

# Name-Brand Negro



S. L. Webb



S. L. WEBB

# Name Brand Negro

*Advocacy Within the Dominant Narrative*



Copyright © 2026 by S. L. Webb

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.*

*Cover generated by Google Gemini AI.*

*First edition*

*This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.*

*Find out more at [reedsy.com](https://reedsy.com)*

# Contents

Introduction	1
1 My First Advocacy	6
2 Advocacy as an Adult	10
3 Decipher City as an App	16
4 People Who Refuse to Hear “No”	21
5 Decipher City as a Research Entity	25
6 United States Census	39
7 The Pedestrian and Bicycling Advisory Councils	43
8 2020 Election	56
9 Switching to Full-Time Structured Activism	62
10 Biosquat	66
11 Austin Water Aid	70
12 Education Denied for White Safety	78
13 Project Connect Equity Anti-Displacement Tool	81
14 Community-Led Groups Attempting to Emulate the Dominant...	90
15 Preservation Working Group	93
16 ATX Walk, Bike, Roll	98
17 Project Connect Community Connector	122
18 Climate Ambassador Program	130
19 Ghisallo Cycling Initiative	138
20 Mental Health in a World that Hates	152
Epilogue	161



# Introduction

Most people with sense in the United States understand that the reason racism has been sustained is the enabling of abusers who demand a country where they can control Black people and not be seen as evil for doing so, continuing a pattern of behavior based on colonization. In conservative areas, those who maintain racist ideals are a lot more open and honest, and most Black people know to avoid such places due to the permissive attitude towards racial violence. Having lived in Austin for 20 years as an adult after being raised here, I have come to the conclusion that purportedly “liberal” cities are worse than conservative areas for two reasons. First, there will still be violence and segregation, but the populations will use words like “progress” and “safety” to justify the hostility towards non-white people. Secondly, there will be constant emotional coercion to validate the toxic positivity of being hateful towards Black people while demanding good reputations, ignoring that such places are *neoliberal*, not *socially* liberal. In short, in “liberal” cities, Black people are supposed to face discrimination, socioeconomic bigotry, and constant emotional abuse while being expected to say how happy we are that we live in a liberal city compared to more conservative cities.

Maintaining this reputation is difficult without a certain number of Black people and other people of color to act as models of integration. I should know, as I served as one of those models,

even after seeing that a Councilmember was so willfully ignorant that I was coerced into silence. Naively or narcissistically, or both, I figured that if I could just have the right audience, my message would be heard and change would occur, which is how most advocates begin our careers. With dubious encouragement, I began my fight for change, and over time, I realized how Black people are viewed who try to enact change within the dominant narrative using systemic tools: name-brand negroes. This is not to say that Black people on all fronts who fight for justice are disingenuous, but there is a difference between those who are open to legitimate change and those who secretly enjoy the status quo with the only difference being their position in it. Frankly, the goal of the majority of activism seems to be the continued assimilation of BIPOC participants, because then we *might* be considered human and thus more palatable for social engagement.

The main problem with such advocacy is that there are so many people within the dominant narrative who cannot think beyond this one concept, and they bring it with them everywhere they go: “Black people are stupid subhumans who I am allowed to control without restraint.” While people enjoy smiling and saying that they are Democrats/liberals/leftists/progressives, they truly enjoy *pretending* that they have interest in the subgroups they created while actively shutting us down without true engagement. Furthermore, people often use “human nature” argument to deflect from the fact that they intend to cause harm without reservation. During our time on this continent, people knew they were committing violence, so they had to brainwash themselves into believing that we deserved this violence in some way, either through religion or dehumanization, or both. The conditioning has remained to

this day because the idea that Black people deserve subjugation is the premise of engaging with us on all levels, which is why people are allowed to stalk, harass, denigrate, and ridicule us at all times. This has nothing to do with “human nature,” but deconstructing industrialized mindsets.

For many of the white people that I worked with, the premise was, “Sure, we can fight injustice, but never forget that I am one of the good ones, and continue assuring me of that during this entire process.” Long after I finished doing any advocacy projects within the dominant narrative, I realized that as oppressors—in apathy, if nothing else—beneficiaries of the dominant narrative should start from a neutral position. “I have to be seen as one of the good ones!” What if one is honestly *not* a good person? What if bigots feel perfectly safe around someone because they feel confident that such an individual will “keep the peace”? What if people understand that certain individuals will feel so frozen by past trauma that they know someone will fail to advocate for anyone, even “friends”? What if comfort and privilege demand that people tolerate injustices without blinking an eye? Until beneficiaries and sycophants are willing to ask themselves these questions, all advocacy will turn into asinine conversations structured around coddling feelings. Nobody should stand still for that after a while.

With advocacy, what predators often do is attempt to stroke egos, which is why compliments still raise my eyebrows. During one such opportunity, someone continued to tell me how smart I was while not doing any of the research required on an action. At first, I was flattered, and would spend an unreasonable amount of time helping out, especially with the group that we were both supposedly equal members of, constantly mentioning “solidarity.” However, once the group behaved in a particularly

bigoted manner, the individual tried flattering me again, but then I explained how to do what I did so that someone else could work on it, and that stopped the fake flattery. People hope that Black people feel flattered enough to let them prey on us, and tell us how they need us. As our resources become depleted, we are discarded for someone else, to whom they also lie.

When people were offering “hope” during all that “advocacy,” which turned out to be disingenuous opportunity, we jumped at the chance for evolution, nevermind that we were going to be doing more of the work and getting almost none of the benefit. After all, people who are used to decades of time and trillions of dollars being poured into them for their benefit have no concept of pouring into anyone else. This is why the concept of reparations is so abhorrent. However, the results have been that people refuse to take emotional responsibility for their unwillingness to change. If I do something wrong, it makes me want to repair the damage. Within the dominant narrative, if someone does something wrong, too many hide in a useless ball of shame because their image was destroyed. No effective collaboration is possible with that kind of attitude. Therefore, we need to step back and let the monsters act like the monsters they are, no rationalizing or backup.

In this era of social media, it is important to understand that people do not hate cancel culture, but accountability. In the past, all these emotionally immature clowns could trap people and hold them hostage on all kinds of emotional rollercoasters. Now, people can not only leave, but we can all warn others. Terrible people hate that. The only reason that anyone wants a BIPOCQ face in a “white” spot is to ensure that there is a BIPOCQ face cosigning on racism and oppression. So many idiots keep insisting on the idea that the empire is “post-racial.”

## INTRODUCTION

“Post-racial” means that no one constantly feels comfortable punching down on Black people in public. “Post-racial” means that the dominant narrative stops going shopping for property in nonwhite neighborhoods. “Post-racial” means that there is self-awareness from non-BIPOCQ individuals about their insistence on using BIPOCQ individuals as batteries. Most importantly, “post-racial” means that BIPOCQ children get to grow up in innocence and not be pathologized until someone comes to drug them back into compliance.

# 1

## My First Advocacy

When I was little, I first wanted to be a writer, but then decided that I should study architecture to fund my interest in writing. I had no interest in advocacy, and being raised on watered-down Black history, I never really felt like I had anything in common with people like that. Please note that this is a feature, not a bug, of the school system when it teaches Black history. In fourth grade, I had a teacher who decided that Black people were stupid, and did her level best to make sure I was on her bad side whenever I was in class. This was a problem for two reasons, the first of which that I had started the school year with a Black teacher who had left on maternity leave, and the second being that I was in the gifted program. A friend of mine and I enjoy the joke that “gifted” usually just means “segregated,” but I guess to promote the lie that all the children are gifted, such programs are required to let a few of us lesser mortals into the class. Well, I noticed a double standard between the behavior standards being held for me and those being held for the, ahem, other students.

Despite my reputation of being alternatively a nerd and a

class clown—it was easier to get people to leave me alone if I bothered to entertain them—I was uninterested in being labeled as a troublemaker, which I absolutely was *not*. However, even though I pointed out inconsistencies and made straight A's in class, this teacher would not budge on her mentality that Black people were stupid. Therefore, I drew a comic of her calling me a nigger and “accidentally” let it fall on the floor in front of her when we switched classes. While that resulted in a call to my parents, it also resulted in my having more time away from her than with her, which meant that I could finally get back to being an entertaining and neurotic student. When I got home, I was not punished, which should let people know that some parents have begun to understand trends. Though I respect the idea of consequences, it is irrational to punish people for being born a color that one dislikes from a culture that one refuses to understand.

Advocating for ourselves is something that Black people are forced to do when growing up in predominantly white cities, especially when growing up in the “good” neighborhoods—meaning white and segregated. There were four Black students in my sixth grade graduating class, and since people grew up in segregated areas, my Black colleagues and I were apparently responsible for fulfilling *all* of the stereotypes that everyone had about Black people, a mindset that would continue as I got older. Even though I would do my best to keep the neurotic class clown personality active, I was struck by how many times I was forced to stop being goofy and make it clear that Black people were human beings. My being in magnet schools for six years did not help, especially since I grew up in West Austin and magnet schools were nothing more than a desegregation tactic used by many cities to entice white students to neighborhoods of color

to raise funds. Later, the City would simply shut down schools in nonwhite neighborhoods for failing to meet “standards,” quietly creating the ethnostate they richly desired.

Under the dominant narrative, Black people were first and foremost *physical* slaves, forced to perform constant activity lest we get categorized as lazy or forced to endure violence. During the current era, we are largely *emotional* slaves because it is considered acceptable that we assuage the insecurities of strangers. Throughout my education, there were various cases of teachers justifying the atrocities of the United States based on other imperial examples, and people like me were required to smile and nod. A history teacher stated that indigenous genocide was reasonable because of the violence within that culture, and a biology teacher claimed that indigenous people were just as environmentally destructive. For them, I now offer that even though Greece “developed democracy,” Greece had slaves, because apparently, a democracy cannot exist without slavery. Violence and coercion are the results of unchecked insecurities, and because no one will admit to insecurities, no one can either validate or ignore them.

As was made clear by several students and their parents, I was not the target population for gifted and talented education, as people wanted white students in those programs more than anything else. While my classmates were recruited to the University of Texas at Austin and stayed at the overnight recruiting event, I had yet to receive any information despite my parents being alumni of the University of Texas at Austin School of Law. Out of spite, I refused to apply there at all—so Abigail Fischer could have had *my* spot in 1999—but my “guidance” counselor tried to manipulate me into applying because of my “unrealistic” college aspirations. Despite my “guidance” counselor’s “help,”

I was accepted into Washington University, Yale University, University of Chicago, and Northwestern University. Most of my classmates *and their parents* took it as a personal affront, and made the last two months of high school more miserable than the rest.

In college, I participated in two major protests. First, Yale kept the classes going on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and as students at a private institution that had almost no holidays except for the designated breaks, we decided to march and rally, and succeeded in shutting the classes down for that day onward beginning in the year 2001. My second protest was a march on Washington, which was pretty heady stuff for someone majoring in African American Studies who had learned about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The Supreme Court was rehearing *Brown vs. Board* in 2003, so on April 1, 2003, several groups traveled down to Washington, D.C. to protest the reversal of integration. Having learned about protests and the supposed results from the Civil Rights Movement, I felt like I was a part of something bigger than myself, and like I was truly becoming a part of the history I had studied.

After graduating from Yale, I was scheduled to complete the New York City Teaching Fellows while teaching history from a more marginalized perspective, but like many other teachers—both perspective and practicing—I failed the teacher certification tests due to a lack of study materials. This was so depressing that I was manipulated into returning to Austin, Texas, and while I found ways to be happy, I also realized that Austin is nothing more than a constant demand to advocate for one's humanity in a city where most people are determined to make Black people their pets, props, and tokens.

## 2

### Advocacy as an Adult

Coming back to Austin, Texas was depressing, especially considering not only the lack of a Black population but the continued expectation that Black people entertain everyone else at the expense of ourselves. For a while, I wrote letters to the editor in the Austin Chronicle. One such letter pointed out the empty buses that I saw during the day, to which Lee Leffingwell thought he would “educate” me on how the buses were not empty and used by many people. In truth, there were *and remain* several empty buses because CapMetro has discretely maneuvered its service to move mainly students and white-collar professionals, leaving service workers and nightshift employees to be forced to fund our own private transportation just to commute. Writing these letters gave me some satisfaction, but I also noticed that I was not the only person pointing out the issues I raised, and that discriminatory behavior was getting even worse.

When I was working on my masters’ thesis in 2011, I was surprised but validated to calculate that Austin was more segregated than Jasper, Texas—truck-dragging Texas, for those in younger generations—and I began to eye my city even more critically

than I had before. After all, Austin enjoys portraying itself as a liberal paradise where “everyone” can feel safe, although I started to understand that “everyone” meant rich, white, and possibly queer people, but no one else. This is often the implicit goal of liberal cities: fabulous reputations with terrible behavior, because the only criteria for being a “good” person is voting Democrat. Essentially, “I voted Democrat. I’m done.” Later, I would find out just how cruel the city government would be to people trying to invalidate the standards for being a “good” person.

I had continued to participate in protests until 2015, when I participated in the protest for Michael Brown, complete with police escort. At the end of the protest, I had the same feeling I had during election night for Barack Obama: nothing is going to change as a result of this. Granted, a Black man entering the White House and a Black child killed by police brutality are different scenarios, but I realized that at the end of the protest, nothing happened. No action was taken, and everything was likely going to be restored to the status quo. I even took the megaphone and encouraged people to vote, but even that felt hollow since I had almost been a victim of police brutality myself when housesitting for a friend, prompting other friends to inform their neighbors when I watched houses in the future—at the time, I was a very consistent voter. Protesting, writing, going to meetings, voting—all of it felt both performative and ineffective, and what felt worse is that people kept pushing for these actions *with the knowledge* that nothing would change and hoping no one would notice. Being pushed to ineffectual action can also become depressing because all the “advice” sounds the same, even though the people responsible for the injustice have no self-awareness.

2016 was the year that so many younger people rushed to vote, hoping to deter the likes of Trump entering the White House. Regardless of all the examples and all the threats, people voted to make life harder specifically for Black people, basically throwing a temper tantrum after having to look at a Black man in the Oval Office for eight years. Having survived the Bush/Gore debacle of 2000, I was not surprised, but what made several people disgusted was finding out how many people had lied in the polls. After doing so much to get both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton elected, and seeing just how spiteful and controlling so many people were, younger people were in a daze. That disgust would start making us less inclined to vote as elections continued, even as the same people sabotaged us, a fact that directed older populations to harass us as political cycles continued. I pondered over what I would do to combat the anticipated increase in racism, and a colleague and I decided that we would become information activists to inform people about how urban planning worked in language that most people could understand. In a past life, I had wanted to be a social studies teacher, so this would be less of a shift for me. DecipherCity.Org would come together by the middle of 2017.

Having been in Austin for over ten years by 2016, I had made a number of friendships, one of whom was another writer who was receiving his doctorate in geography at the University of Texas. He was also a cyclist, which was one of the reasons I was introduced to an organization called “Food Not Bombs,” where I also met other cycling activists. The graduate student and I kept in touch after meeting at a writing event, and because he knew about my masters in Geographic Information Systems, he invited me to participate in a map-making project for “The State of Black Austin 2016.” During that project, I met my future

colleague for DecipherCity.Org based on her having lived in New Haven, Connecticut, which I knew after attending Yale and living off campus. I was the only Black person in the group, but there were also two other people of color, because fortunately, the graduate student was from Atlanta, Georgia, making him aware that there were all kinds of people. We created the maps, participated in the “conversation,” and just as most of the attendees had expected, nothing happened. One of the talking points that neoliberals like to keep repeating is that, “These things take time,” so after the conversation, the graduate student’s group reconvened and considered other opportunities for change.

• • •

During the summer of 2016, I had participated in offering food for the unhoused as part of a collaboration with the church that I attended (which was majority white), and I had been a part of that small group for a little over two years. It was once or twice a month, I enjoyed the engagement, and I thought that the team was very united. There was only one rule with the process: the unhoused were made to accept food at the corner instead of the front of the church. It was never clear why there was such a rule, but that rule was supposedly steadfast. At the beginning of our meetups, once I finished helping with the food preparation, I made the announcement, and for weeks, everyone followed the rules and we went on about our business. None of the “brothers” and “sisters” at “my” church ever demonstrated a problem with the way I spoke because I was careful to be as neutral as possible.

However, one day when I made an announcement, one of the white unhoused men started arguing with me, and nobody from “my” church backed me up, and everyone stood away from me, leaving me to look like the image in their minds: a crazy

Black woman. The individual called the church office, and white woman walked outside and berating me. I asked to meet the pastor, because surely this clearly racist individual was *not* a member of the leadership of the collaborating church, but in stereotypical white woman fashion, she educated the stupid subhuman Black woman that she *was* leadership. People often believe that non-white cultures are automatically sexist; I was surprised that someone so bigoted was an associate pastor, but no one supported me in that moment, so I said nothing. There was another Black man who was part of “my” church, but he said nothing in that moment, and berated me to be humble when I saw him again. I had never felt so abandoned in public.

Still believing in public input meetings, I put together maps and went to a CapMetro meeting in January 2017. Before the actual meeting, there was the audience networking session, where people tended to conduct whatever business they meant to deal with at the meeting *before* listening to prepared speeches. There was a cluster of older white people who were talking about transportation in Northwest Austin, and they were surprised and frustrated by the lack of buses. Having studied African American history, calculated segregation in Austin, and lived in Northwest Austin, I began the delicate dance of talking about race without saying the word “race.” “Well, there was a concern about the types of people who would be taking buses in Northwest Austin, which is why there were very few routes dedicated to that area,” I said. An older white woman played dumb, smiled and said, “Oh, you mean people like my mother?” “No,” I responded, and the conversation would have stalled, except an older white man said, “Yes, I remember those concerns, and we’re paying for it now.”

“Yes, and now that the communities have been developed in

such weird ways, it will be harder for there to be any buses. When I lived in Northwest Austin off Jollyville Road, I always knew that I would have to be home by a certain time because no buses would be at that part of town during the night routes. It was very difficult to work late,” I replied. “There are also a lot of people who work different shifts who are forced to buy cars to get out to some areas because the communities didn’t want them, and now—” “That’s because there isn’t any public transportation,” said a rude, racist voice, and I looked over to see who I now know was a Councilmember, smirking at me before ignoring any response I might have made, speaking longer than the allotted time, and then flouncing off to be “important” somewhere else. This Councilmember had no idea who I was, what my backstory was, no self-awareness that I was discussing the segregation that the residents from that district had wanted, or anything else. All that mattered was shutting up a stupid, subhuman Black woman so that a white Councilmember could be “important.”

## 3

# Decipher City as an App

In June 2017, my colleague and I attended a “contest” called ATX Hack4Change, during which programmers and activists convened to make apps that were geared toward social justice. My colleague suddenly found an errand that she was required to attend, while I was delegated the task of attending the conference, putting together a concept for an app, finding a programmer, and launching said app in an attempt to gain relevance. While I was continuing to work at my full-time job, I came up with an idea: what if Black people could anonymously discuss their experiences in different places and provide feedback about their level of comfort? After all, if everyone else is allowed to say that they are fearful in our mere presence, what if we had a way to speak without retaliation?

First, I was speaking to a Black man who had a number of ideas, but was executing none of them in my presence, so I had no idea about what he could do. Next, I was talking to a white man who, when I proposed the concept of the app, immediately produced a demo, and made it possible to test the app with both the Black man sitting with us and me. As I was limited to a weekend,

speed was essential, and we set about coming up with a name for the app, trying “Comfort Austin” and “Know Austin,” both of which were taken. Because I was a writer, I did a search for synonyms of those words, and I found that “Decipher Austin” was available. I imagined that there would be an opportunity to expand outside Austin, so I registered “Decipher City” for the app when I presented it with the programmer.

Even though the “contest” was supposed to match activists with programmers and entice funding, we were all considered to have “won,” which meant that we would be on our own to find funding. At that point, my colleague and I met with the graduate student’s group and the programmer, and we tried to consider everything that needed to be done to create this business. My colleague found another graphic designer, who solidified the visual presentation for the app and could make it more attractive for clients. Everyone agreed to be available if I could secure funding, and I immediately set off applying for an EIN number, finding contracts to bid on, registering with the Secretary of State, funding a server to hold our data, registering with Apple and Google, attending meetings and making presentations to find opportunities. As this was also a time when everyone was supposedly looking for a way to relieve police brutality and address racism, I believed that even though I would never have a massive fortune, I might be able to make a steady living, and enough to support the people who believed in this project.

I worked on Decipher City as much as I could while trying to maintain my social connections. My final interaction with “my” church was during the vacation Bible school of 2017, and I had only agreed to work part-time based on the bigotry I had experienced during the last time I participated in a church activity. The last time I was available for vacation Bible school

was in 2013, and I was paid; Decipher City was not acquiring any income, so I could desperately use the money, having liquidated my third retirement to invest in the possibility of DecipherCity.Org. I noticed a problem on the first day because there were two sets of Black sisters, and one set of Black brothers; the sister sets had matching ages, but the two Black boys were on different floors, one with the youth and the other with the children. During the entire week, I saw everyone correcting him, and I tried to step in, but unfortunately, most of the other workers were teachers with the Austin Independent School District, which I knew from experience to be an incredibly degrading school system for Black children. On the last day of vacation Bible school, the younger Black boy was having a meltdown, and I scooped him up and took him outside, prepared to share my wisdom from my own experience with him.

I sat him on the chair away from me, and I sat on a couch facing him, saying, "Listen, you can't fight back like that in class because they'll think you're bullying them." "Well, they bully me, so I bully them!" he yelled, and for a moment, I was once again that frustrated fourth-grader being bullied by my own teacher and other classmates, with everyone thinking the worst of me. Just then, his white adoptive sister came over and started trying to force him to take a pill, and I did my level best to get her out of our conversation, but she refused to listen. I did not like her because she enjoyed carrying this Black boy on her hip, and I knew that she thought of him as a doll or a prop to her family, not as a true human being who was having a completely reasonable response to being alienated by his classmates. To dismiss my authority as an adult, she got her mother on the phone, who coerced me into allowing her a force a pill down his throat, and return him compliantly to class.

Unbeknownst to me, all the other white adults were reporting me to the children's director of the church, another white woman, and they were ready to gang up on me and get rid of this Black nuisance, as they saw me. When I went with the children to another class, the children's director pulled me outside the classroom, and stated that I had been completely in the wrong. I tried to explain to her that I had experience as a Black woman in an all-white environment at which point she yelled, "I have twenty years of experience as a public school teacher!" Again, I was made to feel like a child, and the younger Black boy saw two things: 1) his opinion was worthless to any of the white adults around him, and 2) even if he grew up, no one would ever believe in his autonomy. I said nothing for a moment, then replied, "If I cannot talk about being Black in this church, then today is my last day." True to my word, I never set foot inside that cursed space again. The children's director pretended that she had simply been "distracted," and asked to meet with me, and I accepted none of that garbage. It took her two weeks to offer a fake apology and ask for a meeting, and when I suggested a date, she had already planned to go on a vacation, but refused to offer another date. I was never paid, and within a month, I made sure that I got off all the email lists for that evil space. Later, the behavior would be rationalized by stating, "We always state that mornings are voluntary, while afternoons are paid."

Unfortunately, what most rising Black activists and other activists reminded me of was that the dominant narrative likes to posture about addressing societal ills. While people really enjoyed my coming around to discuss Decipher City and making sad faces, *none* of that translated into money earned. I had quit my job due to not receiving bonuses or promotions despite stellar reviews for two years in a row, and my performance had

reasonably declined as a result. Decipher City tried opening up to different cities in hopes of other Texas cities finding the project interesting. We hoped that some major firms were interested in the experiences of their nonwhite employees, and were exploring options to make workplaces safer. We received no income, and later in 2019, we found that the Massachusetts Institute of Technology had gained traction and funding from a similar idea in 2016, and were able to present the Atlas of Inequality. There is no competing with the dominant narrative in terms of resources and attention, and the only way to extend the possible viability of DecipherCity.Org was to morph into a blog, which is what happened beginning in October 2017.

During the summer of 2017, I was also attending meetings with the City of Austin Equity Action Team, hoping to find people interested in investing or at least businesses willing to contract so that we could see if we had a viable product. Sending out and searching for bids with my limited resources was becoming a struggle, and I was running out of options before I would be forced to find a roommate who trusted me enough to let me stay relatively for free with the understanding that they would be repaid. I would offer demonstrations and get a lot of enthusiastic nods, but no real investment, and I noticed that the City often had the same people offering the same opinions even when the equity officer made different proposals. The whole experience began to feel like an echo chamber without any lasting commitment from the city and no investment in my efforts, so I stopped attending in 2018. Running in too many directions meant lost energy, and I needed to start looking for work.

## 4

### People Who Refuse to Hear “No”

The biggest issue with “coming together” with beneficiaries of the dominant narrative is that they refuse to accept that sometimes, advocates are not interested in joining their projects. Furthermore, people refuse to believe that Black women are allowed to say “no,” and do not deserve to either be antagonized or further manipulated. The problem with the United States is that people have been calibrated to believe that they have the right to prey on Black women and use us for whatever purpose they see fit. In general, Black women are good prey for two reasons. First, many of us have been parentified due to our ambitious and/or immature parents, so we have been cultivated to “care” for others, “care” meaning comply and repair damage we never caused. Second, most of us have been told that we have to work twice as hard to get half as much by “elders” who were “helping” us maintain the status quo and acting as gatekeepers to preserve their dominance.

When I found some full-time work to maintain my life in 2018 while trying to simultaneously maintain Decipher City, I realized that I needed to exercise, but not in a way that would

be dangerous, as Texas is getting hotter than it was since I was a child. Fortunately for me, there was a pool right next to my job, and I went there every day after work to swim a minimum of 1 kilometer, since it was a 50m pool. I enjoyed working, swimming, changing at the office, and then walking home, since I lived two miles away at the time on a fairly flat path. Taking turns for a lane sometimes meant engaging in conversation, and there was an elderly white couple who had seen me on a regular basis. One day, the elderly woman approached me and we started talking about swimming, and she mentioned that she and her husband ran a nonprofit. I knew lots of nonprofit entities, so that was uninteresting, but we continued to make small talk until a lane was open and I started swimming. This happened a couple of times, and I figured I just met some pool buddies, and since I had met a bus buddy who had a great family and they moved, I considered that my circle was simply expanding.

A few days later, the woman approached me again and said, “Would you be interested in coming over to our place to make dinner from scratch? My husband and I love hosting dinners like that, and I like trying new recipes.” I also like cooking, and an evening is not a long time to devote to maintaining a connection; although I would have preferred a restaurant, cooking at home is cheaper, and I enjoy socializing while saving money. I agreed, and we set up the evening for a couple of days later in the week. At this point, I need to mention that I do not have a car, and at the time, I did not use Uber because I felt uncomfortable with its exploitative model. However, I figure walking to a bus stop after dinner was no big deal, especially since I had no problem walking two miles home after work on a regular basis.

We went to their house, and we had normal enough conversation and prepared a delicious dinner, which she seemed to

deliberately keep prolonging. I cannot remember what we ate, but it seemed like we were beginning to go more slowly as the evening progressed. At about 9pm, when I figured that we would be finished, the woman started talking about her nonprofit which involved teaching to African children, and finally, the alarm bells in my mind started ringing. As a Black daughter of two lawyers, I have met a lot of people who figured that they were doing me a favor by engaging with me, and this "good treatment" usually happened before expecting my labor. I listened thoughtfully for about twenty minutes, but then said, "Okay, this sounds interesting, so let's continue this a bit later since I have to go to work tomorrow." The woman acted as if I had said nothing, and continued to "explain" how she was interested in my taking over their organization, in which I had never expressed an interest. This time, her husband said, "Dear, I think she needs to go home and sleep because she has work tomorrow," and suddenly I felt very drained by the whole ordeal.

