

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

- 2..... Message from Denise Perry, BOLD’s Executive Director
- 3..... Message from Nat Chioke Williams
- 4..... From the report project team: N’Tanya, Zuri and Prudence
- 5..... BOLD at 5 Years: overview of history, method/model, role in the movement
- 6..... Project, scope, and methodology

II. BLACK THOUGHT LEADERS ON BLACK ORGANIZING & MOVEMENT-BUILDING

- 10..... Why Black Organizing?
- 16..... Looking Back (conditions leading us here)
- 21..... Strengths of Black Organizing & Movement-building
- 28..... Internal Movement Challenges & Gaps
- 33..... External movement threats & the new terrain
- 36..... Opportunities Ahead

III. BOLD PARTICIPANTS REFLECT ON PROGRAM IMPACT AND THE FUTURE

- 37..... The BOLD Participant Survey
- 39..... Early Engagement- Becoming a BOLDer
- 40..... Fully Committed- The BOLD experience
- 41..... Leading Leaders- The impact of BOLD staff
- 42..... Leaving the Nest- Outcomes of BOLD training
- 44..... Taking Stock- Perspectives on BOLD’s contribution to Black organizing
- 45..... Sowing and Growing- Suggestions for improvement
- 47..... National Gathering Focus Group
- 47..... How does BOLD’s value of dignity impact you and your work?
- 48..... How does BOLD’s value of black love and black space impact you and your work?
- 49..... How does having an understanding of Black love and being in a 4D Black space empower you to do better and be more effective at organizing and engaging and to move differently in your work?
- 49..... Is BOLD enough in its current form?
- 50..... Should BOLD be a thought leader in education beyond leadership, beyond BOLD programming?
- 51..... How does BOLD handle internal conflict?
- 51..... What do you see as your role in BOLD's sustainability?

IV. IMPLICATIONS & WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

- 52..... Conversations about building up Black organizing and movement infrastructure
- 57..... Movement Leadership





I. INTRODUCTION

FROM DENISE PERRY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BOLD

The 2016 election has resulted in an authoritarian taking daily action to destroy our gains, our spirit, tear apart our families and create a state of fear. I am absolutely clear that we need each other we need firm political ground and an assessment of current conditions. We need both short term and long-term paths to defend ourselves, and dream beyond the limits that have denied us what we most desire and deserve. Many of you are creating exactly what we need.

In my organizing work I did hundreds of community surveys, of one-on-one's, and house meetings. Our organizing teams worked diligently to get to know community members and their perspectives, and to understand political and social conditions so that we could develop a winning strategy to make the changes most important to folks. Of course there are many other components in effective organizing, but knowing the community and conditions is foundational to success. In 2010, along with other BOLD founders, I spent a year learning what was happening with Black Organizing, what we had and what we were missing, and those findings led to BOLD and its programs. Now, six years later, we wanted to reassess what the conditions are. This report is the result of that research, and what it reveals is--no surprise-- the brilliance of our people and that *the most important investment for our Liberation is the ongoing work of organizing.*

Over the last six years, BOLD has built deep, long term relationships with over 200 Black organizers and movement comrades and helped them support one another in building Black Mastery in organizing our communities across the country. These are the people interviewed for this report, and this report documents what we have heard from our unique position inside of Black organizing work.

In all our programs, BOLD is intentional about encouraging a practice of thoughtful political exchange and collaboration grounded in authenticity. We are intentional about supporting participants to organize themselves around leadership, organizational and movement visions that serve as their North Star. Our vision is strengthening Black infrastructure for the long-haul, and the Black folks who lead it. This report reflects our intentions, grounded in transparency, offering a variety of voices, and ideally, serving as a tool for building far beyond the present moment.

There is no better time than now for us to declare a new future. To get there we must practice reaching beyond our comfort zone, individually and collectively. We must be clear about what are we striving for, and what it will take to achieve that vision. We must make time to celebrate along the way. We must keep learning to give and receive trust and to love and support one another. I hope you use this report to facilitate dialogues and debates, to ask more questions, to inspire your strategy, to call folks to collective action, to identify alignment, to encourage continued writing about your work, to develop your assessment of the moment, to be an invitation to Black Organizing, and a BOLD leader, moving with Black Love towards the world we want.

I want to thank all of the contributors who made this BOLD Report possible, the interviewees, interviewers, transcribers, survey participants, focus group participants, writers, editors, designer and everyone who supported this project with their time and ideas. We would love to hear from you about what we reported and what we missed, and any feedback you have to offer.

FROM NAT CHIOKE WILLIAMS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE HILL-SNOWDEN FOUNDATION

Look, but Please Do Not Disturb

Imagine that the BOLD report is a new art gallery, and you have been given a special invitation to its grand opening. If like me, you are a funder, you may think you received this invitation because of your role – but you would be wrong. This was not written for us. The arc and rhythm of the language, the nuance and complexity of the context, the painful slices of truth and revelation – none of it was written with a sensibility toward a philanthropic audience. The medium for this collection is the vibrant palette and rich texture of the shared struggle, responsibility, passion and sacred love that Black organizers have for Black people, the quest for freedom and the abiding promise of liberation. This piece was unapologetically created by Black organizers and for Black organizers, to share their truths in order to expand the horizon for their successes. So as you explore these pages, I invite my fellow funders to absorb the fullness of these collected experiences from a respectful distance, and resist our learned instinct to dissect, deconstruct and critique.

The BOLD report offers many insights and context as to the political development of modern Black organizing, the critical roles it plays in sustaining and advancing Black communities; its inherent strengths, and its current challenges and opportunities. The report also helps us to elevate the vision of Black organizing so that we can glimpse the edges of the future work and evolution of the art and science of Black organizing. But as the report states, we are entering uncertain and to some degree uncharted political territory. Now more than ever we need to strengthen and invest heavily in Black-led organizing so that the progressive movement can best navigate this treacherous political current. Now more than ever we need to build a strong and enduring infrastructure for Black-led social change, because it is the cornerstone of a strong multi-constituency movement for progressive change. BOLD is both an essential part of today's infrastructure for Black-led social change and an important vehicle for strengthening this infrastructure.

Over the past five years, BOLD has been an important resource to the field of Black-led organizing and the BOLD report will help the field sharpen its analysis over the next 5 years. I hope this report will lead you to strengthen your support for Black organizing groups overall and for BOLD in particular. That support will help ensure that we all get free.

Until then,
Be well and be BOLD!

FROM RESEARCH TEAM: N'TANYA, PRUDENCE, ZURI

NTanya Lee coordinated the interviews with thought-leaders. She is a friend of BOLD since its inception, one of the authors of the Ear to the Ground Project, and a long-time Black organizer before she became a movement consultant, and staff to a new project called LeftRoots. While not a professional 'researcher', NTanya has an academic and political background in 'bottom-up' participatory research methods for social change; she believes that the experts on the struggle are the people in the struggle and that reflection, research and analysis in the service of movement-building is critical to all of our liberation.

Reflections from NTanya: I came of age politically in the Reagan years, and never imagined that in my lifetime, I would get to witness and be part of a new stage of the Black freedom struggle. I've been blessed to see and support the emergence of so many talented, courageous and brilliant radical Black organizers in this period, and have been particularly inspired by the transformative impact BOLD has had in many of their lives. I know, as a long-time organizer, that it is difficult to reflect on the work in the midst of its intense demands, so I am especially grateful that twenty-five key voices from our movement prioritized time with us. As a movement we need many more spaces to develop our thinking and our practice, where we humbly and lovingly challenge each other - beyond the slogans and hashtags - about how we are truly going to get free. How is what I am doing today making a contribution to the struggle for collective liberation? The struggle for Black liberation and the radical transformation of society is as complex as it is necessary, and we owe it to future generations to learn all that we can, taking in the ancestor wisdom of a Tubman or Cabral, as well as contemporary insights from one another, across the great divides of geography, identity and politics. Our struggle is itself a fountain of wisdom. We hope this report prompts many conversations about how we can move forward.

Prudence Browne did the heavy lifting for round 2 interviews, transcription, and personally did the analytical coding for all of the interviews. Prudence is the new Associate Director of the Social Justice Initiative and a Ph.D. Candidate in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). She is the former Managing Editor of Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society and has over 15 years of experience working with community-based organizations and schools in New York City and Chicago. She is a core organizing member of Teachers for Social Justice in Chicago and a member of the Urban South Grassroots Research Collective. Her own scholarly research focuses on post-hurricane education reform in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Reflection from Prudence: This project is an opportunity to use research methodologies to examine black organizing in our current moment. It provides a space to explore the questions relevant to those on the ground organizing and those working closely with organizers. It represents a central place for critical insights into the dynamic, complicated and often misunderstood nature of black organizing in the U.S. today. Participant interviews was only one of the tools necessary to gather this data. Another tool essential for this project was a willingness to go to the places of black organizing- metaphorically speaking since most interviews were conducted with the mediation of technology- and to value the contributions and thought leadership of black organizers. My training as a social scientist only half prepared me for this crucial and necessary project.

Zuri Murphy conducted the Program Evaluation and designed the BOLD report. Zuri received her MSW from Georgia State University with an emphasis in community partnerships and has been an evaluation professional for over a decade. She has been engaged in evaluating BOLD's programming since 2012 and has conducted research and evaluation for diverse organizations such as the United Way, The Department of Health and Human Services, 100 Black Men, Morehouse College and Union Theological Seminary. Her approach is informed by utilization evaluation and often includes mixed-methods with a focus on qualitative data collection and interpretation. In addition to her professional commitments, she has been actively engaged in community work and advocacy on the issues of restorative justice, alternatives to traditional policing and police accountability. She became a founding member of BLOCS (Building Locally to Organize for Community Safety) in 2010 and joined the Atlanta Restorative Justice Board in 2014.

Reflection from Zuri: It has been a tremendous pleasure and career highlight to evaluate an organization that aligns with my values and life work. Some in the profession believe that distance provides objectivity, but my connection to this project has only encouraged critical inquiry, not prevented it. The respect and love I have for this unique and verdant pedagogy push me to ferret out the true meaning of the reflections that are shared, to identify the gaps in effectiveness and to investigate the elements that add to or take away from something I find so meaningful. At the end of this year-long project, I am still in awe of the generosity of spirit and clarity of thought that the BOLD family and Black organizing leadership contributed. Without you there would be little for our team to talk about. Thank you for sharing your stories and your hearts. I hope we made you proud.

BOLD AT FIVE

BOLD (Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity) is a national leadership training program designed to help rebuild Black social justice infrastructure to organize Black communities more effectively and re-center Black leadership in the U.S. social justice movement. BOLD fulfills its purpose by equipping Black organizers and Black leaders of social justice organizations with the personal and organizational tools they need to build and sustain trusted relationships, strong organizations and allied social movements, and be more strategic and effective change agents. Our programs include Director/Lead Organizer Trainings; Amandla! New Organizer Trainings; an Annual National Gathering; and additional trainings, coaching and technical assistance for BOLD alumni and partners.

BOLD's unique curriculum has three domains: transformative organizing, embodied leadership and political education with somatics methods undergirding all of it, allowing for a deeper engagement into all of the curriculum. With nearly 150 Black participants from its intensive programs over five years, BOLD has had the great honor to play a critical role in the expansion of Black organizing infrastructure and to have been a critical resource to this period's movement-building efforts. The organization's mission is to strengthen U.S. Black social justice infrastructure through holistic transformative leadership development, training, alliance building, and technical support for Black-led organizations. In a short time, BOLD has created a much-needed community of Black leadership nationally for strategic coordination in movement building.

In the spirit of reflection and critical assessment, BOLD took up this project to learn about the impact of its programmatic work on its participants and the overall state of the field. BOLD is clear that it must be accountable to the needs and perspectives of Black organizers and movement-builders to advance its vision of liberation.

PROJECT GOALS, SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

Organizers are constantly in motion, and movement-building is a dynamic process that shifts as conditions and strategic approaches change. Deep reflection and evaluation is too often lost in the midst of the urgency and complexity of daily work. This project is an effort to share reflections on Black organizing and movement-building from the people moving the work, with no other intention than to support and strengthen individual, organization and movement-wide impact. BOLD is one of the few national organizations bringing Black organizers together across the country, and has been a key, trusted space for building relationships between movement leaders. Because of this positioning, BOLD has a unique perspective on the state of Black organizing and Black movement-building today. This report is anchored by the experience of nearly 150 Black organizers who've participated in BOLD and is broadened by interviews with thought leaders who have not personally been participants, but who represent an important aspect or sector of Black organizing today.

This report is both an assessment of BOLD at its critical five-year juncture, and an offering of Black love back to the community of struggle that built this network and that is so dedicated to the future of Black people. It is meant to be part of an ongoing national conversation not a definitive statement. And while it is not a comprehensive assessment of Black-led movement work in this period - in all of its rich diversity of places, tactics, political tendencies, and identities - we certainly hope it is useful.

WE STRONGLY ENCOURAGE MANY MORE REFLECTION, EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT EFFORTS. THE GOALS OF THIS PARTICULAR PROJECT WERE TO:

1. To provide an assessment of BOLD' impact at its 5-year mark
2. To provide an assessment of the state of Black organizing and movement-building from Black organizers and leaders in the movement, for the movement – using BOLD as a point of departure
3. To project the thought leadership of Black movement activists in this historic moment
4. To provide a useful assessment document that can help sharpen organizers' analysis of this moment, while also helping to increase investment in local, grassroots Black organizing and other under-resourced parts of movement infrastructure.

THIS DATA WAS GATHERED OVER AN EIGHTEEN-MONTH PERIOD:

- 25 video interviews, which each averaged about 90 minutes. Each was transcribed and coded in Dedoose, a qualitative analysis tool. There were two rounds of interviews - the first in the fall of 2015 and the second in the fall of 2016, before the presidential election.
- Survey responses from 77 members of the BOLD participant or training community, reflecting on their own experience as well as implications for BOLD, Black organizing and movement infrastructure overall.
- In addition, an extended focus group took place at the 2016 BOLD National Gathering, as well as a large discussion about the first draft of the interview report-back. Feedback on the first draft of that report-back has been incorporated into this final document.

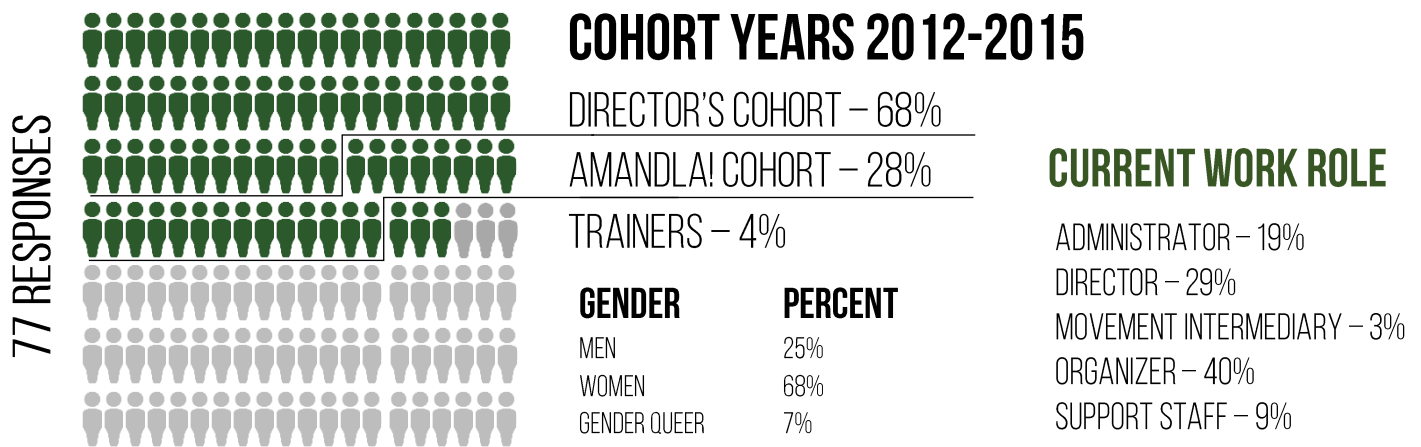
THIS FINAL PROJECT REPORT HAS THREE PRIMARY PIECES:

- A Report-back on in-depth interviews with twenty-five Black thought-leaders from Black organizing and movement-building work, shared in this document in Part 3.

- A BOLD program evaluation, including survey results from 77 participants, and focus groups from the BOLD 2016 National Gathering, conducted by program evaluator Zuri Murphy.
- An “Implications - Where do we go from here?” section in which we share our own observations and recommendations based on an integration of what we heard from the interviews, focus group conversations and survey data analysis.

WHO DID WE SURVEY?

The BOLD Participant Survey was administered online from February 1st to March 7th, 2016. The survey was sent to 140 former and current BOLD participants and staff by email. Seventy-seven people responded (55%). Of the respondents, 68% were in the Directors and Leaders program, 28% were in the Amandla! Program and 4% were trainers. Respondents represented cohort years 2012-2015, with the most respondents coming from the 2012 cohort. It included 30 questions that were developed with the input of the evaluation team and BOLD leadership.



BLACK DIVERSITY: AFRO LATINA- 5%, 1ST/2ND GENERATION AFRICAN- 3%, CARRIBEAN- 5%, MULTI-RACIAL- 3%

WHO DID WE INTERVIEW?

We interviewed twenty-five Black movement thought-leaders – frontline organizers, activists, organizational leaders and activist-scholars from different political traditions and places within the United States. We see ‘thought-leaders’ as individuals whose views have influence on the collective body, in this case - Black organizing and movement-building. Most but not all have been participants in BOLD. We asked them to reflect on their own work, the state of organizing in the Black community and the Black freedom struggle, as well as what this all means for the future of Black people, progressive politics and the struggle for transformation of US society.

