with Floyd Jones

Director of Community & Partnerships at Givebutter

Biography

Floyd Jones serves as the Director of Community & Partnerships at Givebutter, the world's first completely free end-to-end fundraising platform. Throughout his career, Floyd has worked tirelessly on building social impact communities around the world, collectively raising over $20 million for grassroots organizations and speaking at over 50 conferences across America. His work and content has been featured by ESPN, AfroTech, Variety, and Wired magazine, and has been sponsored by NIKE, Whole Foods, VISA, NBA2k, and more. Floyd is also a pioneer for social justice. In 2023, he founded BackBlack, a multi-platform initiative that has raised over $1.3 million for 770 Black-led nonprofits.

Question: Could you describe the moment you had this idea of developing a project centered around Black Philanthropy Month? What sparked that initiative for you?

Answer: My career started up as a frontline fundraiser. I have worked to raise money for various organizations, and I was often the only fundraiser at these organizations. I was always figuring out how to navigate this space as a Black American, and in a field that is traditionally not composed of people who look like me. Also, there's a lot of different layers in philanthropy. First of all, it's people asking for money, and money is so multi-tiered. There are so many factors associated with money, especially in terms of emotion and power structures. When you look at the philanthropic landscape, a lot of the power is held by a small, elite few. For me, young and fresh out of college, I always felt like I had to assimilate and strategically shapeshift in these rooms where I'm asking for money.

That's where I started saying, this system is broken, right? There's something wrong here. I'm constantly asking for something that people really should be doing anyway. I'm not asking you to donate just because I'm Black. I'm asking for you to give to this initiative because you're a part of this community as well. If my neighborhood can succeed, then this entire city can succeed. We have to ask ourselves, how do we build a better infrastructure that doesn't profit on the backs of other people? How can we build something where we all rise together?

That's the landscape that I'm coming from, and then I eventually realized as I moved through the philanthropic landscape that most of the funding is also held in the hands of a specific few. When you look at it, out of all community foundation funding for Black-led nonprofits is one to two percent globally. When you look at the stats of Black-led and Black-founded nonprofits, their revenues are probably a quarter or less compared to their white-led counterparts.[1] That runs the gambit from corporate funding, unrestricted dollars and more.

There are so many Black-led organizations, Black fundraisers, and Black leaders that are underserved and under-resourced. We need to do the work of saying, how do we come together? I mean the collective "we." How can we bring companies together? How do I bring foundations together? The goal is to create a spark that will initiate change.

Consider the Giving Tuesday model as an example. Giving Tuesday was an intervention created to spark philanthropy and collective giving. Now it's become an entire movement. Nonprofits all over the world are now benefiting because of this intervention. I thought, how do we do something similar for Black-led organizations? How do we create an intervention to open the door for opportunity and possibility?

Question: Why do you believe that it's crucial to spotlight Black philanthropy?

Answer: We highlight Black because Black is at the forefront. However, we have to look at the stats: On average, Black communities and Black individuals give more of their wealth to their communities and social sector organizations than their white counterparts.[2] And even while they give money, the Black population doesn't have as much purchasing power. If they give most of their wealth, what would it be like if we had more wealth to give?

What would happen if we had more wealth, and better support for that money to flow? These organizations need better resources, the proper infrastructure, and the right platforms to make that money go further. We need to help organizations to mobilize their supporters and create a cohesive landscape with corporate organizations, foundations, and individual donors. That way, the money can go even further and sustain long-term growth. The work is already happening. The Black movement is already happening—we are now just amplifying and supporting the movement to help scale it further and faster.

Question: It sounds like you're really tackling it from a systemic approach. You're

looking industry-wide to call out the discrepancies and working within this system to reframe and highlight that people are giving and very capable of it.

Answer: 100%. When you look at how these platforms make money, they are either charging a subscription fee or they're making money on the platform as organizations raise money. Platforms are incentivized to secure larger organizations. Companies operate on principles of profit and growth. However, the individuals steering that profit and growth often have biases and stringent perspectives. Our challenge is to understand how to present our cause in a way that incentivizes these companies to engage.

Because I work on both sides: philanthropy and the private sector. I have found that there is room to meet in the middle. A lot of times people in the private sector think that, because they're not a nonprofit, they can't give back to the community. But giving back is good for your company, getting involved in your community is good for your company. You can do well while doing good. We need to build a movement that is so strong, stable, and scalable that the public has to see us and do business with us.