With two people making her aware of her rudeness, the woman could no longer pretend that nobody had explained the boundary, and I picked up my belongings and stated that I would go to a bus stop. The woman not only refused to let me go, but while in the car, she made a lot of noises about how she was uncomfortable driving at night, even though I had never asked for a ride. I spent a nerve-racking fifteen minutes being driven back to my apartment complex, and I deliberately told her the wrong building since she had been aggressive. My roommate thought it was funny that night, but then was aware that anything could have happened, and pretended to have empathy the next night. The couple never approached me at the pool again, and indeed, stopped going to that one since I made it abundantly clear that I was there to exercise, not as prey.

People who presume to believe that Black women have no personal rights can be very dangerous, but at least I had made it clear that they had no chance of using me as some sort of centerpiece for their obnoxious efforts to “teach the natives.” Most African countries have superior educational programs, as evidenced by all the immigrants that have come to the United States to study at universities, so by no means was I interested in peddling inferior teaching skills. Refusing to take “no” for an answer is the main reason that most Black people are now distancing themselves from most organizations. No one is interested in peddling mythology about how great the United States is when they can barely function in their own country.

## Decipher City as a Research Entity

The City also produced an Equity Report, which was a compilation of the City's past efforts and the results, and I had some time, so I finally started reading it, hoping to reference it in my own demonstrations. By this time Eric Tang had produced his report on the City and the Martin Prosperity Institute Report had circulated, and they all detailed how Black people were leaving the City because of its racist behavior. When I read the Equity Report, I realized that there was almost no information about what *the City* had done, just about what Black people had done. From the perspective of that report, the City looked like a nonparticipant in its own racist policies, with “mean” Black people asking for “too much” from the City's resources.

I began doing research on what the City had done, and at first, I was completely overwhelmed by the lack of information. Most of the responses seemed dedicated to the 1928 Master Plan, which was convenient as everyone who had initiated and implemented that policy was dead. I went to the LBJ School of Public Affairs library, and found the names of some groups, and they recommended the Austin History Center. While at the

Austin History Center, one of the staff introduced me to the City Minutes, which were online, and I did a search on one of the groups I found at LBJ, and I pulled up a lot of dates where the group appeared in the meetings. Clicking on one of the results, I noticed the actions of the group and the response from the City, and when I had gone through all the results, I realized that there was a message from this information. I contacted my colleague and stated that this was more than a small piece, but the beginning of a book project, and this was how I started my first major independent project—which was completed largely alone.

As for the app and the staff, I had offered a recommendation for the programmer so that he was able to secure lasting employment, my colleague had already found a different job in Fort Worth, and I was struggling to make my latest retirement liquidation last as long as possible. By the time I was gaining personal income, I had invested in multiple visits to Fort Worth to maintain the collaboration with my colleague, two conferences—one international—to possibly gain traction for research funding as an independent entity. Most of my debt was in favor of maintaining DecipherCity.Org because there was still a rise in racial justice missions, and at that point, I was simply trying to break even. My colleague and I produced a number of shorter projects on the blog, and even included a podcast at her suggestion, but despite hours of time on social media, there was no traction.

In 2018, I put together a piece called *Not In the Plan*, demonstrating that the problem with the “regular community engagement” was that activists would go to meetings, ask for things, but get ignored. I paid for a great deal of feedback on that piece, and it still never translated to income. While many people may

consider that it was foolish to keep trying to make a business work, bear in mind that *most* new businesses fail, and it was relatively inexpensive to keep applying for grants and contracts while working full time and maintaining a presence on social media. In fact, I had taken a job designed to help me get out of debt just in case the business never amounted to anything. Sadly, by that time, Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* had been published, and why hire a Black woman to do research when a white woman could be called in and soothe all the elitists and bullies by telling them they are "fragile"?

There was a supposedly socialist group called the Democratic Socialists of America that allegedly worked to elect a Black man who was formerly incarcerated onto the City Council in the fall of 2018. Not only did I think very highly of the candidate—who I had met while he was doing his work with Grassroots Initiative—but I was very much in favor of white people using their privilege to promote someone who society deemed unworthy. His wife also advocated for mental health, and as someone who has been institutionalized due to depression at the Yale Psychiatric Institute, I thought they were the perfect "power" couple to advocate for the unheard on the dais of the City Council.

However, as is often the case in white spaces, the candidate demonstrated noncompliance with the dominant narrative, and he was called to task. People said the most horrible things to him, and he was forced to take it because he needed them to do work advocating for his candidacy. None of the white people in the organization took responsibility for the fact that Black people are always held to a higher behavioral standard than white people, and many of them believed he was getting his just desserts. He did not manage to secure the seat on the dais because that is the truth of Austin, Texas: *all* the progressivism

is a lie. All of it.

I stayed with the Democratic Socialists of America for a while longer only because there was a hodgepodge of people, and I was stupid enough to be flattered by false compliments. This is a very common tactic with a lot of organizations, and it works because Black people are used to constant emotional abuse or negligence. I thought that if I were able to develop rapport, I might be able to find contracts for research or contacts for a better job, since most of the organization was involved with privileged people. Yes, I consider myself to be a socioanarchist, but I also know that people like to keep themselves comfortable, and not many people are looking to change. I volunteered to be on the housing committee because of my planning background, and I thought I was working with someone who wanted to work with me and be transparent as a co-committee leader.

Because a future roommate knew about my research with DecipherCity.Org, she invited me to speak with the League of Women Voters. What I did not know at the time was that the League of Women Voters was inconsistent about its status on racial segregation, but because the United States lies about its history, I assumed that the organization was about engaging women at the ballot. I wanted to see what the organization was about, so I agreed to go to one meeting first, and I met the Executive Director of Foundation Communities, an organization focused on alleviating homelessness. Foundation Communities was opening a number of properties all over the city, and I thought that not only would he be a good contact for the Democratic Socialists of America, but as a potential research contract for DecipherCity.Org. After attending that meeting, I began to feel very positive about my engagement with all of these entities and even more professional, having basically been left

to manage DecipherCity.Org alone with my meager resources.

Well, I presented at the League of Women Voters, and I had a decent time because I am generally not a shy person, and my Decipher City colleague was still willing to do something to help, putting together most of the PowerPoint presentation for the organization. Towards the end, there was some justification for the racism of Austin, which I attributed to the denialism that most of the city possessed, so I ignored it. I was sharing the space with another Black woman who was discussing Black maternal mortality in hospitals, so I wanted to make sure she had adequate time, and I was interested in what she had to say. At the end of my presentation, there was a huge red flag because they asked for me to come speak at the meeting alone, to have me “all to themselves.” I ignored it because again, I could never be sure who was where, and I was still hoping to possibly launch DecipherCity.Org for either research or tech, certain I could find the resources to do so.

I had to help plan a forum with the Democratic Socialists of America, and we were discussing the logistics of where the event should be held. My co-committee leader spent a lot of time badmouthing the Executive Director of Foundation Communities, which made me look bad for two reasons. First, I was trying to get to know the structural world of socialists, and she was doing nothing except let me flounder, not sharing any information about it until I looked ignorant. Secondly, she was a white activist who thought that talking smack about people while doing very little outside her comfort zone was the same thing as structural change, and people like that will never do anything that will affect them in the long run. Later, she would help with the Bernie Sanders campaign, who I despise, but for different reasons than vote diversion. People who

build themselves at the expense of Black people are eventually loathsome, as my co-committee leader was turning out to be. I confronted her on her not sharing information with me, and she was silent, because she truly had no response for alienating someone she supposedly considered her equal.

The forum occurred, it was engaging, but when the Executive Director tried to hug me, I shied away and shook his hand, opting to maintain some professionalism. I had become less comfortable with the dominant population's need to assume familiarity with me while offering me nothing, and I was slowly becoming more aware of extractive tendencies of many entities, including the Democratic Socialists of America. After that, my co-committee leader was going to be out of town, and I was responsible for choosing a site for a meeting. I had decided to go to an environmental committee meeting, and there was a conversation about engaging with the non-English-speaking communities. Knowing that a lot of those communities worked in fast food, I suggested meeting at a McDonald's, and a white woman smirked and said, "Yes, but that's a problem with me, because I'm vegan." She rolled her eyes at me, and the meeting continued, which made me determined to schedule a meeting at a McDonald's, since I supposedly had that power. I was then informed by my co-committee leader that she had already chosen the spot for the meeting, but had neglected to inform me.

After not being informed about so much, having my autonomy taken away, and the blatant anti-Blackness of the organization, I decided that enough was enough, and announced that I would be leaving the organization. There was no point in staying with a group that got off on bragging that they had Black membership, but did everything in their power to command my compliance

with their culture, adding nothing of myself but my emotional and occasional physical labor. My co-committee leader faked empathy and asked for a conversation, but when I confronted her about *her* behavior, she gaslighted me by saying that I was not really angry with *her*, but at the *other* white woman who had disrespected me at the *other* meeting. I knew that there was no going forward with the organization, and I held the meeting I agreed to hold at her preferred location—a coffee shop—and left. Someone tried to flatter me into doing more work later, but I directed that individual to the places where he could do his own work, and leave me out of it.

For one presentation, I was invited to a private school by a teacher to do a presentation on “The Hate U Give,” and I was offered no money for the task. Not only did I have to rent a car to get to the site, but despite mentioning the PowerPoint and lesson plan I prepared, there was no setup for my presentation once I arrived. At the school, there was a Black teacher who thanked me for my efforts because she knew that no one had offered to make my job any easier, and I was left fending for myself. The only thing that went right about the presentation were the questions I asked, and even though the students asked me to come back, all I could see was the cost of renting a car and no preparation for receiving my efforts. After that presentation, I finally stopped paying for the server for the DecipherCity app, and I accepted that it would be impossible to get paid for engagement regardless of all the meetings and investment I had made. I continued doing the writing and research, but other than a grand total of \$340 from 2017 until 2022, there were no donations coming from the blog.

People seem to be under the impression that Black people enjoy pouring all our resources into events and opportunities,

which never have any returns. No, people should avoid anyone who makes a point of getting rich on the backs of other advocates, and the corruption in the activism world is not sacred. However, when nothing is offered to those who are expending time, energy, and resources, that becomes an issue of both entitlement and racism. Black people have had to make up the difference in our compensation for centuries, and it is immature to believe that money just comes from the sky to make our lives what they are. The individuals who claimed to be “so excited” about the possibility of my doing well with DecipherCity were the same people who were nowhere to be found when I was forced to change directions. For one thing, everyone seemed to be looking for someone else to fund me, rather than leading by example. For another, they seem to think my frustration at racism was entertainment, rather than a painstaking effort that took hours away from my life.

By the middle of 2019, my full-time job had begun to dissolve, I was forced to move to avoid further financial abuse, and I was once again looking for ways to recover the gaps in income. During this entire time, my colleague had not only stayed employed but gained better employment, doing less and less of the blog while pretending to support me. The League of Women Voters contacted me to speak at their meeting, but when I asked for \$50 as a speaking fee based on the two hours for the meeting, I was rejected, and other than some banana bread from a member, I never heard from them again. To be honest, this was one of the reasons that I had no interest in joining organizations that already existed, especially as long-established as that. Later that year, the same organization would host a forum and demand to be reimbursed by the City for their independent efforts. Because the League of Women Voters

originally refused to hold the line on segregation, that behavior was consistent with my experience. Remember, segregation was not only racial separation, but allowing Black people and others to do all the work fixing up a location, and then coming up with an excuse to manipulate us out of long-term communities.

In the fall of 2019, DecipherCity.Org collaborated with Ghisallo Cycling Initiative and the Carver Museum to organize a Black history bike tour for publicity of all three places, and to possibly gain financial traction doing history tours by bicycle. Despite the tours and a conference in New York City, I was steadily losing my financial stability while others were maintaining theirs, sacrificing very little. This is usually the way that the lives of Black people work when participating in activism within the dominant narrative: we are struggling to find our ways while other people gain attention from our efforts. We can put our all into it and stay working as hard as we can, but we are also struggling while trying to attend meetings, while trying to mobilize others, dealing with debt and instability while others stay comfortable. Unless we already have healthy savings—an impossibility for most people under the age of 40, despite whatever lies older people have for us—there is no way that we can avoid substantial loss if we put our efforts into racial justice efforts.

DecipherCity.Org attended one more conference in New York in which I organized the entire presentation, and there is where I met a dean from college, who immediately recognized me. Also, there was a play in town with Zawe Ashton and Tom Hiddleston, which allowed me to support a Black actress and see Loki in person. My colleague did not participate in creating the PowerPoint, was mainly disengaged the entire time, and tried to ruin the play just because I had paid for that, but I was catching

on to her contempt for me and Black people in general by that point. Even when Black people are told that our “collaborators” truly see us as equal, if we wait long enough or are ever in close quarters, we will be immediately disabused of such a notion.

By the beginning of 2020, Atatiana Jefferson had been murdered, and my Decipher City colleague—instead of showing up for our yearlong strategy meeting—ran off to pretend to be a Black ally, delaying my schedule to demand control. She offered a fake apology like she always did, but since it had become a pattern, I knew that her apology meant nothing; this was further compounded by her blowing up my phone during a meeting where she was supposedly being “compassionate.” Most fake allies know that being *seen* as an ally is more important to the dominant narrative than *doing* anything that would diminish the dominant narrative. Instead of being surprised with this behavior or impressed with her attention, I knew then that my days of having even the idea of a colleague were over, and it was time to start setting some distance.

As I waited based on my commitment, a pattern was emerging of my colleague exploiting me for her own benefit, repeated excuses, and blanket manipulation. She would be comfortable, regardless of what happened with racism, because she made sure to be comfortable, even if she had to emotionally abuse what she clearly considered her pet monkey based on her behavior. I called her on her behavior, and then she predictably threw a tantrum, whining about how she never meant to be involved, she needed to set boundaries, and she would only be doing exactly the little she felt entitled to do. That same week, she attempted to coerce and manipulate me into participating in a conference when I had specifically told her that I was no longer willing to spend time or money on events that never brought in money.

When being a name brand negro and using the master's tools, there is no protection, and the reality is that the dominant narrative will abandon any Black individual who makes them look bad. Begging her to do her part and taking on all the additional labor and responsibilities? Well, that was supposedly my lot as a Black woman from the United States. Holding her accountable for disrespecting my time, money, and energy? Not only did I have to be scolded, but after the second in-person tour with Ghisallo Cycling Initiative, I found out that our website was sabotaged further by her tantrum, the links to the StoryMap deleted. Thank goodness I had a relationship with Ghisallo Cycling Initiative, as the organization quickly migrated links to its StoryMap, and thank goodness her irresponsibility led her to use *my* phone to record videos. I repaired the website, and despite my better judgment, did not immediately delete her from access. The rest of the year involved two posts while filling up the DecipherCity.Org Gmail drive with her separate projects, bullying me with one of her coworkers, and stalking my social media efforts while sneering with others who enjoyed bullying me. Because every Black woman is entitled to abuse under the dominant narrative, the only accountability I had was to not contact her anymore, which I stopped doing after she attempted to steal credit for my Juneteenth publication in June 2021.

A friend of mine sent me information in 2020 about a fellowship with the Urban Land Institute, which had a reasonable salary. I was truly excited, especially since I had a website that was designed to showcase my talent and could move me forward in a career based on urban planning, even though I had a racial justice bent. My face fell when I saw that the premise of the fellowship was about the privatization of public space, because privatization of public space was, is, and always has

been about segregation in the United States. Angry, I applied to the position, demanding that they acknowledge that they were essentially saying that only people with money deserved to be in public, while people without money deserved to be confined to their homes and their jobs. I sent a research proposal and a timeline, and I never heard back; however, they did choose a Latina planner to promote segregation. This is a predictable pattern of the dominant narrative: get a vulnerable BIPOCQ individual—married, parent, or broke—to defend itself, and shake its head at anyone pointing out its obvious cruelty. Thus, in 2020, “reputable” institutions were legitimizing segregation tactics.

Some people may blame me for being forthright, but the problem with the United States is that there are huge groups of people who are too complacent for their own good, and being around people who only promote the status quo is why the United States is where it is. People who cannot participate in the status quo are encouraged to internalize themselves as failures, and it made me sad that yet another organization I had formerly respected was promoting segregation. Ironically, the more I failed as an urban planner, the more I was able to see how unrepentantly destructive the whole profession is. All of this happened before the murder of George Floyd, which would purported push racial justice to the forefront of the national consciousness.

In the middle of 2020, my full-time job had collapsed, and my rent was being raised. I had seen it coming, but all of the jobs I had applied to failed to materialize, and then I was in the middle of the lockdown. For those saying that I would have been able to make more money if there had never been any lockdowns, bear in mind that I had been applying to jobs

for months, except for the IRS. I had no vehicle, I did not live alone, and the thought of being admitted to the hospital for a disease that had no immunity or cure at the time was terrifying to both me and my roommate. I taught online and I completed independent projects for Ghisallo Cycling Initiative, but because my full-time job was a small private business, I was ineligible for unemployment. A friend shared public school food that her kids refused to eat, and that was how I was able to eat during the summer of 2020.

At the end of May was the nightmare that was George Floyd. My roommate saw the entirety of the execution, but I was still just disgusted that it had occurred. We made a video together during which I recited poetry—not by memory but close enough to be a decent film. Through all of the awareness campaigns, there was a Black man who managed to make an impromptu bicycle tour of East Austin, and the local paper claimed that it was the “first ever” bicycle tour of East Austin. This was offensive not only because I had just finished participating in four bicycle tours, but I had gotten the idea from Six Square, a *different* organization that had organized my first tour experience in 2015, led by Black women. I called the guy out on it, as well as the newspaper—even a conference where this Black man was scheduled as a guest—and everyone made milksop responses about how they were “unaware.” Sadly, this never amounted in the Black man making a public acknowledgment, nor did the newspaper publicly retract its statements. The information was surreptitiously changed by the newspaper, but then the Black man went on to receive publicity, while the Black women were deliberately ignored.

One of the reasons that there has never been a universal women’s movement in the United States is because everyone has

been conditioned to believe that Black women are the footstools of everyone, including Black men. It could be argued that we are degraded because of the patriarchy, but there are so many other women of other cultures and ethnicities that enjoy extracting labor from us; in this case, a woman of color wrote the story praising a Black man, despite being corrected about him being a “first.” No one can justify elevating a Black man at the expense of Black women, but because that tour happened during a time when antiracism was trending, he enjoyed the attention while the Black women got nothing. In the past, I often stated that information should be free, but the reality is that the *cultivation* of information is not free. For people to jump on board with a Black man, and then avert their gaze when being held accountable for ignoring Black women, is yet another reason why Black women are disengaging with activism within the dominant narrative.

## 6

### United States Census

Finally, at the end of July, the United States Census finally contacted me after eight months of hearing nothing. If not for the Census, I would have had to move out of my apartment because there was no way that my roommate could pay for a two-bedroom with the rent increase. Training for the Census took place in person, and because we were part of the Non-Response Follow Up team, we were expected to contact people who were already hesitant to participate in the process. At the same time, Trump was decrying the Census and complaining about using federal resources to determine the population. I learned the entire list of questions, but there were so many times that people barely let me get past the first one, so I worked on condensing my questions as quickly as possible. There was overtime and bonuses, and because this was effectively my only job, and the only outreach that I was able to have with the community, I took it in stride. One of the best parts about working for a federal agency was that I would have unlimited access to masks and hand sanitizer, and without taking advantage of this, I made sure that I was masked every time. I used a limited amount of

sanitizer only because I showered immediately upon entering the house and I washed my hands all the time.

Most of the people who were hesitant to participate were people of color, so I made sure to ask them a condensed version of the survey which would capture as much information as possible. People are surprisingly receptive to involvement that concludes in under a minute, and I had most of my spots completed by the end of August. An efficient Black woman who concludes her business and gets on her way is a lot less threatening than people who insist on completing all the questions, and I knew that exploited people value their spare time more than anything else. By the way, I had further motivation to be done with my work: being outside in Texas in August is nearly punishment for being alive, and the main reason I avoided dehydration was because of the hydropack I wore everyday. As the pressure was mounting to end the Census before its time, I figured out how to get numbers without necessarily contacting people by contacting the property management companies of apartment complexes. Residential properties were the most difficult because my area was full of private property owners who owned property there but lived somewhere else; thus, I had to do research to figure out who the property owner was, and that took up the mornings while I did surveys in the afternoon and evenings.

Ironically, the most offensive moment took place on the property of a non-profit. I went to the property and tried to contact the staff, which was mostly people of color who were being overworked. As I was headed out to knock on doors, a white woman left the office and followed me out, and proceeded to explain that her staff had no idea how important the Census was and that she would do everything possible to make sure I had the information I needed. Having already been scammed for

effort by a white woman for that year, I was extremely skeptical but thanked her, gave her a list of units that I needed information for, and proceeded to go knock on doors. Again, the people were very receptive to shortened surveys and I had no issues with the overworked staff, plowing through a bunch of the units until it was time for me to go back to a complex closer to home. Unbeknownst to me, the non-profit organization owned more than one property, and I ran into that woman at another property. Because she had pretended to collaborate, I approached her as if she meant what she said, and she responded with rage, ran to my boss, and attempted to get me fired. My boss was confused because of my record, and nothing happened other than stress. My response was stupid because I contacted her boss, knowing that white women protected each other against the stupid subhumanity that most of them consider us to be. I simply got to enjoy a day of embarrassment and frustration, and *still* had to respond to all the places on my list.

My supervisor was replaced during September, likely because he had another job, so I got to know a different person when dealing with the last of the census. After knocking on as many doors as possible, there was still work to be done because if people had not responded, one could only conclude that someone other than the owners of the property lived onsite. Short-term rentals, such as AirBnB and Vacation Rental by Owner, have no residents per se, but no one can assume that the property is vacant when completing the census. Therefore, I started looking with the Travis County Appraisal District to see who owned the property, and tracked it down as best I could. This yielded more, so I explained what I did to my supervisor, who asked me to write it down in an email for distribution to the team. Soon, everyone was both on foot and doing the research,

so we got a higher percentage of work done, and although there were no more bonuses, we were able to finish by the October deadline.

## The Pedestrian and Bicycling Advisory Councils

Throughout the United States, there are a number of regulatory bodies that have unpaid positions, but serve to legitimate the dominant narrative's cruelty on distressed communities. Most people in poorer communities walk and use public transportation, but because their communities were not considered important or trendy enough in the past, there is a great deal of backlog for construction. In fact, reviewing previous meeting notes will reveal to any historian that Black people especially have asked for community improvements only for municipal governments to seek studies, votes and other delay tactics. Ghisallo Cycling Initiative told me about the Pedestrian and Bicycling Advisory Councils because they had an obvious interest in getting someone on the Councils, and because I am a Black woman, I was seen as an ideal candidate. Moreover, I was offered pay both for attending meetings, and for any work done as a part of that process.

While I stopped being interested in being any kind of candidate years before, my mother had served on the City of Austin

Planning Commission, and I had been a government worker for a decade. I was used to the bureaucratic way that everything worked, and because of the current political climate, I was under the impression that people were interested in change. Yes, I was interested in the pay because I was unemployed at the time, and the hoops to jump through in Texas for unemployment made it not worth effort—and I could not care less that Texas intends for it to be that way. The money was enough for me to manage to eat without assistance, especially since I was accustomed to reducing my diet to beans and rice during dire straits. I agreed, and started learning about what the Councils accomplished.

To be on either the Bicycling or Pedestrian Advisory Council, one has to complete an application and attend a meeting where we vouch for ourselves. I remember not being nervous, but being someone intrigued that there was an organization specifically devoted to active infrastructure, alternative mobility, or active mobility. Despite seeing the City Minutes on a lot of things, I had never seen either of the organizations appear. Luckily for me, they approved my application, and I presented during the meeting, explaining that I was more focused on the socioecosystem of sidewalks, bike lanes, and real estate. At the time, I wish I had stated that bike lanes were used as a tool of displacement, but if I had, then I might never have gotten a chance to see what these two councils were all about.

Before the next meeting, there were email exchanges about the materials being presented, and I asked a couple of questions about equity. There were a lot of different responses, but most of them stemmed around the typical, “Developers are making the mistakes, if there are any” and “Austin is so popular.” I stated that if the City is responsible for permitting all the developers to do what they do, then the City is responsible,

too, and the language around the decisions regarding equity needed to include a change in metrics. Unintentionally, I put a target on my back for one of the colleagues, because that was the beginning of a subtle campaign to undermine me at every meeting. My colleague thought that we were “done” with equity because it meant nothing to him but empty gestures that changed nothing, and he wanted to remain in a position of comfort and privilege. Substantive change was irrelevant.

Whenever a presenter came to a meeting, and I asked a question related to how the sidewalks or infrastructure would affect the surrounding community, I was treated as if I had no idea what I was talking about, or that I was confused about how things worked. On email chains, my colleagues would be in constant “freeze” mode whenever I asked a difficult question. Things came to a head during Winter Storm Uri during the last meeting before my electricity collapsed. The colleague began with his smirk and condescension, and I finally said, “We’re not going to do the thing where ‘Stephanie has to be wrong at every meeting.’ We’re not going to do that.” Nobody backed me, nobody acknowledged his behavior, and rather than apologize, it would be over four months until that colleague reappeared. Yes, he participated in the legislative session, but since he had been consistently participating until that moment, that was not the reason.

This is what happens when people who enjoy undermining Black women are called out on their behavior: either they retaliate, or they run away. Many of my colleagues had seen his poor behavior on a number of occasions, but chose to say nothing, instead being entertained by either my distress or my frustration when people failed to recognize my perspective. By education, I could have literally been working as an urban

planner, but because of how urban planning works, most planners are white, but because I had not been given the label of being “professional,” I was consistently ostracized by people who wanted to compartmentalize how communities were built. Unfortunately, because I needed the money based on a pandemic and the retaliation against the Black Lives Matter movement, I had to keep enduring his poor behavior to pay my bills on time.

People often smirk when Black women mention microaggressions. To them, I offer a scenario: imagine being in a room full of smiling people hurling insults at you. Now, imagine that they stop, and the conversation stabilizes and becomes more contextual. Then, out of nowhere, another smiling insult is hurled, but since “everyone” is now “stable,” no one says anything. You are forced to defend yourself when someone else smiles and tells you to move on. As the meeting continues, said process continues, and you never know when a random ad hominem attack happens. This is the dominant narrative at work: it *demands* that Black women be on edge while grinningly calling us “angry Black women.” No one supports you publicly but everyone—including other Black people—holds you accountable for their behavior.

Eventually, one of my colleagues pretended to try to befriend me once the weather had gotten more clear. He had an accent, but after months of not paying attention to someone bullying me, I was skeptical, but professional. We discussed his origins, and I was pleased that someone was taking time to engage with me; being alone in a room full of people is truly disheartening. By the way, that is one of the oldest tricks in the book for keeping Black people, particularly Black women, in emotional unsafe situations. First, let the Black person begin to feel isolated so that it feels like they have no allies, and when they consider

leaving the organization, swoop in and act like a savior. Never mind that said ally never said anything when the discomfort was evident, because the point is the *appearance* of care, not actually care.

Later on that year, the same colleague would attempt to refute my statement by talking about other Black people he had spoken to, and how I was wrong for saying the things I said. People like to collect and trade Black people like baseball cards, which is ironic since we were the last people “anyone” wanted to watch play baseball. Sadly, because too many white people use Black people to flex on other Black people, they make situations wildly uncomfortable. I had made the dastardly mistake of not blindly supporting him in all things, so he began to do exactly what the other colleague had done, which is subtly undermine me, while attempting to make me look crazy. Another of my colleagues commented on his behavior *after* the meeting, but nobody said anything at the actual moment. By the time his position was up for renewal, he threw a tantrum and resigned. In fact, both he and that other offensive colleague went off to form another organization when it was clear that I was going to continue talking about equity in a way other than a cheap talking point.