People were asked to represent themselves, not the views of their organizations. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed. With a sample size of 25, we were not seeking to have the interviews perfectly represent the ethnic, age, sectoral, political and geographic diversity of Black organizers and movement-leaders, but we did make efforts to interview people who have different perspectives and vantage points from which to reflect on this moment.

PARTICIPANTS WERE INVOLVED IN A RANGE OF MOVEMENT WORK:



GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

42%



MOVEMENT-SUPPORT GROUPS/ALLIANCES

25%



**INTERMEDIARIES, TRAINERS
COMMUNITY SPACES**

17%



**WORKER ORGANIZING,
LABOR ORG**

8%



ACTIVIST-SCHOLARS

8%

24 INTERVIEWEES

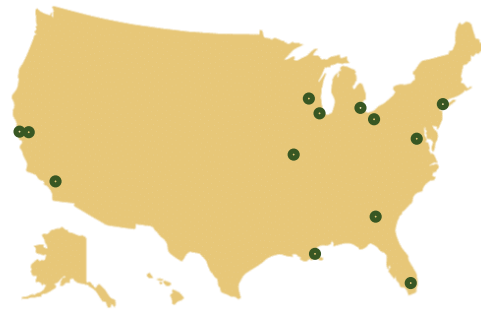


75% WERE BOLD PARTICIPANTS

ACTIVIST-SCHOLARS – 8%
DIRECTORS – 58%
MOVEMENT INTERMEDIARY – 13%
ORGANIZERS – 21%

FROM 4 REGIONS

AGE	PERCENT	GENDER	PERCENT
26-35	21%	MEN	33%
36-44	54%	WOMEN	63%
45-54	17%	GENDER QUEER	8%
55-65	8%		





II. BLACK THOUGHT- LEADERS REPORT BACK

WHY BLACK ORGANIZING?

LOOKING BACK: CONDITIONS THAT LED US HERE

STRENGTHS OF BLACK ORGANIZING & MOVEMENT BUILDING TODAY

MOVEMENT GAPS & CHALLENGES

EXTERNAL MOVEMENT THREATS

OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

WHY BLACK ORGANIZING?

INTRODUCTION

This report is about Black organizing, the role of Black organizing in movement-building, and how BOLD has contributed to the work in the last four years. Twenty-five Black thought-leaders from different progressive and left political traditions, parts of the country, and positions in ‘the movement’, graciously shared their analysis, reflections and lessons with us. They did this during an inspiring, complex and sometimes dizzying moment of Black struggle, in which a new movement was born. In this report, we call this “the movement for Black lives”, a broad and politically diverse constellation of forces, in which a wide range of organizational forms, politics and tactics are being used to transform the lives of Black people in the United States.

One of the contradictions of this moment is that thousands of people identify as organizers while long-time organizers worry that in fact “*there is a spirit of activism but not of organizing.*” (*the South*) Among the wide range of approaches and strategies needed to improve the lives of Black people, this report has a focus on Black organizing, because we see it as 1) fundamental to building the power of Black communities to materially improve conditions of Black lives, 2) fundamental to movement-building for deep and long-term social transformation for Black people, and 3) necessary for the liberation of all people. BOLD was founded based on the assessment that Black organizing is critical, and that Black-led organizations and Black organizers specifically were severely under-supported. It is our view that even now, in the midst of a 21st century renaissance of Black resistance, of radical Black tactics and culture, Black organizing at the grassroots level continues to be under-appreciated, under-resourced, and under-practiced.

In the interviews, we shared our working definition of Black organizing as:

organizing a constituency of people to build a base of Black leadership for transformation & power, though, at minimum, these basic categories of work: membership outreach & recruitment; leadership development & political education; collective action and campaigns.

Different forms of Black political struggle have different challenges and contributions. Today’s broad and diverse *movement for Black lives* includes Black activists, ‘protestors’, faith leaders, educators, communications strategists, allies, cultural workers - and organizers. We have Black Twitter making #BlackLivesMatter a rallying cry around the world, a new organization called the Black Lives Matter Network operating with branches across the country, activist formations identifying with “Black Lives Matter” in some way, and new kinds of Black movement-building spaces like the Movement4BlackLives ‘tables’. This is not a report about that whole range of work; instead it is an effort to lift up Black organizing in particular and to elevate the perspectives of people who were organizing around Black



**"BLACK ORGANIZING IS MORE CRUCIAL IN THIS TIME THAN ANYTHING. OVER THE LAST YEAR, AS MANY OF US WERE COMING TOGETHER TO BUILD UP THE {MOVEMENT 4 BLACK LIVES} POLICY TABLE, TALK ELECTIONS ETC... AND BUILD THE DOPE NATIONAL WORK, MY GUT WAS TELLING ME THAT WHILE WE BUILD THE NATIONAL WORK WE NEED TO BE JUST AS INTENTIONAL, GIVE THE SAME RESOURCES...TO GO DEEPER, GO LOWER INSIDE OF OUR ORGANIZING WORK."
- (THE SOUTH)**

community needs before the current movement erupted and who have played critical movement-building roles in this recent period.

As a part of the Black radical tradition, the deliberate, labor-intensive day to day work of Black organizing has and continues to be fundamental to movement-building, even when that role is often not as visible as efforts that make the headlines. We know from history that an effective, powerful movement needs millions of supporters, thousands of activists and a strong core of strategic, accountable organizers. Throughout the 1950s and early '60s, for every news headline featuring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., there were thousands of unknown “foot soldiers” and scores of dedicated organizers on the ground, building leaders, organizations and power.

In today’s context, we know that on one hand, Black organizers did not start the historic, catalytic rebellion in Ferguson, MO; this is of course not how rebellions emerge. The ‘roots’ of the movement should properly be placed in the courage of young Black working-class people whose militant and heartfelt confrontations with police brought the terror of their lives to an international stage. On the other hand, in cities where there has been an uprising in response to a particular incident of racist police violence, it is organizers - new and experienced, paid and unpaid - who work to sustain the struggle, channeling rage into sustainable and powerful struggle, rooted in accountable forms of organization. We see the need to lift up that work. For this report, we prioritized thought-leaders who had both personal experience of Black organizing and were in a position to reflect on broader movement conditions.

KEY THEMES FROM BLACK THOUGHT-LEADERS: WHAT IS BLACK ORGANIZING?

We asked Black thought-leaders to share their definitions of Black organizing. Language within movements is important; it should not be used to shame or self-aggrandize but rather, used to clarify our various roles in building a movement capable of transforming society. For example: some cultural workers are also organizers. We need both roles; but we can’t build a powerful movement for deep transformation based on the contributions of cultural workers alone. We heard a wide range of descriptions of Black organizing, but these four themes came up in nearly every interview.

1. Building *organized bases of*, with and for oppressed Black people, *over time*;
2. Building up *Black leadership*, particularly among those most impacted by oppressive/exploitative practices and policies in our society, to change power relations;
3. Bringing Black people together for *collective action*; engaging in collective campaigns or projects that express and assert the interests of Black people, as defined by Black people. Because of how Black people are positioned in this society, the interests of working-class Black people are *particular*, are at the intersection of white supremacy and anti-Black racism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy, which means Black working class people have a self-interest in ending these systems for the benefit of all.
4. Doing all of the above, for the purpose of *transforming power relationships and the structures of society* in a progressive direction.

KEY THEMES FROM BLACK THOUGHT-LEADERS: WHY IS BLACK ORGANIZING IMPORTANT?

Black organizers are often asked to explain not only what Black organizing is, but why it’s important to *specifically name* Black organizing as a particular form of collective action worth supporting. One tendency in the last ten to twenty years has been to make the case for community organizing in general (because organizing groups remains

severely underfunded compared to large advocacy organizations), and then to describe the constituencies we organize in general economic terms like *low-income* people, or to use racial justice language like *communities of color*. While using “communities of color” has been part of effective efforts to build strong solidarity between working-class people of color impacted by white supremacy and capitalism, it has also tended to over-simplify our unity and flatten out the particular differences between, for example, Black and Latino communities’ experience of racialized criminalization. The contemporary efforts to focus on Black organizing and activism is in part a response to this failure to name and fight for the *interests of poor and working-class Black people* in the previous period.

Black thought-leaders were unanimous in their view that it is important to explicitly name Black organizing in the history of Black freedom movements and in contemporary movement-building. For many years, people committed to organizing Black people around their particular interests and for progressive change have not been supported. While sometimes they have found support in the context of multiracial organizations led by non-Black people of color, too-often they have struggled in white-led organizations lacking a commitment to Black organizing.

We heard these five primary themes throughout our interviews about the need for Black organizing:

- 1. BLACK ORGANIZING IMPROVES THE LIVES AND CONDITIONS OF BLACK PEOPLE.**
- 2. BLACK ORGANIZING BUILDS THE POWER NEEDED TO MAKE *STRUCTURAL* CHANGE.**
- 3. BLACK ORGANIZING BUILDS COMMUNITY.**
- 4. BLACK ORGANIZING IS NECESSARY FOR BLACK LIBERATION.**
- 5. BLACK ORGANIZING EXPANDS DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL PEOPLE**

1. BLACK ORGANIZING IMPROVES THE LIVES AND CONDITIONS OF BLACK PEOPLE.

Most interviewees shared the view that if you are concerned about the health, safety, economic security, rights, and civic participation of Black communities, then it is important for you to know that Black organizing wins concrete improvements for Black people - particularly the most marginalized- while also building up the community’s own leadership and power to win victories over the long-term. To make an impact on concrete conditions in the Black community, organizing groups tend to wage campaigns around specific issues with specific targets, to get material wins. Interviewees we talked to were involved in the major issues and sectors of Black organizing and movement-building work today, including:

- Black organizing to end the school to prison pipeline and mass incarceration
- Black organizing for prison abolition and/or an end to all forms of state violence
- Black worker organizing – in unions, worker centers and the Fight for \$15
- Black tenant organizing to fight gentrification and end Black working class displacement
- Organizing for Black immigrant rights
- Black youth and student organizing
- Black organizing around queer and trans justice, gender justice, and reproductive rights
- Black civic engagement, electoral organizing (c3 & c4)
- Black organizing around environmental justice



**“OUR LIVES DEPEND
ON OUR CAPACITY
TO ORGANIZE.”**
-(MIDWEST)

- Organizing for public investments in Black education, community health, and other ‘social safety net’ human needs.

In each area of work, interviewees talked about the importance of naming the particular ways that structural racism and economic inequality have impacted Black communities.

Black thought-leaders referred to a wide range of ways that organizing “gets the goods” for communities otherwise neglected and marginalized. Contemporary Black organizing around police violence, mass incarceration, and the school to prison pipeline has led to historic “Ban the Box” policies, school suspension moratoriums, reinvestments of public funding from policing to community needs, and the funding of reparations for victims of police torture - all of which have meant material improvements for Black communities around the country. Black youth and students have often been the leading, insurgent force in these organizing efforts, as both participants and organizers, while Black unionists, leftists and working class women have also played critical, often behind-the-scenes organizing roles. The Movement 4 Black Lives Policy Platform builds on, and expands on these victories.

While we did not specifically ask about historical examples of organizing victories, a number were mentioned. Grassroots Black organizing in the 1941 “March on Washington Movement” forced the US government to issue Executive Order 8802, which opened up wartime industry jobs and began to desegregate the armed forces, a historic breakthrough in economic opportunities for millions of Black workers. In the civil rights movement of the 1960s, SNCC’s courageous grassroots organizing in the deep South led to historic victories around voting rights and the growth of Black political power, while providing the grassroots backbone for a wide range of Black-led cultural, economic and political initiatives amongst southern Black communities.

A number of interviewees emphasized that when Black organizing is not named, articulated and invested in, some racial or economic justice victories can be won, but anti-Black racism, as a “fulcrum of white supremacy” can be left unaltered. They argued that the failure to address anti-Black racial oppression ultimately benefits non-Black people and elites at the expense of Black people and undermines the potential for ever truly ending white supremacy. For example, *“The criminalization of any immigrant does not help us, and that criminalization is actually based in the history of anti-Blackness...[so] a multiracial coalition that does not recognize how oppression affects Black people, how anti-Black racism holds up the system of white supremacy overall, will continue to put a band-aid on the problem.” (Midwest)*

2. BLACK ORGANIZING BUILDS THE POWER NEEDED TO MAKE STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Most interviewees spoke about the importance of organizing to *building power*, to force changes in how oppressive systems and structures are working. This view is a basic assumption amongst organizers, and wasn't elaborated on by interviewees. There was, however, greater emphasis on making the case for *organizing specifically in Black communities*.

Given the dominance of activist approaches and tactics in this period (in the US overall, not only in Black movement spaces), it's worth naming that a basic premise of organizing is that the problems of oppressed people stem from their lack of power; that advocacy,

“BLACK ORGANIZING MEANS...TO BUILD POWER WITH BLACK PEOPLE, TO WIELD POWER IN THE WORLD, TO TRANSFORM OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS.”

-(MIDWEST)





legal representation, and social work services tend to maintain the power status quo even as they provide temporary relief; and that episodic mobilizations, uprisings or actions that are disconnected from ongoing base-building, leadership development and member-led initiatives or campaigns will not have sustained structural impact. Oppressed communities' organizing in their own interests will force a shift in power relations over time. When communities organize and build power, they become capable of not only winning concrete material improvements, but of changing how systems work - for example, when public school systems are forced to pass restorative justice policies that are not in the interest of the

institution but are in the interest of working class Black families. While all oppressed communities require organizing to gain power, ending Black oppression requires, at its foundation, organizing by and for Black people.

This is not to say that Black organizing automatically is a radical or transformative approach to social change or that it is sufficient to broader liberation. There are more, and less, radical approaches, depending on organizers' political framework, and many Black thought-leaders pointed to this period's exciting break with respectable "get 10 minutes on the politician's schedule" kind of tactics. There are new organizing formations in this period - BYP100 and Dream Defenders to name two - that are trying to connect the strengths of this generation's direct-action-focused, intolerance of "respectability politics" with the strengths of Black organizing traditions. Similarly, several interviewees involved in or familiar with the Movement 4 Black Lives Policy Table discussed the importance of transformational organizing demands that may not be easily won but that put forward radical, alternative ideas about how community problems can be solved.

3. BLACK ORGANIZING BUILDS COMMUNITY.

"We do it not for winning-for-winning's sake but because of our love for each other. That means when we fail or when something falls short, we come back to the table and we put that love back into practice and we continue to move forward and not give up and not to give in and not to blame one another. But we say that collectively we can make this change and to keep moving forward in that direction." (California)

"I think a good organizer and a good organization values people and values the complexities, the emotions, the well-being of the people that they are building a base with over everything. A good organizer is somebody who is authentically committed to building meaningful connection with the folks who they are building a base with; this isn't always the case [in the field of organizing] and then the relationship between us and the folks we are organizing with becomes transactional." (Metro NYC)

Building community in "Black space". A number of interviewees emphasized the need to organize within a Black cultural context, with all-Black spaces that reflect Black history, cultural practices and norms. This has been especially important in the new formations young Black activists are building in this period - at least in part in response to the

reality that many activists, in their previous activist work, whether on college campuses or in other ‘progressive’ campaign, have experienced anti-Black racism and a tokenizing of Black leadership in multiracial organizations. While we do not have official data, what we heard from interviewees and our own experience tells us that most *paid Black organizers* in the US today work in multiracial organizations. One interviewee explained that too-often “Black organizers aren't supported...so many Black organizers are working in white organizations, I see them burnt out and giving up sooner rather than later...which is why we need BOLD.” (Midwest)

4. BLACK ORGANIZING IS NECESSARY FOR BLACK LIBERATION.

“Organizing is the process of trying to bring people together to identify collective problems and then to take action around those problems...Black organizing brings Black folks together to identify the problems of the Black community, and then to take action around a shared agenda that is ultimately going to improve the conditions for Black folks and ultimately pave the way for the liberation of all Black people.” (California)

“Black organizing, based in the Black radical tradition, sees the root causes and historical context of community problems, and creates spaces where we can address them, and envision and imagine a world where Black life is beyond survival...it’s a manifestation of the struggle for self-determination.” (Metro NYC)



Across a range of political perspectives, most of the people interviewed in this project shared a commitment to Black self-determination and “Black liberation”, seeing their own organizing and movement-building work as ultimately serving that vision. While few could identify a particular “path to power”, or a theory of change that connected their organizing to that long-term goal, most identified with the idea that organizing “the most impacted” is critical: “Our theory of change is that people most impacted will be at the center of informing and transforming systems”(California), and that “Black organizing for Black liberation means placing priority on the most oppressed sectors of our communities and working from there to develop programs and agendas.” (Midwest)

What is particularly significant amongst the interviews was the depth of commitment to an intersectional, liberatory politics that goes far beyond an incremental view of policy wins and organizing reform victories, that identifies with Black radical and even revolutionary ancestors, and that seeks deep transformation of the basic social, economic and political structures of US society.

