The Gorge Liberation Movement: Building an Anti-Racist Community in Rural Oregon
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<td><strong>June - Mid August</strong></td>
<td>Participate in all Black Lives Matter in The Gorge events and other local events that I am able to</td>
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<td><strong>June 23</strong></td>
<td>Attended the zoom meeting of join the Black Lives Matter in The Gorge organizer and action team - committed to the BLM Anti-Racist Business Network and Police Advisory groups</td>
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| **June 23 - Present**    | Attend online meetings, communicate on Signal, and work on projects with both groups.  
  - For the Anti-Racist Business Network, I did things like edit and review letters, scripts, and the poster, contact over 25 businesses about the network to encourage their participation.  
  - For the Police Advisory Group, I worked on power mapping people of influence in our community, researching 3rd party police misconduct reporting systems, and working to make a way for the businesses in the business network to think critically about how they involve law enforcement in their safety policies. |
| **June - Present**       | Educate myself further about issues of whiteness, privilege, and structural racism through books, documentaries, and listening to People of Color. |

* The work to create an anti-racist community and an anti-racist self cannot be done in one summer. This is a continuous, long term project that I have committed to and will continue to work on into the unseeable future!

** It should be noted that as of September 1st 2020 the name of the organization I’ve been working with was changed from Black Lives Matter in The Gorge to the Gorge Liberation Movement.
Final Reflection Paper

Summer 2020 did not go how I planned at all. Before the pandemic I planned to take classes on campus in the spring, then stay in Kalamazoo in the summer for medical certification training and an internship before leaving at the beginning of August to lead LandSea in the Adirondacks. I found myself very hopeless as it became clear throughout spring quarter online that in fact none of my summer plans would happen. Towards the end of May in light of the murder of George Floyd, protests swept the country, so when I found out about a protest happening my hometown Hood River, OR, I just had to go. These protests kept occurring all across The Gorge (a group of small towns all in the Columbia River Gorge), and stuck at home, I went to all of them like it was my day job. At these protests, everyone wore masks with no physical touch. After a few weeks of protests and rallies hosted by the same people, they formed the group the Gorge Liberation Movement (GLM) (formally named Black Lives Matter in The Gorge) to continue building on the momentum of the protests and create a more anti-racist community. I saw the important work with GLM both as an opportunity for me to stay busy over the summer and as something I could engage with as a SIP, so I reached out to the main organizers about how I could get involved. GLM is working on projects in many different areas of the community, but I signed up to work on 2: The Anti-Racist Business Network and the Police Advisory Comitee (PAC). I spent the summer attending rallies and protests with GLM, as well as working on my projects and educating myself further about anti-racism. More specific details about what I did can be found in the Daily Entries. Throughout the rest of this paper I will reflect on connections I’ve made, challenges I’ve faced, and how I will carry my experiences from this summer with me in the future.
Through working on this project, I’ve engaged with a lot of people in my community that I would have not otherwise. When I started attending GLM events, I would go with my sister. But in July, she left town and I didn’t have anyone to go with anymore. I was apprehensive about this because it can be hard for me to meet new people, but I forced myself to show up at the events anyways. At the events, I stood next to other people around my age who were there by themselves and eventually we became “protest buddies” - we would talk and stand with each other at every protest. This ended up being really nice because otherwise the only other person I interacted with in person was my mom. With GLM, I also got to connect with activists in my community. After introducing myself to Rosie Strange, the head activist of GLM, she connected me to other activists in my community. Along with working with Rosie, both the Anti-Racist Business Network and PAC are composed of caring community members that has been nice to get to know. I was intimidated working with both of my groups because I am the youngest by at least 10 years. The other people in my projects have careers and many more connections in the community than I do, but they were very welcoming and happy to have my involvement. For both of my projects we have Zoom meetings every other week to discuss the progress on our projects. It was fun to sometimes run into people I normally saw on Zoom at an GML event. Through working on this project I got to connect with a lot of people in my community who are passionate about the same issues that I am which was really impactful.

While connecting with people posed difficult at first, there were a lot of aspects to my projects that were actually very challenging. Part of my work with the Anti-Racist Business Network was contacting local businesses to invite them to be a part of the network. Especially because we couldn’t go into the businesses due to Covid, it was hard connecting with them.
volunteered to contact 25 businesses mostly in Hood River but also in Odell and Parkdale. I chose these businesses because in high school, I reached out to these businesses to ask them to support my robotics team - I was hoping some of the business owners would remember me. Calling the businesses was challenging because oftentimes the person who answered was a server or cashier and they didn’t have the power to join the network. Sometimes people said they would get back to me, but then wouldn’t. I also emailed a few businesses but very few of them replied. It was hard for me to stay motivated when contacting the businesses when so few of them committed to the network. I thought that it would be easier to ask businesses to commit to being anti-racist than to donate money, but apparently it’s not. As time progresses, we’ve improved our outreach methods and have been getting more businesses coming to us - we see this as a promising sign for the future.

