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Anna Wachspress   April 7, 2021

Justice for Georgia: An Ethnographic Documentary Exploring Civil Rights Activism in Atlanta

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Abstract

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Justice for Georgia is an ethnographic documentary which seeks an understanding of contemporary civil rights activism through exploring the efforts and experiences of two Atlanta-based activists as they manage their organization Justice for Georgia. This textual report is intended to accompany the film to explain my motivations and goals, discuss applications of visual anthropology and debates in documentary filmmaking which influenced my approach, examine Atlanta as the site for this research, and describe my fieldwork and production process.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

I. Personal Interest

On March 13, 2020, Americans spiraled into panic when the president declared the novel coronavirus a national pandemic. In the days surrounding, officials across the country began ordering schools and non-essential businesses to close, large gatherings to be canceled, and masks to be worn in public places. As Americans became occupied with fear of the unknown and lack of control incited by Covid-19, an enduring pandemic of another form continued to plague the country. On the very same day, Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman, was murdered by police in her own home after they forced entry and opened fire. For Black Americans and allies, the news was sickening but not surprising. Police brutality against Black people has been a life-threatening disease in America since the inception of policing, and while activism has led to progress towards racial equality over time, police brutality continues to plague the Black community in the 21st century. When another Black American, George Floyd, was killed at the hands of police in May, people across the country were struck by the reality of perpetual police brutality, and mass protest for racial justice erupted under the resurging Black Lives Matter Movement.

I did not realize how passively I was living as a white person in America until the aftermath of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd's deaths. At the time, I was surprised how I could lack so much understanding about racism in America after nineteen years of education, and I was ashamed it took these circumstances to recognize my unawareness and inaction. I was raised in a predominately-white area and educated in predominately-white schools, which I began to realize had glossed over crucial conversations about race. It seemed many of my peers were coming to similar realizations, trying to become educators online while recognizing their

ignorance and need to learn more offline. Confused and overwhelmed by the abundance of

opinions about productive forms of allyship and activism, I desired perspective from current

activists who are participating in racial justice work.

This project seeks an understanding of how civil rights activism is currently being

organized in Atlanta and the experiences of Atlanta activists. My exploration of these questions

led me to Justice for Georgia, a civil justice organization committed to supporting families of

police brutality and white supremacy victims, whose co-founders' efforts became the focus of

my research and film. My motivation for this project was three-fold. First, I was eager to learn

about current racial justice efforts in Atlanta. As I had been reflecting on my education, I realized

that even throughout my three years as an Emory student, I remained fairly sheltered, contained

in the bubble of my predominately-white institution yet within a city known as "the cradle of the

Civil Rights Movement." Knowing that Atlanta is rich with civil rights history, I figured the city

would serve as profound site for my research. Second, I hoped this research could serve as a

resource for peers with similar questions about the organization of civil rights work and provide

perspective on ways they might become more involved themselves. Third, recognizing that the

first step in fixing a problem is becoming aware that one exists, I wanted to offer this project as

another platform for local activists to promote their organizations and efforts. In doing so, I

hoped this project would benefit their organizations by recruiting support among those who

encounter it, either by volunteerism, donorship, spreading more awareness of their organizations'

campaigns and events online, or any combination of these actions. While collaborating with

activists and offering this project as an avenue to share their perspectives, I also wished to make

the research process and product a celebration of the leaders whose tenacity and diligence make

each of them warriors in the fight for civil rights. Activism and progress are the combined efforts

of many unsung heroes, and I hoped this project would offer voice and well-deserved recognition to some of these inspirational changemakers.

II. Documentary Filmmaking as an Approach to Exploring Civil Rights Activism

The increased public attention towards civil rights activism following Breonna Taylor and George Floyd's deaths is deeply connected to film. Public outrage over the treatment of Black Americans grew in large part because a witness recorded and shared a gruesome video of George Floyd's murder, providing unavoidable evidence of police brutality against Black Americans. Through videos of protests, riots, and continued police brutality which flooded the internet, action against systemic racism was sustained throughout the summer. Recognizing the power of visual images as a tool for social change combined with my personal interest in documentary filmmaking, I explored my research questions through documentary film.

Documentary filmmaking, and use of the visual more broadly, has long been used as a method for promoting social change (Nisbet and Aufderheide 2009; Nichols 2010; Askanius 2014; Charbonneau 2016). Visual material, and film especially, is capable of emotionally resonating with audiences and illustrating human experiences which the audience has never encountered in a way textual description cannot capture. Pulling from the scholarship of Bertrand Russell, David MacDougall asserts the power of visual media in research by explaining that it enables knowledge construction by acquaintance rather than description (MacDougall 1997, 286). The practice of encouraging acquaintance builds a relationship between the subjects, the filmmaker (researcher), and audience, which engenders a deeper sense of connection and emotional contact than written description provides. While it is true that film can be manipulated to portray a false sense of reality through the editing process, film offers a more tangible sense of reality than text allows which makes it a powerful tool for increasing awareness of social issues.

For this reason, documentaries are often funded as an effort to spark debate, shape public opinion, affect policy, and build activist networks (Nisbet and Aufderheide 2009, 450).

Imparting knowledge through visual evidence makes it more difficult to refute. This is an especially critical point to recognize when trying to raise awareness of racism in America. The association between the visual and reality is frequently weaponized against the Black community. News and entertainment media notoriously reinforce racist stereotypes by framing Black people as criminals, drug addicts, and instigators of violence. Since the visual imparts reality, at least to some extent, overrepresentation of Black people visually in these contexts dangerously reinforces racist beliefs in the public. To invalidate these associations, it becomes even more important to produce visual media which represent Black people in a way that is actually reflexive of their life experiences.

The tendency to view visual media as reality has also contributed to social change that favors Black people. For example, during the Civil Rights Movement, images of young Black people dressed in their best clothes being violently attacked by police officers had a profound effect on public opinion. Describing the imagery as "doves being attacked by wolves," author Tomiko Brown-Nagin quotes *New York Times* journalist Anthony Lewis who described the effect of the sit-ins on public opinion: "When young people…risked literally everything to demonstrate for equal treatment as human beings, it was impossible for the South to talk convincingly about 'outside agitators' or Northern politicians or the Supreme Court as the source of the 'trouble'" (Brown-Nagin 2011, 141). While white Americans can never know the experience of being Black in America, many remain so segregated from Black people that they do not see their life experiences regularly nor from close proximity. Since white people are the

ones who perpetuate systems that oppress Black people, it is important and powerful to use visual media as a tool for increasing accessibility to knowledge about Black experiences.