I was not the only colleague of color on the Pedestrian Advisory Council, and because the other was a certified and practicing planner, I tried to resurrect the podcast on DecipherCity.Org by interviewing them. They were amenable, especially since we were both people of color who believed in active transit based on our lived experiences, and they had a lot to say both about their education and their job in Austin. There was even a recent award to be discussed, and I spent three hours editing the audio, and felt proud of both of our work on the episode. However, because people like to stalk Black women and whatever it is

we do, Biosquat's owner not only tracked down the episode, but harassed my colleague on their work email and copied half the Pedestrian and Bicycling Advisory Council. My colleague then asked me to remove the audio, but I kept the writing I had done with their approval, disgusted that someone needed to intimidate my colleague and alienate me further.

Another opportunity for collaboration came with the discussions for the expansion of I-35, and I could already tell the direction that those discussions would go based on the behavior of the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT). There were meetings, and resolutions were drafted and submitted, but there was no real commitment to do anything but expand the highway. During the summer, there were two walking tours scheduled, which I vehemently protested against, based on the heat and my own personal experience of walking in unshaded areas. The collaboration leader explained that this was an important form of advocacy, even though I pointed out that high-dollar contracts were the reason that TXDOT was more centered on expanding highways. I also pointed out that there would be no promises that the expansion would be shut down, and that this would be a waste of effort and time. The collaboration leader condescendingly told about all of his experience with advocacy, and implied that I was "too inexperienced" to offer a valid opinion.

People get off on invalidating Black women because they know that nobody will ever stop them, and they will likely also be seen as "brave" for going against such a monster. As it turned out, my colleague of color was going to participate in the tours, and I do my best not to allow people to be isolated in potentially dangerous situations. Therefore, I participated in the walking tours, and the TXDOT workers made a big show

of coming in yellow vests and making the appropriate facial expressions of concern, while inwardly knowing that this tour would change nothing about their policies. I remember being further disgusted when people made big shows of showing up on bicycles to “prove” how environmentally friendly they were, but they also made mention of their car ownership. Thus, the tours were nothing more than performance art, and it was a waste of time for everyone involved. Moreover, the highway expansion is *still* slated for the future and is in that process as we speak.

TXDOT was no prize to be sought in their responses to the concerns of the Councils, either, and why would they be when we live in a car-centric nation? On the first tour, one of the TXDOT employees stated that TXDOT had come a long way in creating environmentally safe highways. I looked at that employee and asked what was meant, because under no circumstances can the environment be helped by the introduction of highways. During another meeting, another TXDOT employee put on that fake positivity and stated that the reason why highways were so prominent was because constituents and TXDOT failed to speak the same language. I looked at that individual like they were a fool, and said, “Highways were not expanded because no one knows what a spatial merge or a vector is. Highways were introduced as a way of segregating Black people, so no, language was not the problem.”

Essentially, I realized that the Councils were nothing more than opportunities for people to talk about how much they loved bike lanes and sidewalks, and nobody actually needs that, because neighborhood improvement is usually the impetus to displace the Black community. I hypothesize that many white people think of singular components of a community because of

a segregated upbringing, since it is difficult to imagine oneself as part of a whole with such a compartmentalized lifestyle. Essentially, if someone looks at a picture and cannot see its systemic ramifications, that individual does not need power. Zip codes should not need to be displaced just because someone has difficulty understanding the skills of professional graphic artists. By September, I was already wondering how I was going to emotionally manage the toxic positivity, bullying, and the ineffectual nature of both Councils, but I also needed the money. This is often the plight of Black women, because wherever we are, people consistently work to keep us in a state of perpetual deprivation so that we will be more amenable to being controlled.

There was an opportunity to attend a Project Connect meeting to potentially draft a Council resolution about Project Connect, and based on my experience with the equity anti-displacement tool, I volunteered to attend the meeting. One of my colleagues, another woman, also volunteered to be a part of the experience because she was finishing a masters' degree and was finally in a position to be more available. We had both been on the Pedestrian Advisory Council for about a year, so there was no seniority, but we had also both seen the problems with the Council. After speaking through email and text, we were both of the opinion that it might be best to dissolve the Council based on its having no real power and its influence being questionable.

Because signals from the universe come in threes, the same individual who refused to cancel highway tours in triple-digit heat pretended to engage with me, and asked for a conversation. For those who are unaware, "conversations" between Black women and most white people are—as I once heard in a comment section—a way to "discuss us into submission."

The collaboration leader asked me to meet alone, hoping to get me into another situation to bully me into submission and get a nigger pet for himself. I made a point of copying the other volunteering colleague for all emails, and the three of us met, during which time he self-aggrandized for the majority of the conversation. Afterwards, he began to behave as if he were our supervisor, even though we were on the Council and he was not. Both my colleague and I were disgusted, but realized that there was no point in correcting the matter because of his lack of self-awareness, which is common. Most Black women evaluate if people are receptive to feedback and after his earlier rebuttals of my input, I stayed quiet.

My colleague and I attended the meeting, and we were very disappointed in that CapMetro demanded that we avoid the topic of land use. That was a crucial part of both the equity issue and the active mobility infrastructure issue. Basically, we were spoon-fed a puff piece on how great the city would be if there was a functioning train. Other people asked about shade coverage, and CapMetro was noncommittal, explaining that while there would be shade, they had to be careful growing trees around the stations because of the roots. All in all, my colleague and I were disappointed, and we realized that there was not nearly enough information for us to draft a resolution. My colleague and I sent out a message to the Pedestrian Advisory Council, explaining that not enough information was available to produce an acceptable resolution. We called it good, and prepared for the next meeting.

Lo and behold, the collaboration leader inserted himself into the conversation, even though he was not on the Council, and stated that it was crucial for the Council to prepare a resolution so that our voices would be heard. He masked his assertion

of dominance by using the word “passion,” regardless of the fact that he completely alienated the two women who were responding to the task, and that he had undermined us in front of our colleagues. One cannot work with people who feel entitled to insert control into collaborative relationships. Healthy interactions require the acknowledgment that one is engaging with a complete being, not a tool. To add insult to injury, another colleague agreed with him further undermining our position. Since she was a white woman who, ironically, claimed to work on gender discrimination at her own job, I sent her an email asking her why she felt the need to disrespect us with someone outside the Council who was out of line for dismissing our positions. She, of course, played the victim and pretended that she believed in women unifying, but her words rang hollow to both my volunteering colleague and me. Fortunately, everyone else had heard, and no resolution was drafted.

Simultaneously, I was doing research on the highway to provide researched feedback for the highway expansion. I could have captured more data points if I had more time, but I had also been trying to complete a timeline for sidewalks and bike lanes for both Councils, giving them research information for the future. Although I was contracting for Ghisallo, I did not charge for the timeline work because it was a pet project that I figured was necessary, and I was hoping to complete both of them before my final meetings within the next year. My colleague of color surprised us with maps of the affected areas for the highway expansion, and because of her generosity, I was able to include those at the end, once she saw my writing. I was able to complete both a rough draft and a more polished version of the highway expansion research, but there was no way I could

finish the sidewalk and bike lane timelines due to sheer volume of information.

Because of the pointlessness of both the Pedestrian and Bicycling Advisory Councils, I suggested that we put an end to them, inwardly giving up on my timelines for sidewalks and bike lanes. There were more groups advocating for active mobility, and neither of the Councils had any real power. I actually asked the City to provide information about the governing authority of both Councils, but they offered no concrete information, just the idea of “information being provided.” Before the meetings when we would choose new applicants, there were meetings called to determine whether the Councils should continue, and everyone had the same answers. “We need these Councils to advocate!” “I think there’s a value in making my voice heard.” Again, there were other groups, these had no real power, and City staff was required to run them. By then, I realized that the *appearance* of being important was more relevant than actually being a vital government body, and there was nothing I could do about such a mindset.

During one of my last two meetings, we were looking at the new applicants to be on the councils, since everyone decided that “government entities” without agency and/or power should be maintained. I had discussed potential leadership with my colleague of color, but both of us understood the pointlessness of the organizations, so we had decided against it. One of my white colleagues suggested me for leadership, for which I was truly disgusted, although I expect I was supposed to be flattered. True leaders know that leadership is only as good as its team, and I carefully considered the potential experience of “leading” a team full of people who will let me be torn down because a white man has a “good idea,” or because they saw a pretty PDF.

That sounded like a nightmare of gaslighting and bullying, and as I had already done my time in West Austin and at Yale—where I moved off campus my junior year to avoid more—I was not interested. Also, too many people want Black women in “leadership” positions to gossip about other white people, effectively serving as emotional labor mules. I understood that if people want to make genuine efforts changing the world, they stop seeking leadership and accolades within an abusive system.

I stayed for two more meetings because I had intended to remain until the end of my tenure, and I wanted to “prove my strength,” and see if the Councils improved with the removal of the previous leadership. Yes, I also needed the money that I was earning for participation, regardless of people seeing me as a pet project instead of an equal colleague. Unfortunately, even people who had “left” were looking to maintain a stranglehold on the meetings, and there were no new answers, and too many people wanted the same ideas to sound “revolutionary.” The collaboration leader and the other two colleagues who made a point of alienating me took over meetings, often making the meetings longer and more difficult for my other colleagues. Something about a Black woman apparently makes people want to exercise control, which was no surprise to me. After seeing that nothing was going to get better, I realized that there was no strength in remaining in a toxic situation when people were pretending like the bullying I was experiencing was irrelevant. No situation should always be a competition or a fight, and I was tired.

Often, people do not understand that disengaging does not mean that one is done processing; just that someone is done processing with others who enjoy picking fights. Fighting is approval-seeking, and if someone has demonstrated outright

disapproval, let that be what it is instead of begging for acceptance: that person, those people, or that situation is unsafe. For me, I was still participating in ATX Walk, Bike, Roll, and Project Connect, so I was already participating in what I thought was a meaningful way. Ironically, one of the last two meetings had a representative from ATX Walk, Bike, Roll, so it felt like a nice transition from one advocacy group to another.

## 2020 Election

The last time I voted was when Joe Biden was primaryed, a fact I am not ashamed of, and I am more than happy to explain why. For most people still subscribing to the dominant narrative, Black people are seen as responsible for our own oppression, and we are repeatedly required to prove our humanity. To a certain extent, the respectability politics within the Black community is almost stronger than the dominant narrative, except that it lacks true authority. However, there has been an obsession with voting being linked to our inherent survival, and after March 2020, I am disgusted with the entire process. Mathematically, I am disgusted with the premise that 14.5% of the population is responsible for fighting against everyone else, and that even if none of us were imprisoned and we all came back from overseas, we would be nowhere near the majority. People target Black people because they choose to, and I will aggressively defend that bigots have no authority to tell us to submit to a system that hates us.

During the 2020 primaries, there was a wide range of presidential hopefuls, and I was truly impressed by the people I

had in front of me—except Joe Biden. He was running for president because he felt entitled to run the country, in the same way that Ruth Bader Ginsburg felt entitled to remain on the Supreme Court when Barack Obama asked her to step down so that there would be an opportunity for someone else. Honestly, her selfishness made me lose faith in the system long before the fascist oligarchy was officially in place, and low and behold, it screwed everyone over as she was replaced by a Republican sycophant—which could have been entirely prevented. I truly wish that selfish creep had been alive to see the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, and see what she had done for all the women in the empire, thanks to her selfishness. For those who thought Merrick Garland was supposed to be some kind of savior? I could care less, because once he got into power, he enjoyed his power and money, and further undeserved reputation that made sure Trump came back into office to hurt people worse than ever before.

Biden built his reputation with younger generations by being linked with Barack Obama, because none of the younger folks were interested in someone from the WWII era being anywhere near the White House. Proximity to Blackness often gives undeserving people opportunities which they would have missed, because thanks to the rise in awareness for Black equality, there were many people grabbing onto Black people—myself included—hoping to boost their own reputations. When I heard that Biden had cowed to segregationists, that was all I needed to hear. There were other women, including white women, on the ballot, and there was no need for this power-hungry bigot who built his reputation on the backs of Black people to be anywhere near the ballot.

By the way, that goes for Bernie Sanders as well, who has

built his reputation on a *photograph* of him being arrested with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I have yet to see a successful campaign of a Black candidate where the primary evidence of their engagement was an arrest photo taken decades before running for president. Sanders has not consistently uplifted Black people once he got his power, and I would never trust someone who built their reputation on my efforts, who then failed to offer the same efforts to uplift me. Ironically, by that time, my Decipher City colleague was pointedly demonstrating a willingness to use proximity to Blackness to uplift her existence while refusing to do the same, so no, *words* of support do not matter when power is at stake. His platforms were based on college and housing, but in ways that continued to feed the same post-WWII narrative that the United States had been coasting with for decades, which would continue to primarily be beneficial to white people, and no one else.

Elizabeth Warren was on the ballot, and if I still believed in the electoral process, I would have been excited to see a ticket with her and Kamala Harris. Also, a Black queer colleague in Florida was pro-Warren, and with that endorsement, I knew that I was on the right path. Warren had a recent reputation for being pointedly anti-oligarchy, so in my mind, she would have helped create and enforce legislation demanding that the wealthy participate in the public process. This would also redeem the populations that had voted against Hillary Clinton, and there would be a chance at meaningful change. I wanted Kamala Harris to serve as Warren's vice-president because although I knew very little about her, I figured that with her experience, she would be able to make meaningful changes in the judiciary, especially when pressured by people who saw her as a cop. Moreover, since the vice president usually runs after

the president completes a cycle—whether one term or two—I would have been interested in seeing what the two of them would accomplish.

Someone else in my state was running to be a federal senator, and I had complete reservations about her since she was involved with an organization that I had found to be demonstrably racist at the time. Once, she invited me to lunch to strategize her election process, and I asked her if she was sure that she wanted to run. When she confirmed her desire, I encouraged her to talk to *three* women-led Black organizations—*organizations*, not just three Black women—and ask them if she should run. I was not surprised at her arrogance in thinking that she could go from basically unknown in Austin to holding a federal seat because that is the pride of the dominant narrative. Unsurprisingly, she did not win, although the organization canvassed many people on her behalf. 2020 was, ironically, the same year that Senator Kirk Watson ran away from an undisclosed scandal to rebuild his reputation with the University of Houston’s Hobby School of Public Affairs.

In March 2020, Biden was announced as the winner for the Texas primary, and I was so disgusted. Obviously, Texans were excited about an old segregationist, but when I saw that people were too obsessed with the proximity to Blackness and sexist, I was done with the process. Throughout the rest of his campaign, Biden spent the rest of his time demanding that everyone honor his power grab while he told all of the “elites” that nothing would change. He had the nerve to tell Black people that we were confused about our identity if we chose someone else, affirming that he felt entitled to the presidency because he worked with Barack Obama, who remains popular. Yes, Biden made the promise of forgiving student loans, but the fact that the majority

of that happened only at the *end* of his presidency and only so that he would look good for reelection makes his candidacy abhorrent to me. Like Lincoln, if he could have avoided forgiving student loans, he would have, and based on his behavior, he would have felt no remorse. Additionally, the interest paid on student loans by struggling graduates made it even worse during the pandemic.

When November came around, I was thoroughly sick of hearing about how Biden was supposed to be some beacon on a hill for Black people based on his decision of Kamala Harris as his running mate. After all, this was the same as the Obama/Biden duo: yes, society allowed for a Black individual to run for office, but only under the “guidance” of the people who the United States *really* believed should be in charge. After the results were called for Biden, I remember being attacked when I started sentence with, “At least—” with my Black roommate being horribly vile by saying I was always negative and never had anything positive to say. I left the room crying, saying, “I was going to say, ‘At least something good happened, and I didn’t have to do it.’ Why are you always so mean to me?” This obsession with old white people representing anything good for Black people when the Black people are offered supporting roles is obnoxious in the Black community, and it has not resulted in positive change.

What we saw in 2020 was a bunch of performative nonsense that was purely about egos and had nothing to do with change. Why else did the rioters feel empowered to storm the Capitol? For those who worship protests, I was literally marching for *Brown v. Board* on April 1, 2003, and twenty years later, I saw the end of affirmative action. *That* is what power thinks of protests. People never even learned the difference between

protesters and rioters, although my roommate explained the difference: insurance coverage. If there is a protest, then property insurers are required to pay, but if something is labeled as a “riot,” insurance companies have no such obligation. The coverage calling the protests “riots” made a lot more sense when I learned that fact. The result of the 2020 protests was a seething resentment plastered under this delusion: “I just want to be able to performatively emote while lying about my intentions to stop exploiting, harassing, and violating you. Why is that so wrong???”

## Switching to Full-Time Structured Activism

When I say that I used to spend a lot of time on Facebook, I mean I spent hours every day. In fact, when I was contracting from home, I would wake up and walk for an hour or two, come back and meditate, watch YouTube as my therapy, and then hop on Facebook for at least three hours. I had people who I regularly connected with and followed, and there was a lot of engagement with racial issues, and with me related to the built environment. There were movements that I thought I would join and the contacts were on Facebook, especially the Autonomous Zone that people were looking to plan. Sadly, once it was discovered, the initial planning fell apart. Basically, because I was contracting and had very little work, and the vaccine was still unavailable for regular people, I was very active on Facebook. However, I was starting to get stressed from running my presence on multiple platforms, and social media can be a very demanding medium.

On the morning of January 6, 2021, I was looking at Facebook earlier than usual because I had come home from my walk and

was about to finish some work on my contract, but saw some posts about a protest at the Capitol. I was surprised, but since the George Floyd protests, I expected some drama in Washington D.C. When someone posted a picture of the cross being set up, I then closed my computer, and took my phone into the living room to turn on the television. I put the volume up very low because my roommate worked from home, but there were already swarms of news coverage, and my roommate came out of her room, because she had apparently gone offline to see why I was in the living room. We both were shocked and surprised, and stayed watching until the Capitol was under control again.

While the riots had been occurring, I had posted things like, “Maybe if they had smiled more, their grievances would be heard” and “They should probably update their resumes if they want to be taken seriously”—things that Black people are told all the time when idiots want to defend the status quo. I had never seen anything that extreme, and I had been to protests in the past, and my shock was not that the actions were untenable, but that the perpetrators were white. People worked to keep the rioters alive, and even though people were killed and property was damaged, no one was held accountable until later, and they killed people *themselves*; they were not killed by law enforcement.

At this time, I feel better than ever about not going to the George Floyd protests not because I did not believe that he had been murdered, but because I realized that people do not care about what Black people have to say as protestors. In the past, like the early 1900s, protests for unions, fair labor, and a standard work week were effective—because the people who were seeking those protections were white. If someone can be murdered with impunity, and countless Black people

have been murdered with impunity, then their frustration does not matter to the eyes of the dominant narrative. People lack sensitivity when they refuse to recognize the negligence that Black people have been forced to endure for the sake of the dominant narrative. Continuing to talk to people who continue to ignore is a waste of energy and efforts.

However, because of January 6, I decided that it was time to stop talking about engagement, and to actually start engaging. I knew that during City Council meetings, Council approved dozens of permits, and most of the residents in the permit areas could not be there to avoid the consent. Thanks to my former colleague, I also understood more about how urban planning worked, and that dozens of permit applications were presented daily. Without devoting oneself completely to disrupting the planning process, there was no way to effectively intervene; everything was happening quickly all the time. Since so many organizations lied and said that they were investing in diversity, equity, and inclusion, I assumed that there would be any number of opportunities for me to work with multiple organizations and/or governments.

During July after January 6, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick was talking about how Black people caused the pandemic, referring to how the George Floyd protests had gotten everyone into groups, which was supposed to be against the rules. I had spent hours online talking to multiple different people, and I was completely overwhelmed by how much white privilege I had to stomach. Between people trying to dominate, but then feeling affronted when I called them out on it and saying they were *not* my “enemy,” and people who just wanted to yell and follow without doing anything, I just felt like the whole endeavor was a waste of energy. Decipher City had made no money, but

everyone wanted to “thank” me with words, tears, and demands for validation—not to mention that my former colleague was giggling with new “friends” while still following me. Because I had several followers, I announced that I was leaving Facebook because of the incessant vitriol, and other than a like I gave in April 2022, I have never returned. Several previous “friends” have tried to manipulate me back, but remembering the hours of unpaid emotional labor was enough of a lesson for me.

Furthermore, over the course of Decipher City, I had started out following the model of extraction: get other people to tell me their stories, get politicians to tell me the secrets. However, as I developed more research skills, I realized that people never had to tell me anything because all the City’s behavior was recorded—which included people’s reactions. Confronting racism was more about confronting an abuser, rather than trying to force the targets to behave or engage a certain way, and until perspectives changed on that, racism in the built environment would be literally cemented in ways that caused harm. After all, marginalized people deal with people demanding to extract from them on a regular basis, so it stops mattering *who* is asking for them to give of themselves yet again.

## Biosquat

Even though I was a person of structure, I was more open to radical “organizations” by the end of 2020. There was a number of groups, but I had been spending a lot of time online due to the lockdowns, and I was more interested in meeting people in real life and making that energy into something substantive. I met another Black activist who had been communicating with someone who made a point of trying to live off the land, and had even formed an outdoor community in the past on land in East Austin. For a moment, I remembered being a little girl who wanted to run away and live in the forest, and I was more than excited to figure out how to make that community work. Apparently, it was called “Biosquat,” because people were supposedly living off the land and “squatting” in the community—even though it was owned.

The individual in charge was looking for new people to revive the community, and a few radicalized folks were looking for a home. We took a tour, and it seemed like a magical place full of possibility. To us, it was very clear why it survived even though Texas has grown hotter in the past few years. After the tour,

everyone was on board, and I decided that I would start a garden while everyone else was working on clearing out some of the spaces. I was lucky because it was located close enough to a bus route that went to my neighborhood, and I had gotten back in shape because of my work doing the census. We spent a couple of weekends with everyone going out and helping restore Biosquat to livable conditions because people were actually beginning to end leases and needed a place to relocate.

One thing I began to notice was that Biosquat's owner believed that he was in charge of everyone there, so he began not only to try and direct our efforts, but to coerce us into leadership positions with other organizations within the dominant narrative. He figured out that I had gone to Yale, and he latched onto that and dismissed my lack of interest in trying to sit on the board of any of the organizations with which he had picked fights. Black women are used to people trying to use us for their own purposes, and when it was clear that he was going to be disrespectful, I started working on the garden when nobody else was there, least of all him. He had an abrasive personality and considered himself superior to all of us due to his experience in a housing project and his previous activism efforts. There was one time when he tried to give me a gift, but I already hate gifts and I had more belongings than I knew how to maintain. By that point, it was pretty clear that his goal was to control all of us, and he was very subtle about his ownership of the property, which is frowned upon by activists—especially Indigenous activists.

When I came to the site one day, Biosquat's owner kept trying to coerce me into applying to be on some board so that I could be his puppet, and he thought I was dumb enough to follow it. He tried flattering me about my Yale education, and he would mention it every time he saw me. This is one of the reasons that

I used to avoid bringing up my education: people like to attack Black women for our education, and tell us that we are truly stupid, but we took our spots from deserving white students. He honestly thought that after decades of being attacked for not fitting white stereotypes, I would be flattered. I told him, “The only reason you think Yale is impressive is because racists told you it was.” He finally stopped mentioning my education.

By April, one person actually lived onsite, but everyone else had quietly started to disengage. It was obvious that the last people to inhabit the space had eventually grown tired of Biosquat’s owner and his need to harass everyone into submission. This situation was a lot less harmful than it could have been because there were a number of people, including myself, who were paying attention to toxic personalities at this point. We realized that oppression targets learn to exploit each other because they *share* trauma, and can prey upon others with a voice of *experience*, which is difficult for many of us to detect. Such people are not *mirroring* others, but *remembering*, so they know exactly what to say to inspire trust. Other colleagues and I began to talk about how we could encourage the only resident to find another place to be, based on the behavior of Biosquat’s owner.

Even though the garden had begun to grow, there was constant construction surrounding the site, and Biosquat’s owner was beginning to be enticed into selling. Fortunately, the resident had left, and everyone had fully disengaged, no longer being willing to listen to someone congratulate themselves on their importance. Eventually, the land was sold for a pretty penny, and none of us ever got a dime, which he surely justified based on his ownership. The experience was somewhat of a shame, but the truth is that trying to find liberation within the dominant

narrative is like trying to find a benevolent dictator. Everyone knows that such a circumstance could not exist, but when we stop looking, we are confronted with the injustice of the dominant narrative, and that is a difficult situation to address.

## Austin Water Aid

For several years, there had been cold snaps in Austin, but we had experienced relatively few winter storms. I remember one moment in 2014 when I kept myself warm in a rain jacket having strongly underestimated the weather, and another time in 2015 when I had swum in Barton Springs Pool in water that was warmer than the weather at 68°F. Cold was no problem for me having lived in Connecticut and New York, but the issue was not the cold, but the City's preparedness for it. Buses previously had no chains, which was why there was no bus service for many years, and that only changed due to the increased frequency of cold snaps. When Winter Storm Uri hit, I had heard reports of people losing water or lights, but my roommate and I maintained our water and lights for two weeks, so I thought nothing of it. The lockdowns were still in effect, so both my roommate and I were working from home, and I had an editing contract that I was trying to finish, which was extended when the client sent me more to do, despite my explaining that he would have to pay more which he pretended not to notice.

Earlier in the month, I finished standing up for myself during

the Pedestrian Advisory Council and anticipated a joint Council meeting right after Valentine's Day. At about midnight on February 15<sup>th</sup>, I started working on the timelines for sidewalks and bike lanes, and I had a good little flow for a couple of hours. Suddenly, at 2:15a on February 15<sup>th</sup>—yes, that was literally how it happened—the electricity stopped. Still unbothered, I told myself that it was a sign from the universe to stop working and go to sleep, which I did, although I was grateful that I had a sleeping bag from my backpacking days as backup. Only when I woke up the next morning and saw that the power was still out did I realize that my apartment complex had joined the parts of Austin without power. Luckily, our water was running, and we were able to get warm by taking showers.

Unfortunately, my roommate worked in remote customer service, so time offline meant a lower paycheck, and I was unable to have meetings or complete my editing work as we continued to wait. Right before my phone died, I updated my online community and let them know that I had lost power, and that I would let them know when my power resumed. Ghisallo had been feeding the unhoused community in a nearby park, and contacted me to recommend that I get bottles of water in the off chance that the apartment lost water. Fortunately, I happened to have a lot of water bottles from my long-distance cycling days, so I spent a couple of hours filling every bottle I had for my roommate and myself. That advice was spot on, because that evening, we lost water.

Our neighbors fared no better, but we all tried to be helpful to one another. The next-door neighbor was heating up food on a barbecue with a slight bit of wood they managed to find, and I had happened to buy a couple of cans of soup based on low income, so we had a warm meal on the first night. Sadly, the

neighbor ran out of wood, and although the apartment complex was next to a creek, all the wood was soaked through because of the storm. As the conditions worsened, my roommate and I were offered a place to stay, but I volunteered to stay behind because someone had to know when the weather would improve, and the power and water returned. Since I was staying alone, I gave my number to the neighbors and promised to let them know when things were returned to normal.

The next morning, I realized that if I had no power, I would have no way of contacting anyone, and even keeping my phone off for most of the day left my phone running low on energy. Finally, I decided to venture out to hotels, because I remembered that in Houston, some of the fancy hotels had fast-charging stations like the airport, and if I could get my phone completely full, I might be able to keep it going for a couple of days. Walking past unhoused people was incredibly stressful not just because it was distressing to see how they would handle the cold, but because there was very little I could do, given my own lack of resources. None of the hotels had fast chargers, and the majority of the staff—save one Black man who knew exactly what I was looking for—treated me like I was trying to steal comfort from their patrons; I bet I know why. I ended up walking to Palmer Auditorium, which I remembered was a shelter, and while I waited to charge my phone, the buses started running again, so I was able to take the bus home.