With the PAC, we’ve also had a lot of challenges. The first thing we wanted to do was compile information about misconduct and funding sources for all of the police departments in The Gorge. This has been challenging because the funding and police budgets, while available to the public, are hard to find on the websites and also difficult for the average person to interpret. We’ve learned that both Oregon and Washington’s police misconduct records are private. Since learning this, we’ve been brainstorming ways for us to have a police misconduct reporting system to improve accountability but this poses a lot of complications. If people reported incidents to us, they would likely want to take action. However all that we could be able to do is start to collect this data to notice patterns in departments. There’s also a lot of issues regarding confidentiality, so it is difficult. The PAC has been moving slower than the Anti-Racist Business Network, but that is okay because these are long term projects.
I’ve also observed some challenges that I think apply both to GLM and civil rights groups nationwide: burnout and performative activism. At the first few protests in early June, hundreds of community members were showing up. As of mid-August, the point when I returned to Kalamazoo so I am no longer at the protests myself, roughly 20 people would attend events. It was sad to watch the turnout of events dwindle throughout the summer. I attribute a lot of this, especially at the beginning of summer to performative activism. People were showing up to BLM protests when they were trending, when it was a cool thing to do. But as BLM stopped trending, they (white folks) went back to live as usual. I observed this just in what I observed in my community as fewer people attended events after the news cycle and watching businesses rotate their BLM displays to their 4th of July displays. This is also something I see on social media. Anti-racism practices, whether it be in a community or yourself as an individual, involves consistent work, not just participating in ways that are comfortable when it is trending. Another thing that has been a challenge for me personally and I think accounts for why the GLM momentum dwindled over the summer was burnout. Our work can be exhausting and sometimes it feels helpless. This can cause some to steer clear of activism work. For example, on my second day of reaching out to businesses, not a single one was successful - this made me feel like it was pointless to reach out to businesses. I had to take a break and focus more intentionally on self care for a while before going back to contacting businesses. These issues of performative activism and burnout are definitely also applicable to the BLM movement across the country too.

While we’ve ran into many challenges, one more that I wanted to highlight is racism in our community. Because we’re on the West Coast, The Gorge has a reputation of being a peaceful, liberal hippy town, when in reality, the rural communities we are a part of have long
histories of racism that continue today. In its origins, Black people were prohibited from moving to Oregon, and those already in the territory were sent away. This, along with other factors, has resulted in Hood River and The Gorge having a very low population of Black people. The Gorge has a high population of people from México and Central America, as well as a higher than average Indigenous population, so these are the communities we are most trying to uplift through our efforts. I think that because our area doesn’t have many Black people, a lot of the (white) public didn’t think the nationwide protests would affect The Gorge - an out of sight out of mind situation. While I knew that systemic racism is everywhere, I never realized how outwardly racist some of my community members were until attending the events. Some of my encounters with racists are documented in the Daily Entries. It saddens me that not everyone agrees that Black lives matter. Human rights should not be political.

Something that was particularly jarring for me this summer in learning more intently about systemic racism and how it is reproduced in my community was learning about NORCOR, the prison in The Dalles that “serves” the surrounding counties in The Gorge. While I’ve known NORCOR existed since at least middle school, I learned horrific things about it’s history including notoriously terrible conditions for inmates and it’s contract with ICE, not to mention the industrialized prison complex as a system. It makes me sick thinking back to high school - whenever someone from my high school/ that people know (because in small towns everyone knows everyone) got arrested, we (kids at my high school, ashamedly my friends and me included) would look up their mugshot on the NORCOR website and critique it. Giggle about it. It disgusts me that that activity was so normalized and that I participated in it. Since working with GLM one of the things I learned is that NORCOR, along with all the other terrible things
about it, is the last prison in the state of Oregon that still has a contract with ICE. Because of this and that NORCOR disproportionately affects BIPOC in our community, a lot of our protests were outside of NORCOR itself. I’ve lived 20 minutes away from what amounts to an ICE detention center my whole life and I didn’t even find out about it till this summer. While I didn’t commit to work with the “De-ICE NORCOR” project group with GLM, I tried to get involved in ways that I can. I’ve attended the public board meetings and helped circulate a petition around our community. A remarkable accomplishment was on August 20, 2020, the board announced that they would end their contract with ICE! This was an amazing moment to witness, but it was disappointing to hear the chair exclaim “we’ve looked at the numbers and it doesn’t make sense for us to have the contract anymore” as the reason for ending the ICE contract, not the magnitude of human rights violations. Even though they claim to be ending the contracts with ICE, there is a lot of concern about accountability and prevention of future ICE affiliations in the future. This work relating to NORCOR and ICE has been done by the groups Gorge ICE Resistance and De-ICE NORCOR for almost five years; it has taken years for progress to be made and is still an uphill battle.