At the core, racism is deeply intertwined with the visual. It is a construction entirely based on phenotype rather than genotype; there is no biological basis for race. In their racial formation theory, sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant famously theorize that racial categories are products of social, economic, and political factors which are constructed socially, and they base race off cultural rather than biological factors (Omi and Winant 1994). Since race is socially constructed and only possible through recognizing visual difference, visual material has the ability to transform the way race is used and understood. Just as visual material can be weaponized to perpetuate racism through associating arbitrary definitions with skin color, it can be employed as a tool for combatting racism by illuminating experiences and promoting associations that do a better job at reflecting reality.

III. Overview of Film

Justice for Georgia is an ethnographic documentary which seeks an understanding of contemporary civil rights activism through exploring the efforts and experiences of two Atlanta-based activists as they manage their organization Justice for Georgia. After demanding justice for police brutality victims over the summer and feeling called to do more for their local community, co-founders Britt and Johnny created Justice for Georgia in June of 2020 to support families of police brutality and white supremacy victims as they fight for justice. Justice for Georgia assists families by making websites, media, and public service announcements, organizing protests, assisting with public relations and social media coverage, and being physically and emotionally present for families.

I connected with Britt and Johnny in late September of 2020 and filmed their work with Justice for Georgia from mid-October until early February. Throughout my research process, I connected with activists from five different organizations after reaching out to many more, but in the end, I decided to focus my attention and the film specifically on Britt and Johnny's work and experiences for reasons I will discuss in detail later. I began my research by attending and filming their daily protests outside of Centennial Olympic Park in downtown Atlanta, and as I developed a closer relationship with them, I followed them through more and more aspects of their work. I learned from Britt and Johnny through close observation and participation, and the resulting film reflects these methods as an approach to understanding their work and experiences as civil rights activists.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

While there are many reasons that I felt film would be a powerful tool for exploring and presenting my research, my decision to create a documentary stemmed from my personal interest. I have always loved filmmaking and documentary-style media in particular, and I hope to pursue a career in video production after college. Before this project, I had worked on shorter and smaller-scale productions, but I never had the experience of directing, producing, and editing a film from start to finish. I saw the thesis program as an opportunity to grow my skills, gain new experiences, and learn about myself as a filmmaker. One reason I really value my anthropology education is that I have learned to recognize and respect social and cultural differences, and this awareness allows me to approach my film subjects with consciousness and care. Anyone can write a script, work a camera, and learn editing software, but working with subjects to create a compelling film requires learning how to appreciate worldviews outside one's own and approaching relationships with curiosity, open-mindedness, and humility.

My experience with watching ethnographic documentaries before beginning this project was limited to older films with non-Western subjects which I viewed in an academic setting. With only these films as reference, I was skeptical about being able to create a film guided by anthropological methods which also appeals to a non-academic audience. In this section, I will review scholarship about film as an ethnographic research tool, applications of visual anthropology, and debates surrounding documentary filmmaking approaches which collectively helped me understand how my film could fit both criteria.

I. Film as an Ethnographic Research Tool

Whenever people ask about my research, I notice that their interest always grows when I mention that I am making a film. I recently spoke with someone who admitted that she had little interest in reading her close friends' written theses but would love to watch my film once I finished. Filmmaking is a powerful research tool both because it has a unique capacity for illustrating information and because general audiences find the medium accessible. For research to inspire social change, as I intended to do with my film, it needs to capture the attention of non-academics, and filmmaking offers a revealing and unintimidating way to do so.

Filmmaking as a tool for generating and communicating knowledge aligns well with the primary goal of anthropological research: understanding and appreciating differences in the human experience. To understand the human condition, anthropology promotes the core methods of fieldwork and participant observation which require close sensory contact with subjects. It is this multi-sensory exposure to lived experiences different from one's own which allow anthropologists to understand differences across cultures (MacDougall 2006). Commonly, anthropologists collect data through fieldnotes and audio recordings based off observations they make and interviews they conduct while immersed in their subjects' environment. Then they

present their findings textually according to these notes (Asch and Asch 2003). Collecting and representing data through ethnographic film eliminates the intermittent step of putting words to sensory observations made in the field. While the filmmaker still serves as an intermediary between the participants and audience through decisions about what to film, how to film it, and what to include in the final report, film enables viewers to make observations themselves and learn from subjects in a similar manner as the anthropologist.

Visual media has become a widely used tool for delivering information. Information which used to be textually communicated through books, newspapers, magazines, and blogposts is now visually communicated through pictures, videos, and infographics. If academics strive to generate insight to educate and enlighten the public, not just scholars within their field, researchers must adapt to the changing ways that the everyday person seeks and absorbs information. Adapting does not mean compromising the rigor of research. Instead, it requires the drive and care for incorporating precedented methods with current expectations (Pink 2006). Anthropologists who strive to adapt do not have to start from the beginning. Film as a means for exploring and representing ethnographic work has been used since video equipment became available a century ago (Rouch 2003). The challenge lies in recognizing the intended audience and using film in a way that most effectively promotes knowledge and understanding for that audience.

II. Applied Visual Anthropology

When I began planning this project, it was important to me that the resulting film did more than just explore and reveal something about current civil rights activism for the sake of contributing to the field of anthropology. I wanted the film to have non-academic applications for general audiences and inspire these viewers to take action. I also hoped the film could be

something that my subjects could use to promote their organizations and gain support from the community. This goal of using anthropological methods to draw attention to a societal issue and facilitate change reflects the intentions of applied anthropology, which as opposed to academic anthropology, seeks to solve a practical problem rather than fulfill the main goal of contributing knowledge to the discipline.

Applied visual anthropology addresses how anthropological methods can be used to promote social change through visual material among a mainstream audience (Pink 2006; Pink 2009). Throughout extensive scholarship, Sarah Pink develops the concept of applied visual anthropology which she defines broadly as "involving using visual anthropological theory, methodology and practice to achieve applied non-academic ends" (Pink 2009, 6). Applied visual anthropology underscores the possibility for visual anthropology to engage in projects of social intervention. It positions researchers as cultural brokers responsible for visually representing the experiences of one group to another which may otherwise be unnoticed, inaccessible, or misunderstood. Contrary to academic visual anthropology, applied visual anthropology seeks to problem solve and affect change rather than explore without intervening in subjects' lives (Pink 2009, 12).

While anthropological methods normally promote long-term fieldwork, the methods for applied visual anthropology can serve short-term projects as well. When possible, long-term fieldwork is highly preferable since it provides the opportunity for anthropologists to build relationships with the group under study (Barbash and Taylor 1997; Asch and Asch 2003). For ethnographic filmmakers, an extensive period of reflecting, learning, and establishing mutual understanding is well accepted as the best means for producing representative and ethical work (Rouch 2003). However, for anthropological research sought and funded for the purpose of

social intervention, this timescale is not always realistic (Pink 2006; Nisbet and Aufderheide 2009). Applied visual anthropology recognizes close collaboration and participation with subjects as a means for uncovering knowledge of anthropological value within a short time frame (Pink 2009, 16). While I wished there had been more time for me to build relationships prior to filming, the short timeframe of the project did not allow me to do so. Instead, I invested in regular collaboration and participation to explore my research questions as Pink recommends.