I was further surprised to find that there was a warming bus at my apartment complex, meaning that I was finally able to work on my contract, and when I went to my home, I finally had hot water again, which made the day worth even more. Once I had hot water, staying in my home was a lot more palatable, but I had to go back to the warming bus to work, and trying to

edit on a phone screen is pretty much the torture Steig Larrson described in *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*. Finally, on February 19, the power returned after being out for four days, and I called everyone, and my building refilled by that evening.

One thing I noticed during my limited access to the internet was that people were beginning to develop mutual aid stations to help those who were still dealing with power and water outages now that the temperature was rising. Without a car, I figured that there would be a limited amount of work I could participate in, but I was pleased to see that others were working. During the first week of March, I found out that there was a water mutual aid effort in which there would be stations to pick up donated water on a weekly basis. I noticed that it was at a location that was right off a bus line dropping off a block away from my house, and I would not need a car. Excitedly, I went there the next weekend, and although it was right next to another mutual aid effort, it was very straightforward. People pulled up in cars to bring home cases of water, and we would load them up, and then the next carload would pull forward. With this effort, I was able to help keep loading cars until we ran out of donated water, so it was also an excellent way not to overexert myself, since I had a nasty habit of doing that.

Needing a car to get resources is another element of privilege that people do not regularly consider because in the United States, we have been brainwashed into believing that everyone has certain things, including a car. There was even a time when I had to explain that I had no television, so I needed another way to know about inclement weather. However, building car-dependent architecture in an era where resources are dwindling is as irresponsible as it is to assume that everyone has a car, and can access water stations. The streets had thawed, so it was

possible for people to drive, but service workers have irregular schedules, and unlike grocery stores, mutual aid efforts have specific hours. In the future, people with privilege need to work on their delivery methods to ensure that they are not simply offering opportunities for other people with privilege.

Fortunately, when the first location asked the mutual aid efforts to relocate, it was in a spot with a bunch of apartment complexes, meaning that not everyone had vehicles, and there were people with cars who would drive onsite to deliver the water. That was even better than the station close-by because all the apartments were close-by, with the exception of the Rosewood Autonomous Zone, and the timing was still the same. Even better, most of the people I worked with were leftists, meaning that they understood the flaws within the dominant narrative and were not trying to make space for institutional comfort. Not everybody spoke English, so I got to practice my then mediocre Spanish, and I felt a lot more motivated because of the extra effort.

I found the Rosewood Autonomous Zone while I was taking the bus home, and I got off when I saw tents in Rosewood Park. The most well-known autonomous zones were planted in Minneapolis and Portland, but I had not seen any zones in Austin until that moment. A lesser-known fact: veterans of WWI were promised a bonus, but did not receive it, which was not only problematic, but during the Great Depression, such a situation was catastrophic. Therefore, a former Army sergeant and unemployed cannery worker, Walter W. Waters, recruited veterans to camp on the lawns of the White House, and he actually recruited tens of thousands of veterans. At first, there was a bill proposal to address the concern, but it died on the Senate floor, so the encampment was eventually cleared by law

enforcement. It warmed my heart to discover that there was actual precedent for autonomous zones, and that those claiming such activism to be “chaos” were speaking out of ignorance.

Even though I had been out for a while, I got off the bus, watching as people with weapons stood watch outside the space. There had probably been information on social media, but I was beginning to feel increasingly stressed when logging on, so I had started pulling away, except from YouTube consumption. I saw people planting food plants and generators—and children, which warmed my heart because it is difficult teaching youth the values of protest and self-respect, and parents need support as society becomes more unstable. For those who question why weapons were involved, remember that this was 2021, right after January 6, 2021, and this was the time not long after the 2020 protests. Also, the Black Panther Party also patrolled with weapons, which explains why those who murdered Fred Hampton came when everyone was asleep, like cowards. Finally, this was Texas, and weaponry is something we do, and rather than be intimidated by guns, we learn to respect and avoid them when given the chance.

Walking around the perimeter of the larger communal garden, I was approached by the leader, and I was pleased to hear that even the leader stated, “This is not liberation.” It was explained that this activism was the best we can do because most Black people in Austin lack material resources, because again: liberal means *neoliberal*, not socially liberal. The leader gestured towards the plants offered by a local restaurant and stated that they were negotiating their stay with the City, and I was pleased that there was no direct plan to evict them. When I returned to the mutual aid station during the next week, I talked about the autonomous zone, and my colleagues were ecstatic;

we planned to make the stop the next week after the rest of the scheduled apartment stops.

Sadly, we arrived at the park, and the groundskeepers were putting the final touches on the landscaping to restore Rosewood Park to its original conditions. My colleague and I were completely dejected as we returned to the water station base, because we saw how the dominant narrative was regaining control of the activism narrative. I would later discover that the NAACP had supported the City's removal of the site, and I was disgusted that a generational gap led the older Black population to preen at the City's attention while throwing the younger generation under the bus. The week after that was the last week that people donated water, so it was my last week volunteering, and I was relieved because that had been a severe letdown.

Most of the ensconced Black activists' role is to undermine and sabotage the younger generations into submission. Many have spent the majority of our adult years invalidating our experiences to the point that younger Black Austinites are barely participating in church, not trusting icons from the past. Too many older people do not want to represent what we want, but tell us what we want. After dealing with the brunt of excessive physical violence, many older Black residents have accepted surprisingly low standards for how they are treated in the dominant narrative. Frequently, many of them will make excuses for psychological and financial abuse of younger individuals while blaming the targets for such mistreatment. Thus, the younger generations look extremely intolerant for not enabling mistreatment.

The difference between the Civil Rights Movement and now is that Black people had significantly more resources, and there were fewer smoke and mirrors to make even the smallest

efforts look meaningful. Churches were beacons of activism, not submission, and for meaningful change, not glossy efforts that look like progress but maintain the status quo. People could also organize at homes they owned, provided that their behavior was not considered a “threat.” These days, many of us are lucky if we get jobs that pay living wages, and have any spare time, let alone time to organize. Anyone saying that activism is possible even when people work multiple jobs is not considering how much our communal networks have been decimated. Grandparents have to work as well, and younger generations cannot afford independence. Food costs enough to make people reevaluate procreation, so there is no one to carry the mantles. More importantly, the opposition has to have shame and/or morals, and those have almost been collectively diluted for the majority.

## Education Denied for White Safety

At the previous church I attended, there was a pastoral couple—both of whom were ordained to be pastors—who introduced me to a friend who was working as a teacher in a local high school. Theoretically, all three were interested in continuing to educate a willfully ignorant, predominantly white population about how oppression was one of the roots of the United States. I met with the teaching friend, and at first, it legitimately seemed as though the individual was willing to educate students about Black history, and I was invited to teach on March 1<sup>st</sup>. We caught up since we had mutual friends in common, and having trained to be a teacher for part of my college years, I was preparing a lesson plan for the students. Again, we met to solidify the plans, but I noticed something during our second meeting: the teacher friend was starting to gush about all the Black-centered activities that had been done, and began seeking my affirmation for those efforts instead of solidifying the plan. I was also told that I would have some time in the lesson, but the exact amount and structure of that time remained vague. Then, I was invited to come the night before, and I would commute with the teacher

to save time. At least this time, I was not forced to rent a car, so I had not poured excessive resources into this activity.

The night before I was scheduled to come up to the teacher friend's home, I packed my belongings, and started on the bus so that I would get to the house at a reasonable time. After I passed Town Lake, the teacher friend called me on the bus, and cancelled the invitation. I was surprised and confused, and stated that I had provided information about my lesson plan and was willing to provide a copy so that we could discuss it, but the teacher friend was resolute: my time was cancelled. Fortunately, I had not come a significant distance, but I realized a consistent trend of a number of white people working to keep themselves safe while I was struggling, despite my not asking for anything more than following through on plans that were made. Both the teacher friend and I realized that a line had been crossed, and not only would I not be able to rely on further endorsement of my capabilities, but that I would not be offering validation on any "Black-centered" efforts—especially after thwarting mine.

Another positive aspect of my engagement with this individual was that we had agreed on payment: \$50 before the class began as a deposit, and \$50 upon completion based on the reaction of the students. My general course of action guides me to avoid receiving money when services were not rendered, and I communicated as such, and considered our contact to be at an end. I was surprised that the texts continued, and the teacher friend asked to pay part of my compensation since it was not my responsibility for the event to be cancelled. Because I was desperate, I had to agree, even later when I was offered the second half based on some semblance of guilt during the 2020 protest movement that continued into 2021 after the riots on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Only now do I realize that offering little money

instead of opportunity is controlling: I had not sought a handout, but the fulfillment of a responsibility. Then again, more white people enjoy controlling Black people rather than working with us.

## Project Connect Equity Anti-Displacement Tool

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, I woke up in Washington, DC, landed in Austin, took a bus, walked from the stop to my house, and had one hour before I started working on this effort. While in DC, I had participated in a Zoom panel on homelessness, during which I saw one of the members of my old church who had considered involving me with the Junior League, which I would have no longer seen as “activism.” I was already dealing with the reality that some kinds of activism were only for appearances, and that Black people were expected to defer to white leadership. For whatever reason, I still had hope that people had meant what they said in not only refusing to elect Trump, but participating in the voting activism of 2020. Mostly Black women had been in the news, but as Black people are only a maximum of 14.5% of the population—and that includes those overseas and imprisoned—I believed that there had to be more than just us.

Like all Zoom meetings, it started out with everyone introducing ourselves and explaining our activism, which I had expected based on all of the coverage of people in Zoom meetings during

the lockdowns, although this was right about the time those ended in Austin. One of the participants had actually been displaced from East Austin, and she began by explaining her experience, and the city liaisons thanked her for her story. That hit me the wrong way on the right day, so I unmuted myself and said rather aggressively, “Do you think this is a show? This isn’t Netflix. This is her life.” Everyone got quiet for a second, and the participant elaborated further on how it felt to be displaced. One of the city liaisons apologized for treating the experience like entertainment, and that was the last time during this effort that any of the staff treated lived experience like a show.

People within the dominant narrative have a bad habit of distancing themselves from the experiences of Black people, and thinking that we exist for the entertainment of others. This may be one of the reasons that there is little thought given to all cultural appropriation of Black people, especially rap, which was created out of the radical movement in a response to respectability politics. If our experiences were unreal, then people would never consider themselves as part of a system that was deliberately harmful. Consequently, too many people see racism as something in a movie, on television, or other consumable media—not something they or the systems are doing. People without insight cannot be reasoned with, no matter how long we wait. Until people view racism as actually happening in the same reality of other people, they will feel no responsibility to rectify the conditions. If people are too busy trying to fit all BIPOCQ individuals within the dominant narrative, eventually we realize that the beneficiaries and sycophants do not truly want to understand us.

The group continued to meet once a week for two hours, and there were constant discussions on how developers would

try to get around them. Many people talked about housing construction being a solution to lower housing costs, but having just seen the explosion of luxury housing, I raised that question, and people changed the subject. I also pointed out that there was a great deal of empty housing around the city, and that there was no reason for further construction, since people would argue about “The market!” as an excuse to price out certain demographics. The biggest problem I saw was that people were looking to solve an actual problem that might make it easier for them to live in this ridiculously expensive city, but the City was more often learning to make money.

Some of us were invited to participate in an antiracism course, and although I had been to some seminars on the topic, this was my first workplace training. It was taught by a Black man, white woman, Latinx woman, and the Latinx woman was replaced by a Black woman towards the end of the week. There were also various city staff participating, which made me much more hopeful than I should have been. During the week, I truly appreciated that the Black man discussed how he used to fall for the lies of transit-oriented development and urban renewal. Too often, there is a discussion about how white people have been racist, but not that Black people have internalized self-hatred because we have been consistently denied access to our history. Especially because some of our parents moved to mostly-white suburbs as a flex, it became very common for many millennials and younger people to be consumed by the dominant narrative and think of ourselves as “better.”

When the white trainer spoke, she pointedly discussed enjoying the control that her whiteness provided, because she was under no impression that she was either innocent or ignorant about it. We were talking about which parts of our cultures

that we appreciated the most, and she was honest, instead of trying to drag up European ancestry to which she had no relationship. She pointed out that while all of us had actual cultural aspects to what we stated, she had no examples to give because there was no real culture to her identity. Because whiteness had no specific lineage and people could become white at any time, there were no defining characteristics, which is why white people felt so comfortable appropriating the cultures of so many different people. Both she and the Black teacher discussed the disparate funding for displacement and the fact that only East Austin was an acceptable place to “experiment,” while West Austin was kept more sacred for its residents. The city staff who was there spoke less during this moment, and there was even someone I knew from the Democratic Socialists of America, who apologized for her behavior when the Councilmember candidate was questioned in the past.

There was one moment when the City had already outlined plans to use all \$300 million to purchase land instead of doing anything that they said they were going to do for equity, and unfortunately for them, I found the information in the City Minutes. All people working on the equity anti-displacement tool were livid, and made plans to attend a meeting in person, which I declined, as I had already found and relayed the information. Since the City Council, and all the boards and commissions, had demonstrated their disinterest in Black voices, I chose not to yell into the abyss. Again, people who are not receptive to feedback can use all the energy of anyone trying to inform them about their problematic behavior. After that meeting, people felt a little more positive and were further energized into working on the project, and our part ended in August.

Someone approached the group to make videos about our

part in creating the equity anti-displacement tool, stating that the opportunity would be paid. Initially, I signed up for it, but the timing happened around the same time that the Pedestrian and Bicycling Advisory Councils had been misogynistic, and the collaboration leader had gotten off without anyone other than me calling him out on his heinous behavior. I was not in the mood to talk about how great the City was, nor was I interested in smiling on camera for a collaboration that was fraught with tension based on how easily people dismissed concerns about racial equity. I held one conversation with the video organizer, and politely declined, which was a good move since she *had* wanted some nonsensical touchy-feely garbage about how the process had transcended race, which it had not.

In the fall, different activists were supposed to present to various boards and commissions about the equity anti-displacement tool, and I accepted the responsibility not only because I could use the money, but because I was not intimidated by “educated” or “rich” people. Some people are, because “elites” are generally very nasty, condescending individuals who think that they have nothing to improve because they are perfection. During my actual presentation to the Commission, one of the commissioners was concerned how the equity anti-displacement tool would affect West Austin, and I said that the entire city would fall under the purview of the tool. The same commissioner had the audacity to suggest that West Austin get a BIPOCQ representative to protect West Austin, to which I curtly responded that East Austin had not been attacking West Austin, but that Council had listened to West Austin directives nonstop. The equity officer tried to reduce the tension, but I refused to let that commissioner lie and say that West Austin had been steadily “under attack” for a long time.

Before the meeting, I had seen the unfortunate senatorial candidate, and she smiled as if we were friends, despite my falling out with the organization. I kept a polite but firm distance, and to no one's surprise, she began latching on to the sole Black woman serving as a commissioner. Afterwards, I met an East Austinite I had actually met back when I helped with a Ghisallo bike tour, and she discussed the natural springs in East Austin that nobody cared about poisoning based on the industrial development. We both talked about how the only environmental causes worth protecting seemed to be in white areas, while everyone else was forced to deal with the responsibility of being solely used for economic growth. She got my Decipher City contact, and we both left the meeting after I finished presenting.

Well, West Austin does not like having its control questioned, so even though I was scheduled for other presentations—including one in northeast Austin—all of the presentations were cancelled because there was suddenly a “legal issue” to discuss. The problem with all racial equity work is that most white people want to look good without doing anything that could possibly hurt their superior position, and the government's responsibility seems to be to comply. Essentially, Blackness is allowed to speak as long as whiteness wins. That is a failure to recognize that punishing people for speaking out is justifying abuse. After a month, the City Council twisted the knife further by taking credit for the equity anti-displacement tool, and announcing that there would be a legal review. All the team members discussed the result, but since people had already gone to a City Council meeting and the Council had failed to stand up for the tool, nobody felt like participating in a degrading process, especially for as little as we received, approximately \$1500 for

work from March 2021 until November 2021.

For those who believe that we should be grateful for that much, I would remind those same people that there are inspirational speakers who make *thousands* of dollars at *one* gig. Inequitable funding of activists of color is rampant within dominant narrative activism. A while ago, a very good Black friend of mine engaged with the foster system and arrived at Yale University in 1999, which is how we met. Through some ups and downs, she eventually became a lawyer, got married and moved to Washington, DC, then sought out churches to join for building community. The family settled on a more racially integrated church, but while they were attending, people found out that my friend had made it through the foster system. Gleefully, they invited her to speak at a function, bragging about how they usually had to spend \$15,000 for a speaker, but they were excited about being able to gain a *free* speaker since my friend happened to go to their church. My friend carefully asked them why they felt entitled to her work for free instead of paying her \$15,000, especially since the family had multiple small children to nurture. After wiping the glee off their faces, the church members tried to backpedal and discuss limited resources, of course expounding on how grateful the children would be for her experience and triumphs. Not surprisingly, my friend declined, and the family stopped attending that church, deciding that the expectation of free labor from Black people was entirely inappropriate.

There was one more fake engagement I attended in October 2022, but by then, the City was still attempting to keep the project in limbo by saying that there were “legal issues” to discuss, and nobody had heard anything about its progress. Also by then, the equity officer had left the city—and the equity office

will likely dissolve, based on the new regime in the United States. Someone at the community engagement event pointed out that the City had promised that the tool would be in place, but instead of being able to see it, the City kept talking about “legal issues.” In the end, there was no meeting, because the next phase was the City’s usual tactic: create a panel to analyze whether the tool would be effective. The panel would put the tool in a variety of scenarios and describe the process to developers and city staff. By the time I quit participating in the City’s distraction tactics on racial equity, the bigot mayor who destroyed East Austin had been reelected, and the panel was still “investigating.” Of course, by then, nobody cared.

This is generally what whiteness demands: watching BIPOCQ residents struggle to enact change while steadily blocking our efforts and blaming us for its unwavering commitment to abuse. A policy is only “racist” if it attempts to undo systemic injustice for nonwhite people, but it is considered “normal” if it emphasizes the dominant narrative. At some point, if working for a goal that depends on cooperation is fruitless, then we should become disengaged and do something else. Sometimes “trying to see the good in everyone” makes someone just as unsafe as the powers they pretend to defy. Activists do not owe beneficiaries and sycophants the right to ignore our pain and satisfy the delusion. This process demonstrated another example of how when the dominant narrative states that it wants to engage with BIPOCQ communities, it means a demand for legitimizing racist behavior. The thought process is, “Would displacement really be considered wrong if BIPOCQ residents agree to it?”

Moreover, being chastised for disengagement after refusing to admit to ignoring communities is racial hatred, no matter

how many Democrat boxes one checks. If the City could not produce an equity plan with an intent to follow through and provide results, then the City merely developed a gaslighting plan to further alienate its BIPOCQ population. Standards have generally been created to take things away from BIPOCQ communities, not hold the dominant narrative accountable. Thus, the equity assessment tool was dead on arrival because the dominant narrative does not think of BIPOCQ scholars and activists as inherent equals. It had done nothing wrong, so why change?

## Community-Led Groups Attempting to Emulate the Dominant Narrative

There is a YouTuber I enjoyed for about four years who has a great video discussing the wealth in the Black community, since people insist on constantly referring to it. Basically, he notes that most of our wealth is locked in property, retirement accounts, and other largely nonliquid assets that take effort to access and require huge penalties. I have “enjoyed” four retirement accounts—because when I was desperate and everyone wanted to shrug their shoulders, I had to liquidate them to keep my head above water and last until someone who was unfamiliar could hire me. Of course, I was able to pay rent and buy groceries, but there was very little else I could do, and no one was getting rich from my “investment.” This is not a unique story because dealing within the dominant narrative, most of us never enjoy making it to retirement due to people’s need to push us out of their financial obligation.

Therefore, when a community group wanted to discuss how to pool our “resources,” I was curious about what resources other people had, or if they were homeowners who were able

to leverage their houses, which was a common practice in the Civil Rights Movement. Over the course of three meetings, everyone else was reminded about how little resources we all had. Were we interested in starting housing cooperatives to reduce homelessness? Sure, just cough up the regular money it takes to buy property, as well as for any community land trusts that the City would surely challenge. Did we want to start paid businesses? All we had to do was secure business loans, and make sure that people paid us for our services, which was likely not happening since we were at this meeting. I had an old friend who encouraged me to get a PPP loan during COVID for DecipherCity.Org, but since I was already underfunded and in debt thanks to terrible work opportunities, I was not interested in another bill to pay. From what I gathered, this group would have been a great idea during the eras when people had more money and/or things cost less, but a nation of rising inflation and raging discrimination was not the time or place to attempt to emulate the past.

Note that while there are some non-white people with resources, none of them were at these meetings, meaning that the people who were the most interested in developing community assets were the people without assets. As a Yale graduate and a West Austin resident, I know that most non-white capitalists are people who want to remain capitalists, and they do their very best to distance themselves from people without resources—“guilt by association.” People who already have everything they need and more want to be seen as people of means, and they know that if they associate with radicals or activists, their meager resources could be taken away, and then they could be seen as “problems.” Like Jay-Z walking with other billionaires, that is how rich people behave now: they hoard, and they

spend time around other people who help them justify hoarding control and resources.

I will note that this was *not* a white space, but still a space attempting to operate within the dominant narrative, which means that we were forced to conform to rules as if we *were* white. This is problematic because as we are more targeted by insecure individuals, we will have fewer resources to pool unless we manage to accumulate wealth in other countries, which is just Black colonization and equally wrong. We have all done what we could to attempt to manage our own destinies, but as all targets know, abusers cannot relinquish control, so every avenue we have been able to navigate has been thwarted or destroyed. Unless people pour into us within the dominant narrative, we have very limited opportunities to pour into ourselves, which is very intentional, and why we have been reduced to very limited mutual aid.

## Preservation Working Group

In the fall of 2021, one of my colleagues in the Pedestrian Advisory Council recommended that I apply to be a part of an outreach group on preservation, since she knew that I was in ATX Walk, Bike, Roll, and that I was focused on race in the built environment. Bear in mind, I had come up with a timeline involving “respectable” advocate history and the planning history in Austin, so I knew a lot about Black history in Austin from the City’s perspective. I applied, but got rejected, so I had put the issue behind me until I was informed about a small focus group for preservation talks. For two sessions that were each two hours, I would be compensated \$15/hour, which was not much, but I was making so little that any income would help at that point. The first one happened in the first week of December, so I was pleased to be paid by the end of the year.

The meeting began with introductions, and the city liaison started describing the objectives with the program, and after she finished speaking, one long-term advocate said, “Racism won’t be over until white people decide it’s over.” I had seen him at a number of events, and it made me ecstatic that someone

was thinking along the same lines as me. We both understood that the system could not be changed unless/until the onus of liberation falls on those who *cause* harm, rather than forcing people who experience the harm to make all the efforts. Making all marginalized people “fight for justice” is a fruitless endeavor, leading to burnout and mental health concerns. The city liaison was taken aback, because instead of us begging for a seat at the table, she had to actually listen to how the city was deliberately complicit in harm. Within the “struggle,” people like to groom Black people to make them look good while offering next to nothing, so this was likely a shock to her system.

Later in the conversation, someone mentioned the preservation officer, and I stated that the officer was highly problematic, and was obnoxiously condescending when the preservation of Rosewood Courts was discussed. For those who do not know, Rosewood Courts was among the first ten housing projects in the United States, and yes, I mean the entire country. In Austin there were three, and they were Rosewood Courts for the Black people, Santa Rita Courts for the Latinx population, and Chalmers Courts for the white population. However, East Austin was considered prime real estate for displacement because of the City’s continued disdain for the Black population, and people were hoping to tear down Rosewood Courts and make more space for market real estate. Along with several others, I had gone to the meeting, and the preservation officer was an insufferable bigot, just like the majority of the Historic Preservation Commission.

The city liaison bristled at my words, and stated, “I need you to respect my colleague. I will not have you speaking badly about him.” The underlying thought process is, “I honestly do not care if you like me, but you better not make me look

bad.” The meeting got quiet for a few seconds, but one of the other attendees privately messaged me—too cowardly to do it in front of everyone else—to tell me that I was understood, and that the preservation officer was soon expected to leave. An unmistakable pall was cast on the rest of the meeting, and I said very little, which was the entire point of cutting me off in front of everyone and reminding me of my place. People think that Black women need to be incessantly “resilient” so that they never have to manage their own behavior, but between the cancellation of the equity anti-displacement tool and the bullying on the Councils, I had endured enough for the year. When people keep making excuses for terrible people, others should stop feeling comfortable relying on them when times become more difficult.

The next day, I contacted the city liaison and told her that I would not be continuing with the next panel because of her deplorably racist behavior. I told her that I had expected her to *listen*, and not demand that I maintain the dominant narrative façade in pretending that the City respected Black people. Additionally, I contacted the other city liaison and declined payment because I was tired of receiving chump change to participate in self-negating circumstances. It seems that no one understands that folks became activists because we thought people might *stop* bullying us, not because we need to prance around like trick ponies. No one should have to be “special” to survive, but that is the world that the dominant narrative created for Black people. Now people want us to meekly stand and gently beg people to stop the bullying? Those people are showing us that they are irrational and incapable of change. Because there is such limited accountability when working with white women, most Black women exercise the only power we

are permitted: leaving. No one cares that feelings are hurt when truth is presented.

Of course, the city liaison knew that this made her look incredibly inappropriate, for two reasons. One, the City had *recruited* advocates, and was *expected* to listen to more viewpoints than to honor the City's position. Two, and what made that situation even worse, this city liaison had sat with me in the same racial justice training offered while I helped create the equity anti-displacement tool, which further proved that "becoming educated" simply means learning how to lie better. Speaking to people in a controlling manner because someone thinks that is what the other person needs is not a healthy or warm connection. I received a fake apology and request for a conversation in response, which I participated in just because I avoided the second panel, but I was so thankful that this would be the last time I talked to her. The other city liaison assured me that I did not have to receive the income, and was disappointed in the process. So many people fail to understand that words do not negate our Black experience. No, just because someone wants to superficially absolve racism does not mean that institutions have changed or ended.

At an event in April 2023, I met the other city liaison at a community event, and she began to talk about incrementalism, which I immediately dismissed as a degrading suggestion for Black people to accept. Incrementalism is offensive because it implies the right to control when large groups of people can live free of surveillance and harassment. One has to wonder at the mental health of people who suggest, "You have to wait patiently until we feel like stopping our abuse of you and using you to your detriment and our benefit." Continuing to demand time for change while avoiding adverse effects from a lack of change

is abuse and manipulation. A bigot requires time for people to expend their resources in favor of phantom insecurities. People love to say, “These things take time.” No, learning a language or cultivating a harvest takes time. It is common sense to stop harassing groups of people someone feels has provoked them merely by existing. When someone says, “These things take time,” they are just announcing that they feel entitled to other people’s time. By promoting incrementalism, the dominant narrative is saying, “Just keep waiting for our behavior to improve at *your* expense.”

In fact, because I had been participating in various advocacy programs, I was approached to participate in a revamped discussion on equitable preservation in the fall of 2023, but by then, I had learned that the City would block any and all efforts to do the right thing. Bear in mind, the City had already engaged a preservation committee, which I had been rejected from, and had to remove myself from the conversation demanding that I praise bigots because they were “staff.” First, I agreed, because I thought that I could use the money, but then that same spirit that caused me to protect myself the first time welled within me. I told the recruiter that it was emotionally abusive to keep demanding that Black people participate in “equity initiatives” that kept being blocked, and that the City was based on white power and racial hatred. That coward of recruiter not only failed to respond to my statement, but then ignored my changing my address when I needed to do my taxes at the beginning of 2024 until I involved other city staff. After the fake equity plan that the City avoided implementing for three years based on “legal review,” there was news about a historic Black site being dismantled because—whatever they decided the reason was.