5. BLACK ORGANIZING EXPANDS DEMOCRACY & HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL PEOPLE.

*“Black organizing is essential to any kinds of true transformative systemic change.”
(South)*

An important theme across the interviews was that Black organizing is important to improving the lives of all oppressed people in the US, not only Black people. Black organizing addresses the interests of people impacted by racial, gender and economic oppression in the US. In many different ways, interviewees made the point that as the

**“IF BLACK PEOPLE GET FREE, EVERYONE WILL BE FREE...WE'RE NOT GONNA MAKE IT ANYWHERE WITHOUT BLACK LIBERATION HAVING A CENTRAL ROLE WITHIN A BROADER MOVEMENT-WHETHER IT'S 21ST CENTURY SOCIALISM OR WHATEVER YOUR VISION IS FOR A BETTER WORLD.”
(CALIFORNIA)**

workers whose unpaid, racialized labor provided the capital that built this nation’s economic and political power, Black people therefore have a stake in building a world without white supremacy, patriarchy and capitalist exploitation. And more concretely, victories for poor and working class Black people often lead to improvements for other groups impacted by those same systems of oppression. The struggle against racial discrimination and segregation led, for example, to critical advances in the rights of women like affirmative action & workplace protections. Similarly, safety net programs like food stamps, WIC and free school lunch that came out of Black-led urban struggles against poverty became programs available to millions of white poor families. Black-led organizing for voting rights, both during Reconstruction and the civil rights movement, led to the expansion of voting rights for poor, non-property owning people, women, young people, and other people of color, as well as to the expansion of “American citizenship” beyond its white supremacist, racialized definitions in US law.

As we have already discussed, beyond the importance of material improvements and reform victories, a number of interviewees see Black organizing and the struggle for Black liberation as critical to a strategy for broader transformation of society: *“The current economy and social structures and political structures are entirely dependent on the exploitation, oppression, and the genocide of Black people.”* Therefore, *“If we can uproot our systems of oppression, this will free everyone.”*(California)

There is no single model of Black organizing, and other forms of Black community work are critical, too. Interviewees noted the importance of diversity of tactics within Black organizing, and the diversity of approaches that often grow out of different conditions - for example organizing in the rural south has key differences than organizing in the urban coasts. Based on the needs of the specific constituency and different strategies for change, some organizers are integrating cultural work, self-help projects, or rights-based services. Black trans youth in an urban setting may have different needs than first generation Black immigrant workers. Some organizing projects are also building alternatives (like coops or community gardens); some are integrating somatics and healing practices that address the particularities of trauma in the Black community.

There are of course, many ways Black people are engaged in social justice and social change work. Many of them can be integrated into Black organizing approaches; others often stand on their own. Throughout the interviews, we heard references to the importance of cultural work, policy advocacy (without the grassroots base building), online/digital organizing, and of course as we see so powerfully in this moment, lots of direct action tactics, from walk-outs, die-ins, business shut-downs, highway blockades, banner drops and as many more creative tactics as activists can envision. We heard a call for the formation of new Black independent political/electoral organizations, the need for Left cadre organizations, and the need for more politicized healing work like the form of somatics integrated into BOLD.

LOOKING BACK: CONDITIONS THAT LED US HERE

INTRODUCTION

We asked thought-leaders a series of questions about their sense of historical context – as organizers, activists and movement leaders in this moment, what did they see as the key economic, political or social conditions that have been shaping Black life and Black politics? What are the dynamics and contradictions that grassroots organizers and movement activists have inherited, and must now navigate and wrestle with today, both internal to Black communities and more broadly? For the purposes of this project, we were most interested in participant’s reflections

on our history since the 1970s - a highpoint of movement struggle and power, in the long history of the Black radical tradition. Participants' analysis of the last few decades was wide-ranging, including the impact of COINTELPRO on Black movements; the impact of Black feminisms; the deep structural crisis facing most Black workers; community crises around addiction, mental health and poor models of self-and-collective-care; and the complicated emergence of new Black elites.

KEY THEMES FROM BLACK THOUGHT-LEADERS:

Among the long-list of conditions (internal and external), three core themes emerged from participants' thinking:

- 1. NEOLIBERALISM' IMPACT ON BLACK COMMUNITIES: RACIAL CAPITALISM SINCE THE '70S**
- 2. BLACK STRUGGLE AFTER THE PANTHERS, BEFORE OBAMA**
- 3. THE IMPACT OF STRUCTURAL OPPRESSION AND VIOLENCE ON BLACK COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELL-BEING**

1. NEOLIBERALISM'S IMPACT ON BLACK COMMUNITIES: RACIAL CAPITALISM SINCE THE '70S

The nature of the economy since the '70s was a significant theme. A number of interviewees named the increased access to opportunities like college education and the growth of a Black middle class, all gains won through the Black freedom movement desegregation victories and "jobs and freedom" demands. Interviewees named these as hard-fought struggles, and hard-won opportunities. And then, interviewees almost always coupled that acknowledgement with examples of victories that were co-opted, attacked or out-right defeated. One organizer put it succinctly *"It's like we're fighting the same struggles...and in the worst way because we got a bone and then, they took it back."* (California) These 'take-backs' included decades of attacks on affirmative action, the loss of thousands of public sector jobs and services in so many rounds of public service budget cuts, the attack on voting rights, and ongoing economic crisis in the Black community, including the historic loss of Black wealth that took place as a result of the financial crash's foreclosure crisis.

WHAT IS NEOLIBERALISM?

Neoliberalism has been the leading strategy of the capitalist class after facing the social movement demands of the 60s and 70s and international economic crises of the early '70s. Neoliberalism became the dominant strategy of global capitalism by the 90s, advanced by both Democratic and Republican presidential administrations. Its driving ideology is the promotion of unregulated free-market capitalism as the solution to everything – as opposed to the post-WWII capitalism which promoted capitalists' drive for profits but limited inequality by redistributing income, providing for a strong safety net, education opportunities etc. Neoliberalism's main features have been 1) attacks on government, with massive budget cuts to publicly-funded social services, healthcare and education; 2) replacing public services with corporate profit-making services ("privatization") in health care, public education, the military and even the provision of water in local communities; and 3) increasing the ability of corporations to pursue profits anywhere in the world ("globalization") without regard to the loss of jobs in the country where they are based and without having to manufacture real goods ("financialization"). Net results include stagnant and or declining incomes for most Americans alongside blossoming debt, a historic concentration of extreme wealth at the top, and especially since the 2007/2008 crash, an increasingly insecure, precarious, downwardly mobile 'middle class' among all racial groups.

This theme was significant - that it was hard to name and celebrate movement gains, as the scale of losses over the last forty years felt so much more significant. Most participants talked about the way that the shift in the economy since the 1970s – what is called neoliberal capitalism - has deepened structural unemployment, poverty and inequality in Black communities, in stark contrast to the dominant narrative of racial progress.



“In this period, we inherited NAFTA, job loss, long-term poverty – [which is] not the fault of our people, even though we’re taught to blame ourselves for not having a ‘good job’” (South)

“We inherited the post- 70s de-investment, de-unionization, and de-regulation that changed and flipped the script and made the ‘American dream’ out of reach for most Black people” (California)

“We are dealing with the economic violence that our community has faced, and then with crack cocaine - the underground economy became a major income source of our community.” (California)

Many participants explained the history that after the victories of civil rights, Black power and other progressive movements of the ‘60s, this new, neoliberal capitalism was able to undermine their impact by integrating some Black people into new professional classes and even into new corporate elites, without actually improving the conditions for most Black people. This created unparalleled class inequality *within* the Black community:

“Since the 70s some of us have greater access to social mobility, and...that has played out in a class stratification, which is pretty dangerous...There are people who have moved on up, but they are not checking on everyone else. That Black upper class didn’t exist 50 years ago.” (Metro NYC)

Of course, within mainstream politics, the difference between most Black people and the so-called “successful” Black people - whether they are Black physicians or Black billionaires like Oprah - is explained by differences in individual or family effort. In these interviews, movement thought-leaders instead named the source of this inequality as a structural issue, rooted in the national economy.

Additionally, organizers pointed out the particular relationship between structural racism and capitalism in this period, such that Black poverty has been criminalized, working-class Black communities policed and controlled in new ways that led to the rise of mass incarceration & increased state violence. By 2012, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement put out a report documenting that in the US, a Black person was murdered by agents of the state or vigilantes every 28 hours. As this crisis escalated, the long history of racist policing, police violence, and extra-judicial lynching in the US once again became a focus of Black community outrage in communities across the country. A number of thought-leaders went on to connect the dots, articulating a relationship between the “issues” of racism, economic poverty, mass incarceration and state violence that are often discussed independently but are actually inter-connected. It was important, they argued, to expose the role that neoliberal capitalism, fundamentally racialized in the US, has played in shaping the conditions of Black life since the 80s:

“The policies that enabled certain Black people to get super rich and most Black people to become poor or living a precarious life through privatization, through the export of jobs and capital, through using the criminal justice system as a way to manage unemployment and unemployable populations, which led to mass incarceration...all these transformations that took place in the last 20 or 25 years are very much part of a neoliberal agenda.” (California)

In terms of more recent economic impacts of neoliberalism, the 2007-2008 financial crash had a profound impact on Black lives, with broad implications for US economic and political conditions since that time. Several interviewees noted that the crash led to the greatest decline in Black wealth in US history, with more than 10% of all Black home-owners facing foreclosure, leading to a total of \$194 billion in direct and community ‘spillover’ asset losses in Black communities. Others have noted that the upsurge in populist politics and social movements (from Occupy, Not1More, movement for Black lives, etc) is in direct response to the continuing decline in opportunities for young people & families to achieve “the middle-class American dream” since the 2008 crash - despite the myth of a so-called “recovery.”



TODAY'S MOVEMENT THEN EMERGED OUT OF THE HISTORIC WALL STREET CRASH OF 2007, THE EXPERIENCE OF THE FIRST BLACK PRESIDENT, IN WHICH "OUR REAL, HONEST HOPES WERE DASHED", AND A SENSE OF ANGER AND BETRAYAL GAINED GROUND WHEN THE WORSENING CONDITIONS IN BLACK COMMUNITIES - INCLUDING RAMPANT POLICE VIOLENCE - WERE NOT SUBSTANTIVELY ADDRESSED OR IMPROVED.

2. BLACK STRUGGLE AFTER THE PANTHERS, BEFORE OBAMA

As we discussed above, in the economic arena, many participants named the complex and contradictory reality that for Black people there has been both *progress for some while stagnating or worsening conditions for the majority*. In discussing Black political power and movement-building, Black thought-leaders' nuanced narrative of racial “progress” even in the midst of broadly deepening crises, was even more pronounced.

Interviewees named the voting rights gains won by the Black freedom movement and the growth in Black elected officials as important advances. And at the same time, interviewees lamented almost in the same breath that so many Black political officials and elites are not truly accountable to Black poor and working-class people. Additionally, it is notable that not a single person named the election of the first Black president as a key ‘advance’ won by the Black freedom struggle.

“You now have a Black power structure that consists of elites - Black elected officials, Black entrepreneurs and those types that didn't exist, or exist in a substantive way, 30 or 40 years ago. And so, when you're talking about radical organizing and putting forth radical demands; often times, you first have to confront that power structure inside the Black community [before addressing] the bigger more systemic causes”. (California)

“Some advances are also the losses. There were many more organizations that were doing community organizing, Black community organizing, or movement organizing, or Black liberation and Black freedom organizing in the 60s and 70s than exists today. Part of that is that to some degree, in the next generations of Black Africans many have

been siphoned off into running for political office, working for politicians, running civic organizations, those kinds of things, where in a different era they would have been radical activists and organizers.” (California)

While in mainstream political discussions, the growth of Black political representation is taken as an indicator of racial progress and power, many of the organizers we interviewed talked instead about how this growth in Black elected officials has not necessarily led to better representation of the interests of Black poor and working class people over the last few decades. This is shaped by activists’ direct experience with a Black president in the White House who, during a period of upsurge of resistance to racial violence, failed to incorporate organizers’ demands into his agenda in any way that felt substantive to most Black movement leaders. But even before the election of Barack Obama, long-term organizers had to contend with the lived reality that Black political representation did not automatically translate into more political power to address Black community needs. In fact, in many cities, instead of Black elected officials being effective champions of a progressive racial & economic justice agenda - especially after the early wave of officials like Harold Washington who were elected by movements - it has been Black mayors, police chiefs, superintendents, etc., who have become targets of community organizing campaigns.



Many interviewees mentioned COINTELPRO and the state’s repression of Black movements since the ‘70s. Fifty years ago, Black Power emerged out of the primarily southern-based Black freedom struggle; it took many forms, but over time, the revolutionary militancy, national scale and influence of the Black Panther Party came to be emblematic of the movement’s transformation into a national, revolutionary struggle for Black liberation and the

liberation of all oppressed people. Many of the heroes and sheroes of today’s Black organizers and activists, including Assata Shakur, come from this period. In reflecting on the conditions that led to the current moment of Black political struggle, one theme amongst the interviewees was the state’s violent attack on this Black radical and revolutionary insurgency, which fundamentally weakened its level of organization, power, and impact. One interviewee pointed out that since the ‘70s global elites internationally *“squashed and/or constrained national liberation movements that were sources of support and inspiration for the US-based Black liberation struggle from the 50s through the 70s,”* (California) which undermined a key source of inspiration as well as ideological and material support for radical movements in the US. As a result of this concerted assault (including and beyond COINTELPRO), scores of key leaders were murdered, hundreds were imprisoned, movement energy was shifted into defense, internal conflicts were manipulated into intra-movement violence, and thousands were alienated by the movement’s traumas.

Instead of the liberation that these movement’s envisioned, the racist right united with economic elites, and new elite strategies of co-optation, incorporation and control were developed. By the 1990s, as many interviewees noted, conservative neoliberal politics had even gained a hold over the Democratic Party – including many elected Black Democrats. Culturally, “we went from being a community of a Black collective, to a community of individuals,” competing for scarce resources and opportunities. This in turn created more difficult conditions for Black organizing and movement-building.

3. THE IMPACT ON THE HEALTH & WELL-BEING OF BLACK BODIES AND COMMUNITIES.

“[We have to confront] ...the way that the trauma of colonialism and generations of racist violence shows up as poverty and manifests as drug addiction in our communities...” (South)

In their reflections on the conditions activists today have inherited from the last few decades, another strong theme was about the ways in which structural oppression, economic inequality, and collective trauma impact Black people at the individual level, showing up in a wide-range of supposedly ‘personal’ struggles like drug addiction, mental illness, burnout, high-stress, and family violence. Additionally, a number of interviewees named the impacts of internalized oppression in the last period, particularly the dynamic that “Too many of us have internalized the criminalization of our own people...”, and “We have inherited the racist narrative that Black people are inherently dangerous...and too often, a fear of our own people.” Thought-leaders named this capacity of the system to mobilize Black community support for conservative ‘anti-crime’ initiatives and the system of mass incarceration, by changing our own ideas about ourselves, pointed to the need for approaches to organizing and movement-building that not only seek to change dominant culture but that even within the Black community “We need a culture shift, a change in the hearts and minds of the people.” to get free.

OTHER PERSPECTIVES: ORGANIZING IN THE 80S & 90S

Two interviewees who experienced the tail end of the Black freedom movement of the ‘60s and ‘70s (and who, notably, are activist-scholar historians) challenged the idea that the Black freedom struggle peaked in the 70s and was relatively ‘weak’ until this current upsurge: *“I don't think it's ever peaked or valleyed. I think that it has moved in relationship to the conditions that the movements confront...What sometimes appears to be a valley is actually a re-organization to a new kind of conditions.” (California)* They both spoke to the important Black organizing that took place in the 80s, for example, including the National Black United Front, the National Black Independent Political Party, the Black-led multiracial mass mobilization for Jesse Jackson’s two presidential candidacies, and to the organizing against Reagan’s war on welfare that was a direct continuation of the Black-led working class welfare rights movement of the 1970s.

While it is absent from most histories of Black freedom struggle and certainly from major news headlines, the Black Radical Congress launched in 1998, was a major multi-year effort to reorganize, re-activate and consolidate organizers and activists in the Black radical tradition, after a period of successful attacks on the Black liberation movement and the US left overall, and a series of major gains by the Right in US politics. Interviewees who were active at that time see the BRC as a historic moment particularly in the fight around patriarchy and heterosexism within the Black freedom struggle; the BRC’s points of unity were strongly influenced by radical Black feminism, and the BRC’s work over the years involved explicit commitments to feminist politics, LGBT rights and the leadership Black LGBT people.

This push to look deeper than national headlines to understand the narrative of Black organizing and movement-building has important implications for how we understand the relationship of critical local grassroots organizing today that is not making headlines and the critical movement for Black Lives work that (sometimes) is.

STRENGTHS OF BLACK ORGANIZING & MOVEMENT-BUILDING

INTRODUCTION

Over the last three years, a new social movement has emerged out of the conditions and contradictions discussed in the last section. Nearly every single interviewee articulated or just assumed that “we are a movement”, reflecting a new consensus amongst Black organizers. Nearly three years after the Ferguson Uprising and four years after mass protests around the murder of Trayvon Martin, the upsurge in Black resistance has shifted in intensity but has not disappeared. The movement faces significant internal challenges and external threats. In our interviews we heard a shared sense of pride, excitement, and urgency around the need to build on the momentum that has been developed, to make sure its transformative potential is not lost. This growing social movement, a complex constellation of Black organizational forms, political tendencies and tactics increasingly being called *the movement for Black lives*, has achieved a scale of *Black mass resistance* and a level of Black popular support that the country has not witnessed since the late 1960s and early 1970s. As nearly all interviewees noted, tens of thousands of Black people have been activated and engaged in resistance to white supremacy, anti-Black racism and state violence, with a wide range of politics and tactics. Black Lives Matter is on the lips of millions of Black people. New kinds of organizations are being built and older ones are being strengthened, to sustain this new phase of struggle and grow the movement’s impact. It is a pivotal moment in the history of the Black freedom struggle. To what degree this movement will have transformative impact on the conditions of Black life in the US is being shaped and determined right now.