III. Approaches to Documentary Filmmaking

In some sense, settling on research questions and subjects—the goals for the film and the characters who drive it—is the easy part of documentary filmmaking. As a filmmaker, the challenge lies in determining how to best present the information uncovered while exploring these goals and learning from these subjects. The decisions filmmakers make while recording and editing footage inform how viewers process what they see, so filmmakers must carefully consider how different approaches will affect their intended audience.

In the book *Introduction to Documentary*, film theoretician Bill Nichols outlines six different approaches to documentary filmmaking: expository, poetic, observational, participatory, reflexive, and performative (Nichols 2010). While these modes are distinct, filmmakers often combine qualities of multiple styles when creating documentary films to create a distinguishable style and voice unique to themselves. This section will explore two of these approaches, observational and participatory cinema, the combination of which influenced my decisions as a filmmaker.

Observational Cinema

Nichols identifies observational cinema as an approach which looks on social actors as they interact with their environment as if the camera were not there (Nichols 2010, 151). The

camera takes the position of an objective onlooker and observes behavior. Examples of observational cinema made for general audiences include *Primary* (1960) and *The War Room* (1993). The former revolutionized documentary filmmaking by being one of the first films to use the observational approach. With behind-the-scenes access, filmmaker Robert Drew follows John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey through their candidacy in the 1960 Wisconsin primary for United States president from an intimate yet unobtrusive position. Through a sometimes shaky camera, we learn about Kennedy and Humphrey's experiences on the campaign trail by observing their interactions with constituents and members of the campaign team. The position of the camera is privileged in the sense that it may observe events and interactions to which everyday people would not have access, yet it is also unprivileged since uninterrupted behavior takes priority over ideal camera angles. The audience receives some information from a narrator, yet the rest of the information in the film is shown rather than told. The film includes dialogue between social actors but no interviews. *The War Room* (1993) follows a similar approach to explore Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign experience. Also with a hand-held camera and lack of interviews, directors Chris Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker illustrate the campaign experience through long conversations between members of Clinton's campaign team as they strategize and make decisions. These uninterrupted discussions reflect a key benefit of the observational approach, the quality of reflecting duration, which is often lost through the editing process. Within the field of anthropology, ethnographic films reflect similar considerations when taking an observational approach. In their film *Takeover* (1979), filmmakers David and Judith MacDougall offer viewers the opportunity to learn about an Aboriginal community's negotiations to maintain sovereignty through discussions within the community and between Aborigines and outsiders. Rather than requesting interviews for the sake of the film, the

filmmakers capture and present information through regular conversations. Similarly, in *Campaign* (1993), filmmaker Anna Grimshaw offers an understanding of the campaign process for a woman running for elected office through dialogue among subjects. She provides any contextual information necessary through title slides and narration rather than asking subjects to say it themselves in an interview.

Debates in Observational Cinema

Scholars within and outside of the discipline of anthropology contest the merit of observational cinema. Critics argue that observational cinema objectifies subjects and creates too much distance and detachment from them to qualify as sophisticated research (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009). David MacDougall, a proponent as well as critic of the approach, was one of the first to suggest that observational filmmaking is too passive since it involves merely recording rather than searching for information (MacDougall 1995 [1975] cited in Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009). MacDougall also expresses concern about asking subjects to be open to the filmmaker while the filmmaker maintains a distanced position (Young 2003). Critics claim this "fly on the wall" approach to inquiry where filmmakers have free access to intimate experiences in their subjects' lives distorts the information provided by ignoring the presence and influence of the camera on the subjects (Nichols 2010). In reality, filmmakers must develop open and intimate relationships with their subjects before filming to conduct sound and ethical research, even if evidence of that relationship is never shown on screen. Therefore, the important debate lies in whether there is danger in omitting indications of this relationship for viewers to see, perhaps creating conditions for a voyeuristic viewing experience (Nichols 1991 cited in Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009).

Proponents of observational cinema argue that its merit stems from the ability to show instead of tell (Asch and Asch 2003; Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009). Interview-based documentary gleans information by asking subjects to say what they think or do, knowingly and unknowingly resulting in biased descriptions of experiences which reflect what the subjects want researchers to know rather than their actual lived experience. Observational cinema has more in common with traditional notetaking methods in the field in the sense that both seek to record lived experiences as they are occurring. Researchers gain knowledge through observation rather than asking subjects to recall and retell their experiences. The key difference between notetaking and filmmaking is that film can represent the original event directly and through more senses (Young 2003). Contrary to what critics may say, visual anthropologists using observational methods do not argue that their films are objective. Just as textual anthropologists make decisions about what observed behavior to record and how to communicate what they see through words, ethnographic filmmakers do the same. Rather than dwelling on objectivity versus subjectivity, it may be more important for anthropologists to work purposefully and pay close attention to detail to ensure their reported findings represent their subjects' experiences fairly. To do so, filmmakers must develop sensitivity to the way events tend to unfold in time and space as well as a multi-sensory awareness of their surroundings (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009). After all, a key benefit of observational cinema is the possibility for illustrating dimensions of situations which cannot be captured by just text or images, such as sounds, inflections, silence, the flow of language, and the navigation of time and space (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009, 545). Even though visual anthropologists do not see their films as objective accounts of reality, it is still important to consider the effect that the absence of the filmmaker has on the messages the audience takes from the film; viewers tend to take films as fact (Young 2003). This does not outweigh the merits

of observational cinema, but it is a necessary consideration for filmmakers to make throughout
their research process.

Participatory Cinema

Nichols identifies the participatory mode as a form of documentary which embraces
noticeable interaction between the filmmaker and subjects (Nichols 2010, 151). In contrast to the
observational approach where the filmmaker's relationships with subjects are not seen on screen,
the participatory mode presents evidence of these relationships and highlights the effect of the
filmmaker's participation on the situation that unfolds for the camera. The filmmaker's presence
may be referenced through interviews or comments by the subjects, or more directly through the
filmmaker's voice or appearance. Michael Moore's documentaries are key examples of films
made for general audiences which use the participatory mode as a tool for bringing attention to
social issues and advocating for change. In his film *Sicko* (2007), for example, Moore invites
viewers to join him in investigating the American healthcare crisis. The film largely consists of
interviews with healthcare system employees, government officials, and most abundantly,
ordinary people from around the world who have been affected by their country's healthcare
system in dramatic ways. Moore is a social actor in the film, and viewers gain knowledge
through his audible questioning and visible interactions with his subjects. He is curious but
ordinary and does not seem to have an abundance of knowledge about the need for healthcare
reform prior to filming. His presence creates a bridge between the film subjects and the viewers,
who are invited to make discoveries about breaks in the system with Moore as their guide. Some
anthropologists also approach filmmaking through the participatory mode. For example, in the
film *A Man Called "Bee": Studying The Yanomam*ö (1974), ethnographic filmmakers Tim Asch
and Napoleon Chagnon reveal what they learned during their fieldwork with the Yanomamö

people through footage of Chagnon interacting with people in the village and participating in their activities. Viewers glean knowledge from watching these interactions as well as direct statements given through narration.