I started my first initiative at Givebutter and we've seen the results grow exponentially. The amount we are raising is doubling year over year and we are also driving impressions and brand awareness. These are elements that companies traditionally look over, but I have made it my job to look at them. We've built a model that we've been able to scale across the industry, and we're going to continue to scale.

Question: How have you been able to rally that organizational support?

Answer: You have to find something that you believe in, something worth fighting for. When you do that, it doesn't feel like you're working. It feels like you're part of the arc of justice. You become a part of something that is bigger than yourself.

But to bring it to companies successfully, you have to figure out their goals. One thing that I had to learn is that people generally want to contribute, but that's not the function of their business. Every business has a function. If it's a for-profit company, the function is to profit. You have to decipher how your goals and the organization's mutually align. I always tell my nonprofits, regardless of whether you're Black-led or not, you have something to offer. If you've built a community, you have something to offer. If you're doing something in your neighborhood, you have something to offer. It's your job to package your offer strategically for companies that want to partner with you. Then you can help them to accomplish their goals as well as yours.

Question: As you've worked to build this momentum and gain buy-in from folks, how did you ensure that the voices and feedback from the community were truly integrated into developing this?

Answer: With BackBlack in particular, the catalyst was my attendance at the Bill and Melinda Gates Greater Giving Summit. That

was one of the first opportunities that I got to sit in a room with the CEOs and leaders of industry across the sector. It was a fabulous opportunity to not only talk to them but also hear from organizations on the front lines. Many organizations were saying, we want to work better with the fundraising platforms. The platforms hold so much power. So, what would it look like if power was redistributed? What would it look like if we take a step back and actually put our people at the forefront?

The voices of people at the front lines have been integrated from the very beginning. I'm excited to push this even further because these endeavors only succeed when people are telling their stories and letting their voices be heard. Yes, we could publish a report about our impact based on the data, but you always need to understand the meaning behind the metrics. And that meaning is the community that's being impacted.

Question: Beyond the event you attended, were there any methods or digital platforms that you used to gather community feedback?

Answer: We did a big social media campaign. I hired an all-Black team also to put this together. We hired a Black graphic designer, Black videographer, and a Black web builder. Everyone building that cause was also a part of the community. Then, when we launched a campaign on social media, we got feedback from people in real time. We had them join our mailing list and used it to form focus groups. I have meetings every week now with people, and I

can ask them directly about their needs and challenges.

A major part of the next iteration is going to be building programming to address those needs that they brought forward. Even when working with Givebutter to launch our first Black-led campaign, we did campaign reviews. Every week we would sit down with people and review their campaigns together. Many of those people who sought funding would sit down with my team and me to improve those campaigns over time. It's easy to miss the specifics of these needs when you're just reading a social media post or attending a webinar. So, we sat down and really connected to help them grow for the long haul.

Question: Storytelling is a big tool when it comes to communications and shaping it for the public interest. Could you share how you have used storytelling to connect with the greater audience? How did you coach the organizations on developing their stories?

Answer: First, we made a campaign video. I wrote a poem, an original piece. We also incorporated footage from Black-led organizations. We actually weaved their footage into the campaign story. On the Givebutter side, we also published blogs, and through written articles and content we weaved in the stories of those organizations that were granted funding from us in the past. On the organization side, we did a lot of the work through their campaign reviews. We asked, what is your story? Even in the application, we asked for their stories, and then we coached them in the art of

storytelling and saw a lot of success that way as well.

Question: Can you share some of the big success stories or big impacts that emerged from this initiative that you launched?

Answer: On a macro level, we raised over $1.3 million for over 770 organizations in five weeks. It really speaks to what can happen when everyone is working cohesively. There are so many initiatives already taking place, but we need to ramp it up. We need to be a hub and a home for those initiatives already taking place. That's how to mobilize more funding and get corporate partners involved when we all work together. It was beautiful to witness.

In terms of other success stories, one organization that we helped was a sports organization for youth to secure funding. They provide sports programs for kids in a marginalized community. I talked to a lot of the leaders when they were in the parking lot of FedEx getting jerseys for their kids. They were on the front lines doing the work, and they were just brought to tears. They felt we showed them how to truly mobilize their community. It spoke to the power of just giving people a chance. If you're only looking at the numbers and you miss your people, you're missing the point. You won't see long term growth that way. Some companies get it, and it was beautiful watching them get involved. I'm excited to

continue expanding this because there's no limit. There's really no limit.