## ATX Walk, Bike, Roll

I was part of the Pedestrian and Bicycling Advisory Councils when this opportunity popped up, and not just me, but one of my colleagues was chosen to participate as well. He was a white guy, but he was a white guy without full-time work and two children under the age of three, as well as a triathlete, which meant that he spent a lot of time on trails and on the roads as a cyclist. I had no car, and he shared a car with his wife who worked. Both of us were becoming thoroughly sick of the Councils because of the lack of either authority or action, and the sycophantic way that everyone was praising presenters for graphic design instead of considering how the trail and bike lane improvements would affect residential property values. I was already in East Austin in a predominantly migrant neighborhood, but my colleague had two small children, which I joked would make it easier to talk to other families.

We were both drawn to the pay, which was not a lot for me, but it was a lifeline that allowed me to continue doing advocacy work instead of conforming to the dominant narrative. My life was already quite small, but I still needed income, and

it was becoming increasingly clear that most people around me enjoyed my energy, but never felt compelled to return my efforts, even when I was clearly in distress. Being paid for community engagement was a big step, because most people who are paid to advocate have literal positions dedicated to grant applications. Getting money to change the dominant narrative sounds nuts when I say it out loud now, but I thought the air was electrified after the protests, and since some people were younger, I expected better.

During the month of June, the program started with a Black consultant who had already had issues with some of the municipal policies, but began with the advocates because of the underlying contract. I was invited to an interview to complete the application, and I met her and some of the other members of the City's team of staff dedicated to the task. Rather than be nervous, I wanted to figure out how the City planned to incorporate BIPOCQ voices into the expansion of sidewalks, trails, bicycle lanes, and public transportation for two reasons. First, whenever these projects were completed, the property values of the surrounding communities always increased, so the infrastructure could be directly linked to displacement—something that the Pedestrian and Bicycling Advisory Councils never liked to hear. Secondly, most of the time in the City Minutes, whenever BIPOCQ constituents spoke to the municipal government, they were treated as if they were stupid; I had no interest in “experts” being condescending.

After being accepted into the program, there were a lot of Zoom meetings to maintain the social distancing methodology, which worked wonders because it meant that everyone could easily get to all the meetings. There really were BIPOCQ advocates from all over East Austin, and it is notoriously difficult to

get from east to west because of the racism that was consistently cultivated into the City Plans. I had gotten into the 2000s for the sidewalk and bicycling timelines, and I had hoped to finish by the time the plan was in place—until I heard about the plans to expand IH-35, which changed my research direction. My Council colleague and I were annoyed about being labeled as “community ambassadors,” but we genuinely believed that everyone wanted to hear honest feedback about city policies. About halfway through July, the Black consultant working on the project left the firm she was working with, and a new Black consultant from New York took that position. Not surprisingly, the first Black consultant joined an activist organization called Go Austin! Vamos Austin!—affectionately known as GAVA—and that was the last I saw of her involvement with the project. Leaving would become a trend in this project.

During the month of September, a project manager with the City came and spoke to the Pedestrian Advisory Council in one meeting, and he was discussing the process of ATX Walk, Bike, Roll with the other council members. Throughout the meeting, there were several references to “professionals” and “experts” that the council members nodded along with, but I said nothing at the time after dealing with nobody standing up for me with the condescending council members and the collaboration leader. After the meeting, I sent the project manager an email, basically stating that it was inappropriate to say things like “expert” and “professional” when those terms have often been reserved for white people who come in and destroy communities. For obvious reasons, people have trained themselves to believe that the only “professionals” are trained people with power. He offered to meet with me, but I had gotten tired of fake meetings where people performatively emoted without changing behavior, so I

maintained that I had said what I needed to say.

In October, my Council colleague stated that he had surveyed people, but that they explained that the City had already heard their grievances. No one wanted to rehash what was being said, and my colleague asked if I wanted some of his hours since he had reliable income. We confirmed with the City, and I made a point of going to multiple trails, going out of my way to get to the ones that were closest to the remaining BIPOCQ communities. A lot of displacement had already happened because of the New Vision for East Austin under Kirk Watson in 1999, so getting to large communities of Black people took time, especially without a car. In fact, other ambassadors were starting to leave because the constituents they talked to had already engaged with the City, and had felt ignored by the City's actions. Most people were reluctant to complete surveys, which makes sense because surveys are a tool used to suppress free communication, so I usually asked leading questions and let people tell me whatever they wanted.

We kept attending meetings, but one of the issues that I was beginning to have with the meetings is that our "handlers" kept needing to control our behavior and revert back to what they knew about community engagement. Everything was supposed to happen on their terms, and even when people were sharing reports and getting real feedback, the only issue seemed to revolve around using surveys so that the data could be manipulated into charts and graphs. I tried to explain to them that human beings do not like being constrained when providing feedback about their home, but most of the higher-ranking city staff were proving that they did not care about anything other than marginalized and distressed people "sharing feelings," which would hopefully be centered around how much they loved

pretty pictures of potential architecture. Just like with the Pedestrian and Bicycling Advisory Councils, nobody wanted to hear about how people were afraid of “improvement” because it generally meant, “Niggers and Mexicans, get out! White people want to live here now.”

In January 2022, I actively called the City out on the low pay it was giving its community consultants, especially when all of them were comfortable and worked full-time jobs, watching us struggle for entertainment. This is a common feature of calling in activists to “work” with governments. Regardless of how much time we work or how our perceived alliance with the city alienates us to our own communities, we are expected to have additional income that does not rely on any of the people contracting with us. All the activists are expected to endure economic distress while the city leaders are given reasonable salaries and can spend time furrowing their brows at what we say while they wait—and search—for white people to contradict us. For several “professional consultants,” there are high prices and exclusive contracts, and as somebody who reviewed City Minutes discussing contracts, I began to find the payments we received laughable. Nobody would be able to live or sustain a business under these tiny contracts, and meetings were not just to engage with us, but for accountability, and towards the end even the city staff was over its overseeing role with people the City claimed to want to engage.

At this point, I should point out that the funding for all the outreach for marginalized communities came from the Biden Administration through an Executive Order entitled, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through Federal Government,” and the total was \$1 billion. Before anyone gets too excited, I want to remind everyone

that most of Black life revolves around navigating the wishes of the dominant narrative. If Black people try to make our own communities, people work to insert themselves into those communities so that we neither compete nor transcend the expectations of others. When people decide that we are “too much,” they work to destroy anything we have built—just like the DecipherCity.Org website—and then they furrow their brows and/or cry when we discuss how we are harmed. Rebuilding after destruction requires time, energy, and resources, and bear in mind that most of our communities are located in either really urban areas or really rural areas, both of which are expensive in different ways. Sending \$1 billion to “fix” racism may sound like a lot until one considers that *every major city* in the United States had a historically Black community that was wiped out when others decided that they wanted to live in those areas or dilute the solidarity they saw. War gets more funding than engaging with harmed citizenry in the United States.

The consultant who was working with ATXWBR was a Black woman from Brooklyn, and we clicked because of our Ivy League backgrounds and our experiences being surrounded by those who expected us to carry their burdens. In fact, because of this consultant, I was recruited for another contract which had a much shorter contract, but was more concentrated on public transportation. After basically yelling about not being paid enough, the consultant was very understanding because they lived in a nice apartment by themselves close to downtown. Furthermore, I was invited to participate in a conference with the Association for Pedestrian and Bicycling Professionals in Minneapolis, Minnesota. At the time, I was so disoriented with figuring out where I was going to live and looking for full-time work that I completely forgot where this conference was going

to be held. Since I had been to conferences before, I agreed in a manic fervor, and the consultant submitted the information.

One of the places I was looking to live was a housing cooperative located along South Lamar, where I would have my own room and I would be relatively close to work. To live in this cooperative, I needed to have two meetings with them, and the shortest stint would be about six months. An old friend of mine had lived in a cooperative and met a future spouse there; I was not looking for companionship, but the fact that the old friend had stayed in the cooperative for years made me appreciate the opportunity. I was accepted for a meeting, and everything seemed to go as planned, but I would have been the only Black person in the household. People should understand that since I was raised in West Austin and lived there for most of my life, I was very acclimated to being the only Black person in a situation, and having my own room would have made the process even easier.

Because I was doing surveys with ATXWBR, I emailed the cooperative to thank them for their dinner invitation and to send them a survey. While I was not trying to pressure them, it was unclear why I failed to hear from them after that dinner. I had nowhere to go after my apartment lease ended, and I was wondering why I was hearing nothing when I could not fathom what could have gone wrong with the dinner. Finally, I accepted at the end of the month that I was not going to hear back from the cooperative, and I managed my depression the best I could. People may argue that sending a survey in a thank-you email was a bit assertive, but I never followed up on the information; that was one of my jobs, and I wanted people to see that I was safe enough, but respectful enough not to be pushy. Later on in life, I would live in a shared household where I was not the only

Black individual, and I felt extremely grateful for not previously having lived under such circumstances.

Time was inching forward and I was getting more frantic, but I knew not to reach backwards in my life because when people are used to Black women behaving a certain way, they expect that behavior without question, and will not condone or nurture vulnerability in a healthy way. I had a couple of colleagues from an old project, and one of them was trying to keep a job while also supposedly living in an unhealthy situation. I suggested to the colleagues that I pool resources with the individual who was struggling to keep a well-paid job, and we came up with a plan that would last at least until I was able to secure employment with the IRS, since nothing else had materialized. The colleagues agreed, but the individual would not have any income until being able to secure a company computer and set foot in the office, since the company no longer allowed the use of a personal computer.

First, I got up very early and took the colleague to retrieve company property before heading back to my apartment and continuing to pack things up to move to storage. I had secured a room at an extended-stay hotel that was downtown, and that allowed me to keep working on my contracts while waiting to hear about a firm offer from the IRS. The individual had nowhere to place belongings, so I offered to help them open a storage unit in the same facility where I stored so that everything would be kept safe. During this entire time, I was going to meetings with ATXWBR, but for a week, I could do very little outreach, which worried me because I still had no reliable income. My roommate's belongings were secured, as were mine, and once we moved into the hotel room, I basically collapsed into sleep, and asked for a day without engagement since my roommate

would finally be able to go into the office.

Looking for short-term housing is incredibly stressful, but since I had lapsed on one of my higher credit card payments, I would not be eligible for any apartments at the time. Also, I needed to be close to bus service and I would need to be close to the IRS, assuming that I would need to arrive early in the morning based on my previous experience with the IRS. Therefore, I looked at Craigslist, and there was a house in Old West Austin with two bedrooms, and I shared the information with my roommate, who agreed to the price. It would be a walk for the IRS, but I would have housing with bus access near sidewalks and bicycle lanes. I still had a bicycle tour to give at the end of April 2022, so I needed to be close enough to the sites so that I could receive the final payment of that contract. The landlord had been interested in hosting a “cute dog,” and I was lucky that my roommate owned an emotional support dog who liked other people, but not other dogs. We all agreed to a tour the second day of the hotel stay.

The house was older, and only one bedroom had a fabulous bed and air conditioning. I have camped, backpacked, done triathlons and marathons—and I would have less money than my roommate, so I immediately stated that the roommate could have the nice bedroom. Thanks to a generous ally, I secured the house with a deposit and a pet deposit, with the roommate promising to pay once a check was deposited. Our other colleague stated that a fan was available so that I could be comfortable, and having lived in New Haven, CT and New York City without air conditioning for two summers, I was perfectly fine with a fan. The three of us moved my roommate and me to the house, and I finally collapsed in my room, completely exhausted. For a couple of days, the IRS acted as if it did not

have my fingerprints, but fortunately, everything was resolved, and all I had to do was wait for a little bit.

I was finally able to have meetings for my contracts in my own space again, and during that time, I announced that I was looking for a place to live. One of my colleagues stated that they were looking for roommates, and we set a date for me to go and look at the property. During the rest of the week, I started going out again and doing outreach, and it felt really good to be able to talk to people from a safer perspective and to start doing my reports again. My roommate and I barely spoke because either they were at work, or I was out doing outreach or in my room doing research. I felt like I would be okay for a little while, and that I could transition to another level of normal—before I got word that my mother was on her deathbed, and I needed to go to the hospital and see her. The only person I told was the consultant who invited me to do the conference, and I spent a weekend in Houston seeing my mother for the last time before diving back into ATXWBR and waiting for the IRS to contact me. April was an excessively trying month for me, but I was grateful when I finally got notification that I would be starting my full-time job in May with the IRS. I would finally have regular income and I would finish ATXWBR without heavily struggling to feed myself and close my own door.

Remember that both my roommate and I had only signed a temporary lease, and for me, that was because I had only searched for a place close to bus access and that would allow me to commute to the IRS. The landlord had also discussed that a temporary lease was only available because renovation would be done on the house, which meant that our time could not be extended, and we would be required to find different lodging. Fortunately, the ATXWBR colleague had mentioned that they

were looking for roommates when I told the group that I was looking for long-term housing. On April 20, I went to go check out the property and it was huge, only a mile away from the IRS—meaning that I could walk without interference, and was close to a grocery store. The price was \$800/month for one bedroom in a four-bedroom house with two outbuildings, one of which could function as an office. Not only did I manage to avoid becoming unhoused, but I had secured income and found lodging at another location, which greatly helped my emotional equilibrium.

Right before I started working at the IRS, I was invited to a panel at the University of Texas School of Architecture, and a senior was presenting a final project. Apparently, the project was part of an appeal to additional housing, and the way it was presented, I felt like it was a variation on what I now recognize as an Alexander Aravena piece that helped him win the Pritzker. The meetings with ATXWBR were great, but I was the blindsided by the fact that the IRS wanted me to start working at nights. Previously, I had worked nights with another organization before, but I hated it because the hours were 10p-6a, which just translates to never getting any sleep. However, the hours I was given were 4p-1230a with training from 6p-230a, and to me that was a late night, not a complete time shift.

Another issue about working the night shift was that I realized that very little information had been gathered about pedestrianism at night, and that is an important distinction for folks without personal vehicles. When there are cities that make a lot of their money from advertising night life, there is almost no discussion about how service workers are going to safely make their commutes, although there is a lot of derision for people who cannot afford personal vehicles. I made a lot of reports on

my nighttime commuting experience, walking a mile to get to the closest bus stop, and walking a mile home from the stop closest to my temporary home. Unhoused people generally took over the areas where they would be shooed away during the day, so there were fewer people on the sidewalks, in the bike lanes, and on the busses. One of the most memorable moments was seeing a Whole Foods baker taking an Uber at 3a, and my first thought was that bakers made very little money; how was this individual supposed to afford regular Ubers?

Since my income was already precarious, I had switched my phone service to one of those \$15/month services back in 2021, and I had experienced problems with it ever since. Basically, unless I was directly connected to WiFi, I would have no internet access on my cellphone, although I was able to make phone calls. My phone was purchased in 2018, so I imagine its obsolescence was also starting to become a factor. Thanks to the City liaison for ATX Walk, Bike, Roll, I was able to rent a portable hotspot so that I could have internet access just about everywhere I went. It was like carrying two cellphones, but when it was time to access my bus pass, I was assured that I would have internet access to reach the app, even though it was promised to function without needing WiFi. After about three months, I was ready to stop using it, though, and get a regular phone plan, but I was unsure of which one to get based on my contracting and working full-time. Someone within the activist circles wanted to sign as “family,” but I had already experienced bad faith with “family” phone plans that led to coercive control, so I wanted the phone plan to be my own.

The ATXWBR consultant and I met to put together the presentation for the Association for the Pedestrian and Bicycling Professionals conference once I had moved into my long-term

housing in August 2022. She put together a beautiful PowerPoint, but agreed that I would do most of the talking only because of my independent research and experience in Austin. Only then did I snap out of my frantic mania and ask, “Oh, so when are we going to New York?” She was confused and answered, “The conference is in Minneapolis, and we’ll be flying out on Sunday since the activities start on Monday.” My jaw dropped, because I had never been a part of the George Floyd protests and I had been doing engagement for years, but I never in a million years thought that I would personally get to see the site that had catalyzed racial justice in the United States in 2020. I was super excited, especially since I had just enough vacation time at the IRS to avoid a dip in income, and I was only going to have to recalibrate my sleep for a couple of days.

Both of us met up for the conference to fly very early, and ironically, both of us had only gotten about a couple of hours of sleep. For me that made sense, because once someone has a completely different sleep schedule, it is difficult to acclimate to sleeping at any other time. We landed, and our first impression of Minneapolis was that it was so comfortable to be outside, and despite getting almost no sleep, the first thing we did was drop our stuff in our hotel room and take a walk. There was a Somalian community nearby, and if we had more time, we would have explored the community more, because both of us worked in advocacy. We walked by a nearby university and a little train very similar to trains in Austin, Houston, and other areas that pretended nobody needed to get anywhere other than by car. The area was beautiful and the weather was so nice that we had to remind ourselves that we had come for work, and we ate whatever was closest to the hotel and passed out for the night.

The next day, the conference was in full swing, and there were so many interesting people who were activists, consultants, and municipal employees. One attendant was from Medellin, Colombia, and everyone was thrilled because the mayor of Medellin was famous for installing elevated bus stops and one of the most popular international bike paths. However, one thing I noticed about all of the attendees was that people were tired, especially because of the friction between people with cars and those of us who were trying to make it more comfortable to stop owning personal vehicles due to climate change. It was not just so many people wanted to stay tethered to their cars, but that bike lanes and sidewalks raised property values, and people were afraid of being displaced. At one of the networking events, I met some people from Tuscon, Arizona, and we all agreed to meet later to discuss improvement mitigation in Tuscon at a later date. For the first time, I felt like people were being honest about how infrastructure affected the racial composition of communities at a conference that was largely focused on infrastructure instead of race.

When the consultant and I got to present, we gave our information and perspectives, but to my delight, it was more of a discussion than a lecture. The consultant offered invaluable insight about her experience working with different government entities as planning consultant, and I was able to add historical insight as well as my experience in advocacy. Other participants from other cities shared their disappointment in how municipalities seemed to keep expanding suburbs without expanding pedestrian or bicycling infrastructure. Someone gave a federal guideline that stated the right to be paid for community engagement, and other people in the audience took note. All in all, it was the first conference I had been to in three years, and I

was grateful to have gone, but I also realized that spending a lot of money to be validated or vindicated was money that could go elsewhere.

The real joy was being able to see how people had transformed the site of the murder of George Floyd. It disgusts me that beneficiaries of the dominant narrative are saying that a criminal got what he deserved, but then again, comfortable people need to believe their delusions lest they learn the sources of their comfort. Art was all over the place, involving various mediums and expressed in numerous locations near the site, as well as the site itself. People planted various community gardens with food to recreate the concept of a freedom colony, a community closet had been opened, and different residents were offering personal tours of the area. However, what I noticed was a lack of WiFi in the community, as well as places where people could be employed at a living wage. This reminded me that when given the opportunity, Black people do the best we can to improve the mess we have been given—right before the dominant narrative makes an excuse to take it away from us.

The consultant was extremely considerate with my need to get to work after this conference, but it meant that our return flights were separate. Going back to Texas after that experience was rough because I had to recalibrate my sleep from nights to days again, and that mainly meant sleeping in airports. This task is difficult at best, but after being hyped up on community engagement and active transportation, it was even more difficult. I went from getting up at around 4am to sleeping on a 2.5-hour flight, sleeping for an hour in the airport, and then sleeping on another hour flight to Austin. Fortunately, I was able to take the bus directly from the airport to work, and then I walked home with two large backpacks at 2am after

working an 8-hour shift. Consider that even though I had been offered a chance to consult with another city, there was no money discussed, even though I came as a community member, not a certified professional. This is the life of an advocate, where yes, we are more than happy to share our experiences with others, but we are generally sent back to those circumstances and expected to adjust.

There was another conference that took place in Austin called “Think Bike,” and Austin was supposed to receive visitors from the “mecca” of cycling, the Netherlands. I agreed to go despite being unpaid because 1) I had been supported to go to a site I never thought I would see, and 2) I was no longer in dire financial straits. From the moment I arrived, there was a vapid air of being proud of the capacity to ride bicycles, and I only wish we had discussed more about how climate change would affect people’s confidence in riding under constant construction. I had actually walked 1.2 miles in the heat every day when I lived downtown, and I had to carry an additional shirt because I was drenched with sweat by the time I got to my full-time job. Most of the people at this conference owned vehicles because it is miserable to walk in the heat during the summer, which was exactly the time that I was accustomed to walking in the downtown area, where there was little shade. Riding a bicycle would have been even more difficult because downtown drivers hate poor people, and do everything they can to make our lives stressful.

When I was in my twenties, I remember thinking highly of wanting to live in dense spaces before I learned what they cost. Once I learned the price, I stopped being impressed with people who had run away from the cities to live apart of those they considered “beneath” them. Most of the people who lived in the cities took bicycles and public transportation while everyone

else worshipped their cars and the capacity to live in single-family homes. Only now that driving has become both less trendy and environmentally destructive did all the selfish people finally recognize that they should use different methods of transportation. Imagine being a grown adult who had run away from cycling, walking, and public transportation to drive a car “away from it all,” and then being proud of the capacity to ride a bicycle. I wondered what these people thought they were in Austin to teach because people did not lack an *understanding* of how to drive less, but the political will.

The vapid smiles continued as the Dutch visitors discussed their experience with people wanting highways, and how they were able to push back in their government roles. The City also discussed how it had built and developed several bike paths and created a more bike-friendly city. None of these officials discussed how bike paths raised the cost of living because they were popular, serving as a tool of displacement. Likewise, the Dutch failed to discuss how they had been drawn to highways based on the model from the United States, emulating segregation. That is, until the bicycle planning staffer stood up, and more or less said, “We need to discuss how all of this behavior has been colonial in nature, and that there has been extensive destruction on marginalized communities from both the Netherlands and the United States.” Finally, this became a more honest meeting, and all the vapid smiles were wiped off everyone else’s faces, and people became more thoughtful rather than patting themselves on the back for riding bicycles.

Part of the conference involved riding bicycles, which was completely appropriate, and I rode an electric bicycle for the first—and hopefully, last—time. While riding, I met the City staffer who was hired instead of myself in 2018, and a city official

from Utrecht. Our conversations were interesting enough, but since I was there as a pet from the ATX Walk, Bike, Roll brigade, I realized why it was so difficult to engage people on the concept of racial inequality and active mobility. First, people who felt proud of themselves for having a “good idea” will never consider whether their “inspiration” hurts anyone else. I call this the “white boy with a dream” syndrome. Secondly, around the world, people were praising those who learned the false United States history for embracing something “new.” Most Dutch people lived in segregated communities, which was confirmed when I spent time there in 2024, and they think nothing of the division that their culture encourages, regardless of the joy of cycling. One must never forget that it was the Dutch East India Company, long before the British took over the seas.

When the conference returned to City Hall, we were directed to go into breakout sessions, and I went to one where they were discussing more of the scientific aspects of transportation. Someone put the formula for kinetic energy up on the screen, and that one time, yes, I was proud of understanding something I had not studied for over twenty years. However, the City bicycle planner found me, and directed me to the room I was supposed to be in for my role as a community ambassador. The first thing I noticed was that someone I had known from the Pedestrian Advisory Council was there, and he was already proud of himself for being in the room. During the discussion, there was a lot of patting oneself on the back for being pro-cycling, but the City bicycle planner said, pointblank, “If building all these paths and infrastructure raises the cost of living, then we need to be honest about who we are building these for.” The Dutch visitors were finally catching on to the fact that no, “thinking bike” was not only about gleefully exercising on the way to work, but everyone

who needed to live in a community.

At some point, people began talking about how we all needed to build more housing, and I interrupted saying, “Look, development tends to destroy marginalized communities, and most developers are racist. They do not care about anything but getting the most money for their projects. Therefore, no one needs more construction. We need to lower the cost of housing that already exists, and stop incentivizing people to keep vacant properties.” I tell you that there is nothing on this earth that will create a fake emotional event like telling beneficiaries and sycophants of the dominant narrative that their ideas are wrong, and that there is proof. One individual was so in his feelings, whining about how his friends were not racist and they cared about everyone, and I visibly rolled my eyes because that is what beneficiaries do to avoid accountability: everything becomes about their feelings. I said nothing to this, because when people start performing, they stop being legitimate individuals with whom effective discussion can be had. To this day, I am not interested in anyone who makes my lived experience about their feelings.

All the efforts that I have discussed—getting to the feedback, meetings, and conferences—involve what it takes for people to get to places with consistent public transportation, day and night. Imagine if I existed without the education or network I had at the time. People who commute to air conditioning in white-collar professions have no concept of how inhumane it is to expect speed and efficiency from those who do blue collar or service industry work after commuting over an hour in the heat. Yes, several people within the working class understand all the transportation, but people moving to Austin for the first time with limited resources will not feel comfortable asking all these

questions. Apps can be helpful, but they can also be misleading, and Google may not have backup information—I learned that the hard way when trying to rely on Google in other “developed” countries.

Months later, after this conference, the City staff suggested that community ambassadors go to another unpaid conference called the Equity Transit-Oriented Development Summit, and once again, we would not be paid for our participation, not even through the contract. I was working full-time and contracting, so that would not be a problem for me, but I noticed that people were more than happy to parade us around for attention while never compensating us for time that they were paid for without question. One of my roommates was able to lend a car, and I was able to drive to the city buildings, which was helpful because I had to wake up early and hopefully sleep again before work. Again, I saw all these folks who were super excited about the train expansion, but had failed to consider how it would affect any of the poorer communities. The more I participated in events like this, the more I realized that people wanted to pretend that there were no problems, which meant that they had nothing to do but keep supporting the status quo, while people like me were forced to navigate different levels of distress.

However, another advocate participating—also a Black woman—said the same thing I had heard at the historic preservation meeting: “Racism will only be over when white people decide that it should be over. There is nothing that anyone else can do to solve that problem.” After moving us around to have fake discussions, once again the City asked what it could do to address the issues. I decidedly stated, “If people could hear the word, ‘no,’ there would be no reason for any of these meetings. I hear ‘no’ all the time, and when I hear that

word, I don't assume that I can still have my way. However, it seems that no one within the dominant narrative believes that they have to hear 'no,' and so they continue to destroy other communities." No one listened because people were paid not to listen, and I went back home being disgusted with my participation. After all, there are only so many times that one can be rejected before being disinterested in continuing to engage, and playing into the dominance game puts a target on the backs of those who can least afford it.

By this time, the community ambassadors for ATX Walk, Bike, Roll had done our engagement and report portion, and we were waiting for the City to give us the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan to review so that we could put our final stamp of approval. By then, there were only four of us left, and we were so thoroughly sick of having to plan all this around our otherwise busy schedules while this was part of everyone else's full-time, salaried jobs. I had a couple of other contracts, but my bread-and-butter was no longer activism, since it was impossible to survive in Austin without being one of the "chosen" few Black consultants, and I needed a full-time job to do what was necessary. Our first meeting to set up our methods of review was in November, and after going to 2-3 hours of meetings before going to work full-time, I was tired and wanted to spend most of my spare time sleeping. By December, we were given a copy of the plan, and the City bicycle planner ensured us that we would be able to double our hours to complete the contract and use all the remaining hours. It was also during December that I was able to relinquish the mobile hotspot and commit to a phone plan so that other constituents could use that resource.