Debates in Participatory Cinema

Participatory cinema is similar to observational cinema in that both modes require filmmakers to invest time and care into building relationships with subjects. The difference lies in the choice to present evidence of these relationships to the viewers or not. While anthropologists often learn through extensive participant observation, many choose to remove indications of their participation in the account of their work (Asch and Asch 2003, 340). With observational cinema, anthropologists attempt to present their findings in a way which gives viewers an idea of what a given situation is like without intervention, even though intervention exists. On the other hand, participatory documentary references the filmmaker's presence and offers viewers the opportunity to consider how it affects the outcome of a portrayed event. The filmmaker becomes a social actor from whom we can learn rather than an unobtrusive observer (Nichols 2010, 181-2). Jay Ruby advocates for reflexivity in ethnographic filmmaking and underscores the importance of filmmakers acknowledging their presence. Since the presence of the filmmaker affects the social interactions of the subjects captured on camera, Ruby asserts it is important to acknowledge it to reveal the bias introduced as a result (Asch and Asch 2003, 340-1).

My Filmmaking Approach

I was hesitant to fully embrace the observational method for a couple reasons. First, I was concerned it would not appeal to general audiences who are used to watching documentaries made for television. These documentaries are often fast-paced, direct, and guided by interview. I

was skeptical about an observational film's ability to hold viewers' attention. Second, although the observational mode requires filmmakers to develop close relationships with subjects to gain access to filming their lives, I feared that general audiences would miss this. I wanted my participation to show and did not feel observational filmmaking fairly reflected how I learned from my subjects nor how I feel people should approach learning about activism. On the other hand, I feared the participatory mode alone would lead to a film that felt fabricated. I wanted the film to reveal Britt and Johnny's work and experiences as they unfolded and to create a film which shows activism in action rather than one that merely talks about it.

Ultimately, I decided to combine the two approaches but drew most influence from the observational mode. One of my motivations for this project was to discover and reveal how civil rights activism is currently being organized by observing and participating internally rather than simply reading or hearing about it secondhand. For people who are not Black and who are not involved in activism, there is no access to learning by seeing instead of hearing. It is rare to find this in mainstream documentaries and through news media. Since my fieldwork enabled me to gain intimate access to a community in a way that many other people cannot, I wanted the resulting film to create space for viewers to learn by observing. Of course, the film is still a secondhand account since viewers did not actually participate in the fieldwork, but the observational approach allows the audience to still learn in a multi-sensory way which creates opportunity for individualized reflection and processing.

Discussions about the participatory mode influenced my decision to include references to myself as the filmmaker. While there are only a few acknowledgements throughout the film, I felt it was important to address my presence for a couple reasons. First, observational filmmaking can give the illusion of non-intervention, but in reality, it was my active participation

which informed my work. I did not act as a fly-on-the-wall while conducting fieldwork, and I did not want the film to leave this impression. Second, while the observational mode offers viewers access to learning from seeing rather than hearing, I wanted to emphasize that the access I gained to the events in the film was completely a product of my diligence with building relationships with Britt and Johnny. Especially as a white filmmaker among Black activists, I did not want to give the illusion that anyone—and white people especially—can easily gain access to the position I held just because they want to learn. The relationship I built with my subjects was the only reason I was able to capture the footage that I did, and I wanted evidence of that relationship to be clear.

Chapter Three - Site Review: A Brief History on the Evolution of Civil Rights Activism in Atlanta, Georgia

Known as "the cradle of the Civil Rights Movement," Atlanta is rich with civil rights history which makes it a profound site for researching current developments in organizational efforts. Prior to this project, I was aware of some national trends in activism, but as I learned, approaches in Atlanta did not always align with these efforts for political, economic, and social reasons specific to the city. To contextualize current efforts within the historical landscape of civil rights activism in Atlanta, I will use this section to discuss some of the key aspects of its evolution, focusing primarily on different approaches to civil rights activism over time and the rationale behind these approaches.

I. Reconstruction and the Early 20th Century

Setting the Scene

In the years following the abolishment of slavery, Black people in Atlanta found themselves caught in a period of both new opportunity and relentless oppression. One of Atlanta's most notable successes was the establishment of multiple Black higher education

institutions. Atlanta University opened in 1865, followed by Morehouse College in 1867, Clark

College in 1869, and both Spelman College and Morris Brown College in 1881 (Hobson 2017,

15). The early establishment of these institutions laid the foundation for a thriving Black elite

and middle class in Atlanta which still exist today (Brown-Nagin 2011, 31). In 1871, the first

Black people were elected to the Atlanta City Council, beginning the history of Black political

leadership in the city (Hobson 2017, 15). However, despite emancipation, Black people were

persistently subjected to brutal violence and disenfranchisement. Angered by false claims of sex

crimes perpetrated by Black men on white women and general frustration about the rising Black

elite, a mob of white men and boys viciously attacked and killed Black people in Atlanta in what

is known as the 1906 Atlanta Race Riots. Between 1880 and 1910, white mobs continued to

lynch Black men and women in areas near Atlanta (Myrick-Harris 2006a). Black people voiced

their adamant disapproval of these atrocities through direct-action protests, and while their

effects were not necessarily successful or long-lasting at the time, they did pave the way for the

institutionalization of direct-action protesting in the future (Myrick-Harris 2006a).

Conflicting Strategies for Racial Equality

I set out to research how civil rights activism is currently being organized in Atlanta in

large part to understand which forms of activism are showing evidence of success and how my

generation might direct our energy for the greatest impact. Yet, by considering the history of

civil rights activism in Atlanta, it becomes quite clear that this question has been asked since the

abolishment of slavery, and there is still no correct answer. From the era of Reconstruction until

today, approaches for achieving racial equality in America have never been unanimously agreed

upon. While fighting for the same ultimate goal, prominent leaders have been known to hotly

critique each other's strategies for achieving racial equality. In the years surrounding 1900,

evidence of this can be found in the conflicting outlooks of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois.