KEY THEMES FROM BLACK THOUGHT-LEADERS:

We asked participants several questions about the strengths of Black organizing and movement-building in this period. While two themes were the most common, there were six key themes that reflected the perspectives of most participants. Strengths of Black Organizing & movement-building in this period - key themes, in order of frequency:

1. BLACK FEMINIST & QUEER LEADERSHIP
2. DIVERSITY OF ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS & TACTICS
3. MILITANT DIRECT ACTION & THE TURN UP
4. MASS SCALE OF ACTIVIST INVOLVEMENT
5. NEW GENERATION OF RADICAL BLACK LEADERSHIP
6. NEW FORMS OF CULTURAL WORK

1. BLACK FEMINIST AND QUEER LEADERSHIP

"The centrality of gender and gender justice for BLM is in part a response to how POORLY patriarchy was confronted in previous periods-both civil rights and Black Power being fine examples of that. To be building on the clarity around national/racial oppression but understanding how important patriarchy and heterosexism are...in order for us to get where we're trying to go." (California)

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that a core strength of Black organizing and movement-building is that in this period, Black feminist, queer, cis and trans women’s leadership have been core. In cities around the country, there are more ‘out’ Black queer organizers taking on public Black community leadership than ever before. Similarly, the

leadership of Black trans women in the growing resistance to state violence has been powerful, and politically ground-breaking - although not without push-back. Building on the progress of LGBT and Black feminists from previous eras, today's Black feminist, trans and queer leadership has been a direct challenge to the remaining patriarchal, hetero-normative respectability politics of the Black political class and the backwardness of many still-explicitly sexist and anti-queer, Black "conscious", radical and even supposedly revolutionary forces . Participants argued that this Black feminist and queer intervention has been a strength not only because it advances the politics of the Black radical and Black organizing traditions in a progressive and more intersectional direction, but also because it has created political space to organize around the interests of Black people impacted by state violence who have been historically marginalized – particularly cis and trans Black women (in for example, the Say Her Name campaigns), but also all poor Black young people whose needs have been long-ignored by establishment politics.

2. THE DIVERSITY OF ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS & TACTICS



"BLACK PEOPLE ARE DOING SUCH AMAZING WORK ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. ORGANIZING NOT ONLY TO TRANSFORM SYSTEMS BUT ALSO TO BUILD NEW SYSTEMS – IN HOUSING, COOPERATIVE ECONOMICS– AND WHAT WE'RE DOING HERE AROUND REPARATIONS AND POLICING AND BUDGETS. THE OPPORTUNITIES ARE SO ABUNDANT FOR BUILDING THIS MOVEMENT." (MIDWEST)

This theme did not emerge in the first round of interviews, but showed up when we combined the 2015 and 2016 data. Participants viewed the diversity and creativity of tactics being used in this period as a strength, lifting up the emergence of new organizing approaches - integrating base-building with healing, cultural work, online organizing and social media strategies, massive direct action, and civic engagement work. In this period, there is also a new generation of Black organizers committed to new approaches to building power - building coops and urban gardens, running electoral

organizing campaigns that throw racist, unaccountable prosecutors out of office, and creating new self-organized Healing Justice spaces alongside community campaigns to expand publicly funded mental health support services. Black people are contributing to movement-building today through a wide range of organizational forms, with a rise in the number of non-hierarchical collectives, integrated on-and-offline campaigns, and decentralized networks without traditional forms of national leadership.

3. THE ROLE OF MILITANT DIRECT ACTION & THE TURN-UP

"I'm very hopeful about what we call Black Lives Matter. I think the boldness of the organizing, the rejection of the politics of respectability, the willingness to defy convention, even the confrontations with Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton were a violation of political protocol around how we are supposed to engage in electoral politics...to disrupt the status quo and put Black issues on the agenda in a very bold and unapologetic way, as opposed to going hat in hand, getting ten minutes on a calendar..." (Midwest)

Participants named clearly that a defining character of Black struggle in this period has been the scale and intensity of bold, Black-led, militant direct action. Nearly everyone we interviewed highlighted the fact that Black activists and their allies have been engaging in new, powerful mass direct actions against racist state violence, directly confronting police, disrupting business as usual, and refusing to settle for anything less than stated demands for justice. This level of militancy has been seen in all parts of the country, in every setting – in the streets, on campuses, at workplaces, and

in prisons - marking a break with the usual protest and mobilization tactics we've seen in Black politics and within community organizing in the last twenty years. In most but not all places where there has been a significant "rapid response" focus on direct action and mobilization it has been in immediate response to incidents of racist police violence, to hold officers, departments, prosecutors, and other layers of government accountable for the murder of Black people.

Participants have been inspired and shaped by this unapologetic, collective demand for a focus on Black people (and *all* Black people) whether or not they have been on the frontlines of the actions themselves in a sustained way. Most of the people interviewed for this project were already active in organizing in the Black community and for progressive change before this moment. Since the upsurge, they've had a range of roles in helping the movement for Black lives emerge, grow and build infrastructure over the last few years - as visible leaders and participants as well as behind-the-scenes supporters, trainers and mentors.

Not surprisingly, in the second round of interviews (fall 2016), there was an increase in participant reflections about the importance of a diverse set of tactics, the need for strategy, and the potential of the new Movement 4 Black Lives national policy platform to make a significant advance. Even participants responsible for training Black direct action activists articulated a nuanced view, that Black direct action is a critical approach to building power and yet is most powerful and radical when connected to a clear vision, set of politics and strategy for winning deep change.

4. THE MASS SCALE OF MOVEMENT INVOLVEMENT

"There are more people in motion directly around racial justice and state violence than there's been in at least a generation if not more than that." (Midwest)

Most interviewees pointed to the sheer strength of numbers as a strength of the current movement. Tens of thousands of Black people – possibly more – and thousands of allies/co-conspirators have grown a new level of consciousness about anti-Black racism, have been activated into Black organizing or movement work, and have been effective communicators in on-and-offline media, so that now Black Lives Matter is in the hearts, minds and conversations of tens of millions of people around the world. Prior to the *movement for Black lives*, thousands of Black people were involved in organizing efforts in their own union, community organization or political collective. However, that work lacked national visibility, shared tactics and message, and truly mass engagement. Most thought-leaders we interviewed noted the dramatic increase in both the scale of involvement and scale of actions around Black community issues. People are getting involved in so many ways, and thousands of young Black people have been activated into political participation for the first time in their lives – in ways that include, but go far beyond the most public actions. This mass participation appears to be across classes and regions, with a distinct concentration among Millennial age activists in their 20s and early 30s. The Black Lives Matter Network has over 30 chapters across the country (and a few international chapters) and is just one of a number of national Black activist or organizing networks today. One participant noted that an important indicator of this mass participation is that without formal or direct organizational support from any national entity, hundreds of Black athletes, at the high-school, college and professional levels, have taken up their own courageous actions and campaigns lifting up injustices against Black people.

5. A NEW GENERATION OF RADICAL BLACK LEADERSHIP

“We are (in 2015) in the early stages of a significant level of movement building. Thankfully people are talking about strategy, policy, and movement infrastructure.” (Midwest)

Another strong theme from participants was the emergence of a new generation of radical Black organizational leaders, at the local, state and national levels. While each had their own political trajectory, they have each been on the frontlines of mass resistance to racist police and vigilante murders, navigating complex political waters, making significant personal sacrifices and earning each other's respect along the way. Some had been local organizers with limited national experience, suddenly pushed into the national spotlight; others had already been making the shift to work beyond local struggle when Trayvon Martin was killed, or when the August 2014 Ferguson Uprising inspired key organizers to mobilize more than 500 Black people to participate in the “Freedom Ride” to Ferguson that same month. These new movement leaders have different politics but see themselves as part of the Black radical tradition, and have been building a critical part of movement infrastructure while trying to keep an eye on the big-picture, towards “building a new stage of the Black liberation struggle.” A core group had pre-existing relationships through BOLD, and the network of relationships has grown as BOLD and the movement has grown.



IT'S THE BOLDNESS,
THE INNOVATIVE,
CONFRONTATIONAL NATURE
OF THE WORK
THAT IS VERY GOOD
AND VERY EXCITING.” (MIDWEST)

Many of these new organizational leaders were Black organizers who came up in movement work before 2014, but who, alongside folks newly activated, have been ‘throwing down’ to build the movement we now see as a serious national force. Some are more visible than others, providing critical movement resources and infrastructure: savvy and politically-grounded leadership, trained organizers, direct action trainings, healing practices, rapid-response communications infrastructure, social media expertise, access to key allies, networks and funding.

6. NEW FORMS OF CULTURAL WORK

One of the dynamic parts of research is what is revealed by participants directly and indirectly. In the interview protocol participants were not asked directly about new forms of cultural work. There was no question that used this language or asked this question. However, in coding and analyzing the participants responses we stumbled on a number of themes that emerged that we could not ignore. One of these themes is what we are loosely calling “new forms of cultural work”. Under this code, we pulled in data from participants that spoke to solutions that were not traditionally associated with resistance and organizing, but that participants’ saw as essential to effective Black organizing. So many interviews referenced the importance in this period of organizing from “a commitment to Black love” and named the need for the ‘movement’ to shift its culture - away from ego-driven, individualistic competition we’ve inherited from the dominant culture - to new ways of working more collectively and inclusively, where everyone feels they belong, and “we turn up on the state, but not each other.”

In response to the question ‘*What are you most inspired by?*’ one participant responded: “*I’m most inspired by the courage of young people to resist while not having a blueprint. That is intimacy too, to go to the street and stand in love. The act of standing next to someone as they suffer, because it is your responsibility... In St. Louis, there were*

moms, out with food and water. Folks treating each other from tear gas burns to rubber bullets, setting up safe space as a refuge. People protecting each other.” (Metro NYC)

What is additionally interesting about this theme is that it did not emerge at the same location in the interview among participants. In other words, different participants raised this issue in response to different questions. In many places across the interviews, thought-leaders lifted up the role of resistance in healing both individual and collective trauma, the need even for the organizers to “be transformed in the service of the work,” and the need for political work that directly addresses how Black people have deeply internalized the racist, hetero-patriarchal norms of this country. For example one organizer, in a long introduction about the work they are doing in the south, and reflecting on “grappling with hard contradictions” offered, “As much as we have so many visionary demands on the state right now, there is a need to envision what is it going to take to culture shift, hearts and minds work amongst our people...For example, what is it going to take to engage our communities who have been impacted by the war on drugs?” (South)

This dimension of cultural work is a new layer of what might have been called building “consciousness” in past periods, explicitly naming that we need to not only transform external systems but transform our own beliefs, feelings, habits and practices in order for the day to day work to truly align with our liberatory values and our commitment to freedom. We have a question about the impact of BOLD’s unique model over the last five years on this increased attention to the role of self-transformation as part of the process of social transformation.

THE ROLE OF URBAN UPRISING AND REBELLION

“The courage and bravery of folks in Ferguson opened the door to other people across the country who were pissed off and fed up and not willing to take it anymore, to join together.” (California)



Because we noticed that even activists often conflate and confuse organized direct action efforts from more ‘spontaneous’ Black rebellions and urban uprisings (often known in the mainstream media as riots), we asked participants specifically about this form of collective resistance. Rebellions - often sparked by the brazen police murder of a young Black man - have an important role in the history of both the Black freedom struggle in general and Black working-class resistance in particular.

Participants saw rebellions as important moments which both *reflect* the unacknowledged depth of shared rage amongst poor and working-class people, and can serve as *catalysts* for sustained organizing and struggle. A number shared our view that no matter how big, broad or long an uprising is, ultimately is a matter of ongoing organization beyond the initial ‘spontaneous’ uprising period that shapes whether and to what degree a community translates the demands of a rebellion into concrete results.

While not everyone would agree that the Ferguson Uprising marked *the key moment* in launching this phase of the Black freedom movement, there was a recognition among many interviewees that the militant daily Black resistance

coming from Black residents in and around Ferguson in August of 2014 after eighteen-year-old Michael Brown was murdered by officer Darren Wilson and callously left to bleed to death for four and a-half hours, was catalytic. Full of grief and rage, with radical slogans like “*Indict! Convict! Send that killer cop to jail! The whole damn system is guilty as hell!*” young Black activists directly challenged the police and would not back down. They then sustained that challenge, day after day, for weeks, and then months. When the grief of the community was contrasted with the brute force of military occupation, hundreds of thousands of people were outraged and thousands of activists around the country were inspired. One historian we interviewed posits that it may have been the longest, sustained militant Black working class rebellion against police murder in US history, with residents taking the streets for more than one-hundred days. The national convergence to Ferguson in October of 2014 built momentum, demonstrating that something new was happening, and that even more was possible.

The Ferguson Uprising was named as important not because it was an example of sustained Black organizing, but because it was a massive upsurge in Black popular resistance, asserting a kind of militant demand for Black power which connected it not to business-as-usual politics or the pragmatic progressive policy campaigns we’ve become so accustomed to, but to the more radical history of the Black freedom and liberation movements. Assata Shakur, a leader from the ‘70s Black liberation movement and now exiled in Cuba, became relevant in a new way – especially to the sisters in the streets.

While this linkage to the Black liberation movement has provided an enormous sense of inspiration to today’s activists, more than one interviewee thought it was important to understand the Ferguson Uprising as part of the wave of popular uprisings that have popped up across the globe specifically since the financial crash of 2008, from Arab Spring to Occupy and beyond.



“Part of what we’ve seen in the last five years is reflective of shifts that we’ve seen in the global political economy... The conditions for all working-class people, including in the United States and especially for Black folks here, have been getting worse. And the response of the government to the growing crises has been, instead of doling out concessions or crumbs as they once did, to criminalize and marginalize more and more Black people... So, you had these forces coming together and it was bound to rupture.” (California)

Another interviewee noted that there was another aspect of the Ferguson Uprising that was inspiring, bold and sort of electric – the willingness of Black activists to publicly target Black people seen as holding water for white elites or upholding the status quo. Young Black people called out elders who they saw as unaccountable, and openly expressed a Black working-class rage that pointed to a more radical critique of the system, with demands that assert the neglected needs of the Black majority.

“The resurgence of organizing post-Katrina, post-Trayvon Martin, and post-Michael Brown... is really a Black class struggle because it’s not Sasha and Malia Obama who are vulnerable in the same way that a Tamir Rice

or Ayana Jones are vulnerable...So it is really a struggle by some of the most oppressed sectors of the Black community to say we will not be expendable and we will not allow our children to be murdered.” (Midwest)

This is not an attempt to make a thorough assessment of what happened in Ferguson, what ‘kicked off’ the movement, or what cities’ turn-up was the most powerful. Rather, this is simply reflecting on what we heard from many interviewees about the significance of the Ferguson Uprising and recent uprisings in general (including Baltimore, Baton Rouge, etc.) to the development of this as a movement moment.

MOVEMENT GAPS & CHALLENGES

INTRODUCTION

When we interviewed these Black thought-leaders in the fall of 2015 and 2016, they articulated a long and serious list of concerns about the direction and impact of Black organizing work and Black movement-building in this period. We were moved by the level of personal commitment and determination to addressing the concerns, for the sake of Black people and fundamental social change in this country. Throughout the interviews we heard excitement about the movements’ great potential, alongside a hunger for the next stage in movement infrastructure, alignment and power, and a readiness to face whatever may come.

While the rising white nationalist, right-wing populist movement was named as a significant external threat, few predicted or expected the election of Donald Trump. We cannot assume how or whether participants would shift their perspectives now, given the new political reality, except to know that the collective courage, resilience and commitment will remain and possibly even blossom during such trying times.

Participants named five main challenges and gaps in Black organizing and movement-building today.

MOVEMENT GAPS & CHALLENGES - KEY THEMES, IN ORDER OF FREQUENCY

- 1. LACK OF ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY FOR BLACK ORGANIZING
- 2. NEED FOR MOVEMENT STRATEGY
- 3. NEED FOR POLITICAL/IDEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT
- 4. NEED FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND “POLITICAL MATURITY”
- 5. INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

“THERE ARE GAPS IN POLITICAL EDUCATION, GAPS IN DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE BASE-BUILDING, IN OUR ABILITY TO DEVELOP MEANINGFUL NETWORK AND RELATIONSHIPS- SO THAT FOLKS IN THE MOVEMENT ARE OPERATING AS A MOVEMENT AND ARE TREATING EACH OTHER WITH A LEVEL OF DIGNITY AND TRUST. THERE'S GAPS IN DEVELOPING SHARED PRINCIPLES AND SHARED STRATEGY.”

-(MIDWEST)



1. BLACK OF ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY FOR BLACK ORGANIZING.

“We are always spread too thin, and moving too fast. (South)

*“Black organizing is severely under-resourced...Black programs, services—I mean compared to other groups.”
(California)*

While some interviewees were more positive than others about the state of Black organizing infrastructure, everyone shared the basic perspective that the existing Black organizing infrastructure is severely under-resourced. Decades of failure to invest in Black organizing means the scale of Black rage and courage in the streets vastly outweighs the scale and strength of Black movement-building infrastructure. Some interviewees pointed to the tragic failure to invest in Black organizing by liberal and even progressive foundations and donors, while others pointed to the failure of mainstream Black advocacy organizations to invest in grassroots organizing with poor and working class Black people. As one interviewee with a national outlook put it, the reality is that *“there is just nowhere near enough Black organizing going on and we have too few Black-led grassroots organizations with sustained organizing programs.”* (California)

There are new Black collectives, new decentralized national networks, and new formations that are engaging thousands of Black activists, but many interviewees were concerned about how they can be more connected to local, sustainable and organized bases of Black leadership. Interviewees were clear and unequivocal: Not enough energy and resources, even in this moment, are going into Black organizing and building Black mass organizations of the most-impacted people. “We are called to be everywhere, to respond to everything” but there are not enough skilled organizers to go out and deploy in all the places they are needed and not enough resources to hire them. We do not have all the pieces of a healthy movement eco-system that we need – with local Black organizing institutions being the most important foundation.