One thing about working full-time, contracting part-time, and working on multiple projects is that it is very possible

to work oneself sick, which is exactly what I did by the end of December. After a year of multiple moves, recalibrating sleep, and answering to a number of different entities, my body rebelled and I was knocked into bed for the better part of a week. I thought I had COVID-19 even though I had the vaccination, but all the tests—including the ones I paid for—indicated that I had not been positive. Unfortunately, because my immune system was already compromised, I finally contracted COVID-19 after trying to return to work at the same pace. That consulting meeting for Arizona was completely rescheduled online, even though one of their city staff had traveled all the way to Austin for a conference. The Black consultant and I met with Tuscon, and discussed the pitfalls of city engagement with the community, and I learned that there was a large Asian population in Arizona based on the railroad construction. I met with one Tuscon staffer after Winter Storm Mara had knocked out the power, and I was grateful to be able to charge my phone at work so that the meeting could finally happen.

By the end of January, all our reviews of the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan were complete. Ironically, there was one night during the last week when I was walking home and cutting to an opening in the parking lot for neighborhood residents, and I was stopped by the shopping center security and demanded to get out of the “private” parking lot. This incident was funny because I was reviewing the plan and because it proved that despite my involvement, Austin would not change because bigotry has been allowed for too long. There were some final emotional expressions, but the four of us were confident that the City would not stand up for our voices, largely because we had seen on other projects that the City felt required to cave to bigotry. Sure enough, the City bicycle planner sent me a video from a

Planning Commission meeting in July 2023 when an empowered bigot selected by the segregationist mayor felt that his voice was more important than Black women, non-binary individuals, and a formerly homeless Indigenous woman. All the work we included was essentially scrapped, and everything was about suburbanites and their comfort.

One of the most helpful things about ATX Walk, Bike, Roll was that people saw Austin for what it truly was, which was a fake bigot who thinks that Black and other marginalized people are there for its entertainment. The final City liaison moved on to Atlanta, Georgia in hopes of getting a better experience, the City bicycle planner had reduced hours, and the Black consultant had gotten a job that allowed her to return to New York City. Bad faith participation leads to disengagement. I remember one constituent talking about how tired he was when I offered him a survey, and all the people in the neighborhood where I finished had mentioned that when they tried to engage with the City, they never felt heard. Performing empathy without actually engaging it will only get people so far before everyone stops buying the act, and nobody believes that anyone who refuses to see the effects that sidewalks, bicycle paths, and disability access have on communities will ever see the racism in those results.

Usually, when people in advocacy are caught being abusive or offensive, they performatively emote and talk about being attacked for their “passion.” Austin needed to realize that people are demanding to keep being approached by activists, but they thrive on rejecting others and appealing to egos rather than substantive change. Too many people think that white commentary on the nonwhite experience is the only necessary perspective, and until that mindset is released, these circum-

stances will continue to happen. Furthermore, when people say that Black people are not “professional,” they mean that Black people often will not let them get away with mistreating them. Many City officials need to stop expecting the people enduring the mess they made to take charge of cleaning up the mess. Such an attitude is emotionally immature and selfish, and people lack the resources to feed into the delusion that government is engaged after repeatedly causing pain.

Later, the final ordinance included information about how suburbs were constructed without much shade. Well, no one told white people to run away from “everyone else” and live car-dependent lives on the City’s dime. They chose to run away and build transit-restrictive communities while isolating themselves from the consequences of their own regulations. This was just another example of how even when the dominant narrative makes specific choices about alienating society, the government is expected to maintain the reality that nothing is wrong. Such a double standard is the reason why the whole “Build! Build! Build!” rhetoric is moronic to me. We cannot indefinitely afford to keep building highways and pumping utilities to places in the middle of nowhere because people feel “unsafe” in areas that are not racially homogeneous.

## Project Connect Community Connector

One of the main reasons that I was able to keep going with the consulting was that I was finally able to honestly discuss the frustrations of not having a car with people who seemed to actively be working with people who lacked personal vehicles. The Black consultant from ATX Walk, Bike, Roll suggested that I also participate in the Project Connect community engagement program as a Community Connector, which would mean more reports and more weekends, but was completely doable as long as I had access to bus service. I applied in January, she interviewed me in February when I was heavily depressed, but I was able to convey both enthusiasm and competence, which are the most common habits for Black women in professional fields. The meetings would start in March, which meant that I would be paid by another contract, but not in enough time to potentially secure an apartment. Likely, I would have just enough to continue feeding myself with all the bills being paid.

Developers have indoctrinated everyone into believing that building more means that prices would automatically come down, and the unfortunate truth is that a lot of people working

for public transportation entities believe the same thing. The first train line in Austin was centered around most of the stops being park-and-rides, but there was generally nothing to any of the stops except parking. It was dangerous to be at the stops late at night because nobody and nothing was there, but developers kept saying that proximity to transportation justified high prices because they were only building for people who insisted on maintaining private vehicles, defeating the whole purpose of transit-oriented development. Consequently, Austin already had multiple projects based on poorly planned sites that no one in their right mind would consider “transit-friendly.” After all, the assumption within the Texas urban planning scene is that people will eventually get cars, so there is no need to plan as if people lack personal vehicles.

It is exceptionally difficult debating that property values are not determined by construction and that everyone is not itching to add car payments to their monthly bill rosters, especially when discussing such matters with financially comfortable people who all have personal vehicles. There were several CapMetro colleagues who kept parroting that the City just needed to invest in more development, no matter how many times I indicated that rent had risen because developers were only building luxury properties. None of these people had made under \$40k in years, and explaining that not everyone could afford to pay \$1500/month in rent just to have transit was like pulling teeth. Even when I pointed out that developers only included minimal “median family income” apartments to qualify for incentives, people kept claiming that more development was needed. I was reminded of my favorite line from the Harrison Ford, Julia Ormond remake of “Sabrina”: “More isn’t always better, Linus. Sometimes, it’s just more.”

During the first community engagement event, I went to a microbrewery off North Lamar, and once I got there, I recognized that it was the perfect example of ridiculous urban planning that has nothing to do with transit. Half the site has no shade, and the businesses are about 0.1 miles away from the stop itself, while most of the apartment living and housing is wildly expensive and requires people to make at least \$45k a year just to qualify. Furthermore, the site was “kitschy,” meaning that it was supposed to be “fun,” but not particularly functional. Since then, there has been a cultural shift to be more accommodating to Asian populations, but initially, there was no reason for anyone to be there except to go drinking. This is a very bad habit of a lot of community groups in Austin: assume that everyone wants to spend time drinking excessively while facetiously discussing the issues they are paid to discuss. Poor people rarely do this sort of thing.

While there, I met an individual who wanted to pretend that Portland was a truly diverse city, even though it has a terrible reputation among Black people. This was similar to Think Bike, where people were worshipping Portland because it had bike lanes; now, people were worshipping because of the existence of a train. I pointed out that there was a large unhoused population in Portland, and that was likely because of the inability to get living wage jobs, especially at places around the magical train station. However, I was under no impression that I would change the mind of this individual, because I find that people who are excessively rigid in their understanding of the world—regardless of how—refuse to change their understanding, even when presented with new information. For those who say, “Including you!” I will concede, because believing that “edgy” cities are social bastions of equity is a lie; I have lived in one for

most of my life, and I am not impressed.

The event was everything I expected it to be, including a new Councilmember who was whining about powerlines being aboveground instead of underground. In a largely moneyed group, people are property owners, and they only think about ways to make the City do more for them, which the City does because its government was designed to cater to people with property. No one said anything new, and when I tried to discuss how the cost of living made it difficult for working class individuals to get to work or that paying for a car meant a choice between food and a car, the residents' eyes would glaze over. Designing public transportation for rich people looking for a good time is a bad idea because rich people have no concept of everything not catering to their whims. Therefore, I imagine that the next transit stops presented will have the same problems of kitschy businesses that are not open late, no shade, and expensive housing that the working class largely cannot afford.

One aspect that I wanted to discuss but everyone else avoided was permit approval. In theory, if the City does not approve of development projects, developers would be required to change their plans. Unfortunately, every single time I asked how many times the City rejected developer applications—not just with this contract, but with every other contract—I got blank stares and blinks, leading me to believe that all the projects were approved. This was troublesome for many reasons, not least of which that it made me believe that all this “engagement” was in bad faith because nobody was actively going to stop rich people from making Austin a playground for the wealthy. Having lived near the Oracle building in Southeast Austin, I knew the consequences of letting unfettered wealth have its way

in working class communities, beginning with displacement and heavy police surveillance. It seemed that as long as the City constantly approved developers who built projects with astronomical rents, both residential and commercial, then there would be a repetition of the same problem I was supposedly consulting to fix.

Another issue was that there was an obsession with surveys, and the general public was sick of surveys, especially for information they had already provided. At almost every meeting I went to, I emphasized that nobody wanted to fill out surveys, which had been the main method of communication. Even though I provided several anecdotal accounts that led to me doing custom reports anyway, many of the consultants and Cap-Metro staff were still looking for information that could be easily dissected and quantified for computer software. Furthermore, I finally lost my temper when people insisted on including a PowerPoint presentation at every meeting. I understood that those were the tools of the white-collar world, but most people will never need to compose such a presentation, and those are the tools of power speaking to power, not the public addressing the power structure. Nobody cared what I said about that—across any of my contracts—and the PowerPoints and surveys continued until the Equity Transit-Oriented Development plan was drafted.

Working nights and getting into the thick of backlog for the IRS was exhausting enough, but coming home to review policies that were centered around keeping the comfortable in place while ignoring potential side effects was emotionally exhausting. The problem I had was that I still thought that people in power cared about reaching the public, and the opposite has been true since the 2020 elections when polished, out-of-touch “elites”

were dispatched as the solution to societal distress. In my mind, I got to work a repetitive job to put food on the table and maintain stability, but I was also intentionally inflicting myself with additional stress for people who had no interest in anything other than maintaining their stability. Those two goals were not aligned because “elites” know that their strength lies in domination, not collaboration, and the longer I stayed involved in “the struggle,” the less I was convinced that any of it was helping.

By the time the draft was complete, Project Connect was interested in very succinct, nondescriptive, survey-like responses. I had planned to put together a report based on my information, but there was a template that they demanded we all use. The only reason that people had stayed with this project was that it was about nine months and had considerably less responsibility than ATX Walk, Bike, Roll. However, the template was very short, and I had no more energy to put together complicated information when all I wanted to do was sleep through every day. At the end, I submitted my survey and counted it all joy that I was basically done with the contract because all of the refusal to validate our efforts was making me numb.

I had one final push with Project Connect in January and February when I went out to survey businesses and attended a number of other meetings. The only reason I was able to do it was because one of the other consultants promised that I would make it to work on time, and I was very familiar with the areas around both of the stops on South Congress and North Lamar, having lived in both areas. Businesses were even less interested in providing their opinions because they had already managed the effects of a lack of public infrastructure—bathrooms, water, shade, seating—and all they foresaw was more harassment.

In fact, some of them had been very active in city meetings, explaining exactly why they were disinterested in the newer displacing developments, and the City had claimed to respect their opinions, but done what it wanted to do anyway. After all, most of the time, the City forgot that community engagement was about listening, not dictating terms to constituents who were supposed to feel represented.

Doing community engagement walks before working at night, and waking up to review policy was not ideal for someone in the best of health, and it completely wore me out, but thankfully, after most of the projects were complete. Project Connect was one of two contracts I was working in addition to working full time, and I had done all the in-person engagement onsite. The only things left were a meeting at the beginning of March, and that was fairly straightforward when it happened, especially since most of the businesses just saw the new transit remodel as a rise in rent. The consultant tried to make Project Connect sound exciting, but all I could hear was the echo of “Think Bike,” where everyone was proud of themselves for riding a train in this case. By the middle of March, Project Connect halted the community engagement, and there was nothing left for me to do but finish one more engagement contract, which would turn out to be the most authentic Austin experience of them all.

The most stressful aspect of paid advocacy is that most people are paid more than the advocates, and society is trained to think nothing of people making less than they are. Already we are marginalized—which makes people view it as a favor to speak to us in a tone that resembles the control they feel entitled to have over us. Considering the pay, we are going against people making ten times our total fee per contract, sometimes twenty times. This is not unlike the \$300 million anti-displacement

money, already allotted during a Council meeting in March 2021, versus \$7 billion for the light rail expansion itself, which was already increased. Advocates are a joke to politicians and moneyed businesses because they can either put us in jail or charge us out of being nuisances. Nobody in power or adjacent to power considers our efforts with any seriousness.

## Climate Ambassador Program

This outreach program was the piece of the puzzle that put all the other pieces in context, and made me understand my birth city after more than 20 years of living there as an adult. As a child, I always wondered why there was so much hostility against me since I lived in West Austin and participated in “gifted” programs. Most of my classmates had been white, but I thought nothing of that because I had only known living around white people, even in my preschool years, with the exception of one caretaker before I entered preschool at Child Craft, followed by my little sister. Because my parents were fairly successful lawyers at government agencies, we had the childhoods described within the dominant narrative, complete with summer camps and extracurricular activities.

However, even as my sister and I were accustomed to living around white people, there was always the sense that we were weird and unwelcome. I managed to graduate elementary school in one spot, but my sister transferred to Barton Hills Elementary when we moved to Barton Hills, but she ended up having to transfer to Matthews Elementary—with Carmen

Llanes-Pulido—due to the hostility of her fourth-grade teacher. To me, this was “normal” because my fourth grade teacher had also been hostile to me, and none of this “fake nice with mild hostility” behavior changed as we both progressed in school. My sister was recruited to the University of Texas due to strongly-worded letters from my School of Law alumni parents, but she still chose to go to Yale, and like me, was used to the hostility so she made a pact not to return to Austin to live.

Going back to advocacy, this program was the last program I accepted, and it was only because I felt inspired to talk about the environment after doing my last cycling tour based on environmental degradation. I was working full time, so I was not desperate for the money, but I lived with roommates, did not own a car, and believed in mutual aid, especially after mutual aid was responsible for many of my moves in 2022. The program was supposed to be about six months, so I figured that I could come up with a project that could be completed in that length of time. Because there was an abominable mayoral candidate who destroyed the historic Black community, I figured that I would do some research and provide information about this monster who claimed to be for racial justice but had alienated all of East Austin. I had not truly believed that he would have the audacity to return, but one should never underestimate those with too much confidence and too little impulse control.

Throughout all these advocacy contracts, I had met various advocates, and their work was more meaningful the more research I did for DecipherCity.Org. During one of the meetings, the climate ambassadors met with Susana Almanza, one of the founders of PODER, an East Austin organization founded within the Chicano community. It would be impossible to discuss everything they had organized against within the scope of my

accounting of advocacy, but suffice it to say that the group had been around for a while and done a number of things. Surprisingly, they had even done surveys to add to the legitimacy of their advocacy against the petroleum tank farms in East Austin, which one could view at the Austin History Center. On a personal note, because my father's side of the family was from Port Arthur, Texas, I had grown up going to my grandmother's house and seeing large petroleum tanks across the creek in her backyard. My two aunts who lived with her died from cancer in their sixties, and I will never forget the smell of refineries between Houston and Port Arthur, trying to hold my breath for the entire distance. These experiences made me particularly interested in this presentation on environmental activism.

Unfortunately, as Susana was going through her presentation, she touched on school integration in Austin, and pointed out that a federal lawsuit was filed against Austin Independent School District in 1970, about 15 years after *Brown v. Board* in 1954. Furthermore, she explained that Austin schools were integrated by court mandate in 1983, which would only be fully implemented beginning with the completion of Kealing Junior High School—my alma mater—in 1986. Susana talked about many other environmental cases that they organized around, and some of my colleagues found her presentation to be obsolete. Being a native Austinite, all the pieces from my experiences as a child to my professional and social realities came together, and I felt a wave of disgust for this despicable city's reputation.

I already knew that in the same year of *Brown v. Board*, there was another Supreme Court case, *Berman v. Parker*, which allowed cities to take private property for “urban redevelopment,” otherwise known as “urban renewal.” Because of other research, I knew that there were multiple urban renewal plans in Austin

in 1968, and the most recent one in 1999 as a result of East Austin being named as the “Desired Development Zone” in 1997 under the tenure of that odious mayoral candidate. Learning that school integration was three years younger than myself, and only because of court mandate, broke what little affection I had for my hometown. Despite my only being 41 years old at the time, my school district had only been fully integrated by the time I finished kindergarten. The truth was that I had grown up in a city of bigots run by bigots, where the most bigoted and egregious individuals could be successful as long as they claimed to be Democrats. The level of hypocrisy was overwhelming, and that a segregationist was being invited to reelection as mayor after all the districts were established and all these “racial conversations” just meant that the social climate of Austin would never change.

Because I had limited mapping skills and was interested in doing research that did not extract any further from exhausted constituents, I was paired with someone else who claimed to have research interests but was really avoiding further community engagement due to fear of COVID. We had both worked on ATX Walk, Bike, Roll and had attended training, and it was because of them that I found long-term housing based on both of our respect for mutual aid. There were signs that the collaboration would echo previous experiences when I would suggest projects, and there would be meetings with the program director but no real input from my colleague. However, I was working full-time and trying to complete the research before the terrible mayoral candidate could be reelected, and small esteem I had for myself, I felt that if I could get just that done in time, we could have avoided his reelection.

Not only did I not finish the research with very little assistance

either suggested or offered, but I worked myself sick by the end of 2022. I took time off work so that I could do more research, and in hindsight, I realize that working at night full-time, contracting 10-20 hours a week, and hoping to catch the recount was not a stellar use of my time. Not only was I exhausted, but through my fatigue, I realized that there was no way that people would be able to read and digest the material before the election. The mayoral candidate's affinity for expanding suburbs and maintaining harmful infrastructure in BIPOCQ communities would not be addressed in time, and people would be nostalgic about the past when more people had money. I proved to the liaison that work was getting done to confirm that there was a point in choosing me for the project, but something destroyed my immune system just in time for my 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday at the end of December.

In January 2023, I realized that despite all the environmental atrocities of the recent past, I had missed the deadline, and I was struggling to come up with a project for the contract. A moment of excitement gave me a potential PowerPoint—which I despised, but could turn into an opportunity for engagement by attending dominant narrative meetings. I crafted a 10-20 slide presentation and shared it with my colleague and the supervisor, and when it was time for the meeting, I felt justified in my efforts—only to find out that my colleague had cut off sharing with the supervisor. Waiting for feedback was going to be my leverage into moving forward, and I had been communicating with the supervisor by email to strategize only to be left with this sabotage. I downloaded the presentation, emailed it to the supervisor, and we made plans for a follow-up meeting.

The problem with injustice is not just that people are constantly enduring hardship for no reason, but that underworld hi-

erarchies develop that make oppressed people compete against each other. No doubt my colleague got a good laugh at making me look terrible in front of our other colleagues, but they never stopped to consider that *they* had nothing to produce for all the time and money we had been given for our project. I was doing my best not to make it look like funds mismanagement, but because it was a chance to take potshots at me, we both looked like incompetent fools and not activists, which is what we were hired to be. Fortunately, our supervisor and I met up, and she suggested the creation of a zine, which was based on another group's project. I thought about it over a weekend, and I finally came up with a draft so that our meeting with the supervisor would be fruitful.

During the meeting, our supervisor nudged me to work with my colleague, but since there was unmitigated glee in their efforts to undermine me, I firmly decided otherwise. I was asked to digitize the draft, to which I agreed, and thankfully, my father had a scanner for photography, and I both scanned the zine and learned how to manipulate images so that I could do more with the text I already had instead of constantly producing without feedback. After sending the digitized zine to both my colleague and our supervisor, our supervisor suggested events where we could go to get more feedback, meet with teens, which I enthusiastically agreed due to involving the community. In response, my colleague smirked and said that they had better sources and community members to engage with, and that such events would be unnecessary.

By this time, my weakened immune system and fatigue made me vulnerable to COVID-19 despite wearing masks all the time and being as careful as possible. I was also fed up with the rivalry I had never signed up for, and anxious for the project

to be completed so that I would no longer be in a situation like Decipher City, where I was the only one doing the heavy lifting but the bullying colleague still got the credit. While sick, I contacted our supervisor and asked for a meeting, in which I made it very clear that I was not being involved with any more competition and I had done most of the work for this project, but I was done. Our supervisor was very sympathetic after having noticed the undercurrents, and excused me from further involvement based on my evidenced efforts throughout the process. I understood that I would be paying for the production of the zine—which I could afford thanks to the full-time job—and that there would be a showcase that I would not be required to attend.

Later on, after all the bravado, my colleague pretended to recognize how their behavior had sabotaged the project and asked for help again, to which I responded by firmly encouraging them based on the previous bravado. This was the last of all the contracts, and my colleague had depended on social media to take the place of engagement. Not being on social media and seeing how cyberbullying had reduced the number of teens involved, I was not surprised after the COVID lockdowns to see fewer people involved online. Furthermore, I had no knowledge of how my colleague was except to have heard them mentioning some “debates” in the past. In the end, our project received the feedback of exactly three teens, and my colleague moved my previously produced content around in their digital version. As promised, I paid for the production, and continued going to work, preparing to move since our landlord had decided to attack the household as well.

The original date of the presentation was moved because of the weather, and I was invited to a different community event

that day. On the rescheduled date, one of my old friends had shown up to see me, but I contacted them to meet up later and potentially explain. My colleague tried to shame me about my lack of participation, but I was moving, done with the project, and completely immune to shame from someone who had used my content to save themselves without contributing much for an eight-month stretch. As far as I could tell, this was all a failure: reelection of a segregationist, project sabotage, and half effort at the last minute. However, the City was more interested in appealing to Tesla for investment, and had stopped caring about this contract months before it ended.

## Ghisallo Cycling Initiative

During the whole of Decipher City’s existence, there was only ever one client, who I met as I was amping up my Facebook profile by talking about both planning and racial justice online. After gaining over 500 followers, I pretty much did my thing and linked articles, but I met very few of my followers in person. Celebrity was not important to me because having gone to school with a lot of “good-looking” rich people, I understand that I was the last thing on their minds, and that I was not going to “make it” in the world of fame because that takes more sacrifice than I am willing to give. Therefore, when the executive director of Ghisallo Cycling Initiative asked to meet, I accepted based on my interest in cycling and community, not knowing what to expect.

Because this is Austin, Texas we met at a bar that sold coffee—or a coffee shop that doubled as a bar, and we met outside. The executive director was relatively interesting and talked about the organization’s programs, which was interesting enough but there was a puppy nearby. I know how that makes me look, but I had lost my cat in 2016—horrible day for multiple reasons—

and I had very little pet exposure which made me that person when I went out in public. I asked, “I am so sorry, but I am very distracted by that puppy. Do you mind if we take a second and pet it if the owner lets us?” Turns out, the executive director was a dog person, and after five minutes of puppy bliss, I settled down, and we talked about both of our cycling experiences.

In another lifetime, I was a long-distance cyclist and I loved riding all over Austin before it got so dangerous that most cyclists started riding either on machines or in controlled, escorted races and rides. When looking up my history with Ghisallo, I potentially could have been a volunteer for one of their events and not even known in 2016, but I did a lot of volunteering, so small world. The executive director and I had been on a lot of the same routes because for bicycle safety, it is generally in someone’s best interest to ride where people expect to see other cyclists. Additionally, the executive director talked about his life in East Austin, where he had lived for about twenty years, and I gave my standard joke claiming that I was allowed to be considered Black when I moved to East Austin in 2013. The meeting was good, he seemed like an interesting enough individual, and expanding my circle made sense based on my propensity to meet new people. We met again later in 2019 at a bar where he had a collaboration, but other than that, I could not see anything happening and I was getting no ideas.

Later in the year, I came to a volunteer event at Dove Springs and saw the organization in action working mostly with children. Thankfully, I was not the only Black person with Ghisallo, and I waved to the executive director while I was there. Seeing kids and bicycles reminded me of being a kid with a bicycle, and I tend to think that it was that event that made me interested in getting back on my own bike consistently, which I had stopped

based on not being able to finish competitive races. That day, I ended up signing up for a controlled bicycle ride in October of that year, started to reengage my coach from the old days, but then I realized that I was not interested in competing, just cycling, and was probably just excited about the community engagement. Still, nothing made me think that I would be working with Ghisallo in the long term, and I was trying to keep Decipher City afloat while my job was becoming unstable and I needed to move based on an unhealthy living situation.

One evening in September, I got a call from the education coordinator at the George Washington Carver Museum saying that she was sick, but Ghisallo was scheduled to have a bike introduction day the next day. Since people knew me from previous cycling posts, I assured her that I would be there, and it was not too early in the morning, unlike my old riding days. The executive director was not scheduled to be there, so I was around a bunch of kids—one of whom was born towards the end of December, like me, who I referred to as “Capricorn”—and several onlookers. Suddenly, two things happened that finally made the connection stick. First, the Carver education coordinator called me to check in on the event, and asked if I would be interested in helping to come up with a Black history cycling tour which could get more people to the Carver Museum. I contacted my Decipher City colleague shortly afterwards, who agreed because she also rode bicycles casually, and it would make for a great community engagement event. Secondly, the executive director of Ghisallo showed up since he lived right down the street, and he was truly excited about the possibility of a collaboration.

Now, as most people who are generally enthusiastic about collaboration, there was entirely too much communication

going on with entirely too many platforms—Messenger, text, email, Signal—so there was some friction. However, once we limited ourselves to emails, the planning went well, and we scheduled two cycling tours to take place during the East Austin Studio Tours for artists, which would bring people to the historic Black East Austin community in the first place. It was then that a logo was designed for Decipher City so that my colleague and I could wear uniforms that would distinguish us from Ghisallo, and with a little friction in getting the shirts printed, the tours went off without a hitch. My colleague filmed my talking using my phone—which was extremely helpful later when the website was sabotaged, because I could “easily” repair it by editing the videos I already had. Later on, I would consider that there is a general tendency to make Black people perform knowledge in front of people while being entertained, and the first tour reeked of that kind of behavior. Yes, I was a tour guide, but the original concept of Decipher City was interracial collaboration with mutual respect, not, “Look at the Negro I found! She talks in front of other people, too!”

Ghisallo and Decipher City also decided to create a tour on Chicano East Austin, but I refused to do so without contracting with a Chicano tour guide, to which we all agreed. Since it was the holiday season, I went to the end-of-year banquet at Ghisallo and met the Yellow Bike organization, which hosted, as well as the accountant for Ghisallo. All in all, a very successful community engagement collaboration, and firmly fixed connection, and meeting other casual cycling organizations made me feel better about not having been fast enough to finish my events back in the day.

January 2020 brought the first planning meeting for the Chicano East Austin tour, but by then, my Decipher City colleague

had already partially disengaged with everything except the digital merchandising for the tour. We made two tour dates: February 29, 2020, and March 29, 2020, since there would be no direct event tying anyone to East Austin then. Ghisallo had found a contractor for being a tour guide, and I was doing some of the final research for the site, and then the tour was upon us on Leap Day. Despite getting some information incorrect—which was corrected on the site—the tour was successful, although I had slightly less material to edit for the videos since our contractor was more shy than I am. Things would have probably been more ironed out and efficient on the next tour date—if not for the pandemic lockdowns, which ended the second in-person tour with Ghisallo. My roommate encouraged me to do the tour by myself, but with a COVID flair, which I did, but it was disappointing to only have done one tour, especially since that was the most popular post on the site when it was public.

Again, my job had all but dried up, racial tensions were high, and the lockdowns were still in effect, so I was looking for ways to make income. Ghisallo contacted me after deciding to commission a George Floyd mosaic so that we could collaborate on an exhibit, and I was paid to do research and compose explanation plates for each of the mosaics, getting me some much-needed income. However, placement of the mosaics never occurred because Austinites love performatively emoting without ever truly committing to racial justice in a public way. Most of the mosaics were given to the families of activists, and the potential mosaic tour never materialized. By then, I had started working with the US Census, so it would have been a while before I could commit to doing any research. Simultaneously, after the death of George Floyd, there was an unscripted bicycle tour by a Black man, and it was all over the

news in Austin. The news outlet called it the “first” tour—which they later scrubbed from their sites—and praised this “brave” Black man for his efforts. To me, it symbolized that when it comes to Black people in Austin, the interest is so sparse that reporters cannot even be bothered to do enough research to know that there were numerous tours long before this individual was ever given a chance.