Washington, an educator and businessman, argued that racial equality could best be achieved through economic independence and evidence that Black people could be productive members of society (Blatty 2020). In a speech that he gave at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta in 1895 to a mixed-race audience, Washington asserted that Southern Black people should focus on vocational training and commerce instead of civil and political rights (Hobson 2017, 16). Through industrial and agricultural education, he believed African Americans would prove themselves to whites, gain their respect, and become integrated into society at large as a result ("The Debate Between W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington"). W.E.B. Du Bois, a Harvard graduate and scholar, adamantly opposed Washington's approach, referring to Washington's speech as the "Atlanta Compromise." He believed Washington's strategy enabled persistent oppression of Blacks by whites. Du Bois instead advocated for higher education and civil rights activism as the means for achieving racial equality (Blatty 2020). Du Bois, alongside other Black intellectuals, co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 with this approach in mind.

II. Post-WWII Efforts: Pragmatism and Gradualism

Following World War II, the racial agenda among civil rights leaders nationally shifted towards the courts. Specifically, the national NAACP and LDF, the NAACP's Legal Defense and Educational Fund which was formed in 1940, began diligently fighting for civil rights through litigation. Atlanta's postwar Black leaders, however, disagreed with this approach. Against the direction of national efforts, they developed their own plans and priorities which they felt better suited the interests of the Black community in Atlanta. Considering legal strategy

and goals of complete desegregation too aggressive, local Black leaders in Atlanta adopted what they considered a pragmatic approach. Choosing their battles carefully and prioritizing the lesser of evils, Black leaders sought to slowly chip away at Jim Crow in a more targeted fashion. Although these leaders were adamantly against racial inequality in Atlanta, they did not think all forms of segregation affected the Black community in an equally harmful way. Black leaders resolved that negotiating for better social conditions under Jim Crow—in the realm of education, housing, and public accommodations—would be a more productive use of their energy. Ultimately, they prioritized advocating for conditions which promoted Black economic independence, as they saw this as key to eventual racial equality (Brown-Nagin 2011, 18-19).

To understand Atlanta Black leaders' apparent complacency with segregation, it is necessary to understand the social and economic conditions of Atlanta during this time. As previously mentioned, Atlanta was (and still is) home to the most Black institutions of higher education in any American city (Brown-Nagin 2011, 31). With rich educational opportunity, Black people—male and female—became lawyers, doctors, entrepreneurs, educators, and ministers, creating a Black elite and middle class in Atlanta (Brown-Nagin 2011, 31). Due to geographic segregation in the city, Black-owned businesses and establishments clustered together which created the opportunity for a flourishing Black-controlled market. Black autonomy existed in other regards as well. While national civil rights leaders pushed for desegregation in public schools, Black leaders in Atlanta saw segregated schooling as increased employment opportunities for Black teachers, social and emotional safe spaces for Black students, and a way for Black communities to exercise agency over their youth (Brown-Nagin 2011, 84). Even after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954 which unanimously deemed racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional, Atlanta moved slowly

with enforcing the change. In fact, the Atlanta Board of Education stated in August of 1955 that "no sudden, radical, or revolutionary changes in the operations of the schools should be initiated under the circumstances without full preparation" (Brown-Nagin 2011, 111). As for segregated housing, self-interested Black leaders saw the benefit in maintaining segregated neighborhoods and markets since they were good for Black realtors and businesses (Brown-Nagin 2011, 72). Recognizing the social position of Atlanta leaders is crucial for understanding the separate but equal ideology they upheld since they were the ones most benefiting from these segregated markets. To achieve better conditions under Jim Crow, Black leaders relied on the strategy of interracial diplomacy, a tactic that is still prevalent among leaders in Atlanta to this day. Black elites met with white political figures and moderates to negotiate for better conditions, practicing what they referred to as biracial negotiation.

While postwar Black leaders in Atlanta may have thought differently than the national NAACP about the dangers of racial separation, they completely agreed about the dangers of one threat to racial equality in particular: voter suppression. Postwar pragmatists prioritized voting rights, acknowledging that by denying Black citizens the right to vote, they were only citizens in name. Local leaders recognized that voting was the best way to protect individual and property rights since white political leaders could not ignore Black interests if their election was in the hands of Black voters (Brown-Nagin 2011, 42). Contrary to their previous resistance, Black leaders in Atlanta recognized the importance of litigation in securing voting rights after seeing the LDF make strides. After critical court cases deemed white Democratic primaries and the state poll tax unconstitutional in the mid-1940s, the size and influence of the Black electorate expanded significantly (Myrick-Harris 2006b; Brown-Nagin 2011, 57). Black leaders in Atlanta did not completely abandon their trusted tactic of biracial negotiation within the context of

voting rights though. In 1949, Black leaders founded a nonpartisan organization called the Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL), and head organizers frequently met with white politicians to advocate for Black interests and build collaborative relationships. The ANVL would then endorse the candidate who Black leaders considered to be the best representative for Black people in Atlanta, and they expected ANVL members to vote collectively for them (Brown-Nagin 2011, 55). While national leaders pressured Atlanta's Black leaders to practice aggressive legal strategies, this measured and negotiations-based approach persisted in Atlanta until pressure from students changed the dynamic of civil rights activism.

III. The Civil Rights Movement: Students and Direct-Action Protest

A common theme can be seen running through the entire struggle for racial equality in Atlanta: the influence of Black institutions of higher education. Seeing what was happening across the South in cities like Greensboro, North Carolina and Montgomery, Alabama, students from these colleges and universities largely changed the direction of civil rights activism in the city. Students in Atlanta saw the elite Black leaders' approach to achieving civil rights as too slow and too obedient to white people (Brown-Nagin 2011, 133). Through the sit-in movement, college students "wrestled exclusive control over the struggle for racial equality from civil rights lawyers" (Brown-Nagin 2011, 135). Atlanta's traditional Black leadership tried to control students and steer them towards the path of biracial negotiation in order to maintain the bridge they had built with white moderates. The youth initially listened to their elders, but they soon realized that their voices and ambition were being muffled and began organizing sit-ins with the approach of nonviolent direct-action protest (Brown-Nagin 2011, 148-150).

After the Montgomery bus boycott, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and other Black leaders co-founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957 in Atlanta to

assist with the organization of nonviolent direct-action protests in the South. Hopeful to engage eager college students in this approach, Ella Baker, a prominent member of the SCLC, founded the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced "snick") in 1960. The mission of SNCC was to coordinate protests and educate students about nonviolence and grassroots activism (Brown-Nagin 2011, 140). Through SNCC, students organized sit-ins and implemented the jail-no-bail strategy in Atlanta, encouraging protestors to remain in jail after being arrested for peaceful protest rather than post bail. On top of direct-action protests, students saw merit in using negotiation, the media, community education, threat of boycott, and persistent litigation all in combination with one another as the best recipe for progress (Brown-Nagin 2011, 155). As opposed to traditional Black leadership, which encouraged the Black community to trust them with Black advocacy on behalf of the entire Black community, student leaders were committed to "group-centered leadership among the grassroots of the city" (Myrick-Harris 2006b). SNCC dissolved shortly after the Civil Rights Movement ended when Stokely Carmichael assumed the chairman position (previously held by John Lewis) and began promoting the concept of Black power, which was not received well by white and Black leaders alike (Brown-Nagin 2011, 277). Nevertheless, Atlanta's young leaders transformed the landscape of civil rights activism in Atlanta through nonviolent direct-action protest and by pushing traditional Black leaders to embrace more aggressive strategies for activism.