In tangent to my revelations relating to NORCOR, I’ve also reflected a lot recently about my privilege as a white person, my relation to oppressive institutions such as the police, and my engagement with the Black Lives Matter movement. If someone would have asked me since the start of the BLM movement years ago if I agreed with the statement “Black lives matter,” I would have said yes, but I’ve realized that I had never really acted on that belief. I consider myself a very social justice oriented person - in my years as a politically concerned person, I have attended protests and taken action for causes including women’s rights and pro-choice,
environmental conservation, and increased gun control. Why had I not engaged with BLM until
the summer? Why is it that until this summer I would bite my tongue if a relative said a racist
remark? Have I ever felt personally afraid of police presence? I’ve asked myself a lot of
questions like these, and while I don’t have a perfect answer, I think that my privilege directly
relates to many of them. I’ve also asked myself since getting involved with GLM things like
would I have committed to these projects so intently, if it weren’t for the pandemic would I have
made an effort to be more anti-racist? What spaces am I taking up as a white activist? Would I
have shown up to all the GLM events I could and committed to the projects if I wasn’t also doing
this for a SIP? How am I going to maintain this level of engagement even once school starts?
These are difficult questions, and I think that ultimately if circumstances were different, I would
have not gotten to focus on GLM this summer. I’m really glad that for my SIP, I ended up being
encouraged to do something that matters in my community. Honestly, I probably would not have
shown up with GLM so consistently if it weren’t for my SIP, but that’s not necessarily a bad
thing. My SIP (and the global pandemic) motivated me to step out of my comfort zone and try
something new- I think at its core, that’s what SIPs should all be about. While I still am
disappointed that my original summer plans fell through, I really value the work I’ve done this
summer and will continue to do in the future.

Even though the summer’s over and I’m finished with my SIP, I will continue this work
into the foreseeable future. In the political climate of today, activism and anti-racism work is of
utmost importance. I chose the Anti-Racist Business Network and PAC as projects because I can
do them from anywhere. Now that I’m back in Kalamazoo, I’ve been attending BLM related
events as I can, and I intend to get involved in this work wherever I live in the future.
Date: June 6, 2020

Title: Peaceful Protest Against Police Brutality in The Dalles

Description and Photos:

I attended a peaceful protest in The Dalles, the largest city in The Gorge. The Dalles is a notoriously conservative city that has a history of racist acts dating back to the Oregon trail. The event turn out was amazing - the largest civil rights event in The Gorge ever. Around 1,500 people attended, all wearing masks. As people arrived, community members spoke and shared their experiences with racism in the community. Then, we gathered and marched a few blocks to the police station. We all laid face down in silence for eight minutes and forty six seconds, the time that the officer suffocated George Floyd, leading to his murder. Then, we marched around downtown and looped back to the park that we started in. Downtown there were a handful of counter-protestors. The most alarming thing to see was white male business owners “guarding” their businesses with automatic rifles slung over their shoulders. The event stayed peaceful though and was important in helping BLM in The Gorge build momentum.

Photo by Jennifer Rose
I attended a protest in downtown Hood River. Everyone gathered on the sidewalk on both sides of the street. Rosie Strange spoke and encouraged other People of Color and youth to speak. Then we marched to the busiest intersection downtown and laid face down for eight minutes and forty six seconds. Afterwards, we outlined all of our bodies in chalk. We marched across the bridge over the highway and to the waterfront. Since we had the whole street, Rosie blasted music and we had a dance party. Building community is an important part of anti-racist work too!
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<th><strong>Date:</strong> June 14, 2020</th>
<th><strong>Title:</strong> Black Lives Matter in The Gorge Youth Rally at The Dalles Marina</th>
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**Description and Photos:**