Concern about this growing and yet still under-developed Black organizing infrastructure was two-fold. Most interviewees were concerned that today’s Black organizing efforts are “stretched far too thin”, compromising both organizer’s personal health and the sustainability of organizations’ work. And they were concerned that even *before* the current period, the lack of stronger local Black base-building work across the country means that we now have an inadequate infrastructure for absorbing new activists, developing new leaders in ways that are democratic and accountable to community’s immediate and long-term interests. As one southern organizer put it *“There is a spirit of activism but not of organizing. Folks don’t have political homes to walk out their politics and don’t have the experience of being a part of an organization, where you have accountability to the work.”*

One dynamic to note here was raised by a few organizers that the critique of the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC) has a strong influence amongst Black activists today (and in the movement more broadly, one could add), and there is a strong interest in alternatives to nonprofit paid movement work and a deep commitment to non-hierarchical, democratic spaces. At the same time, there is a related anti-leadership and anti-organization political tendency in US movements today that can work against efforts to build ongoing community organizing institutions that build real power. Working together with the reality that there are many unaccountable and undemocratic organizations in Black (and other) communities, some organizers trained to “build organization as a foundation for building movement” find themselves in tension with other Black activists. It is significant that while most thought-leaders interviewed for this report work as paid staff for movement non-profit organizations, many share a critique of the limits of nonprofit paid

work for long-term transformation, and ultimately want to see the growth of powerful, democratic Black mass organizations in various forms, the most radical being the least likely to have official “nonprofit status” in the long-term.

2. NEED FOR STRATEGY

“People get up when something happens, and we need to have more sustained efforts...We are too often reacting to the latest crime against our people. These days, we are trying to be more proactive.” (Midwest)

“So we’re in a place where if we can dream it, the potential to make it real is there. We can have more than a symbolic win. We can actually win. We can actually achieve layers of governance. We can actually transform the way that we interact internally. We can actually exert real power—if we stay organized. If we stay disciplined. If we can actually align on strategy. I mean it’s a lot of big ifs but I think so much is possible now.” (Midwest)

Across the country there is a deep hunger for national alignment and a sense of united national direction.

A strong theme among thought-leaders we interviewed was the concern that the power of the movement for Black lives and its ultimate impact will require a shift from highly-responsive action to the collective development of movement *strategy*. There is a parallel hunger for more bottom-up, decentralized ‘alignment’ and not so much old-school “top-down coordination.” Everyone shared the view that a core strength of the movement has been Black activists’ willingness to ‘turn up’, resist the status quo, and confront state power with militancy. From the spontaneous uprisings around specific police murders, to the carefully planned direct actions, the upsurge in Black resistance in the streets is inspiring, powerful, and necessary. At the same time, several interviewees pointed out that even the most militant direct actions are by themselves insufficient to building power and creating transformative change. And the energy needed to carry out direct action is like helium in a balloon - it can blow up big but doesn't last forever. In addition, some interviewees connected the need to expand grassroots organizing with building political support for militant direct action, so as not to risk alienating the communities that activists are struggling for. As these interviews were taking place (between 2015-2016), this shift was already beginning to take place, but barriers to a higher level of pro-active, strategic movement alignment continue to exist. Many interviewees spoke to the transformative and healing aspect of direct action, which is part of why they are so inspiring and contagious. And even those most personally involved in some of the direct actions to date were concerned about the need to pivot, to focus more on how to articulate “what we really want, our collective freedom dreams” in order to drive the next phase of strategy, campaigns and hopefully, a transformative stage of movement wins. How do we ensure that we are not “organizing from a place of despair”, but organizing from our highest visions, so that we can shape transformative campaigns and demands that lift up our sense of hope while increasing our power to fight and win?



A STRONG THEME AMONG THOUGHT-LEADERS WE INTERVIEWED WAS THE CONCERN THAT THE POWER OF THE MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES AND ITS ULTIMATE IMPACT WILL REQUIRE A SHIFT FROM HIGHLY-RESPONSIVE ACTION TO THE COLLECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF MOVEMENT STRATEGY.

“We limit ourselves based on what we think is possible because of the political climate or structures...and we have had a tendency to name what we don’t want. But now, we [need to] really name what we want...”
(Midwest)

“We need to develop alternatives to policing plans, strategies for building autonomous economies.” -
(California)

“Our generation, we’ve not been developed to think about what alternatives are or what the world or society that we are trying to build is. We have very sharp critiques of how fucked up the world is but when we think about what our vision of liberation will actually look like, deeply believing that is possible, and mapping out the steps that are necessary to get there, I don’t think that we’ve been trained to do that.” (California)

In discussing the need for movement “strategy,” some thought-leaders named the need for a shared agenda across geography - both *agitational demands* like national reparations that are unlikely to be won in the near-term but that help people imagine radical, alternatives to mainstream reform efforts, and specific policy demands at the local, state and federal level that movement organizers can unite around, and struggle to win. (Responding to this need, a number of the thought-leaders involved in this report came together with many others to develop the national Movement for Black Lives Policy Platform (www.m4bl.net). It does not replace the need for shared strategy, but a shared national agenda is a remarkable feat and a major political advance.)

Others specifically named that collective “strategy” is needed to shift the balance of power at a national scale - *“We are moving campaigns and messages forward; but we are shifting the balance of power? I don’t think we are.”* (Midwest) One interviewee pointed out that *“We know more about Black freedom tactics than we do about the history (or future) of Black freedom strategy.”* (NYC) In other words - we have pride in past freedom fighters, but we lack an understanding and an assessment of the strategies used - whether they be from the southern civil rights movement or from revolutionary organizations like the Black Panther Party. What strategies made an impact, which did not, and why?

3. “WOKE BUT NEW”- ACCELERATING THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NEW ACTIVISTS & EMERGING LEADERS

The thought-leaders interviewed for this project overwhelmingly shared excitement and pride about the new wave of radicalized Black activists and leaders, and were wrestling with the new challenges this upsurge presents, especially given the pre-existing limits of organizing infrastructure. While many of the people interviewed are themselves part of a new layer of ‘movement’ leaders, having even 5-10 years of organizing experience before this moment gives them a different perspective than leaders who first emerged in the movement for Black lives uprisings and upsurge since about 2014.



Participants talked about the critical need for intentional leadership development - skill-building, political education and personal development integrated into organizing efforts - and also named some underlying reasons why more not happening: the pace of the work is so fast; “we feel we have to respond to every murder and crisis”; we need more developed, Black trainers; and sometimes there is not enough “owning up” to what we don’t know or haven't yet learned. One interviewee, a relatively young movement leader who has been building a new Black organizing project in this period reflected, “Unlike our Black activist spaces, Black organizing requires intensive leadership development. That is, the belief that through leadership development we can actually not only transform ourselves but transform the world particularly through our organizing, as we build relationships with each other.” (Midwest) This emphasis on development was broadly shared:

“The internet has affected Black organizing, so we have a generation of woke leaders, developing fast; they have more than enough ability, but not enough concrete skills yet....And from our standpoint engaging Black queer and trans folks, you know the identity politics have been one of the most challenging things to move folks beyond.” (South)

“There is so much we haven’t been taught, about our own history, our own resistance, that can help us understand where we are and need to go.” (Midwest)

Of course, development happens through the intense experiences of struggle on the ground, through concrete practice, trial and error. Participants were making a case for intentional training over time, where we get an opportunity to sharpen our own ideas and skills for the sake of collective struggle - not for the sake of academic inquiry. A few interviewees specifically named the need for more attention to developing out people’s politics - our ideas about Black community problems and solutions - and then developing shared work together that comes from the basis of political unity. (This includes but is not limited to what, in some left traditions is called ‘ideological development’). For example, one movement veteran named “*The movement has an obligation to wrestle together with complex ideas and complex analyses about the current moment. How is racial capitalism working? How are security regimes working?...This work is not luxurious or idolized, but it’s essential. We do need to mobilize resources [but] the process of political consensus building...is a different kind of resource that we need...If you have 10,000 people who agree with a concept, even if they don't know how to organize a press conference, you can still make an enormous impact.*” (Midwest)

There is plenty of evidence, however that the challenges around the lack of intentional and ongoing leadership and political development space is not simply due to “activist culture”, because when political education has been provided in accessible ways, the response has been strong and sometimes even overwhelming. Study groups have begun popping up, more activists are looking to join cadre organizations where revolutionary training includes regular study, and BOLD program participants have consistently asked for *more* political education.

“PEOPLE ARE FRESH INTO THE WORK, BUT THERE IS NOT ENOUGH DEVELOPMENT, NOT ENOUGH SHARP ANALYSIS OR SKILLS. [THIS LEADS TO] A SKEWED UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT TAKES, AND AS A RESULT, WE’RE WITNESSING A DISBANDING OF GROUPS THAT POPPED UP OR LOSING FOLKS WHO ARE FRUSTRATED. EVERY DAY IS NOT A MASSIVE PROTEST; WHAT DO WE DO TO STRATEGIZE, WHEN IT’S NOT HOT? WHAT IS THE CAMPAIGN?”

- (MIDWEST)



4. PERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL STRUGGLES

Nearly every interviewee had something to say about the challenge of managing conflicts in movement spaces, although few went into any level of detail about examples. We know of course, as in any movement eco-system, that there are conflicts driven by ego and personality, political differences in strategy or tactics, and underlying competition over resources and public influence. There was a broadly shared concern about the growing movement's capacity to productively resolve conflicts - especially when the distinctions between political differences and interpersonal beef is murky. On one hand, some named the tensions that arise when there are criticisms of movement leaders but few want to risk undermining movement support by bringing the concerns to light. And on the other hand, other interviewees named the "shaming, call-out culture" that can sometimes reserve the harshest and least-compassionate criticism for people within the movement, which has a toxic impact on movement culture overall.

"Our enemy is going to seek to disrupt us and to undermine our credit. Our credit with each other. They are going to seek to divide and conquer. And right now I think it's so very easy. If we don't have a very strong core that holds us together, this moment could be lost... So I do worry about some of the internal tensions. I think you always have opportunism when you have a movement that's highly visible and is getting attention from a lot of people in power. And I think that many people are figuring out principled ways to confront opportunism. But it's difficult because you don't want to lower yourself to the level of criticizing individuals or mudslinging or whatever that might be received as." (Midwest)

Interviewees familiar with the history of state repression of radical movements in the US named the political importance of directly addressing internal movement tensions. "We need to learn from our past...We know there are outside forces that will try to come to blow up what we are trying to do, but we don't want to implode ourselves in this process." One of the greatest threats to movement-building has been the government's divide and conquer tactics that build off lack of trust, lack of direct and principled communication (i.e. spreading unfounded hearsay) and movement leaders' tendency to close ranks when under attack.

Others discussed the challenge of living up the movement's "high-impact, low ego" aspirations in a society dominated by individualistic culture. People have ego and ambition for themselves, and when scared or threatened or challenged by something new, our tendency is to point fingers, isolate and/or take conflict into an unhelpful interpersonal 'beef' realm - instead of bringing it into collective spaces for struggle, principled debate, and emotional vulnerability that can build relationships for the long-haul.

Having relatively weak Black organizing infrastructure means that there are not enough spaces in which Black activists and organizers can experience the process of building working relationships of trust, political alignment and accountability over time, through times of low and high intensity. Activist spaces are notoriously difficult contexts in which to address conflicts, since there generally aren't clear membership requirements, transparent leadership roles or long-term participation. Trusted community leaders, elders, mediators and 'healers' are in high demand helping address conflicts within and between movement formations. Few organizers have deep experience and practice with "principled struggle over political differences" or mediation and accountability processes that "address harm in a real way but provide everyone with the opportunity to transform, so that none of us are thrown away." While BOLD stands out as a critical piece of connective tissue that has been helpful, and its impact far exceeds its budget, it remains significantly under-resourced itself. (See Section on the Role of BOLD.)

EXTERNAL MOVEMENT THREATS

"If there was a COINTELPRO before, now the time is made for it. People can intercede in our movements and conversations simply by logging onto Twitter. They can insert themselves. They can change conversations. You can feed misinformation in (new) ways...And because there's such a great amount of weight given to that space, it really does undermine our ability to relate personally." (Midwest)

When interviewees responded to our questions about movement challenges and threats, most focused on the internal movement dynamics discussed in the previous section. Amongst the responses about external threats, there were three themes most consistently mentioned.

1. GROWING OPPOSITION & ATTACKS BY THE WHITE NATIONALIST RIGHT

2. ELITES' ATTEMPTS TO REINTERPRET THE MESSAGES OF MOVEMENT LEADERS AND CO-OPT ITS RADICAL POLITICS

3. STATE REPRESSION - 21ST CENTURY COINTELPRO

1. GROWING OPPOSITION & ATTACKS BY THE WHITE NATIONALIST RIGHT

Even before the election of Donald Trump, a number of participants articulated a strong concern about the growth of an organized, politically powerful, well-armed and sometimes violent white supremacist right-wing over the last period. More than most of the participants, they were sounding the alarm that Black organizers in general and the movement for Black lives nationally needed to deal with the Right as a serious movement threat. (While the existence of the extreme racist right is not new, it is taking a new form in this historical period of white anxiety about the decline of the white Empire, downward mobility, the new majority of people of color, the first Black president and rising resistance among Black people and immigrant people of color.) Movement leaders we interviewed were concerned not only about people's safety, but also about the degree to which the racist backlash against "Black Lives Matter" will threaten the political trajectory of the moment.

With Donald Trump as president, openly in alignment with the white nationalist right and its base of popular support, new assessments about the nature of this threat are taking place throughout the movement.

2. ELITES' ATTEMPTS TO DEFINE MOVEMENT LEADERS AND CO-OPT RADICAL POLITICS

"It becomes very easy to manipulate that situation because I think people in positions of power can hand-pick or cherry-pick what demands, and platforms and what individuals they want to deal with to look like they're being responsive. But if one doesn't have a constituency and mechanisms of accountability, then being Black and talking about Black people is just being Black and talking about Black people." (Midwest)

"[There is a] great deal of risk for us if we are not very intentional about being transparent with each other, about being accountable to one another. They can and will disrupt us and I don't want to say by buying us off but by rewarding some of us with attention and some of us with none." (Midwest)

"I want younger activists to be clear...don't confuse the media representation of Ferguson and its importance as a newsworthy space with actual work on the ground. Because sometimes you do your very best work when you don't have that kind of visibility." (California)

You don't have to believe in conspiracy theories to worry about how the dominant institutions of society will impact the development of this movement, and there is a long history of healthy skepticism amongst Black people of “Black faces in high places” who undermine Black radicalism for their own interests. Some activists are named movement ‘leaders’ by the media and liberal elites but are not necessarily ‘leaders’ at the grassroots. Multiple interviewees worried about this power of corporate media to “name our leaders for us” and frame movement politics for us, especially when we don't have more developed infrastructure to promote national leaders ourselves, support them and hold them accountable to movement interests. In thinking about the need for democratic accountability, one veteran on the west coast who we interviewed felt compelled to note “Twitter followers are *not* accountable bases.”

A number of interviewees named the contradictory role of philanthropy – the funds are needed (and some pointed out – owed), but how they get distributed tends to be divisive and feed competition rather than build unity. Similarly, the culture of social media both supports the movement – providing ways for videos to go viral and the word to get to millions of people instantly, for example – but also harms the movement when people forget the need to build “off-line bases” of real grassroots power alongside the online ‘digital organizing’ campaigns.

The danger of opportunism is real in any social movement, especially in the media-dominated world of today. However, there is also a general uneasiness among many organizers and activists about any movement leader who gains public visibility and influence, and sometimes an unhelpful assumption that a person has ‘sold-out’, given in to self-interest above collective self-interest, without any actual investigation into such accusations. For the sake of movement relationships and political security, it is clear we need a stronger emphasis on the political importance of respectfully going directly ‘go to the source’ when accusations begin, when motivations are questioned, and before false ideas take on a life of their own, erupt into toxic unresolvable conflicts and/or are exploited by the opposition. More than one interviewee pointed out that the more “we can build democratic Black institutions, where we are accountable to each other” the less the movement is vulnerable to these threats and challenges.

3. STATE REPRESSION & 21ST CENTURY COINTELPRO

“The state’s militarized response to protest and organizers creates fear.” (California)

“In this climate, the righteous anger of BLM activists, they are called terrorists...We see this as setting the stage for the next wave of political prisoners. We can't change what they think, but we have to grapple with the tactics that we use. Be strategic about keeping out people out of jail, knowing that is the state's response every time we turn up.” (South)



State repression of Black activists is real, and documented both historically and today. How the state will respond as the movement gains deeper footing and builds power, was a strong concern named by many activists, especially those with some historical perspective on radical Black organizing, even before the election of Donald Trump.

At the same time, in this new era of Trump presidency, the possibility of increased state repression of Black and other radical activists is likely to increase, and in fact there are signs of danger that the US may be on the road to fascism. New threat assessments are being developed every day and we are certain that if we made third round of interviews now (in early 2017), this particular threat would likely rise to the top of participant's reflections.


OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

While interviewees were united around a number of key themes shared in this report, their reflections on the opportunities ahead were remarkably diverse:

1. OPPORTUNITIES TO DEEPEN AND EXPAND EXISTING WORK:

- support and train more Black organizers
- develop the new young folks coming up, there are emerging leaders & organizers who are on fire
- invest in spaces for more popular and political education at every level - new activists, experienced organizers, and people ready for life-long, cadre-level commitments
- deepen the connections between the M4BL National Platform and local organizing
- create spaces for national political alignment that is driven by base organizations
- expand and strengthen Black community base-building within Black-Brown unity building projects; strengthen Black leadership within multi-racial POC formations
- expand organizing in the South and double-down support for all the promising work there
- to define our freedom dreams, vision of winning and then to develop strategy beyond campaign and organizational strategy, to movement strategy and to long-term strategy for really winning our vision of a liberated society

"ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE IF WE HAVE A STRATEGY AND A VISION FOR WHAT TRYING TO DO, WHERE ARE WE GOING? AND AN ANALYSIS OF WHAT IS HAPPENING. FOR SO MANY PEOPLE THIS MOMENT IS AN AWAKENING. FOR SO MANY PEOPLE, THE GROUNDWORK HAS BEEN LAID." (WEST COAST)



2. OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD NEW ALLIANCES, GROW NEW RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

- Organizations need to work more together, get out the boxes we are isolated in, around our city or issue
- New national platforms can lift up and build new scales of support for local grassroots Black organizing.
- Move beyond mobilizing ally-ship; provide more Black leadership to multi-racial movement spaces in order to move the progressive agenda to the left
- Organize white working class people around racial and economic justice at the same time

3. OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPERIMENT

- new ways to identify and run slates of progressive, movement-accountable Black people to build local and state power
- replicate Jackson Kush plan in other strategic areas
- build up more alternative, community-controlled economic and community institutions
- integrate more transformative, healing practices (like somatics) into organizing work
- create new forms of independent political organizations outside of the Democratic Party that can make tactical alliances as needed, as part of a broader, transformative strategy



III. BOLD PARTICIPANTS REFLECT ON PROGRAM IMPACT AND THE FUTURE

THE BOLD PARTICIPANT SURVEY

EARLY ENGAGEMENT- BECOMING A BOLDER

FULLY COMMITTED- THE BOLD EXPERIENCE

LEADING LEADERS- THE IMPACT OF BOLD STAFF

LEAVING THE NEST- OUTCOMES OF BOLD TRAINING

TAKING STOCK- PERSPECTIVES ON BOLD'S CONTRIBUTION TO BLACK ORGANIZING

SOWING AND GROWING- SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

NATIONAL GATHERING FOCUS GROUP 2016

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the impact of BOLD at its five-year mark was a priority for BOLD leadership and discussions of how to bring this evaluation to fruition happened over a year period. What developed was a plan to discover the hidden narratives and unspoken stories from past and current participants and staff. The process included interviews, an online survey, and a focus group. The following section includes analysis of the results of The BOLD Participant Survey and a summary of focus group findings. Many of the BOLD stakeholders who participated in this aspect of the project echoed themes from the thought leaders interviews while shining light on the unique role BOLD plays for them in their personal development within the context of a broader movement milieu.

THE BOLD PARTICIPANT SURVEY

The survey was administered online from February 1st to March 7th. It included 30 questions that were developed with the input of the research team and BOLD leadership. These questions fell into six categories:

1. Demographics/Participant Profile
2. Early engagement and onboarding
3. Perspectives on programming
4. Perspectives on personal impact
5. Perspectives on Black Organizing
6. Suggestions for program improvement

WHO COMPLETED THE SURVEY?¹

The survey was sent to 140 former and current participants and staff by email. Seventy-seven people responded (55%). Of the respondents, 68% were in the Directors and Leaders program, 28% were in the Amandla! Program and 4% were trainers. Respondents represented cohort years 2012-2015, with the most respondents coming from the 2012 cohort. Most (88%) were still involved in movement work.

From 2012-2015, there were 142 participants in Amandla! and the Director's Training. Of those responding to the survey, the average age upon entering the program was 35. The youngest participant was 20; the oldest was 64.

¹ Q1, Q2, Q6, Q7, Q15

EARLY ENGAGEMENT- BECOMING A BOLDER

Q3. WHAT WERE SOME OF THE REASONS YOU DECIDED TO APPLY?

Word of mouth has been a powerful tool for resistance, so it is no surprise that BOLD releases applications through its Alumni first. As a result, most participants heard about the program through the grapevine. In the survey, several expressed that recommendations from Black organizers they trusted led to their applying for the program.

Other common responses included the opportunity to learn amongst other black leaders, the desire to have a supportive community, and a place to obtain advanced leadership/organizer training.

Many explained that they were feeling “lonely” and “disconnected” in their work and “burnt-out” and that by applying they hoped to “rejuvenate” and “grow”. As some shared in the focus group, training within an all-black space was a unique opportunity that they had never experienced and played a role in their interest in the program (Only 9% of respondents work in all black organizations²).

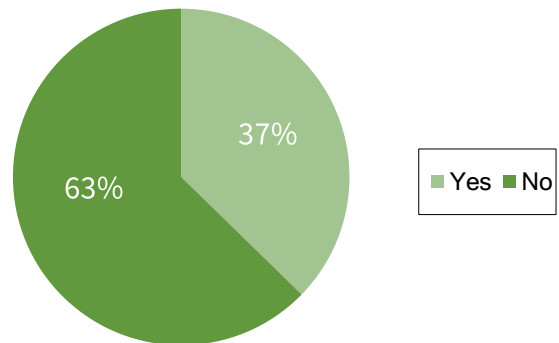
“I heard it was fantastic! I wanted to be around Black people who were doing similar work. I wanted to improve my leadership and be a stronger contributor to my organization and to the overall movement”

There are always more applicants than slots, and the review process is extensive. Applications are scored and those selected complete a one-hour interview.

Q4. WERE THERE BARRIERS TO THE APPLICATION PROCESS/YOUR PARTICIPATION? FOR EXAMPLE, CHALLENGES AROUND TRAVEL, SETTING ASIDE TIME, ETC?

Applying and subsequently participating in the program was not without its challenges for some. Thirty-seven percent of those responding to this question indicated that they had to overcome barriers such as taking time off from work, obtaining childcare, and gathering the money required (either themselves or their organizations) to participate fully.

Were there barriers to the application process/your participation?



Some selected quotes are below:

“The obvious challenges were around resources. Otherwise, the process was straightforward. My organization saw the value in my participation and with thoughtful planning they were able to make the retreats possible.”

“I felt the most anxious about the cost. Part of the program was during a very intense first week of my job's summer program which was hard for my co-workers.”

² Q16. Do you work in a Black-only organization or in a multi-racial organization?

FULLY COMMITTED- THE BOLD EXPERIENCE

One doesn't go through BOLD- one becomes BOLD. The program pedagogy marries somatics and leadership training with the purpose of creating a transformative organizing model in order to develop leaders who are grounded politically and energetically. The tools used throughout the almost 100 hour program include body-centered practices to promote awareness, dignity, and confidence. In addition to helping participants become better at their jobs, they also became better at understanding how they show up in their work and how that embodiment impacts their effectiveness. When asked *which of the practices most impacted their personal journey and why* (Q8, Q9), many practices were named:

“Doing Jo, developing a personal routine, developing a vision & commitments for myself, Black Love”

“The Jo has been the most powerful practice. The other, as much as I struggle with it, is centering.”

“The somatics and political education”

Jo and Centering were the favorites, with over 40% of respondents listing these practices as most impactful. Participants also highly valued the commitment making process.

REFLECTING ON COMMITMENTS

“At first I was skeptical regarding whether any of them would be helpful. As it turned out, however, all of them were and still are extremely helpful. I reflect on my commitments every day. The time to identify what I am a commitment to was invaluable. It allows me to center my decision-making by keeping the main thing the main thing- it's freeing in a lot of ways. Knowing what I'm a commitment to not only reminds me who I am, but it reminds me who I'm not. Additionally, the centering practices, particularly the jo (full disclosure- I practice the jo regularly, but I don't always do the full 31 kata) allow me to reflect on how my actions move me towards or away from my commitments.”

Commitment making holds a firm place as key ritual in BOLD's pedagogy. The commitment is a personal mission statement declaring the individual's values, priorities, and purpose that is documented, edited and is central to the identity of each participant. One becomes known by this declaration- when commitments are spoken they begin with the phrase “I AM a commitment to...”

What also emerged from these questions was a sentiment that some were skeptical about these tools when they entered the program. However, all respondents expressed that they experienced positive results and explained that the practices were significant for a number of reasons. Their responses can be grouped into the following themes; stress management, self-awareness, personal transformation, and discipline. A sampling of responses is below:

“I see myself as a warrior and organizing as warrior work. I was looking for mastery. Bold aligned with my personal vision of myself and my professional self. I was eager to learn b/c I wanted to be a better leader and servant to black people. The language and ideology gave me new understanding. It fed my desire and built my will for transformation. I wanted transformation.”

“It has really changed how I take on my leadership and work. It has made me more conscious of myself, others and my environment.”

“These practices were concrete things I learned to do to help me align my values with how I actually show up in personal and professional relationships.”

“At the time, I didn't understand the significance of these practices but looking back, it has been something that I've been able to take with me no matter where I am.”

As a follow up question, respondents were asked; *What practices could you have done without? And Why?* (Q10, Q11) Only 14% indicated that they could do without a practice, but of those who answered, the hand on heart exercise was mentioned most often as uncomfortable due to the touching aspect. Also, a few could have done without the jo practice. One mentioned that carrying the jo staff on the plane was a challenge!

LEADING LEADERS- THE IMPACT OF BOLD STAFF



FROM THE TRAINER PERSPECTIVE...

“BOLD REPRESENTS THE MOST EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION OF PERSONAL, GROUP AND SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION I'VE SEEN TO DATE, AND I HAVE A LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO BLACK FOLKS AND BLACK LIBERATION. HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE PART OF DEVELOPING BOLD AND BRINGING ITS APPROACH TO SUPPORTING BLACK LEADERS IS COMPLETELY ALIGNED WITH MY LIFE PATH.”

The BOLD staff includes multiple support members and interns as well as a core team of four trainers, three of which have been there since the start of the program. The impact of BOLD founder Denise Perry and her leadership team is wide in scope and layered in the minds and hearts of the BOLD participants. Questions 12 and 13 of the survey asked respondents to describe that impact. This report format doesn't allow adequate space for all the narrative provided (over 240 lines of text), but some selected quotes follow:

“I am not the same for having known this team of people. They literally saved my life and helped me find the courage to bring more of myself into the world.

“They are some of the most committed intentional compassionate and grounding people I know.”

“Just being open and available as training team. I was especially moved by seeing them in practice alongside us, showing that this isn't something you can just master but it takes time and we are all in our own transformation.”

“I appreciated their honesty, passion and knowledge in the space.”

“Each spoke to and/or represented the possibilities of overcoming fear and self doubt.”

“The Bold facilitators created a safe space for me to let much of my guard down and be real. I was rarely afraid to speak truth. The healers were also strong enough to be with my pain. That is very important for Black leaders who often feel like there is no room for our pain.”

“They showed me what it looks like to roll with a serious and supportive team dedicated to the full development of all of our potential— with no shade and with judgment, filled with Black Love.”

Transformative leadership isn't just a buzz phrase- it is a well-researched modality that has been defined as "the one that creates valuable and positive changes in its followers."³ Among the attributes associated with the transformational leadership process, trust has been acknowledged as one important factor that can lead to change. It is this factor that respondents are communicating when they use phrases like "I felt cared for", "I was welcomed", "they encouraged me", "she related personally".

In observing Denise and her team in three trainings from 2011- 2016 it is very clear that trust plays a major role in trainer-trainee relationships and the research supports the tremendous positive outcomes BOLD participants reported in the survey.⁴

LEAVING THE NEST- OUTCOMES OF BOLD TRAINING

"BOLD is guiding folks on how to transform themselves and their organizations while providing accountability to shaping and sharing best practices." -Denise Perry

After the Jo-ing, Black Love, and camaraderie of training; it's time to go back to work. BOLDers are employed at dozens of organizations across the country and when they return it feels different. Their organizations haven't changed- they have. They're more skilled, more focused, and have a clear understanding of the how's and why's of black liberation. When asked to describe the organizational successes that they attribute to their time with BOLD (Q21) three themes emerged.

1. THEIR LEADERSHIP SKILLS BENEFITTED THEIR ORGANIZATION.

One respondent summed it up in one sentence: "Showing up more powerful everywhere." Showing up transformed into centered and skilled leaders was considered a success within itself and many linked this mindset to better work relationships, increased ability to manage conflict and improved decision-making. One person commented "I may have left the work and my organization in a bad place in my previous state of being."

2.THEY MADE CHANGES IN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE/MINDSET

These changes include valuing the importance of healing practices more, incorporating a stronger racial justice analysis, and increased willingness to confront patriarchy.

3.THEY HAD CAMPAIGN VICTORIES

They used BOLD resources for better organizing. Better organizing led to more wins and more wins means tangible results for black liberation. Some examples include: The organization Women on the Rise- had the state of Georgia ban the practice of asking people to indicate if they had a criminal record on job applications. Another organization won a campaign in 2015 that shifted money away from the Sheriff's office to community based organizations to provide offender reentry services.

One respondent spoke in depth about experiencing many of these successes...

"I have led a transformation of my org, with a tripling of our membership in NC and a move towards a new political direction to be voted on in March. In NC our members have won leadership of the local teacher's union and grown the

³ Dvir T., Eden D., Avolio B. J., Shamir B. (2002). Impact of transformational leadership on follower development and performance: A field experiment. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45, 735-744.

⁴ Braun S., Peus C., Weisweiler S., Frey D. (2013). Transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and team performance: A multilevel mediation model of trust. *Leadership Quarterly*, 24, 270-283.

union membership, prevent bus fare increases, protected teacher tenure from Republican attack, saved 185 teaching jobs, and helped relocate 150 families evicted from their homes. All this has been possible because of what I've learned and the new leadership skills and presence I've been able to bring to my org(s). I am very clear that BOLD helped me identify how and where I can make my best contribution to movement, rather than just grinding out in places that are either not strategic or not my area of greatest contribution.”

The purpose of BOLD is fulfilled when every individual chooses to do movement work from a healthy and embodied place. Organizers live at the intersection of a perfect storm of pressures and demands that make self-care difficult. Turnover rates for non-profits⁵ are the second highest in the country and burnout is difficult to prevent. After participating in BOLD, 87% of survey respondents are still involved in organizing/movement work. And 67% said that BOLD impacted their decision to stay or leave movement work. BOLD is not only impacting leaders' work outcomes; it is also leading to improved life outcomes. When asked to examine personal successes as a direct result of their program participation, the answers were very rich and several respondents listed multiple successes. The following four themes emerged:

1. BECOMING ENGAGED IN A COMMUNITY

It's ironic that those engaged in community work lack a supportive work community but that was the case for most participants before joining BOLD. They explained that they valued the connections and support from other members as much, if not more than the practical skills they gained.

2. STARTING OR ACCOMPLISHING SOMETHING NEW

“I was ordained as a deacon, I got married, I was able to move (because before BOLD I felt trapped), I graduated from undergraduate school, and my in switching jobs my earnings per year increased 10x.”

From ordinations to launching new projects, so many participants directly attributed their newfound confidence to take risks on new ventures to their BOLD experience.

3. TRANSFORMATION AND GREATER SELF AWARENESS

The majority of responses fell into this category. They wrote so much about the significance of the deep transformative experience that they had while participating and how that experience helped them create a new way of being in their day-to-day lives. BOLD carried them forward

“While I am still on the journey I am so much further along then when I started with BOLD and that alone is such a huge personal success. I can honestly say Bold has given me the tools I need to deal with my situations that have come up in my life since participating in the program...”

4. IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS

“My relationships at work have changed as a result of me being able to learn how to center, and act from a place of love as opposed to anger.”

⁵ <http://www.nonprofitr.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2015-Nonprofit-Employment-Practices-Survey-Results-1.pdf>

TAKING STOCK: PERSPECTIVES ON BOLD’S CONTRIBUTION TO BLACK ORGANIZING

BOLD is the first organization to train leaders using their unique model: Leadership Development + Political Education + Somatics + a Black-only space. But a model must be more than the sum of its parts. It becomes significant when it produces tangible impacts in the real world. In one of the final sections of the survey, participants were asked to write about three contributions BOLD has made to Black organizing in the US (Q27). Their responses focus on two areas: impacts on those who went through the training and the impact on the movement for black liberation. The responses overwhelmingly indicated the participants experienced deep change. They used words like “empowered,” “stronger,” “healing” and “courage”. When speaking on movement impact they recognized BOLD as the catalyst for Black Lives Matter and its fundamental role in providing the physical space and methodology for large-scale trainings.

ON INDIVIDUALS	ON MOVEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounding in a theoretical framework • Black Love • Healing from trauma • Essential practices / Somatics • Avoiding Burnout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incubating Black Lives Matter • Network and connection • Creating Space for leadership development for black organizers specifically • Tools of transformation

Specific people were listed as contributions to Black organizing: Denise Perry, Thomas Assefa and Nikki Lewis.

Below are some select quotes from over 140 contributions listed:

*“BOLD has given so many Black organizers a **new-found confidence, sense of commitment, support and love** that has been the silent driving force behind the current unapologetically Black movement sweeping the country and the world.”*

*“It's created a **powerful network** of individuals and organizations that have and continue to strengthen existing Black organizations and create new ones.”*

*“The Development of Organizers that are **leading some of the strongest movements** today.”*

*“**Providing tools** to unlearn harmful/destructive conditioned tendencies that impact our movement.”*

*“**Creating a space** for healing, training and building relationships that can collectively shift the direction of organizing work.”*

SOWING AND GROWING- SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

There is a clear sense of pride and thankfulness that run like a thread through all the responses. It's from this place of deep personal investment that BOLDers envision a stronger more powerful future for BOLD. The survey asked two questions to gather these recommendations for growth and were structured by putting the respondent in the decision-making position.