Question: What does the future hold for Black Philanthropy Month and BackBlack?

Answer: The main goal is to continue expanding, especially with BackBlack. We want to continue building the movement, bringing on the right partners, and eventually we want to involve the voices of Black businesses and artists. We're going to do more with social media and amplifying messages of change from the front lines. We're continuing to scale and solidify this so that more people can get involved for years to come.

Question: What advice would you give to communicators looking to foster public interest in Black philanthropy initiatives?

Answer: I would suggest focusing on your story. What is your story, and why are you choosing to get involved? At the end of the day, people connect with people, and they will join your movement because they want to be a part of making change. They identify with it or else want to be a part of the transformation that you're making. The goal of our movement is not providing handouts. It's about changing infrastructures and systems together. It has to be a collective effort. I always say—if you want to go fast, go by yourself, but if you want to go far, go together.

References

Braithwaite, L. (2022, October 13). Black philanthropy: Overcoming the wealth gap to build on a legacy of giving. *Philanthropy News Digest.* https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/exclusives/black-philanthropy-overcoming-the-wealth-gap-to-build-on-a-legacy-of-giving

Dorsey, C., Bradach, J., & Kim, P. (2020). Racial equity and philanthropy: Disparities in funding for leaders of color leave impact on the table. https://www.bridgespan.org/getmedia/05ad1f12-2419-4039-ac67-a45044f940ec/racial-equity-and-philanthropy.pdf

Singletary, M. (2020, December 11). Black Americans donate a higher share of their wealth than Whites. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/12/11/blacks-prioritize-philanthropy/

W. K. Kellogg Foundation. (2012). Cultures of giving: Energizing and expanding philanthropy by and for communities of color. https://www.d5coalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/CultureofGiving.pdf

---

[1] A 2020 racial equity and philanthropy report by Echoing Green and the Bridgespan Group (Dorsey et al., 2020) indicates disparities in both revenues and unrestricted assets between white-led and Black-led organizations.

[2] A 2012 report by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation estimates that, on average, Black households give away 25% more of their income per year than their white counterparts (Braithwaite, 2022; Singletary, 2020; W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2012).

THE REVOLUTION WILL BE HILARIOUS: COMEDY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AND CIVIC POWER

AMELIA WADE

Journal of Public Interest Communications

Book Review: *The Revolution Will Be Hilarious: Comedy for Social Change and Civic Power*

By Caty Borum

American University

Reviewed by Amelia Wade, Appalachian State University

Borum, C. (2023). *The revolution will be hilarious: Comedy for social change and civic power.* NYU Press.

Caty Borum's *The Revolution Will Be Hilarious: Comedy for Social Change and Civic Power* demonstrates deep insight and years of dedication to comedy's use as a tool to further social justice movements. With a wide range of research concerning historical and present-day social movements throughout the United States, Borum's optimistic yet analytical approach to difficult discussions of civic power and social identity makes compelling arguments for the use of comedy as a strategy to subvert cultural norms and encourage participatory culture. Borum further explores the idea of comedy as a social practice through exploration of the relationship between historical ideas, creative deviance,[1] and their outward effects on social justice movements—weaving her own personal experience within various social justice comedy productions throughout. Borum has also co-authored the book *A Comedian and an Activist Walk*
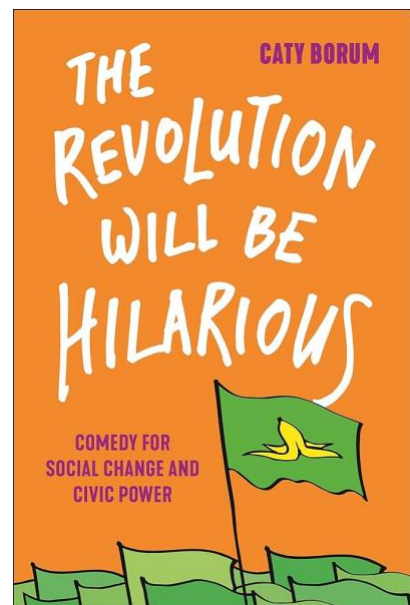
*Please send correspondence about this article to Amelia Wade, Appalachian State University. E-mail: wadeam@appstate.edu.