This was a much smaller event in the Dalles. This time we met at the marina - as people arrived we wrote on the parking lot with chalk. Then, we walked onto the path that goes next to the highway and stood lining it. We got lots of supportive honks as cars drove by. Towards the end, a white man started shouting at us for "defacing property." Rosie Strange, the organizer of the event explained to him that it was all temporary chalk, but he was still enraged. He got into his truck and took photos of all the license plates there - I don't think anything came of it though. The “young adults” (18 - 25 year olds) of the group assembled to write “Black lives matter” on the side of the concrete divider. Each of us were in charge of doing one letter so we could get it done quickly. It turned out great but due to the speed of the highway, it would be hard for cars to see it unless they knew it was already there.
**Date:** June 19, 2020

**Title:** BLM Remembrance Rally for Juneteenth in Hood River

**Description and Photos:** Images by Katharine Kimball

For Juneteenth, we gathered at the fish fountain in Hood River. Rosie Strange spoke and then we all watched a video on Zoom about the history and a reflection of Juneteenth from Black activists. We also gathered for awhile and sat in silence in remembrance of the lives lost in the brutal history of American slavery. I stayed around after this event, so I could introduce myself to Rosie and ask how else I could get involved aside from participating at events. She took my contact information and invited me to the next BLM The Gorge action meeting.
This was one of my favorite events that I went to. We met at the community school in Mosier, the smallest town in The Gorge - we were told to bring blankets for social distancing on the feld. First Rosie shared the history of pride with the audience: she talked about the Stonewall riots and the vital role that BlackTrans women such as Marsha P Johnson played in the origins of queer pride. We had a moment of silence for Black Trans Folx lost to violence and had an altar in their honor. Then Sara Mains, a chief and dance instructor taught the “5 Rythms” dance. After learning the dance and doing it for awhile, they opened it up to be a dance party - playing songs all by Black artists. We formed a big circle and had people dance through it- towards the end, we also had a “dance-off” between the youth and older folk. It was a really impactful event, but also really fun with a lot of community building. The only reason we left was because the mosquitoes got really bad.
Date: June 21, 2020
Title: Black Lives Matter Community Rally at NORCOR

Description and Photos:

This protest took place at the Northern Oregon Regional Corrections Facilities also known as NORCOR. NORCOR is the only prison in the Gorge that “serves” Sherman, Wasco, Gillam, and Hood River Counties. NORCOR is the only remaining prison/jail in the state of Oregon that has a contract with ICE, and it is manifested by many racist systems - NORCOR is a stain on our community. This was Father’s day - we assembled around the sidewalk. After standing for awhile with signs, we gathered around and listened to different people speak on the mega phone. Then, we gathered at the corner of the fence that it's been reported the ICE detainees can hear protestors from and chanted. We chanted in English and Spanish phrases like “Chinga la migra,” “somos unos,” and “abolish ICE.” There was a police car from Wasco county parked across the street but no altercations were exchanged. We ended the event by blasting music and dancing.
Date: June 23, 2020
Title: BLM in the Gorge Organizer Action Meeting on Zoom

Description and Photos:

This was the first virtual meeting I got to attend with BLM in the Gorge Organizers, the second one they’ve had. There was a huge turn out - 33 people attended. Rosie Strange led the meeting. She went over ideas for projects we could do to make The Gorge anti-racist that people identified in the first meeting. Then other people shared ideas for other projects. At the end of the meeting, we identified six categories to focus on: Education and Outreach, BLM Anti-racist Business Network, De-ICE NORCOR, Police Advisory Committee, Indigenous Outreach, and Healing Practices. Then, we signed up to work on different projects based on everyone’s interests and skill sets. I committed to be a part of the BLM Anti-racist Business team and the Police Advisory Committee. I choose these groups because I have past experience reaching out to local businesses, and these are both groups I can participate in even when I’m not at home. We joined team groups on Signal, and started communicating on that.
The BLM Business Network team met for about 30 minutes to check in. Over the past few weeks, we have been messaging on Signal - editing and reviewing documents, planning a timeline, and arranging printing. In the meeting we decided we have the “go ahead” to start contacting businesses - we’re using a spreadsheet to keep track of the businesses. This meeting was also nice because it was a smaller group so we took the time to introduce ourselves.
I attended the weekly demonstration put on by Riverside church and Somos Uno. They meet at the fish fountain every Tuesday at 5:30pm. I would have attended these every week but I had just found out about them. As I was walking up to the event, I saw a truck driving by the group holding a confederate flag out the window, yelling at the protesters (pictured below). The truck circled the block several times before driving away. The group responded with silence. Aside from that, it was a really nice event - they handed out paper with lyrics to words and we sang the songs“” and “Lean on Me). Also some people spoke and we ended with eight minutes and 46 seconds of silence. I will definitely try to attend more of these events in the future.
Date: July 17, 2020

Title: Community Meditation for Black Lives Lost To Police Violence in Bingen, WA

Description and Photos:

This was a small event at a park in Bingen, Washington (across the Columbia river from Hood River). We gathered social distancing on our own blankets. Avery, the leader of the healing practices led a meditation. Before, we all wrote on sticky notes a manifestation of what we want to see in the world. Then, they led us through a guided meditation. I don’t have much experience with meditation but it was nice.
This event was on a very hot afternoon at NORCOR (North Oregon Regional Corrections Facilities), the only prison in The Gorge and THE ONLY prison in Oregon remaining with a contract with ICE. There are countless reports of the poor living conditions in NORCOR, and after years of activism, the conditions have scarcely improved. At this event, we met at the gate and lined up along the fenceline with our signs for passing vehicles to see. A police car was parked in the shade the whole time. The march organizers were giving out popsicles and spraying people with water. Participants for this event were asked to bring blocks of ice - a highlight of the event was “smashing ice”. We put blocks of ice on the pavement and hammered them to little pieces (was safer than it might sound). It was a cooling, effective metaphor.
For this event, we met on the walking bridge in the Hood River waterfront. They had intended to have an art project where we created a banner to hang across the bridge, but it was very windy so we couldn’t. Instead, we stood over the bridge with our signs for about an hour. There were a few pedestrians that walked across it, but I think people were driving too fast on the highway to see us. Towards the end, everyone circled up on the land and listened and spoke about what’s going on in Portland right now.
We met at NORCOR around 11am - we keep consistently meeting here because NORCOR is a huge concern of BLM in The Gorge, both because of it’s ICE contract and conditions in general. Like we have been doing, we stood surrounding the prison fence for awhile. But the road that NORCOR is on doesn’t get much traffic, so this time we marched to a main four way intersection controlled by traffic lights in The Dalles. The group split up so there were 5-10 people on each corner. Here we were much more visible. We held our signs, chanted, and danced. Rosie had a sign that “honk if you’re anti-racist,” so we got a lot of supportive honks as the cars drove by. We also received more thumbs down, middle fingers, opposing yells, and revving of engines than ever before - that does make sense though because this area had the most traffic we’ve protested at so far. Many people yelled along the lines of “all lives matter” or “blue lives matter,” but my favorite remark was when a woman just yelled “YOU ARE DUMB.” Anyways, it was about 95 degrees, so after about an hour we marched back to NORCOR before we melted. Back at NORCOR someone handed out popsicles and we circled up and listened to people speak about NORCOR/PDX. As we were doing this, a car stopped as it was leaving and a woman said to us “my Black son is in there thank you for all you’re doing.” It was a nice reminder for why we keep showing up.
This was a smaller meeting with the Police Advisory Committee (PAC), the first one that I was able to attend. The PAC is smaller than the group of people working with the business network. Five of us were on the Zoom call; I had never met any of them in person. In the beginning, we went around and introduced ourselves, saying our name, pronouns, town, our work, and why we wanted to be on PAC. Then, we discussed progress in researching the police departments and next steps. We’re going to do power mapping of people in our community who could influence the police departments budgets so that we will have a clear idea of who to focus our efforts on. Another thing we talked about was a way that the PAC can interact with the business group. We want to have dialogue with business owners about their safety policies and procedures- we want them to examine how they involve law enforcement and reflect on that. Emily and I are both also in the business network group, so we will bring this up to them as a future initiative once more businesses are a part of our network.
I attended my first NORCOR board meeting on Google Hangouts. GLM asked that as many community members as possible show up to show that the eyes of the community are on them and to demand the end of their contracts with ICE. It was a really interesting experience. Usually, they have public commentary at the beginning and then proceed with the meeting. But once the meeting started, they announced they were moving public testimony to the end of the meeting. This was really frustrating. I, along with others, critiqued the board meeting in the Hangouts chat. It was disgusting how they discussed inmates like they were inventory. And they were patting each other on the back for having tested 2 inmates - both of them came back negative. After a while of their talk, they had to have their private (I’m not familiar with the official terminology) meeting so they kicked all the public out and asked that we went back 45 minutes later. These were tactics to get the public eyes off of them. Once we were allowed back in the meeting, the Chair announced that “after looking at the numbers, it no longer makes sense for them to have their contract with ICE.” I was so surprised by this announcement. It’s disappointing that community members have been demanding the removal of ICE for 5 years and there’s still a lot of NORCOR work to be done, but this was a huge victory! Instead of angry public testimony, people spoke words of gratitude to the board for their decision. They will be terminating their ICE contracts for both adults and juveniles within the legal bounds, so in 60 days.
Connect with The Gorge Liberation Movement

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Anti-Racist Business Network Facebook Page