Q22. IF BOLD WERE TO RECEIVE AN ADDITIONAL \$500,000.00 THIS YEAR, HOW WOULD YOU SUGGEST THEY SPEND THE MONEY?

1. More training, e.g. internationally and across the United States and for new organizers and for refresher courses for alumni.

“Definitely continue the Directors tract but consider what 2.5 or 3.0 looks like. Develop some training that can possibly be replicated. Look at organizational 1.5/2 day trainings. Although the trainings are essential to Black organizing some of us work in diverse organizations. I believe that there are some pieces that would benefit our white allies in ways that could help us work with them and/or be more effective.

“International delegation & Black liberator-in-residency”

“2nd tier training for folks who have completed the program. A train-the-trainers cohort or how to embody this work with your staff. Something about practice implication seminar w/ best practices or ways to introduce somatic practices to staff. And a special program for new organizers that are not attached to base building orgs but are moving through/ creating new organizing models”

2. Hire more well-paid trainers and staff to increase capacity

“Increase pay for staff and consultants; then strategically build with Black Lives Matter and Movement for Black Lives to do strategic healing practices and skills development; invest a portion for longevity if possible.”

3. Scholarships

“Making access to the program free. We have so many hurdles doing this work that making time to fundraise for this just adds to our already full shoulders”

“Every Black organizer needs to go through BOLD, so I would recommend a grant program that allows for a few organizers to go through BOLD free of charge.”

4. Invest in sustainability/infrastructure/land

“1) Ensure "scaffolding" support for participants and alumni, including access to coaching/bodywork, and practice groups (2) programming to foster the network (intensives, special retreats); 3) building up the



training team, for example, deepening the embodied leadership of top organizers/movement leaders who could then be part of the team on a part-time basis”

“... **creating a BOLD center** where folks can go to take classes, get bodywork, or spend their sabbaticals in intensive and restorative training”

5. Update online communications

“I would suggest putting more money into their **digital communications and digital content**.

Currently, BOLD utilizes a Facebook page to keep participants in touch with each other and to share program updates. The BOLD website was updated in 2016 and hosts a blog, program information, and contact mechanism. BOLD could expand its digital content to include elements such as interactive reports, online applications, a resource clearinghouse, or knowledgebase for organizers.

Q23. IMAGINE YOU'VE BEEN ELECTED TO A BOLD ADVISORY BOARD, WHAT ARE THE FIRST FEW THINGS YOU WANT TO TRY TO CHANGE OR IMPROVE?

“...begin institutions on infrastructure and **capacity buildings for emerging non profits.**”

“Include more organizing and strategy training in the program. It's a great opportunity to develop a **national shared organizing praxis** and vision among Black organizers.”

“...**send a newsletter monthly** to the group and let them know about funding opportunities for social activism... and highlights BOLDers in action where ever they are.”

“Black donors/friends of BOLD program”

“**Formalizing the BOLD network** purposes of staying connected more deeper like newsletters for alumni, circulating job postings and regular calls for somatic and centering practices. Also, discussions about moments and organizing] work that we going thru.”

“figure out how to **set aside time for people who are multi/biracial** to process their experience of Blackness in a space that is their own (without judgement [sic] from others).”

“I think it'd be interesting to **go back to exploring a "platform"** for black folks along with black and brown communities that we could hold politicians accountable for across the country at all levels. explore more joint fundraising efforts and ways to organize the nonprofit industrial complex. how can we move towards a new "Black Wall Street" that creates and generates economic security for us.”

“More political conversation/education. More conversation around work. **More 1-1 coaching or pod coaching from training team.** FFS model for orgs that want ongoing support or coaching. Regional work or working through national networks.”

“Aligning the national Black organizations in a more explicit way. Specifically **aligning the Movement for Black Lives with BOLD, BYP 100, etc.** Also, **building out the financial administrative capacity of BOLD** to be able to support Black led organizations building their infrastructure.”

“A **mapping project of who we've trained**, what organizations are doing on the ground, and connecting people's work to a large struggle for Black Liberation.”

“...I believe that Bold has cultivated and nurtured so many dynamic leaders that the organization should be lifted up and become more of a household name. I would then work to create strategy for the organization to monetize such as BOLD t-shirts with some developed language that has come out of trainings, or other products to increase the amount of sustainability. I would also love to see some of the tools taught to organizers also taught to the communities, I think it would be helpful to our overall healing...”

“1) Creation of the regional "Black Love Cells" 2) Communications: establishing relationships with National and local press, managing social media, and creating BOLD thought pieces that can be shared nationally 3) Alumni engagement. We have a network of members now, but there's no reason why we can't act as a movement organization with a vision, principles, and work that we can move.

NATIONAL GATHERING FOCUS GROUP 2016

The focus group was conducted on February 25, 2016 at the National Gathering with BOLD participants. This was the second part of a mixed methods study into the impact of BOLD programming on participants over the last five years. The purpose of conducting the focus group was to gather more in depth insight in a group setting. There were nine participants who participated who entered BOLD in various years, including the first cohort in 2012. Five were from the Amandla! program and four were from the leadership cohort. Eight participants were working as organizers or leaders at an organizing group and one person was in a support role. There were 3 men and 6 women.



There was an hour allotted for the focus group. The evaluator, intended to cover 14 primary questions, with multiple follow-up questions, however all questions couldn't be answered in the allotted time. Ultimately, there were seven primary questions asked and three additional follow up questions. The first three addressed the participants' perspectives on their own lives as a result of participating in BOLD. The last four asked them to reflect on the BOLD program and its future impact. The following section is structured in a Q&A format with the question written in all caps, followed by verbatim statements in quotation marks from interview participants. Commentary/observations by the evaluator follow quotes.

Q1. HOW DOES BOLD'S VALUE OF DIGNITY IMPACT YOU AND YOUR WORK?

One of the differentiating factors of BOLD's training is the emphasis placed on specific values such as love, dignity, centeredness, and transformation. This question and the next ask participants to explain the personal impact of some of these values.

“As a Black person sometimes we are shrinking our self down. Being in BOLD makes us feel comfortable being in our own length.”

“The first thing that I thought about the dignity piece was Marcus Mosiah Garvey, who talked about the dignity of black people.”

“I love that black Dignity is not confused with Black Respectability. In this space we respect each other. I am honoring your dignity and not confined to what that is supposed to look like. Every time we gather, every time a cohort is formed and grows that gets nailed and hammered in. This is your Dignity. When you are in your dignity we can all be present and Respectability Politics don't come into play.”

Q2. HOW DOES BOLD’S VALUE OF BLACK LOVE AND BLACK SPACE IMPACT YOU AND YOUR WORK?

*“First, Black Love **expands our capacity**. The way it looks inherently is about loving each other across differences and loving each other as we come and show up.”*

*“The other part is that allows us to **hold each other accountable**. Black Love is about relationships and relationships require accountability. If I love you I am going to hold you accountable in the moment that you are feeling outside of your commitment because I know that you want it most deeply. I am going to remind you when you forget. Black Love allows space for that to happen.”*

*“**We are now telling ourselves that it is okay to love ourselves**. We are taught through every form of intelligence, on every level even subliminally to love and appreciate people who don't look like us. Black Love is the thing... we are changing the narrative; to say " it's okay to be Black and it's okay to Love Black!" That is what I love about it.*

*“**It starts with yourself**. For so much of my life I was giving it all out. That was me, giving out Black Love. Now I love myself first and now let's see what I got left. It might be a little bit today. It is like being aware of your capacity with your love.”*

Additional reflections on Black-only space:

*“I think when we talk about Black Space and Black Love it hits head up against the idea that we have to be inclusive. What does inclusive look like... me trying to make space for you because we need to make space for everyone? **I end up invisibilizing all of me to make space for all of you.**”*

“I feel like my family is the only Black Space that I have been exposed to and that is questionable. Outside of my family I have not been exposed. Coming to BOLD and breathing in all of this Blackness and being filled up with this Black Love...I take it with me now. I carry it with me now. It is the signature on my emails.”

Q3. HOW DOES UNDERSTANDING BLACK LOVE AND BEING IN A 4D BLACK SPACE EMPOWER YOU TO DO BETTER AND BE MORE EFFECTIVE AT ORGANIZING AND ENGAGING AND TO MOVE DIFFERENTLY IN YOUR WORK?

“Before BOLD we use to do Black People Breaks in my city because we dealt with being in all white organizations constantly. Coming here I was excited that other people got that feeling of what it is like to be in an all Black Space. The first question--the dignity to go in with Black Love caused me to go home and just call people out on their bulls; like the tokenism, the not wanting to fund and not trusting the Black organizations. We are going in our communities. Let’s do our own plans. Let’s do our own thing. Because we can do this.”



“I feel that BOLD increased my capacity to do the work the way that I wanted to do it. I gave me the tools to do it. I am a visionary thinker. I think further ahead. What BOLD did was offer the somatic tools. I am not a touchy feely person outside of a partnership. The first time I was like ahhh, whatever. I am going to do this because we do it every morning. Then we started to talk about GRABS and at the same time at home I was in a tumultuous relationship (not romantic) with another organizer. We were butting heads. We were in the community and we could not figure it out. And I had so much ugliness in my heart and spirit towards that person. Then we did the GRAB exercise. Denise and Thomas asked us to think about what GRABS you. What is that and how are you showing that? When you know the things that are grabbing you, how do you move pass it, what are the tools? I was like ‘Oh S---!’ When I got home it was like, this is what is happening? I am actually denying her. This is a function of something else that is going on. So I wrote this long message:

*‘I believe in my heart of hearts that you want the same things that I want for the community. It’s that we have different opinions of how it should go. I apologize for the times that I showed up and did not recognize your humanity. I apologize for the times that I showed up and heard you and did not listen....’ So it allowed me a different level of holding myself accountable. It made me a better organizer. **I would not have been able to do it without the tools that BOLD provided to help me actualize that vision.**”*

I WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO IT WITHOUT THE TOOLS THAT BOLD PROVIDED TO HELP ME ACTUALIZE THAT VISION.”

-2012 COHORT PARTICIPANT

Some participants spoke of unintended consequences to their participation in BOLD. What they were learning was impacting their relationships outside of work as well. One organizer confessed, *“I am breaking up with people left and right!”* They explained that learning about their trauma made them uncomfortable being in relationships with people who were not interested in healing.

Q4. IS BOLD ENOUGH IN ITS CURRENT FORM?

There was a collective exhale when this question was asked! Participants seemed very conflicted when offering critique in this area. They were satisfied yet hopeful that BOLD will grow into something bigger, yet they were concerned about sacrificing the integrity of the space for numbers.

“Yes and No. Yes, because we are always enough right where we are as long as we realize that you are always well. When Denise said that she is a commitment to BOLD becoming a sustained institution when she was talking about institution building. That means everything is iterative. In it's current iteration it was a totally different thing than it was when I was entering BOLD. It is constantly transforming in a way that gets better. I think that BOLD is growing at a rate that makes sense. It is only doing the things that it has the capacity for while also being mindful of its growing capacity which is important because what you see a lot of organizations do is to try everything at once and fail or stay in the same place and be not enough. BOLD is enough in that it is an iterative thing that generates and grows and shifts. It's an anamorph.”

“We are growing and I don't know where the connective tissue is. In terms of where we are going. I see more and more people. And more and more people are speaking of BOLD. Where is the connective tissue? Are we thinning out? Are we diluting? **Yes, BOLD is enough but I need more.**”

Q5. SHOULD BOLD BE A THOUGHT LEADER BEYOND BOLD PROGRAMMING?

BOLD participants have a deep confidence in BOLD's relevance and necessity in current movements such as Black Lives Matter. They see BOLD as an elder that can provide guidance for the movement- and they described it using terms in the tradition of black matriarchy. While many people spoke of expanding, there was by no means consensus. Some BOLDers see a lot of value in BOLD flying under the radar.

*“I think that we all can contribute to people's education because we are brilliant people... I don't want to allow people into this space if they are not ready and are not grounded. This is our space and it was carefully built. There is an invitation process and you have to be referred. **I'm happy that BOLD is not a public thing.** If you are not a grounded organizer, you don't know about this.”*

*“I do think that we need to be educating people. We did this kind of timeline where we were laying out our work. I thought that it was something that was really important for BOLD and something that we should revisit every time that we come together like this. We should roll that thing out and see what it looked like last year. **We should evaluate ourselves on whether we met those things that we put out there.** If we didn't, figure out why we didn't and what we can do in the new term to try to accomplish some of those things.*

“In education I think BOLD folks need to have an internal translation piece (A Rosetta Stone). What is the work that you are doing with BOLD that is in line with BOLD, that then you can speak out to people who are not a part of this.”

*“**I would also like BOLD to be a place that helps ground people who are outside of it.** I'm going to say this and people might have a lot of opinions. With movements for Black Life and the leaders that crop up there is a feeling that there is a level of un-rootedness in the people who are actually in the movements. But recognizing that White Institutions lift those people up and their impact on the people that we organize... part of me wonders how do we ground those people in something and how does BOLD become the sort of thing like your mama---that snatches you when you need to be snatched.”*

“IN SOME STAGES AND DEGREES, IT'S OKAY WHERE IT IS... DO WE NEED TO RATCHET IT UP?”

I SAY YES.”

-2013 COHORT PARTICIPANT

“BOLD provides the framework to do this work and survive. BOLD saved my life through the Baltimore uprisings. If it wasn’t for the fact that I knew that it was a group of people that would have my back. I know them through other things but it was BOLD that solidified the fact for me.”

Q6. HOW DOES BOLD HANDLE INTERNAL CONFLICT?

The question about conflict was posed to provide an opportunity for the group to reflect on the more uncomfortable side of maintaining relationships over time. There were only a few comments on internal conflict and they centered on the way it is managed by the leadership manages it, as opposed to actual stories of conflict among members.

“The conflict I have watched go down happens quickly. Move that person out of the room; let’s have a one on one. Verses whatever is going on... let it spill over. That is my own personal healing modality, thought process. Sometimes you got to let it spill out. “

“The snatch is so important to me because It comes back to conflict. Your mama will let you scrap a little but then she will snatch you before you go too far.”

Q7. WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR ROLE IN BOLD’S SUSTAINABILITY?

There were just a few responses to this question, overall the group seemed to agree with the following quotes:

“Getting my network to sustain BOLD financially without any input. Just financially.”

“I need to pull the DC group together. We have got to do the regional stuff.”

“Giving people, bodies in the training. People that I think would be awesome and would benefit from this.”

Over the last five years BOLD has made a major impact on community organizing, The Movement for Black Liberation and hundreds of individuals throughout the country. The survey and focus group were commissioned to collect anecdotal and measurable data to aid in understanding how that impact was made and to gather the stories of the leaders and organizers who have spent months and years steeped in the learning and practice of somatics, organizing and transformative leadership. This is just the beginning, and as BOLD continues to grow there will be many more stories to be told.





III. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In the process of this project, we heard a deep welling up of Black love, excitement and pride about what this new movement has already accomplished, alongside a weighty concern about losing momentum, a great worry about lost potential. We heard a strong sense of urgency about getting the next steps right, to keep building Black power and not be deterred by our opposition. While the overall tone was hopeful, we sensed a mixed feeling among key organizers and movement leaders: on one hand knowing “we are the ones we’ve been waiting for” carries with it an exciting and powerful sense of purpose; on the other hand it also carries a heavy, sometimes daunting, sense of responsibility.

Having had the privilege of learning from so many fierce and committed organizers and movement leaders, we developed some reflections of our own that we hope lead to juicy, collective conversations within our movements. Because while the responsibility to lead is a serious one, it’s never one we undertake alone. We are all in this together.

By any reasonable analysis, this is a different kind of team than we’ve been up against for many, many decades. President Obama took a relatively moderate approach in responding to the *movement for Black lives*, acknowledging the need for greater police accountability but supporting measures that didn’t much rock the boat. But as a candidate, Donald Trump publicly said BLM activists should be considered *terrorists*, he advocated violence against Black protesters at his campaign events, and sees white police officers who’ve killed Black people as victims needing mass political support. This not the same old rich white guy in the White House. This is not the same old racially-coded corporate-run Washington politics we are used to fighting. Trump has a growing white supremacist, right-wing populist movement behind him, even farther to the right than the Tea Party, and his administration is rapidly filling up with right-wing billionaire capitalists like himself. And it’s not just the federal government; the Congress and a majority of state legislatures and governorships are controlled by Republicans.

Yes, we must grow our resistance. And it’s crucial that we understand what’s going on. To do this we need to answer questions that go much deeper than problems with Trump’s personality, deceitfulness, or sanity. What is the current balance of power between progressive movements and the Rights? What direction is the economy headed and what does it mean for Black communities, other communities of color, and the struggling majority of US workers? Who amongst the ruling elites are aligning with Trump’s administration and who is not? What are the splits we can take advantage of? What unique and specific threats are Black communities facing in this period? What are ways opportunist & reactionary Black people will be used to advance their dangerous agenda? (For ex – Black ‘leaders’ supporting his so-called “New Deal for Black America” while his anti-immigrant agenda exploits tensions between working class Black and Latino immigrant communities.) What power do we need to build to blunt the influence of reactionary and unaccountable Black leaders?

Should we seriously consider whether fascism is on the horizon - not as a rude or militant-sounding epithet but an actual form of political rule? We know the militantly racist and xenophobic right-wing is growing in Europe, what should we predict here? Paranoia is not helpful; clear assessments can help us understand to what degree our movements should double-down on defense, preparing for even more aggressive COINTELPRO-style state repression, or a surge in white vigilante terror like the one that nailed the coffin on Reconstruction back in the 19th century? Will there be a steady worsening of already-crisis level community conditions – in a way that increases Black suffering but yet fails to mobilize public outrage? For example a dramatic, state-by-state, expansive re-investment in prison ‘infrastructure’ is on the agenda, with a steep increase in Black incarceration even beyond its mass levels today.