Close to the end of the Census work, Ghisallo approached me and offered payment for my participation in the Pedestrian and Bicycling Advisory Council, which I agreed to based on my desperation, my lack of a personal vehicle, and my cycling experience. The executive director mentioned that I had been recommended by his second-in-command, but they chose not to approach me unless they could offer me payment. This is the only way organizations should approach Black people for advocacy jobs: if the organization is run by comfortable people, they owe funding to those who will either be already experiencing distress, or will be retaliated against to become in distress by participation. As I once mentioned to the Pedestrian and Bicycling Advisory Councils, the proper volume of Black women speaking is dead, which they demonstrated while I participated. Ironically, it was Ghisallo’s second-in-command herself who expressed concern that I might try and finish my terms when it was obvious that the Councils were hostile to anyone who refused to blindly smile about active transportation.

Other than invoicing for participation with the Councils, my involvement with Ghisallo stayed low due to both the pandemic lockdowns and my searching for work. The Census claimed to offer me another opportunity, but they refused to respond for months after I filled out an application in January of 2021. Around Juneteenth, the executive director contacted me and

asked if I would help create a self-led tour for Juneteenth, to which I agreed based on interest and financial need. Moreover, since I was working to keep Decipher City alive based on my interest in information advocacy, I needed to have a project for self-publication, and I decided to do a report on Juneteenth from the City minutes. As an added bonus, I looked through Juneteenth in the Austin-American Statesman archives available through the public library site online.

Whenever I hear about how “liberal” Austin is, it makes me want to throw up a little bit these days, and part of that is because of what I found regarding Juneteenth. First, we had always been told that the City had taken one Black-owned park to construct a housing project, but through the minutes, I found out that the City had actually taken two parks, and the second one was replaced with what is known as a “pocket park,” or a much smaller park that gets very little maintenance. Secondly, the City Council whined and complained about refunding the fees because of all the cultural events every single year until they finally looked bad doing that and stopped when Biden used Juneteenth as his “I like Black people” move. History showed how obnoxious the police were that Black people were going to get a day off, and people would constantly complain about how lazy Black people were despite all the work that it took to make a Juneteenth event happen. Funnily enough, I also learned that the plural of “beef” is “beeves,” although that word is not commonly used anymore.

On June 15, 2021, after a feverish week of finishing two timelines and a report and publishing them to Decipher City, I encouraged Ghisallo to publish the map, and we just made it before Juneteenth and published it on both of our websites. My former Decipher City colleague attempted to take credit

for the work by claiming that she resigned a month after the publication, but by then, I was just pleased to have made one of my two self-publications for the year. Between the Councils, trying to find work and failing, and managing social media, I was finding the concept of advocacy more difficult not because the work was hard, but because all the “liberals” around me were coming up with excuses to maintain the status quo. I kept working on my own writing, but it became clear that without further income—not “likes,” which pay nobody—I was going to wither into oblivion like so many other Black writers. See, when people like to write, we do it without money, but eventually if there is no oxygen of resources, there is no way that we can continue writing. That was only one of the reasons I shut down my Facebook profile in 2021 after Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick accused Black people of starting the pandemic, hoping for angry white people to gun us down so that Texas could be “free.”

When the lockdowns ended, Ghisallo contacted me again to plan out a Black architectural tour, and since I was beginning to realize that I no longer wanted to be on the Councils, I readily agreed. For those who are observing, yes, I was doing a lot of work with Ghisallo and had gotten to know both them as an organization and as people—but not for free on either of our parts. They knew that I was vulnerable, and I knew that as a white East Austin organization, they recognized their responsibility to the historic population of their location. Once I was no longer gainfully employed, they saw me as a contractor, and accordingly responded. When organizations treat Black people as perpetual volunteers with endless resources, they deserve to lose Black participation.

The architectural tours were a lot easier to research because

John Chase had graduated from the University of Texas, and Henry G. Madison was a former Austin Police Department officer. The movie “Green Book” had come out recently, so everyone was flooded with information about safe Black spaces, and was interested in seeing how such spaces were placed. I had multiple contracts, but I was also beginning to see that people used me as entertainment, not as a catalyst to do anything other than what they had always done. By then, I recognized that while information should be free, the cultivation of it should not be, and that the passive consumption of Black history had accomplished nothing since the 2020 uprisings. With all of that in mind, Ghisallo and I planned the Black Architecture tours for October 2021, which was interesting to coordinate because I was largely off Facebook except for posting the events. There would be two parts, cycling and walking, because since there was so much material, I did not want the tours to run forever or be too taxing for any of the participants.

On the first tour day of the Black Architecture tour, I was accompanied by the executive director, and things began without a hitch, with everyone asking interesting questions and decent conversation. Unfortunately, there was a white male teacher from Kealing Junior High who became obsessed with talking about the house of Isaiah Quit Hurdle—which was not a stop on the tour due to time—who was the principal of Kealing before he “retired” to become an advocate with the Colored Teachers State Association of Texas, the building of which was an actual stop on the tour. This man refused to become engaged with the rest of the tour and looked at my efforts as *his* platform, and to avoid conflict that could arise with the police right across the highway, I was inclined to let him continue. Afterwards, he claimed that he would be interested in working with me and

inviting me to speak in his classroom, but unsurprisingly, once he had dominated my event, he expressed no further interest.

This is a very common trait among people who work with Black people, because within the dominant narrative, everything is a competition. Instead of realizing that Black people do not get to treat our threatened existence like a hobby, people continue to try and “out Black” us, and think that because they consume Black content, or live and work in formerly, or current, Black communities, they have “lived the Black experience.” Newsflash: the Black experience involves navigating implicit segregation, the mercurial emotional state of strangers, and outright violence, not consuming content that Black people do not have time to absorb because people enjoy watching us suffer. We respond to this with indifference because there is nothing to be gained by engaging with such people, who live completely in the delusion that there has never been any barriers to equal opportunities. Such individuals take over tours, conversations, and anything meaningful about Black people to which they have access, and proceed to make a mess. A friend who had come later said they should have spoken up, to which I agreed, but I also knew that excessively and unnecessarily confident people are not receptive to input.

Walking afterwards was no better because this time two tour participants decided to make the tour about themselves instead of the topic at hand. First, there was a loud phone conversation when we were close to the end of the tour, and people were looking at the individual, but having worked in customer service, I knew that the first rule of conflict is to ignore those who were seeking attention. The individual never apologized, and spoke to another lighter woman of color afterward just to avoid being confronted about their rudeness. Anyone who thinks that a

phone call is just a phone call should consider how obnoxious it would be to have some idiot disrupt weeks of research and preparation for a personal life in which none of the participants are involved. The message was clear: “Nigger, your work does not matter and it never will, so I will continue doing what I do.”

Secondly, there was an older white man from Massachusetts who wanted to make the tired argument that because *some* Black people are allowed to “make it,” *everyone* should be capable of making it. He was starting to get into it during the tour, but fortunately I was too busy to engage him too much because of all the other things I had to discuss. Unfortunately, after most of the other people had left, the man accosted me and demanded that I “admit” that Black people were too lazy to do “what it takes,” and he refused to leave me alone until his daughter pulled him away to do other things. During the course of that discussion, I stated, “Sir, obviously you need to believe that, and I have no intention of convincing you otherwise.” That really gassed him up, but I refused to give him the benefit of a good faith argument. I had already lived in the northeast and experienced the racists of the North, so his location was irrelevant to me. His daughter apologized profusely, and then I finished talking to the executive director before going home and sleeping for fifteen hours after being hungry and dehydrated.

Racism is annoying for many reasons, but the most important reason is that people are entertained by the struggle of Black people, and liberals particularly love watching us navigate hurdles because they are always convinced that there will be a “happy” ending. I remember many discussions during the planning of the tours in which I was instructed to provide a “positive” spin on the things that were happening, and while I put some positive language in, I reminded people that smiling

does not change a situation. There is nothing “positive” about people who gleefully watch others perform the emotional labor of fighting off abusers all the time. Despite initially liking the movie “Hidden Figures,” I now find it to be a movie full of whiny brats who cannot get over themselves enough to do their jobs, and that is how I view people’s tepid response to racism. I do not care that emotionally immature idiots need fairy stories to be true. Life under oppression is difficult, and maybe if there had been more honesty and less whining about positivity, something might have changed. I am now convinced that the reason oppression continues is because people are afraid of losing their entertainment.

Oddly enough, Ghisallo’s executive director announced that he would be stepping down a month after the second tour, and people looked at me as a potential replacement. While I considered the possibility, I understood many things long before someone smirkingly discouraged me with, “You couldn’t get the job even if you applied!” First, one of the employees had just had a child, and within a nonprofit, all funding is precious. People enjoyed telling me, “No!” on the most innocuous of requests based on my education, but I was not about to start starving children based on the pettiness of others. Moreover, people *need* Black women to fail in everything we do, and since I had gotten to know the organization staff, I had no intention of making them unemployed based on the glee of racists. Therefore, after careful consideration, I decided that the environmental tour we decided to organize would be my last collaboration before parting ways.

During my research, I usually find out something about Austin that I never wanted to know, and that was no different for the environmental tour. The Holly Power Plant was annoying because

everyone had asked and done neighborhood surveys without the City's involvement, but it still took way too long to shut down. Knowing that Austin had dealt with tank farms was irritating because half my family was from Port Arthur—and I say “was” because they died from cancer. However, finding out that people were sentenced to work at the recycling center downtown as part of municipal sentencing made the environmental push to “recycle” that much more offensive. People may call me extreme, but using “judicial”—translation: “prison”—labor to minimally protect the environment is egregious. Additionally, the trail which the recycling organization had developed after cleaning was only developed after Montopolis residents had complained and fought illegal dumping in that area for years. For the first time, I asked Ghisallo not to uplift that organization because ignoring residents and prison labor are not things I endorse, no matter how much greenwashing is splashed on them.

Initially, I got no response, which I expected based on potential loyalty to another organization. After a week went by, I lost it, and demanded either a response or a lie. At the time, I was also dealing with my housing situation, looking for work before finally committing to apply to the IRS, and advocacy that was looking more like an attention-seeking joke instead of moving towards change. While I accepted that they were replacing the executive director, I was struggling to know if I was going to be paid for a report that I was doing for one of my other contracts, while knowing that it was going to take a miracle not to end up on the streets. The second-in-command fervently apologized, got me a response, and we moved forward from there. After that brief friction, everything else went forward without a hitch, and I even let her know when my mother

passed, just in case I had to change the date of the last tour. So many people are congratulating themselves for handing out scraps that they fail to acknowledge that they are handing out scraps. I never got paid for that report because the City was uninterested in being informed about the inequity of its trails, and I could not reasonably justify the expense for Ghisallo. Being the daughter of two business owners who were attorneys, I know a lot about business ethics, and doing work outside the scope while charging would open me up to a lawsuit.

The weather was getting hotter faster, and I was grateful that we had scheduled for the last day of April because I had no intention of trying to talk through the heat of May. We were lucky because Carmen Llanes-Pulido was able to bring people to speak and talk about the springs that were not protected because they were on the wrong side of town. Even though we did not visit one of the stops due to time, it was mentioned on the StoryMap we included, and we made it back within our two-hour time limit, just as the day was beginning to get hot. The second-in-command and another Ghisallo instructor would be leaving Ghisallo as well, but we were all proud of our work on this final project. I invoiced the organization the next day only because I had considered not doing so based on tax fees, but I had not started at the IRS yet, so I still needed the money. The last time I spoke to Ghisallo was for the tax form they sent in 2023, which was towards the end of my advocacy work within the dominant narrative; the last time I communicated was when the DecipherCity.Org site came down in 2025.

## Mental Health in a World that Hates

During the pandemic lockdowns, I dealt with several mental health issues, at one point believing that I would benefit from professional care, even to the point of sacrificing my personal autonomy. This was not because of the pandemic, because I truly enjoyed the lockdowns and having my schedule on my own terms. The Census during the lockdowns was a much better experience because I was not required to go to an office during that time, and I was able to assist my old position while earning income. However, the main issue that I was enduring was a lack of income at a job I had hoped to maintain until 2021. Instead of going to the IRS at the beginning of 2020, I was doing my best to remain loyal to a defunct position, and avoid contracting COVID-19. When the lockdowns occurred, my roommate and I discussed how uncomfortable she felt with my outside work based on exposure, and requested that I shower immediately every time I came home—which made sense, as neither of us had respiratory therapist money. A therapist friend recommended YouTube videos, which I had already been watching, but I doubled down and made it my business to listen to soothing tones which

validated my distress. However, it is hard to feel dopamine rushes if I cannot feel anything.

During the George Floyd protests, a Black college classmate decided to host a mental health group due to the barrage of racial issues that were front and center, as well as the fake “support” Black people were getting—which largely included murals, “conversations,” and posting black squares on social media. One of the members worked in racial advocacy, and at the time, the individual mentioned being completely done with racial advocacy. Back then, I wondered why, but I was also enduring low income, being in a racially hostile town with two police shootings near my home, and feeling increasingly disconnected to “friend” groups that were more about spending money and gossiping than emotional support. The group lasted for about six months, at which point I was more relaxed and stable, but I was beginning to understand why people were becoming fatigued with working in advocacy in the dominant narrative.

In 2021, I was doing multiple contracts, but since people enjoy Black people as entertainment rather than human beings, I was not receiving consistent livable income. A friend told me about an inside job to which I applied, but I never heard. Even though the Census had taken eight months to respond, I forgot how long it took to gain employment from the federal government, and I was trying to complete some contracts while also looking for income. By the time I considered going back to the IRS at the end of 2021, I was already in dire straits, and I needed help from long-term friends to avoid becoming homeless. I had gone from gainfully employed to desperate in two years, and I was barely managing to hold on mentally while contracting. At the same time, there were no in-person hiring events at the IRS, and I

had to wait until there was another one—which would not occur until March 2022. My roommate and I had decided to part ways, which was helpful for both of us because during the lockdowns, we managed not to become completely hostile, but there was nothing left to sustain once I lost my income.

Other “friends” gave me some emotional support, but there was very little to look forward to, and I explained this to another friend—who happened to be a social worker. This individual had been very supportive to me during the lockdowns because they were in a higher financial status in a double-income household, and their household took the racial justice conversations very seriously as Christians. I never would have gotten through the months of January through April 2022 without their help. At any rate, this friend suggested that I engage in subsidized mental health, and I was interested in seeing if there was therapy available so that I could process all the situations I dealt with, including the dissolution of a lot of unhealthy relationships.

Subsidized care is nothing like the therapy I had participated in during college and after the end of a long-term relationship and familial discord. There are several more people, and the process is incredibly underfunded and therefore understaffed; I no longer wonder why there are so many unhoused people who were never able to process their issues and attain emotional equilibrium. Without a car, it was very difficult to get to the appointments, especially while moving twice, since the facilities were in East Austin. During the onboarding appointment, I made a point of being vulnerable and discussing how I had come to the conclusion that I needed therapy beyond YouTube, and the staff was very understanding and gave me my first appointment towards the middle of April. It was also then that my mother passed away, and in addition to moving excessively, waiting for

my job to begin, and having little income, I had to process that loss as well.

The second I walked into the appointment, I was asked about my weight and blood work was done, which was odd to me since I had attended therapy multiple times in the past. I had gone without health insurance for so long that I had forgotten that people needed bloodwork for medication, so I was still patiently waiting for an onboarding therapy session, hoping that I would get reasonable appointments. As I was waiting, a physicians' assistant walked in and proceeded to ask me if I was allergic to medication, and what kind of medication I would be most comfortable with taking. I explained that I was there to receive mental health care, to which they responded, "Well, that would be another appointment, so let's get you set up with the medication while we're here." I responded, "Is this designed to keep me productive and consumptive?" The facial expression was priceless, and the physician's assistant said nothing. "Thank you, but I'm looking for therapy, not medication, so perhaps someone else will find this helpful." Side note: I *have* taken medication in the past, but recognized that pills do not change circumstances.

The next week, I was scheduled for an onboarding therapy session, and while I was there, I noticed that there were several people there as well, but there were a lot more apprentices being supervised rather than standalone practitioners. My onboarding session went relatively well only because I had received notification that I would be starting my job at the IRS soon, I was comfortably housed in a temporary housing situation, and I had received information about long-term housing that would be available right as my short-term lease was over. After the session, I was directed to a number of

different services, but the payment was at least \$50/session, and I was barely making ends meet while waiting for the job to start. I realized that I would not be able to maintain any kind of therapy until I was able to afford more money per session, and that I would need to potentially have insurance.

People should notice two things about gaining mental health for people who are actually struggling and who lack the opportunities required to sustain themselves. First, rather than providing anything, most people will try to give someone medication so that we can continue with our lives of drudgery, because those with wealth and privilege will do anything but accept the responsibility of filling lives with stress and dissatisfaction. Second, the poor are considered the easiest people to observe, as if it is more important to observe how to make us tolerate more torture than to genuinely relieve the circumstances, especially since the wealthy have no intention of sharing. While it may seem fun to stare at unhoused people talking to themselves in the streets, consider that most of them have mental health concerns that they can neither afford nor assuage.

Towards the end of April, there was a potential paid fellowship that reviewed racial stress for people who had been working in racial justice and allowed folks to have discussion groups and journal. This was right up my alley since I had spent eighteen months going through a variety of different fellowships designed to engage race on different issues within the built environment. The pay was only \$1500 for an entire year, but I figured that if people started listening to the toll that racial activism takes on people, more people would start doing things to actually address the issues being presented. I told other people, including a new roommate who was also a colleague, and we both were hoping to hear good news about the project.

I kept checking back to see what happened to the program, and suddenly the organization sent an email out, explaining that it was reorganizing leadership, and everyone would know more about the program soon. Months afterwards, we learned that the program was shut down, and nobody ever heard about it again, proving that even the notion of mental health was unworthy of discussion within the dominant narrative. I have never heard of any other program that has ever considered the toll of offering solutions and explanations can take, especially when people lie and tell you that they want to address problems, but refuse to do so. For racial justice, people are too focused on external exploration rather than self examination, as well as critiquing the behavior of targets of oppression and marginalization.

Consequently, the stigmatization of mental health is also anti-Blackness because it fails to acknowledge how Black people were used as emotional labor in situations we could not escape. White people who cry and trauma dump during “racial discussions” are revealing their bigotry. This proves that people believe that it is worthless to respect the emotional abuse of working with those who never see any point in changing, and put the onus on the world around them. I would later lose a job in another country by merely suggesting that people are responsible for their feelings *and* behavior.

Because of the emotional and financial trauma I endured while moving four times and waiting for full-time employment to subsidize my living expenses, a colleague recommended free mental health services with the SAFE Alliance, and I was finally able to get therapy in November 2022. Mind, this was two years after I originally sought therapy, and I had been in advocacy for years under different umbrellas. Simultaneously, consider all the conversations I had endured where I was required to walk

on eggshells and make space for everyone else's feelings while nobody was required to consider mine. I recognize my good fortune in not succumbing to complete emotional shutdown during this time, and this is why I am sharing my experience.

My personal life had changed significantly, and I was worried about reverting to destructive patterns based on betrayal trauma, so thankfully I was able to get the help I needed. Having the money to afford my life, being in a "safe" living circumstance, and coming to the end of the advocacy programs was critical to ending the stress and emotional turmoil in my mind. There was one moment when a neighbor maintained a pack of vicious dogs who bit everybody and a roommate who actively goaded the dogs to harm others, and the stress level rose again throughout the house. My therapist asked me if I was looking to relocate since my home had become unsafe, and I remarked that I was in the process of searching, but that I needed to be close to my full-time work. I had also finished the majority of my contracts, so I was literally down to one job which paid my bills and allowed breathing room, all of which made my life much easier.

Amidst all this unrelenting harassment and surveillance, there is a constant command to "be nice." Imagine being worked sick, displaced, constantly ridiculed, and financially destroyed, and then being told to "be nice" by the ones that made it happen. Too many white people like to threaten BIPOCQ advocates with the idea of burning bridges, as if it should be impossible to hurt our emotional health in any way. This is a carryover ideology that we feel less pain because we are so "resilient." Additionally, so many people look at BIPOCQ individuals as if we are supposed to acquiesce to whatever they say. I guess since so many people were raised in segregation, it never occurred to them that they have the right to speak their

mind, but not the right to control a response. Demanding that we fund racism while we wait on the dominant narrative to shape up is financially abusive. It is not uncomfortable to be paranoid as a Black femme. It is uncomfortable to have said paranoia substantiated.

The most devastating aspect of structured antiracism work is the repression of emotions due to being at the mercy of white feelings. Even as assertive as I was, there was so much reframing and rewording due to the knowledge that most of my colleagues were looking to brand me as “crazy,” “angry,” and my personal favorite, “ignorant about the process.” Enabling behavior is less about accommodation and more about control, essentially stating, “Since I am not allowed to be comfortable in this space, you have to remain uncomfortable just like me to prove how committed you are to the cause!”

For any future racial justice work, people will need to maintain therapists on standby, because willfully incompetent people cannot solve problems they refuse to face, nor should they coerce others to “help” them. Too often, the “success” of advocacy commands that we want the same things within the dominant narrative. Anyone who wants something different is seen as trash. Moreover, if people want Black people to work in racial justice with people who want to pretend that racism is all in our minds and get defensive when any real circumstances arise, they need to pay a lot more, or accept that they enjoy psychologically abusing Black people in front of other white people for “kicks.” The federal funding by its own admission was centered around “conversations” and “feelings,” even though people have been enduring more than that and have been forced to recover on a regular basis. Black people will need a lot more than “social capital” before we are willing

to endure anything else resembling racial justice work that involves manipulating us without any material gains.

## Epilogue

Was I pure as the driven snow throughout this process? Absolutely not, because despite the requirement that Black women abdicate our humanity, I am a person first. There were crushes and unprofessional arguments, and when I think about how I could have avoided debt by simply accepting that the dominant narrative is too enticing for people to change, I can fall into a deep depression. I did the best I could with the information I had, but the problem was that I continued to 1) believe in institutions that I knew to be lying on a regular basis, 2) believe in the integrity of people who showed me that they believed me to be beneath them, and 3) keep putting my money where my mouth was when no one else was doing the same. Ironically, as I was writing this, my former DecipherCity.Org colleague attempted to extract my financial resources to keep up the site despite “resigning” four years ago, and I had to fight with the company holding the site to retrieve my money. “Passion,” “drive,” “resilience,” or whatever nonsense people want to call it, I should have had less, and I might have ended up breaking even, instead of being racked with high interest debt while most of the people around me stayed comfortable, sacrificing nothing and maintaining good reputations.

Among the activism that I did, the most enjoyable groups I joined were Food Not Bombs, which was a collaboration with a local grocer and biking organizations. We would get together

and cook food, and then ride around and distribute the food to unhoused encampments. I lasted for about three or four months, and then I stopped hearing about it, but I met an organizer a year or so later, and she mentioned that the grocery store stopped collaborating. Lend Your Legs involved riding in tandem with people who were visually impaired, and that was a fun experience because riding a tandem bicycle is simply fun. Sadly, I overheat quickly, and I stopped after about three months due to heat, but someone else I knew said that the group stopped going out, probably because of the heat. Riding bicycles and doing activism felt rewarding for both parties, but climate change has made the heat something else, and doing things like that can be downright dangerous for large groups.

The biggest problem with dominant narrative advocacy is that Black people are supposed to hear accounts like mine, and think, “I could do better.” In our minds, we are supposed to adopt the arrogance and narcissism of the dominant narrative, and instead of paying attention to all the signs that the dominant narrative has no intention of evolving or seeing its own faults, we are supposed to take up the mantle. For this reason, even as yet another woman candidate who was Black was thwarted again by lying white women, instead of accepting that the United States is never going to treat Black women with respect, we are supposed to take up the fight. We are still supposed to be participating in the fake democracy that never truly listened to what Black people had to say in an ostensibly long-lasting way. We are still supposed to recruit people to listen to the promises of institutions that have repeatedly failed and lied to us, hoping that if we just say it the right way, people will give us a chance to be free in the land of our birth.

All advocacy *within* the dominant narrative is a lie, and

that has not changed from the penning of the Declaration of Independence to the allowable public executions of Black people occurring today. There has been no law that has made it illegal to charge Black people more for existence, put us consistently in debt, defame us by using the press to spread propaganda, or harass/murder us, and more people have gotten away with making our lives miserable than have been held accountable. Everyone is afraid to side with us, believing that if they show that they support us, they will be targeted next, and comfort is a powerful drug, the most powerful narcotic sustaining the United States population. When we fight within the dominant narrative, there are so many rules, regulations, and biases that we are guaranteed to end up being in further distress or dead. With those as the stipulations, it is not a wonder that many Black people are ignoring the process, opting out, or choosing to leave the country. What is our motivation to stay when people are allowed to murder us without consistent repercussions?

The biggest problem I see to communal understanding is that the dominant narrative refuses to understand that it is unethical to demand that any group of people constantly prove our humanity. Conservatives evidently want to go back to a time when they could enact pain on whomever they wished as long as that person could be deemed “other” by the dominant narrative. Their hatred is obvious, and it is presented on a regular basis without cessation. Whenever pain occurs, there is an unmitigated glee that so many “traditionalists” feel that they actively seek out those who oppose them, anticipating the cause of more pain. Over the past few months, we have seen no shortage of good ol’ folks who have demonstrated how they never wanted to be held back on their violence in any way. Remember, folks, this animosity arose after *one* Black

president and *one* Black vice-president. Apparently, when certain people are considered subhuman, the thought of any becoming a figurehead is a sign of the apocalypse.

Conversely, the liberal/progressive/centrist populations have no desire to move forward into a world where they, too, are held to the same standards as Black people. They often want to return to a time when they were simply unaware of the harm that they caused, and they idolize ignorance in the form of being “colorblind,” and offering clichés to fix legitimate issues. Similarly, they constantly delay any progress for non-white people because they are persistently demanding studies and legal reviews to ensure that white superiority and comfort are preserved. Most liberals/progressives/centrists have the delusional mindset indicating that we all have to keep believing in institutions—which are mostly white, or led by white people. Furthermore, they demand that we keep proving our humanity or equality because deep down, they *also* believe that they are above us. Otherwise, none of the efforts under their leadership would have been delayed for any reason; they would have seen it as general progress as time continued.

Joe Biden did irreparable damage to the country by not resigning in January 2024. If people had been able to observe at least six months of Kamala Harris’ leadership, she might have had a fighting chance. Forgiving the student loans should have been at the *beginning* of his tenure, *not* the end, because placing it at the end to sustain his power made it more probable to be undone, which it was. Just like that white woman who thought she would go from unknown to federal senator, Harris had an impossible task. Biden and Ginsburg demonstrate that “liberals”—who are actually *neoliberals*, not socially liberal—are just as power-hungry and racist as anyone else, and had

Ginsburg stepped down under Obama and Biden resigned in January 2024, we might be looking at very different world. I am grateful that Ginsburg went to her grave knowing that she had made a terrible mistake, and I hope Biden does, too, especially having to live in the pain of his disease, which he *expanded* for people *without* federal healthcare or Secret Service officers.

True to form, Biden treated Harris terribly, almost never stood up for her, and sabotaged her candidacy when it was time to step down and let someone else have a turn. Power-hungry bigots are not special because they are considered to be Democrats. In the words of the Bible we pretend to observe, “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” Not nearly enough happened during Biden’s presidency to validate his having been chosen in 2020, but I will say this: a vote for Harris would have done nothing but preserve the status quo. Trump’s stimuli in 2020 were even larger than the stimulus under Biden, and I knew that was going to come back to bite him in the end. Saying pretty words and using Black people is not cute, regardless of who is doing it. Even Biden’s farewell speech was trash because most of the oligarchs became more powerful because of people like him, and just like Ginsburg, he will get to go to his grave understanding the damage he caused to the country.