IV. Atlanta: The Black Mecca of the South?

After years of Atlanta being referred to as "the city too busy to hate," Ebony magazine writer Phyl Garland gave Atlanta a new name in 1971: *The Black Mecca of the South*. In the article, Garland cites the city's booming business, rising infrastructure, lack of recent major riots in comparison to other Southern cities, well-established Black higher education institutions, and

increased Black representation in political leadership as evidence to support the claim that Atlanta is the place where "black folks have more, live better, accomplish more and deal with whites more effectively than they do anywhere else in the South—or North" (Garland 1971, 152). Garland describes then vice-mayor of Atlanta Maynard Jackson as "aggressive," "black-oriented," and "a leading light in the promising ranks of the city's young black political speedsters" (Garland 1971, 154). Indeed, Black political leadership during this time period was key in shaping Black experiences in the South and the continued struggle for racial equality, for better and worse. Maynard Jackson became Atlanta's first Black mayor in 1973, and Andrew Young became Atlanta's second Black mayor in 1982. Jessica Ann Levy, historian of American politics, business, and racism, asserts that Atlanta's Black mayors worked to shift the association of civil rights away from protest and civil disobedience and towards multiculturalism and entrepreneurism (Levy 2015). Jackson and Young focused on pro-business and multicultural politics to bring together white liberals and Black people. At the beginning of his term, Mayor Jackson implemented affirmative action programs to increase employment of Black people and other minorities, although in practice these programs did not support people of different classes and genders equally. During his campaign for mayor, Andrew Young spoke of the 1980s as the economic phase in the Atlanta Black community's fight for civil rights. Once elected, his focus and policies reflected this, and he stood out as a leader capable of embracing liberal politics surrounding civil rights and multiculturalism while also prioritizing international business, tourism, and foreign investment in the city (Levy 2015).

Levy also notes that her perspective contrasts with popular scholarship that frames Black politicians during this time as "sell-outs" who expended the Black community for personal gain (Levy 2015, 421). Support for this idea is not hard to find. Contrary to Black political

leadership's shift in approach towards building economic prosperity and multiculturalism, Black

grassroots organization continued with direct-action protest. This approach to fighting for racial

equality was not always met with support from Black political leaders. For example, take Mayor

Jackson's response to the Atlanta Sanitation Strike of 1977. While seven years prior Jackson had

supported Atlanta's sanitation workers, a group largely consisting of Black men, he did not stand

by workers when they went on strike for better wages in 1977, quelling the movement and firing

workers who did not comply with his orders. The political move reinforced that even with the

strides made through the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, the social and economic

interests of Atlanta's Black working class remained a much lower priority than those of the

Black elite and middle classes (David 2007). Evidence of this can also be found in the way that

Jackson responded, or failed to respond, to the Atlanta Child Murders which plagued lower class

Black people between 1979 and 1981. As described in the HBO docuseries *Atlanta's Missing*

and Murdered: The Lost Children, Jackson and other Black political leaders were in the midst of

trying to convince the country that Atlanta was a good place to invest, and the beautiful city that

exists today is in part a result of minimizing the atrocities that were happening to the Black

working class (*Atlanta's Missing and Murdered: The Lost Children* 2020). Rather than

responding to the murders immediately and urgently, it took Mayor Jackson an entire year to

assemble a task force to investigate what was happening, and the pressure to do so largely came

from activists within the working class themselves. This included direct action from community

organizations such as The Committee to Stop Children's Murders, which was mostly composed

of mothers of child victims, and the Techwood Bat Patrol, which was a group who armed

themselves with baseball bats to protect their public housing neighborhood (Hobson 2017). The

response from Black political leaders in Atlanta furthered the division between the Black elite

and middle classes and the Black working class, and it heightened the Black working class's

distrust in the ability for the Black political elite to properly represent them. In many ways, the

Black political leadership and their insistence on Atlanta as a Black Mecca masked the persisting

racism and poor conditions for the working class which plagued the city.

V. What This Means for Civil Rights Activism Today

These decades worth of civil rights history have shaped the political, economic, and

social landscape of Atlanta today and pushed the city towards progress. However, the fight for

racial equality is far from won, and while progress has been made, the systems of oppression

which plagued Atlanta's Black community decades ago continue to threaten it today. Although

slavery was abolished in 1865, its remnants persist through mass incarceration and the criminal

justice system which are structured to overwhelmingly disadvantage minorities. The threat of

deadly violence perpetrated by white people in power against Black Americans continued after

slavery through lynching and deadly riots, and it continues to persist today through racial biases

in policing which lead to police brutality against Black people. While strategies to prevent Black

Americans from voting such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and white primaries no longer exist,

modern day voter suppression occurs across America, and in Atlanta specifically, through voter

ID laws, purging of voter registration rolls, the closing of polling places, and voter intimidation.

The effects of these voter suppression techniques were clearly evident in the 2018 Georgia

gubernatorial election when candidate Stacey Abrams fell less than 55,000 votes short of

becoming the first Black female governor in the United States after Brian Kemp, Secretary of

State at the time, promoted all of these voter suppression strategies (Cortes and Garbus 2020).

Just as Maynard Jackson had to navigate his political leadership in a way that boosted economic

prosperity in the city while serving the interests Black people across classes, Atlanta's Black

mayor, Keisha Lance Bottoms, faces a similar challenge.

After considering the evolution of approaches to civil rights activism in Atlanta

throughout history, one can recognize contemporary efforts as the coalescence of these

strategies. Direct-action protest still exists as an advocacy approach as seen through the marches

and protests that occurred in the summer of 2020 following multiple instances of police brutality,

including one case which resulted in the death Atlanta resident Rayshard Brooks (McCray et al.

2020). Activists continue to target voting rights as a gateway to racial equality. After losing the

governor's seat, Stacey Abrams launched a massive campaign to combat voter suppression

efforts, and she is celebrated for the effects of her work on shifting the electorate in Georgia

(Cortes and Garbus 2020). While biracial negotiation may not be a fitting term anymore, Mayor

Lance Bottoms must practice negotiation with other political leaders to ensure that she keeps the

support of Black and white communities, as well as other racial groups (Harris 2020).