---

[1] Borum discusses creative deviance throughout the book to underscore comedy's use as a tool for activism and social movements, noting, "The goals may be immediate change or a gradual cultural shift, but the creative expression is meant to capture attention and disrupt" (Borum, 2023, pp. 32-33).

into a Bar: The Serious Role of Comedy in Social Justice, and co-founded the Yes, And…Laughter Lab, a social-justice focused comedy organization that works with major media distributors to find creative outlets for social deviance.

Each chapter of the book focuses on a different aspect of comedy's usage as a societal tool and presents readers with several distinct U.S. cultures—Native cultures across the country, redneck culture of the southeast, and Black culture in Norfolk, Virginia, which was hard hit by the effects of climate change. However, Borum does not focus on these cultures individually. Woven throughout the text is a story focusing on many distinctly different ideas of life in the United States, held together by one clear commonality: the ability to laugh.

The Revolution Will Be Hilarious is divided into seven chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of U.S. life impacted by comedy. However, as a whole, the book revolves around three core beliefs. First, comedy is the most widely accepted form of social deviance. Chapter One starts strong, throwing the reader headfirst into Borum's encounters with comedy as a political tool. The chapter highlights comedy's utility in swaying large-scale national elections in support of social justice movements through hilarious, over-the-top television marketing, as well as smaller scale viewer involvement that slowly infiltrates culture itself, helping "audiences to see and experience people in non-othering ways" (Borum, 2023, p. 42). This strategy effectively serves to slowly alter the status quo among many communities in the United States.

Second, the book suggests that comedy as a form of social deviance can be utilized to support social justice movements. Borum seeks to discuss a tale of two United States within the book—on one side, we are presented with communities living the cultural experiences Borum discusses (e.g., the Standing Rock Sioux who protested the Dakota Pipeline and the impoverished Black populations fighting climate disaster in Norfolk, Virginia). Borum discusses these highly specific struggles with an underlying current of common U.S. issues of police brutality, climate change, ignorance, and racism. Borum asserts that, historically, marginalized groups of people in the United States, especially Native and Black communities, have long entrenched comedy within everyday life, and especially within support of social movements. Borum highlights various aspects of diasporic life in the United States, including Native and Black traditions, and the common thread of comedy as the crux of the social justice movement especially to express new ideas and be heard in the internet age. In Chapter Four, Borum speaks to the power of comedy to support the movement against anti-Black racism in the south—noting unconventional collaboration between comedians across cultural lines. Borum seeks to display both the juxtaposition between the two comedians, and also the juxtaposition between the increasingly politicized nature of the U.S. professional media system against the backdrop of grassroots comedy organizations working alongside social justice organizations to promote an optimistic view of change.

The other side of Borum's book, however, remains cautiously optimistic of a more dire situation. While her tone remains hopeful, Borum also offers small glimpses of a far crueler world, leading readers to the understanding that, "Surely there are grounds for a dystopic lens on a bleak future. Much is broken" (Borum, 2023, p. 210). While the media system in the United

States remains reliant on a "largely unregulated system of people and relationships" (Borum, 2023, p. 58), Borum remains firm that "comedians…often say what journalists—in theory, bedrock guardians of democracy—can't or won't" (Borum, 2023, p. 43). Comedians tell stories, sometimes their own, of tales dangerous to tell in the United States. Comedians make people not only listen, but also reflect on their personal background.

Lastly, the book mentions the power of togetherness—subtly but powerfully. Throughout, Borum explores the idea of a so-called "Co-creation protocol" (Borum, 2023, p.105) in which comedy for social change is always used in conjunction with individuals and organizations involved in furthering social issues outside of comedy. Co-creation is thus a tool, as is comedy itself. In every section of the book, Borum seeks to elevate the causes of communities she works with and offers research to show hope in these communities, even when there is little to show. Borum not only writes about specific cases in which comedic activism within these communities has historically worked, but also has the experience to demonstrate it.

Borum's Book *The Revolution Will Be Hilarious* is an endeavor of a decade's worth of activism and comedy research. It is also a striking work of positivity in a bleak-minded, media-oriented world, thus laying groundwork for continued research into different U.S. communities not explored within the text, such as Asian diasporic communities and Hispanic communities. The text also provides an important space for readers' self-reflection to consider their own support for comedy and activism and to reflect upon how comedy has shaped their respective communities. With such an interdisciplinary perspective, Borum has authored an incredible resource for media professionals, social justice organizations, and public interest communicators alike.