All this danger is real; the threats are greater than most of us can imagine. But inside this moment there are also opportunities for the left that have not existed in a very long time. Not only does Black resistance continue to grow, but the winds of rebellion and resistance are sweeping every corner of the country. In these populist times,⁶ we are in the midst of a massive national political re-alignment, alliances are changing, and new things become possible that were not possible even a few years ago. The ruling elites are in crisis, unable to manage the contradictions in the economy in the same old way; their parties couldn't even elect an establishment Democrat or Republican for president. A populist anti-establishment media personality won the Presidency with an openly racist, misogynist, and xenophobic campaign. And now millions of people, including tens of thousands of Black people who weren't already activated in the movement for Black lives, are now joining ‘the resistance’ and getting politicized. Thousands are getting radicalized by the gap between what establishment leaders say, and the everyday conditions people experience- from racist police murders of our children to the lack of good jobs even for college graduates who ‘played by the rules’. While there is a threat that white liberal leadership will attempt to dominate this new terrain, the strength of radical, popular anti-establishment support for Black Lives Matter and Bernie Sanders during the Clinton presidential campaign is just one indicator that “it’s not going down like that” - that this is a moment for radical leadership from Black organizers and other people of color of a new progressive economic and racial justice movement of millions.

What separates the movement leaders of the 50’s and 60’s from the leaders of today is not the seriousness of the times; there was just as much at stake then as there is now. But we, today, have access to the lessons of freedom fighters from many, many generations, including the lessons from the ‘60s. Today, we have access to new methods proven to promote healing and transformation in the course of struggle, while drawing from the gifts of our ancestors’ sacrifices.

In 1954, Martin Luther King Jr. emphasized that those who had undergone a deep transformation were best equipped to maintain the strength needed to fight the depths of racial injustice. He called them transformed nonconformists and declared that “This hour in history needs a dedicated circle of transformed nonconformists. Our planet teeters on the brink of atomic annihilation; dangerous passions of pride, hatred, and selfishness are enthroned in our lives; truth lies prostrate on the rugged hills of nameless calvaries; and men do reverence before false gods of nationalism and materialism. The saving of our world from pending doom will come, not through the complacent adjustment of the conforming majority, but through the creative maladjustment of a nonconforming minority.” Can we emerge from habits of self-marginalization, self-righteousness and politics of self-expression to provide bold, compelling, radical

⁶ Interview with Bill Fletcher on right-wing populism:

http://www.democracyatwork.info/the_phenomenon_of_right_wing_populism_a_billfletcherjr

leadership right now? Can we be brave and vulnerable even amongst one another, trying on new ideas, new methods, new ways of organizing the people? Instead of debates about radicals ‘vs.’ liberals, what is needed in these times is leadership from fully embodied Black organizers and movement leaders to point the way forward for everyone.

BOLD is strategically and methodically training this generation’s nonconforming leaders who are committed to organizing Black people. What we have learned is that healing trauma, engaging in transformative practices and developing community amongst Black organizers has set the stage for a dramatic leap in movement capacity. It’s a historic opportunity for this new generation of radical Black leaders to not only lead the struggle for all sectors of society but to lead it with their souls intact.

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT BUILDING UP BLACK ORGANIZING AND MOVEMENT

INFRASTRUCTURE:

LET’S TALK ABOUT IT: WRAPPING OUR HEADS AROUND THE NEW TERRAIN OF STRUGGLE

It’s January of 2017. Many of us are still emerging from shock. Or grief. Or just pure rage. And most of us are still wrapping our heads around the reality of a Trump administration, facing all that is unfolding before us each day. We are all engaged in resistance of many forms. But, it’s impossible to fight back effectively when we don’t fully understand what we are up against. If you’re into sports, you know that before a high-stakes game, you’re going to study the other team. You know their strengths and the weak spots you can use to your team’s advantage. You’re honest about your own team’s challenges even when you are filled with hope, determination, and a fighting spirit. We must do the same. We won’t win simply because we believe in the righteousness of our struggle, because we have more martyrs than we can count, or because we just work harder.

1. HOW TO GROW OUR WORK SO THAT MANY MORE STRONG ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGED IN THE DAY TO DAY LABOR OF LOVE THAT IS BLACK ORGANIZING?

While it is true that we need a diversity of tactics and formations, there is no getting around the reality that to build power for poor, working class and marginalized Black communities, it will be necessary to dramatically expand this set of work. If powerful movements need millions of supporters and tens of thousands of activists, it also needs thousands of committed grassroots leaders building local, state and regional bases of power in democratic community or worker organizations. Especially in this period where people are *looking* for spaces to organizing within, every city and region with any significant Black population should have at least one such organization. The agenda of such organizations is developed by impacted Black people themselves (not what advocates or activists imagine), whether they be youth, trans women, tenants or previously incarcerated Black workers.

So many people we interviewed talked about the lack of spaces for practicing collective support and accountability, for developing the kinds of “low ego, high impact” leaders we need. This call was yet another example of why we need much more Black organizing, because these kind of accountable, humble, principled relationships are often forged in highly participatory, democratic base-building organizations where people are making decisions together, learning how to struggle through difficult questions together – and yet stay connected over time. It is strong base

organizations where grassroots leaders learn the ethical, accountable practices through the experience, for example, of being in negotiations with a decision-maker and refusing his offer to cut a deal that would sell the membership out, and where members build the trust needed to check one another in service of the collective goals. We simply need many more of these organizations!

Ensuring the expansion and strengthening of Black organizing institutions in the US requires an urgent, collective commitment from every single person who believes in winning dignity, justice, and power for all Black people. We know from the civil rights movement to the South African liberation struggle, that without such organized infrastructure of everyday people, we lack the political backbone necessary to keep a movement moving in alignment with its interests, politics and vision through its ups and downs of struggle. No matter if you are a trainer, an activist-scholar, a donor large and small, an institutional funder or an independent activist looking to become an organizer, there is a role for us all to play in manifesting this reality.

One interviewee who has seen the struggles of raising resources for Black organizing specifically said “I would like philanthropy to get together and decide to give \$50 million more to Black organizing this year.” Foundation funding will clearly never be the source of our liberation, and alternatives income sources are urgently required (through grassroots fundraising among others), but every freedom struggle needs resources and ours requires many millions more than we are currently raising.

2. HOW TO DRAMATICALLY EXPAND THE CAPACITY AND LONG-TERM IMPACT OF BOLD?

BOLD remains the only organization committed to developing Black organizers, and the program evaluation demonstrates that not only has BOLD been an effective intervention but that its continued development will be an essential part of the next stage of movement-building. BOLD must expand so it can reach many more organizers and leaders in more organizations (people are turned away every year). Additionally, BOLD should continue to deepen the model so that people are better able to integrate the ideas, practices, and relationships more effectively into their daily work over time. Black organizing and movement-building infrastructure will be significantly strengthened to the degree that *both* expansion and deepening happen.

As both the interviews and the program evaluation demonstrated, BOLD has been most transformative at the level of *individual* transformation for organizational leaders and organizers. The integration of transformative somatics methods with quality political education and organizing skill-development for ‘*embodied leadership*’ is a breakthrough not only for Black organizing but for the art and science of organizing in this period. “Deepening” the BOLD model to allow more participants to master practices and embody leadership in ways that impact whole movement organizations and broader movement culture is the natural next stage of the model’s development.

Many BOLD participants gain so much goodness from participation in BOLD; so many deep relationships are built in the cohorts, one tendency is to want to keep it exclusive, instead of opening up the space so that its tools can be shared with most – if not all – Black organizers in the movement today. There is a need to share the wealth! Yet many BOLD participants are understandably protective about the space they have cultivated. It is a unique environment that facilitates intense vulnerability to catalyze transformation and safety is inherently necessary. Group agreements, deep respect and commitment to the love and dignity of fellow participants is the foundation on which BOLD is built. Opening up the program to more participants can advance the growth of black organizing and as long as the core principals and methods remain in place. This may require, as some participants requested, growing the capacity for

structured local or regional follow-up cohorts that continue their development as a community of practice long after their BOLD graduation. In addition, digital spaces should be developed and maintained for BOLD alumni and allies to share resources, encouragement and to build the capacity for feedback, support and accountability.

3. HOW, AND WHERE, SHOULD WE SIGNIFICANTLY EXPAND AND SHARPEN OUR POLITICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS, LOCALLY AND NATIONALLY?

The call for more political education (PE) was loud and clear, both in the BOLD evaluation and in the Black thought-leader interviews. People want more PE within the BOLD curriculum and as a part of their organizations' training. Organizers are hungry to create, and to participate in, more spaces where their political development is taken seriously, where they can wrestle with their own ideas about how change happens, about the nature of racial, economic and gender oppression, the history of the Black Radical Tradition and theories of liberation. Among movements in the rest of the world, including on the African continent and the whole global South, organizers and committed activists are engaged in much more rigorous study than what we do here in the US; in fact millions of non-college educated worker leaders are more literate in revolutionary theory than many college-educated activists here. While deep political education has not been prioritized in the previous period, so many are asking for it now. Questions include - What are the different political traditions that have formed coherent ideas about the relationship between white supremacy, anti-Black racism and capitalism, historically and in the world today? What does 'intersectionality' mean and how can it advance the struggle beyond a thin "identity as politics" towards a rich and powerful, transformative politics of liberation? What's the difference between a *set of politics (anti-racism, etc.)* and a *strategy*? How have past liberation struggles developed strategies not only for social movements but for revolutionary transformation?

We think its critical to note that there is not only a call for more entry-level popular education but also for more 'advanced' political education for experienced organizers and national leaders, and for "cadre-level" organizers committed to a life of making radical change with others. Grassroots organizations need resources to attend multi-day PE retreats, and organizational leaders need to prioritize taking the time for investment in spaces for "radical reflection and education" alongside the daily struggle. Additionally, we know that in radical and liberatory struggles across the globe, from Amilcar Cabral's liberation struggle in Cape Verde & Guinea Bissau to the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, left 'cadre' organizations have made critical contributions to the political training and development of revolutionary organizers and leaders. For many historical reasons, these organizations are relatively small in the US in this particular period, but given the times it is not surprising that there is a renewed interest in building back up this part of our movement eco-system.

4. HOW DO WE MAINTAIN URGENCY ABOUT THE NEED TO EXPAND BLACK ORGANIZING INFRASTRUCTURE WHILE WE'RE IN A MOMENT IN WHICH MILLIONS OF PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ACTIVATED AND NEED BROAD MASS ORGANIZATIONS TO CONNECT WITH AND PROVIDE THEM WITH SOME DIRECTION?

Under traditional models, base-building organizations with progressive politics have not been structured to absorb the scale of activist interest that exists in today's political landscape. Organizers are struggling to respond to the tension between going deep and going wide, between building at local level and aligning nationally. Can new activist networks or national left electoral experiments grow to scale but maintain an accountability to marginalized and working class people in base organizations? Are there successful examples of Black organizing institutions holding true to base-building basics and yet building broad layers of activist and donor supporters? How the can we ensure

that more of the increased donor contributions in this period from Black Hollywood and other Black elite supporters find their way to local base organizations as well as the more visible national organizations?

5. WHAT TRANSFORMATIVE, OR 'NON-REFORMIST' CAMPAIGN DEMANDS, CAN BEST ADVANCE BLACK ORGANIZING IN THIS PERIOD?

On one hand, it has been exciting to see a wave of radical, militant demands (around prison abolition, for example) that refuse to accept short-term 'band-aid' reforms. And on the other hand, organizing requires waging campaigns for demands that can be won in the near-term. As any organizer knows, there is a powerful political alignment and relationship-building that comes from working together on common campaigns. Campaigns are important vehicles for building community, leadership, and power. Organizers also know that there are demands that can reinforce the system, and others that build up people's hopes and power. Some demands are just to win, others are meant to take us a strategic step closer to our dreams. It takes analysis to identify demands that can advance movement-building. In today's context, there is quite a lot of critique of contemporary policing policy changes that many would call "reformist" - unable to get to structural root causes, too easily absorbed by the system and unable to change the balance of power between the state and Black people. But demands are core to fighting and winning power. So what are more "transformative demands" or "nonreformist reforms"⁷ that groups are forming campaigns around now? What are the best practices and opportunities for regional and national coordination? The national Movement 4 Black Lives policy platform, for example is an opportunity to advance this conversation and align on transformative demands that can be taken up at the base level, across the nation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ROLE OF LEADERS IN SHAPING MOVEMENT PRACTICE & CULTURE

In a moment in which there are thousands of new activists on the scene and lots of emerging organizers, there are particular responsibilities of organizational and movement leadership. One of the most important of these is to model the movement values, norms and practice that will advance collective struggle. Black organizers and leaders in the BOLD network are both striving to 'walk their own talk' and yet struggling to do so under current conditions of constant crisis, overwhelm, material scarcity and chronic stress. BOLD works to give organizers tools to align their daily practice with their personal, organizational and movement commitments.

MOVEMENT LEADERSHIP

Reflecting on what we heard from BOLD participants and our interviews, we've lifted up three movement leadership characteristics that seem especially important in these intense, rapidly changing and complex times:

1. MODEL ON-GOING DEVELOPMENT — EVEN LEADERS ARE A WORK IN PROGRESS.

The idea that one must be always politically on-point, not make mistakes or have perfectly pure 'radical' or 'conscious' politics is a threat to our development and ultimately to our freedom. Belittling, shaming, or shutting down less conscious folks within oppressed communities or in the movement is *not* wisdom handed down from the ancestors. As many of us have learned from BOLD, we can stand in our dignity, draw boundaries for ourselves, and still stay *connected* to change-makers who have different ideas, who make us uncomfortable, and even who, intentionally or not replicate oppressive systems of privilege of and power. Tell stories of your own path- who trained

⁷ See Marta Harnecker, *Rebuilding the Left*, p. 131 for a discussion of criteria for reforms that can have within them revolutionary potential.

you as an organizer, where have you gained key lessons along the way, what ideas were once influential that you've now rejected? When confronted with new ideas, or new conditions, name the need to study, to critically assess and possibly reconsider old position. Create spaces in your organization for ongoing political development, at every level (members, staff, national leaders) so the expectation is that we all a work in progress. Our movements must be able to unlock the critical brilliance, creativity and curiosity of our people if we are serious about getting free.

2. PRACTICE PRINCIPLED STRUGGLE.

Name and claim your ideas, your purpose and your work. And then have the humility to invite and accept respectful criticism. Do the personal work you need to do to know your own triggers and what to do to keep you from being unhelpfully defensive, aggressive, shut-down, etc. when in a conflict. Take concerns about someone directly to the person; letting resentments or criticisms build up too-often makes important relationships 'too toxic to touch'. Dominant culture reinforces individualistic behavior, but leaders need to model that we are willing to do things that may not feel good for the sake of the collective. Help to build a movement culture in which we can respectfully disagree, and acknowledge that people with different ideas can be on the same side of the struggle.

3. COMBAT CYNICISM, AND BELIEVE THAT WE CAN WIN.

In the interviews, the scale of Black people's suffering was so acute and present in many thought-leaders' minds that they often could not think of a single "advance" for Black people since in the last two generations. They understood the deep and structural root causes of this suffering, and had rejected both mainstream liberal and conservative explanations for Black poverty, criminalization and brutal murder at the hands of police. There was a sense shared amongst most of the interviewees that the victories we'd gained through struggle and bloodshed had since been stolen; that everyday Black people's hopes in the American Dream have been betrayed and even our most militant struggles have been co-opted. Considering the level of brutal terror that Black people experience and are expected to accept as normal, there is a material basis for the development of "afro-pessimism" today.



There is a way in which rage about these conditions can and already has led to powerful agitational demands, campaigns and actions. But this rage - so powerful on the mic - can also mask a deep, unspoken cynicism about whether 'freedom' is really even possible. If we don't really believe we can win, do we believe that permanent resistance is the best we can do? Our rage moves us to action, but does not necessarily answer the political question of 'How will we get free'? If we can't move from a place of hope, and imagine a US society that has broken free of its legacy of white supremacy and capitalism, we cannot chart a path to victory. Whether that hope is rooted in spirituality, the resilience of our ancestors and the righteousness of our struggle, or a political framework that

projects a “path to power”, hope is as necessary as rage, to fuel us in dark times and to keep our eyes on the prize, not just on our oppression.

The question of hope is not a simple one. It’s painful to face the scale of suffering in our community, and to not see a clear path forward. It can be demoralizing to understand the extent of sacrifices that ordinary people and freedom fighters have made across the centuries and the degree to which, so much bloodshed and struggle later, we remain an oppressed people. It can even seem natural, inevitable...the way it's always been and how it will always be. Some call this cynicism ‘spiritual warfare’, in which we are defeated in our minds before we even begin the work.

ULTIMATELY CYNICISM WILL NOT SERVE US. INSTEAD, LET US BE ON FIRE WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF OUR COLLECTIVE LIBERATION! TOGETHER, LET US BELIEVE THAT WE WILL WIN!

As Malcolm stressed, we are not responsible for our oppression, but we must be responsible for our own liberation. It is not going to be easy, but we have what we have learned and what we have been given that is useful. We have the power those who came before us have given us, to move beyond the place where they were standing. We have the trees, and water, and sun, and our children. Malcolm X does not live in the dry texts of his words as we read them; he lives in the energy we generate and use to move along the visions we share with him. We are making the future as well as bonding to survive the enormous pressures of the present, and that is what it means to be a part of history.

– Audre Lorde, Learning from the ‘60s