Throughout my research, I continued to explore the conglomeration of these approaches in

modern day Atlanta, how they work in practice, and the experiences of the people who

participate in these forms of civil rights activism.

Chapter Four - Fieldwork

Locating Activists and Organizations

I began my search for Atlanta-based civil rights activists and organizations with some

broad Google searches. Phrases like "racial justice organizations in Atlanta" and "anti-racism

activism in Atlanta" led me to racial justice resource guides which various organizations and

media outlets had compiled over the summer in response to the increased awareness of systemic

racism and call for action against it. This included a document of racial justice resources created

by the Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Emory University School of Medicine. Through this, I discovered the Twitter account "Where is the protest in Atlanta?" (@WhereProtest) which shares information about protests in Atlanta and has amassed over 19,000 followers since its creation in June 2020. It was through this account that I became aware of Justice for Georgia and their daily protests at Centennial Olympic Park, as well as an election-related "March to the Polls" event co-hosted by multiple racial justice organizations which is where I met other activists whom I later interviewed. In total, I reached out to a combination of twelve organizations and activists throughout September and October, received responses from eight, and conducted interviews with organizers from four, including representatives from Justice for Georgia, The New Georgia Project, The Urban League of Greater Atlanta, and The People's Uprising. The four organizations differ in size, age, specific focus, and composition of staff, but all of them were similarly founded with missions to dismantle systemic racism.

Interest in Justice for Georgia

When I began my project, I intended to create a film that provided many different perspectives on contemporary civil rights activism and illustrated how various organizations fill different needs while still working together through the shared goal of achieving racial justice. Once I actually began meeting with activists from different organizations, I realized that the timeframe of my project would not allow me to develop the close relationships necessary for generating insight and creating a compelling film if I tried to split my time and attention among multiple organizations. I continued to interview and learn from activists from other organizations, but I decided to focus most of my attention on the work and experiences of Britt and Johnny, the co-founders of Justice for Georgia.

My interest in Justice for Georgia grew for multiple reasons. One of the most influential factors in my decision to focus my research and film on them was that they consistently met and protested every evening in person. Given that I conducted my entire project during the coronavirus pandemic, opportunities to meet with organizers in person were extremely limited since many organizations had switched to online meeting formats and infrequent in-person gatherings. The possibility of working with Justice for Georgia in person within different settings excited me since I would have more opportunities to directly observe them and participate in their work. Additionally, I liked that Justice for Georgia was a newly formed organization. Justice for Georgia had already grown an impressive amount in the months between its creation and the beginning of my research, and I thought it would be interesting to capture their leaders' successes and challenges as the organization continued to grow. Not only that, I liked that the two co-founders were young people with no prior background in activism. One of my key goals for this project was to create a film that serves as a resource for young people about how they might get more involved in racial justice work and inspires them to do so. I figured that following a newly formed organization with young founders would provide a really relevant and powerful perspective for achieving this goal. Finally, and maybe most importantly, Britt and Johnny were both extremely welcoming and receptive to letting me film and learn from them. One of the most crucial elements of anthropological work is developing mutual trust with subjects, yet since I only had a few months to gather all of my footage, I did not have the time to build relationships with Britt and Johnny far in advance from filming. Through their initial trust and openness, I saw the potential that working with them had.

Personal Anxieties about Fieldwork

My heart raced when I parked my car and began walking towards Centennial Olympic Park on my first day of fieldwork. I had met Johnny over Zoom the week prior and told him about my project, but I had no idea what to expect at the protest. Should I have brought a sign? Did I know enough about issues of race and civil rights activism in Atlanta to hold an intelligent conversation? How would the members receive me? Would they see me as a self-entitled white kid just using them for a story?

This last question—and the concept of being a white filmmaker among Black activists as a whole—lingered with me throughout all of my fieldwork. I knew my whiteness would influence the way I was received and the way my intentions were considered, and rightly so. White people notoriously enter Black spaces, extract whatever they please for a self-serving purpose, and leave. This was a major reason why I preferred learning through participant observation and chose to combine participatory and observational methods for filmmaking. Since I did not have the time to really get to know Britt and Johnny before starting to film, I felt non-participant observation and strictly observational filmmaking would appear nosy, creepy, and extremely privileged. It was important to me that I showed Britt, Johnny, and the audience that I cared to learn through getting involved myself and not just watching other people do the work. I knew that as a white filmmaker among Black activists, it would take more time for Britt and Johnny to trust me and my intentions, and with such a short time frame for the project, I doubted myself and my ability to build mutual trust. This fear became less intense as Johnny, Britt, and I developed a friendly relationship, but it never completely went away. Instead, I worked through it, and used it as another source of motivation for working consciously and intentionally so that Britt and Johnny's interests and experiences drove the film rather than my own ideas and goals. I

grew my relationship with Johnny and Britt by showing up frequently to protests, events, and the office and participating alongside them. Sometimes I brought my camera, and other times I did not.

Ethical Considerations

One of the most important ethical considerations I made throughout my research was balancing my goal of revealing the personal experiences of activists while also respecting their privacy. Anthropologists who represent their fieldwork findings textually have the ability to maintain their subjects' privacy through anonymity. Research through filmmaking, on the other hand, requires subjects to share their identity and experiences openly and intimately. The concept of privacy becomes nuanced with filmmaking, and strategies for maintaining it are not so straightforward. To respect my subjects' privacy, I worked consciously while filming to identify when it was inappropriate to record. I also recognized that just because I captured certain moments on camera did not mean that I should disclose the footage. My research focused on deeply impassioned and vulnerable subjects, and while I sought a raw understanding of their personal experiences, they sometimes said things in the moment which I knew they would not want publicized. I remained sensitive to this throughout the filming and editing process.

My best tool for ensuring I conducted my research ethically was continuing to build relationships with Britt and Johnny, fostering open communication, and directly asking them when and what was okay to film. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I provided each of them with an informed consent statement, but I found as I continued working, it was not practical to use it as a means of explaining my goals and intentions to other subjects who I encountered, namely the families who I met while filming. Instead of trying to connect with mothers to explain my project before filming, I would ask Britt whether she felt it was appropriate for me to

film and whether the families would be comfortable with being filmed for my project. Britt has

extremely close relationships with these families, and mothers especially, so I felt confident in

following her guidance. Before actually filming, I would introduce myself to the families and

verbally explain my project rather than handing them a form, which I found to be a more

effective way of explaining my project. As Britt explained to me, the families with whom they

work are used to sharing their stories for cameras and tend to welcome any positive media

attention which helps them spread their loved ones' stories.

Filming

I filmed eight hours of footage over the course of 14 days starting in October 2020 and

finishing in February 2021. For mobility, I recorded all footage using a handheld camera and

shotgun microphone. While filming, I aimed to capture the emotion of events as they unfolded,

but I prioritized respecting my subjects' space over creating the most desirable conditions for

filmmaking. I knew that the camera's presence was inherently intrusive, and I did not want to

disrupt the normal environment even more if I could avoid it. For example, Britt and Johnny play

music through a speaker when protesting on the street which made recording their conversations

difficult, but I never asked them to turn it off since I did not want to disrupt their normal routine.

My attempt at limiting disruption often led me to film my subjects at a slight distance from

behind or the side when they were interacting with families or people on the street. Interactions

between Johnny and Britt and the families were often deeply raw and personal, and I felt filming

up close would be unnecessarily invasive and cause discomfort. On the street, filming from the

front would have created a physical barrier between my subjects and petition supporters,

potentially deterring curious people passing by from engaging with Britt and Johnny. As I

interacted with news media and other media sources while filming, it became incredibly clear

how much these ethical considerations which had become habit to me through studying anthropology differed from theirs. I found that news media representatives were very pushy, encouraging storylines and prioritizing angles which fit their agenda. In contrast, I encouraged my subjects to direct my film's narrative, and I prioritized making my presence as natural and comfortable as possible.

Editing

I began editing in Adobe Premiere Pro, a software I was already familiar with using, in mid-February after concluding filming. I used a catalog which I had made with notes about the clips to guide my first cut of the material and locate poignant pieces. However, since I had not spent considerable time reviewing my footage, the early stages of editing mostly included re-watching my material, making cuts, and labeling segments as I went. I did not have any transcripts of my footage to assemble a script which often made managing all of the material difficult. I relied on notetaking, both within the editing software and on paper, to assemble the narrative, but the final structure primarily resulted from rearranging different scenes until I found the most compelling order with guidance from Dr. Grimshaw.

Editing is always a time-consuming process, but I was surprised by how challenging it was to craft the narrative of the film. Dr. Grimshaw encouraged me to consider the film as a composition of scenes which must have a beginning, middle, and end, and I spent a significant portion of the editing process crafting these different components. I also learned the importance of paying attention to the setting of scenes and not just the dialogue when choosing an order. In fact, seasonal patterns and whether the scene took place indoors versus outdoors drove many of my decisions for the narrative.

In previous documentary projects, I have always relied heavily on supplemental footage to cover interviews and transitions between scenes. However, this technique is rarely used with the observational approach which characteristically presents scenes with few cuts to allow the audience to see how events actually unfolded. While it may seem like less cuts means less work for an editor, the editing process for this film was very involved and required me to work with great care and attention to detail. At times it was frustrating to avoid using b-roll to cover poor-quality footage, but in the end, I think doing so resulted in a more powerful film since I had to work with great intention.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Chapter Five - Conclusion</h2>

Before finishing my final edits, I showed the film to Britt and Johnny to make sure that they were comfortable with the content and presentation. It was an awesome and emotional experience to be with them as they watched it for the first time. I knew that they would appreciate the film, but until hearing and seeing their reactions, I did not realize how deeply validating it would be. As they watched and reflected on their experiences, they radiated pride. Britt expressed that seeing their journey and growth re-energized her, and they both shared that the film humbled and impressed them. In response, I shared how humbled and impressed *I* am by *them* and how grateful I am that they welcomed me to create something with such multi-dimensional meaning and purpose.

I had three main goals for this project: to explore current efforts in the fight for civil rights in Atlanta through film; to create an accessible resource for peers and encourage them to become more involved in civil rights activism; and to promote racial justice organizations while celebrating their leaders. I am grateful to all of the activists who I met over the past six months who graciously welcomed conversations with me to promote my understanding of contemporary

racial justice work in Atlanta. I have learned a lot about what it means to organize differently

around a shared goal, and I look forward to seeing how efforts continue to grow and evolve.

While I have not shared my film with peers yet, the reception I have gotten so far just by talking

about it has made me hopeful about its potential impact. I am excited to host an online screening

and panel discussion next month with Britt, Johnny, and myself for family, friends, and peers

who are interested in learning about our separate and combined work. Finally, through seeing

and hearing Britt and Johnny's reaction to the film, I am pleased to know that I succeeded in

producing a film which benefits their organization in tangible and intangible ways. They

continue to share their thanks and pride, and they are excited for us to host a private screening at

their office for their members, the Justice for Georgia families, and their own families.

    I was thoroughly daunted by this project when I began planning a year ago. As

coronavirus sent the country into lockdown and the status of my senior year became unknown, I

felt lost as to how to plan a year-long project, let alone a documentary film. Reflecting now,

creating *Justice for Georgia* was the academic highlight of my senior year and possibly of my

entire Emory experience. I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to gain hands-on experience

and use the world as my classroom as I concluded the rest of my studies online. The pandemic

surely created challenges, largely related to what subjects, potential subjects, and I were

comfortable filming in person, but it also made the project even more rewarding since I felt I was

learning and contributing to my community during a time when both have become increasingly

difficult.

    While coronavirus posed challenges, I would not consider it a major limitation of my

project. The film is a case study of an organization's work during this specific period in history,

and the pandemic is a key factor in shaping that work. Instead, I consider time to be the biggest

limitation of my project. Because I only had a few months to film, I had to simultaneously get to know Britt and Johnny while filming them, which is not an ideal situation for relationship building. I made an effort to spend time talking to them and working with them without my camera in hand for the sake of building trust, but doing so was stressful since I knew I was missing out on content for the film. Additionally, I did not have time to develop an awareness of events before beginning to film but rather learned as I went. Filming requires careful choreography. To capture events effectively, filmmakers must be able to predict their subjects' movements to a certain extent in order to position the camera at an appropriate angle, distance, and height. Especially when working with a single camera, it is necessary to be familiar with one's subjects to capture conversations and interactions as they unfold. Since it took time to develop this awareness, much of the footage I filmed at the beginning of my research was ineffective in developing the story I wanted to tell. While I am pleased with the scenes included in the final version of the film, I would have preferred more time to build my relationship with Britt and Johnny and learn how they conduct their work before beginning to film.

Justice for Georgia offers behind the scenes access to the developing story of one racial justice organization's growth. Broadly, the film explores and reflects the effects of rising awareness and action against systemic racism which erupted over this summer. By exploring current civil rights activism through film, I was able to capture the passion and movement of organizers leading this work. My written words would not have given justice to their emotion, exhaustion, celebration, frustration, and dedication. The film offers the opportunity to learn through conversation and interaction—through showing rather than telling—and reveals efforts and experiences as they unfold. The care and consideration required of making a film led me to engage with this research in such an intimate, revealing, and inspiring way, and I appreciate the

Department of Anthropology's support in allowing me to pursue my curiosities through this

medium. It is my hope that *Justice for Georgia* will serve as a visual record of the civil rights

landscape in Atlanta during this transformative time and that viewers continue to learn from it

for years to come.

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