Two Civil Rights efforts and no substantive changes should communicate that no transformation is going to happen under the dominant narrative. Anyone saying otherwise should talk to the countless Black people who were told to “let it go” whenever there was any opportunity to enforce the Civil Rights Act. Laws are only as good as their enforcement, and just like those clowns in front of Tesla dealerships have shown, all law enforcement cares about is the protection of private property. Black people have seen that only if we are willing to

reinvest in the participation slavery will our existence be deemed as relevant. Honestly, if someone is incapable of managing mercurial emotions long enough to avoid murdering people or making people homeless, that individual is no leader. No one is entitled to hold people hostage to mercurial emotions. I hope Harris finally understands how problematic it was for her to claim in 2021 that, “This isn’t a racist country,” because for me, personally, I was done once she said that.

Binary mindsets are, by their very nature, narcissistic, and despite the mythology that “everyone” is calling “everything” narcissistic, I want people to consider the following concepts. First, it seems to be up for debate whether Black people are capable of managing our own lives without white interference, which is indicated by the illusion that we are constantly taking government funds and jobs. Second, people believe that it is acceptable to destroy us, our communities, and our livelihoods in the name of “progress,” and causing pain to us to enact policy that uplifts white populations is seen as acceptable collateral damage. Finally, the burden of proof is always on us to prove our humanity, regardless of the relentless smear campaign about our animal characteristics, criminal behavior, and hypersexual personalities since the beginning of the empire.

Moreover, consider that more wars and international interference have occurred on the continent of Africa than any other continent, even when considering size. Resources anywhere in Africa are seen as fair game for the entire planet to consume, and people always talk about the violence, but never about the interference, and why. The United States inspired both Nazism and apartheid, and then the empire demanded to be thanked and praised for “solving” the problems it created. When discussing history, people are commanded to repeat the same narratives

about great white men, with a couple of white women, who all did everything themselves. Anyone demanding relief from the great white men are seen as violent obstacles to true civilization.

Now, there is constant emotional abuse surrounding the revelations of truth in this country. School curriculums are being decimated to prevent the telling of how the empire truly rose, including the magical thinking that slavery was beneficial to Black people because we “learned skills.” Only private educators are allowed to talk about the true meaning behind “states’ rights,” including how the states can offer vigilantism as a solution to maintaining the dominant narrative. Calling the current regime on its obvious lies is deemed “inappropriate,” and anyone offering the slightest accountability is losing their job. Even the censure of Representatives Jasmine Crockett and Al Green is unsurprising, because the truth is that both political parties in this country value the denigration of Black people. Changing one’s approach at denigration does not mean that one is not tearing someone else down, and likely, these same people will be begging for him to “come together,” even as they ignored and bullied him in public.

In this way, I am pleased that there is a more open conversation about covert narcissism, because for far too long, people have gotten away with tearing down Black people in public, and then sending us fake empathy in private. Rather than active and ongoing support, we are coerced into accepting the crumbs of social capital that never translates into anything more than words. At this point, refusing to be publicly anti-racist is just being racist, and all of those members of Congress outed themselves as bigots—as did the rest of the Democratic party. People who continue to play the game of “decorum” are saying that nothing can be done until abusers feel comfortable. Honestly,

what was the point of us getting degrees at predominantly white institutions when so many employers get off on punching down on BIPOCQ workers with degrees? No one asked the abusers for their behavior, and everyone will be suffering because the cowards tend to stand around hoping that someone else will solve the problems.

I view Austin as a microcosm of the United States, and I have yet to be wrong. After all of these “outreach” programs ended, half of the people who were working on the City’s behalf or in Austin had left, and gotten out of contracting with the City. ATX Walk, Bike, Roll went through two City liaisons and two consultants. The climate equity engagement associate for the Climate Ambassador Program left. Even the City of Austin Equity Officer left after the nightmare that was the equity anti-displacement tool, and the inability of the City to stand for anything. Everyone thought that the advocates would be so happy to participate while the City pretended to respect our opinions that nobody thought we would be disgusted enough to leave with that behavior.

Thanks to the legal delays and the fake focus group designed to stall it, Austin will never know if the equity anti-displacement tool would have been effective in making life easier for people of color because DEI work is now illegal, both at the state and federal levels, and affirmative action was reversed by the Supreme Court. Only after the advocates disengaged and the watered-down rules were introduced did the City post a position which would have included implementation of the equity anti-displacement tool. West Austin still maintains control over whether any pro-BIPOCQ ordinances are included, and now that there is no support or federal funding, most of the departments that are related to racial justice will likely be phased out, never

to return. After a while, if someone is only willing to help others when they will receive the bulk of the benefit, that individual has no interest in helping others.

The unquestionable ambivalence about these programs proves two things. One, the dominant narrative enjoys the entertainment of assigned groups struggling for a benign existence. Two, the dominant narrative prefers that the targets internalize the fervent desire for people to attack us. We participated because we thought this would bring about changes, both politically and potentially on a socioeconomic level. What we found was that a bunch of white people enjoyed gushing about the BIPOCQ advocates they found.

Right now, in the farce of democracy that is the corrupted two-party system, Black people are getting baited left and right by people who had nothing to say when we were maintaining the status quo. Republicans want us out in the streets so that they can exploit and murder us “for their safety,” and Democrats want us to be their mules and soothe their feelings. Nobody actually wanted any of the things we spent centuries fighting for, least of all equality. Black people have no reason to sacrifice ourselves for any of this garbage anymore. People have demonstrated that regardless of which party has political control, people will use us for what they need, ignore our humanity, and disassociate from us the second they have what they need. None of that is acceptable to us anymore.

One concept is clear: BIPOCQ residents are expected to advocate for a tranquil existence while living our lives. For some reason, it never occurred to anyone that our lives should be ours to live, not others’ to manage. All the community engagement in the world will not stop the delusional belief that BIPOCQ individuals are unable to function without the “help”

of “experts” and “professionals.” If such advocacy refuses to work for its end, the process becomes less about progress and more about appearances. People wanting to show Black people how to do it the “right” way are merely seeking to control our efforts and maintain the dominant narrative.

Therefore, I have some solutions for managing racism in the United States, but the main one is to stop waiting for people who have proven to be weak-willed cowards who stand for nothing but destruction at the expense of the vulnerable. *Ten recent years* of constant cultivation and education led to people lying to our faces yet again, and worse, people stabbing us in the back when they thought they were part of the dominant narrative. Not even white or rich, but people literally thought that there would be some magic that protected them while they harmed Black people. Harming Black people seems to be the national sport of the United States, so instead of thinking that we will *ever* be included as equal participants, it is time to release that notion. All we gain from pleading for our humanity is prolonged poverty within the dominant narrative, and people have the delusion that “feeling bad about that” is the same thing as addressing it.

To exist in any kind of meaningful way, I only see three paths, all of which are relatively difficult for a myriad of different reasons. The first and “easiest” is to have enough money and be relatively okay. If one has advocated for themselves for any reason, kiss this situation good-bye, and that includes anything from challenging unfair labor practices to becoming a full-time advocate. The dominant narrative sees Black people as batteries to use at its discretion, and people are too cowardly to ensure that we will be fairly treated. Furthermore, there will be more technology, lower wages, and higher costs to come, and the ones with capital will not be looking to share vulnerability with

people they consider beneath them. I did not say “capitalist” because broke people consider themselves “capitalist,” while people with capital actually understand their power.

Secondly, this is a great time to leave the country and establish life elsewhere, doing research and building community preferably before arriving. While empires have bred racism internationally, there are plenty of places where Black people will be allowed to live our lives while other people mind the business that pays them instead of constantly needing to mind ours. The most important purpose of relocating should be to live a *new* life, not to emulate the life one might have had in the United States. The empire’s lifestyle is expensive and wasteful, and we do not need to reconstruct imperialism somewhere else. Yes, there will be money involved, but it also matters what kind of life one is seeking, so if one is looking for a relatively small life with minimal outside interference, that kind of life is very possible.

Third, if staying in the United States without enough money to ignore racism, accept that things will always be dysfunctional for Black people, and do not devote *any* resources into the vacuum called “the work” or “the struggle.” Pour only what is possible into small communities, and I do not necessarily mean the electoral system because that is an equally problematic situation where people are happy to use Black labor, and further excuse our oppression. Do not be bullied by people, including us, claiming that voting rights make us equal because all the numbers of our political participation have not improved our lot.

When people claim to want to address racism but offer no money or compensation of any form, ask them directly why they think they have the right to control Black time, energy and

resources. We never asked for oppression, but people seem to think that as long as Black people are oppressed, everything is right with the world, so we need to stop feeding that craziness. Unless someone is approaching a Black person with substantial money and behavior, no “opportunities” should be accepted. By “substantial,” I mean dominant narrative money, not the trash given to Black people that they pretend was so difficult to acquire. Furthermore, the money and behavior should be offered gratefully, not with guilt trips, denigration, or other emotional manipulation tactics. When people make excuses for other circumstances, they, too, should be seen as perpetuating the dominant narrative, and ignored henceforth.

We need time and distance from solutions already presented to come up with different solutions. Unless we have real time to consider why the same solutions have not worked, we will continue to be stressed into repetition. The main reason that past ideology has been unsuccessful is because based on demographics, it will be impossible to maintain a white majority, and the empire only functions on the premise of helping white people at the expense of everyone else. Welfare, social security, unemployment—those metrics only mattered if there was a substantial white population to assist. Now that the white population is slowly being diluted, there has been a push to borrow from or attack those assistance methods. Building more is environmentally unsustainable, and it is mathematically impossible for everyone on the planet to start a business. Even if we could all have separate cultures and no racial mixing, we would still have to all survive on the same planet.

It is on the people doing wrong to stop, not on the people being targeted to convince them to stop targeting them. This excessive focus on what Black people have done to stop the

oppression has been a centuries long focus on the wrong people. During an abusive relationship, the abuser likes to claim to only harm the target because of what the target did, which was a very effective way of organizing an economic expansion nation built on genocide and slavery. That way, it is the fault of indigenous people that they were slaughtered, and the fault of African people for getting captured. Racism in passive voice has been the most effective way of gaslighting targeted populations into internalizing our own harm. Unfortunately for the abusers, mental health information is now widely distributed, and Black people particularly are no longer accepting responsibility for people's need to harm us.

With all the environmental degradation happening everywhere, it is time to leave the maladaptive people alone. There is no guarantee that the planet will remain hospitable, and it would be a waste to give the final years to people who enjoy telling everyone that everyone else is the problem, not them. How will anyone know who is maladaptive? It is obvious to see if people are authentically engaged by whether their words match their actions, or if they are grasping for attention while expecting everyone else to put forth the effort and keep them comfortable. Sadly, this is the majority of the population because the United States maintained so much comfort for so long, and almost nobody knows how to struggle and find joy. Those people will have to live in their individualistic mindsets, and everyone else needs to work to form community with those who remain.

The only way to stop all the performative emoting is to stop giving people a stage or an audience. Many of them know that they are lying, and they need to know that everyone else is aware that they have no drive to evolve. So much of advocacy seems to be predicated on the notion that Black people are experiencing

“hurt feelings,” rather than strategic and deliberate violence. This is why the rampant belief persists that conversations and activities will cure deficiencies. There is little self-awareness that our “sensitivity” is based on things that people actually *did*, while sneering at our responses. After the first Trump election, there was a women’s march with organizers who found almost no women of color until everyone pointed it out, and they scrambled at the last minute to change it—and even Angela People’s sign reminded the participants that women of color were not responsible. Later, despite a Black woman organizing the #MeToo movement, it was coopted by the dominant narrative, so much so that the target of the Stanford rapist did not emerge until well after the event. These were women, but throughout this accounting, I have given examples of men, and if I gave all the examples where men coopted the conversations, there would be very little else to my experience.

Point being, there are several people who have been performing advocacy while changing nothing, and when people tried again after the second Trump election, nobody bothered with them. If attention is the currency in a capitalist society, then *not* demanding attention is the road to liberation. I know someone who is almost visibly uncomfortable when I mention their efforts because they made a point of doing so without gathering the attention of anyone. I am including the resources I expended to provide an example of how effort was expended, but not reciprocated. When I called attention to the lack of reciprocation, the individuals in question retaliated with emotional abuse, because that is an acceptable way of treating Black women within the dominant narrative. Consequently, it is time for those within the dominant narrative to start doing without needing external validation. If those “friendships” were really that solid,

people would not have needed to be told about them because they would be obvious.

Last but not least, stop expecting people to clean up messes within a dysfunctional system that makes problems without attainable solutions. Life costs money for survival, and all of the people with the majority of the money are happily hoarding it, including the “good ones” who regularly do publicity stunts. If the majority of the people have no money, then expecting regular people without capital to solve sweeping problems with the meager resources we share is to be mentally unsound. No, Black people do not have billions of hidden dollars to extract from, because only the very few wealthy ones have money while everyone else is trying to survive. We are not going to fund extravagant elections and put on ridiculous galas and imitate whiteness for the rest of our engagement in the United States; there is real work to be done.

No one seems to understand what a vote and ballot actually are. By the time an item has been placed on a ballot or taken to a vote, it is the most diminished, worthless piece of trash designed to do less than nothing—for mostly white people. If it destroys Black people or the lower classes, no one blinks, except us. Therefore, vote-shaming us when we never elected to destroy ourselves and are the most energetic demonstrates racism at its height. Likewise, Black people are disgusted by the use of celebrities and superstars as examples of how Black people have never been targets because *no one should have to be a celebrity to survive*. That is quite possibly the most irrational and unhinged racist statement that there is in existence. Additionally, so many people mock younger people about wanting to be famous. None of that behavior makes sense.

Recently, I told a friend that if I had known that all the work I

did keeping up the DecipherCity.Org website, and all the walking and talking would lead to nothing, then I might not have done it. I had previously had a day job at the IRS that I left for the private sector, so maybe I would have switched to part-time in the evenings and/or weekends. Then, I would have had regular income and overtime during the pandemic, and I would not have been so vulnerable, and maybe I would have even gotten out of debt. Of course, I might still have found value in the dominant narrative, and then I could have continued wearing myself thin, and I would not have learned to ignore most of the baiting. Knowing that advocacy leads to nothing within the dominant narrative is a very valuable lesson, and most people failed to learn it until Trump got reelected.

I remember thinking that I thought information should be free, but I later realized that the information is free, but the cultivation of it is not. So many hours were spent crafting articles and searching the city minutes that I will never get back. So much outreach was done that I actually paid to do, and for people who think that people have to spend money to make money, again, that means that the only people who make any money are people who already have it. That was just me, so consider how many Black women who worked countless hours, on their feet, maintaining marriages and families, holding down paid labor, and somehow being the fabric of their communities. None of that was free for us, but we did it because we thought that there would be a better response this time. Not only were we all wrong, but people expect us to offer the *same kind of services* with less time and money, fewer jobs, and no possibility of penetrating the minds of those with power and control.

It takes a special kind of stupid to think that people are going to spend decades up to the last ten years organizing,

educating, and investing in change just to get nothing back, not even the policy changes that were advertised. Learning that nothing we do will change behavior is part of liberation from the dominant narrative, and those who make us feel guilty are not worth relationships. Abusers will always seek targets because they need to prove dominance. Some comfortable people are tired of all the work done for resistance since the election, but Black people are seeing that a lot of folks think emotional manipulation is “work.” To a certain extent, it is, because maintaining a delusion and/or façade takes a lot of energy, and it would be impossible to maintain it forever without every letting it slip. On the contrary, anything comfortable, easy, or safe is not activism, and people who think activism is a hobby are in the way of people doing actual work.

Furthermore, people need to stop listening to those who pander to the dominant narrative’s need to play the victim or forego responsibility for the harm they cause. One reason that narcissism is being so heavily discussed now is that people have finally seen the harmful pattern caused by enabling so much abusive behavior. When older people harmed others, people would continue to say, “They are from a different time, so you have to understand.” When younger people followed through with what their parents taught them, it was, “They are young, and they have no idea what they are doing.” Robin DiAngelo and Brene Brown have made millions pandering to the worst behavior, calling bigots “fragile” and telling everyone that such people are “vulnerable.” No, all the examples of people I just described are narcissistic, in which the key component is harming others, taking no accountability, and falsifying victimhood. Everyone is accountable for their own behavior, and everyone else is not responsible to enable abuse.

Running to institutions seems to be all most people know how to do, whether that is social media, the news, universities, the government, or private industry. In a way, I am thankful for all of this anti-Black policy since 2020 because everyone between 18 and 80 saw that whatever “gains” made will face retaliation and be dismantled once the illusion of progress is complete. The changing world and advanced corruption means that the “wins” are smaller and difficult to strategize, and all of it depends on the whims of cooperative authorities. Nobody is blowing up my phone anymore not just because I tend to ignore people now, but because I was not the one who failed to follow through, and no one can argue that politely advocating for change is helpful anymore. All those people have received the slap in the face they deserve, and they will probably take a while to recover.

Ironically, no one is talking about the white dominance in all institutions, meaning that if someone continues to run to institutions, they are implicitly demanding that white people stay in control. Even when there are Black “leaders” in the institutions, nobody respects them, advocates for them, works diligently with them, or accepts the difficulties it takes to be in such a position. A leader is only as good as the people who support that leader, and if everyone is looking for a reason to ignore what a Black person says because “reasons,” the leader has no support. There is nothing to be gained in begging for a seat at the table when the only thing that people seem to want is for Black people to be served on the menu. To everyone’s disgust, not only will people not support a leader, they will actively join in creating a hostile environment, while expecting Black people to remain.

All these cowards want to shrink back and not stand for anything, but want to call themselves allies. “I don’t know what

to do.” “You just need to vote.” “Tell me what to do.” “No, we can’t do that.” Now that the events are finally affecting people other than Black people, everyone is running up to us with the same pathetic “Sorry” and “Thank you” that they had after the murder of George Floyd. Nobody cares anymore, especially since there is an underlying expectation to keep supporting those who have caused harm and to make excuses for terrible people. Black people do not hold the responsibility of all egos and comfort on our shoulders. Everyone who thinks otherwise is justifying violence, harassment, and stalking. “That’s too simplistic.” No, I would argue that it is far from “simplistic” to live off the assumption that I have to manage everyone else’s comfort.

What I have often seen is that people disregard the control aspect of slavery, but they hyperfocus on the violence that they have studied. Slavery was never only about extraction and wealth; it was about the sadistic desire to have people under complete and total control to whom *anything* could be done. There would be no responsibility or accountability other than having to find another one. Despite a limited number of circumstances, there is *still* that sadistic desire for control, but it manifests in different ways, such as demanding that people go to hostile offices with human resource departments which are trained to hate and punish Black people. Another manifestation is to expect Black people to go to public meetings knowing full well that nobody will listen to or respect our opinion. Most importantly, the mindset that one should rarely or never offer Black people anything, but gaslight us into believing that we have been given everything is part of that sick need for control.

So many people believe that racism implies an unwillingness to engage, but forget that hatred and indifference have many forms. Such hatred is expressed by demands to exploit;

repeated public denigration; desires to torture professionally, emotionally, and physically; and of course, execution, all of which are steps toward control. One thing people accepted into the dominant narrative never consider is that there are literally millions of people doing eons of work that “no one” ever sees. To say that attention is the only thing that matters is to disrespect them. If the world is not going to function any differently, but keeps using BIPOCQ advocates as the audience for poor behavior, we are simply observing contempt. People are not owed time and energy for getting their lives in “order.”

Moreover, all of this obnoxious defensiveness around “not owning slaves” means that people *understand* the issue is control, and they are not willing to acknowledge that. Deflecting to slavery when coercing someone to submit to unearned authority is not part of equality, and control with a smile is still control. People refuse to acknowledge when they have denigrated or refused Black leadership, and they refuse to believe that Black people have contributed anything because *if we have*, they know they owe us. Unfortunately, when cornered, most individuals are very dangerous, and the revelation of the consistent need to control means that all the masks of smiles and performative behavior are no longer effective. This era is all control, and if people are participating in these activities, they are not allies. No one cares about “conversations,” “dialogues,” or anything else that translates to performative, unpaid emotional labor. If no behavioral changes are on the table, there is nothing to discuss. Conversations involve meetings of the minds, so if someone demonstrably thinks that the other is less than they are, conversation is impossible. If no one is committed to changing behavior, then all “conversations” are a waste of time.

The world is not required to cater to a caste that emotionally immature people created to satisfy their own sick desires. Because the dominant narrative is pushing the propaganda that such behavior is “normal,” people have mistakenly believed that it is normal to demand control over others. Even when people know that their behavior is atrocious, they claim, “Human nature!” because they refuse to admit that dominance is not always human nature, but the limited mindset of a selective few. However, because the United States has been conditioned to believe that some people should have control over select others, control was established as a subconscious trait that has mutated into the current “liberal” behavior. When determining the meaning of an apology, consider that domestic abusers apologize all the time. They never mean it, but they realize that in the moment, their impulses are denying their efforts for desired control. Pushback against such control was seen as being “mean,” “angry,” or “crazy,” and it can come in a variety of forms, including the simple act of saying, “No.”

For anyone who behaves as if a Black person is some kind of project that they get to present, that is not treating us like human beings. If people truly believe that we are human beings, then what right do they have to demand that we prove our humanity before the dominant narrative stops harassing and stalking us? It seems like that makes it about a need to control and not our problem, and we are not responsible for the behavior of others. When people keep saying that fighting racism is a marathon, I would point out that I am no longer running any of the marathons that I started years ago. Every race has an end, and if there is no end, that is because the organizers want it to keep going. No, we do not have to run some kind of marathon

to prove to psychopaths that we are “okay,” and every non-Black person we meet is not the arbiter of our humanity. We are allowed to reject bids for dominance, and if people throw tantrums because they were not given enough deference to their entitlement, we are allowed to stay away from them. Our humanity and autonomy are not up negotiation, and no one cares about any number of Black people anyone “knows.” “No” is a complete sentence for everyone on the planet, and we are not going to keep repeating the “no” while enduring unrelenting coercion.

To those who say that I did not ask enough from the Black community during my advocacy, I can only sigh and shake my head. We have a nasty habit in this country of making the targets of abuse responsible for their abusers’ behavior. “If they had only complied” with unreasonable requests that they had no hope of fulfilling, because the abusers were hoping for defiance to excuse horrific behavior. “Nobody wants to work” for unreasonable conditions that do not fulfill even the costs that employers want to charge people for living. “Why do people have to” insist on living our lives without unreasonable interference and constant defensiveness from people we are actively avoiding because they are volatile? No, Black people are not responsible for being chosen as targets by oppressive comfort fiends who think that they are blameless regardless of the offenses they commit. Of course we have networks, otherwise how could we survive what others have done? Long ago, I stopped chasing down targets for the actions of their abusers, and I suggest that everyone else do the same.

Racial hatred is not some cute trend that can be reversed with

a new election. Long-term damage persists, regardless of the narrative people tell themselves. Because people think “doing the work” is getting attention and praise for the “edgiest” viewpoint, their commitment to change extends as far as the attention and praise carry them. When racial justice is “out of fashion,” people find a new trend rather than confirming if something substantive was actually done. Saying that attention leads to change is like saying one is going to marry someone they meet in a club. Hypothetically, they could, but it would be more rational to believe that someone dedicated to marital practices will get married, not change their worldview. There are too many other factors at play to assume mere attention will lead to changed behavior.

In October 2025, at one of my jobs, two activists within the dominant narrative came in to strategize, and identified themselves as activists. I knew the group they were with, and I realized that not much about the situation had changed the minute they opened their mouths. They told me that they were “friends,” and when I mentioned that I, too, had been an organizer, they got that manic gleam in their eyes, the one that communicates an opening of a siphon for my time, energy, and resources. When I told them that I no longer organize, the white woman—because of course there was a white woman—condescendingly said that everyone gets burnt out, and I responded, “No, sometimes people need to give up on a system that hates them.” She took the hint and walked away, but the Latino organizer with her decided to keep trying to entice me, and one of his aces was a book he had read that he thought I should read.

Families are being separated, children are being caged, the government was shut down, and he wanted to talk to me about a book. This is the kind of vapid engagement that has pushed marginalized people away from the game forever, and no amount of fake smiling is going to change that situation. These were union organizers, but as I have said elsewhere, union effectiveness depends on an entity responding to the union. All through my email, I have seen that the National Treasury Employees' Union—which is so good that paid time off and sick time are immediately earned upon employment with the Internal Revenue Service, regardless of position—has spent most of the year in court. No positive outcomes have occurred with the reductions in force—just continued legal battles while employees continue to struggle. That union is longstanding and well-established, and even they have no hope to offer their members.

Eventually, even the “book-learner” understood that I was not interested in his nonsense and finally found the grace to disengage. These two “kids,” basically, thought they would come onto a corporate campus with some t-shirts and smiles, and convince employed individuals to pick a fight with our employers. Social media, as well as general adherence to the dominant narrative, has dissolved people's capacity to think. All over the media, unions are being ignored and people are losing benefits left and right, benefits that were hard-won necessities that individuals are struggling without, and that is fact. No protests, selfies, yelling or crying into phones, or meetings will make anyone listen to newly created unions under an administration that does not recognize unions. In all honesty, unions were an old tool of the dominant narrative, and they

allowed a lot of white people to keep their power. At this point in time, unions are ineffective, and those within the dominant narrative are endangering people by not recognizing that salient point. Voting is over, unions are over, starting a small business is over—all the tools to combat the imperial dominant narrative have been eviscerated. No groups with excited people are the answer to christofascism.

Jane Elliott once posed the question of whether anyone would trade places with a Black person. Well, Project 2025 described how white people would be treated the same way they treat BIPOCQ individuals, and they are all panicking and trying to backtrack. For those defensively posturing about all their antiracist friends, they never stop to consider that such people always know how to put up a front and folks will literally murder others to maintain a narrative. I once told a particularly defensive individual, “You know them as you. You don’t know them as me.” No one is owed praise for an inability to process dysphoric emotions. Instead of asking people to tolerate poor treatment, people need to start asking how much recovery energy they want to feel from everyone harmed by poor behavior. Emotional maturity demands that people start asking the costs that the effects will have on their lives. The need for constant happy endings comes from a vapid mindset devoid of responsibility for the consequences of their own actions.

Control is not friendship, no matter who someone voted for. Control is not collaboration, because someone is refusing to collaborate by demanding to be in charge of the project. Control is not love, and demanding that everyone soothe feelings and self-negate “for the greater good” is saying that some people

should understand that they are inherently below everyone else. My conclusion is that “liberals” enjoy watching Black people struggle from a disaffected distance, and no one can work with people who need to see them as entertainment or validation machines. What is more likely: that all these people are confused and shamed and need to learn, or that they are confused and shamed because they know what they did was wrong and they are stalling for time? All of the “come together” without white vulnerability *wasted* all time they had, and now they get to experience the joy of everyone blaming them for the problems and offering none of the help. Activism is an attempt by marginalized communities to trigger social cognition. However, if an audience is maladaptive, such efforts are too much of a strain on the communities to reasonably justify engagement.

It is the job of those within the dominant narrative to redeem themselves, not our job to validate. We cannot work with people who want us to fail. We will not take responsibility for choices made on information that nobody bothered to verify. Part of creating a better society means leaving those who *need* to abuse and those who *demand* control to their own devices. Our responsibilities are to regain our senses of self and work to create better communities, in spite of the controlling minorities. We need to recognize that if we actually examine their self-proclaimed importance, no one would care because it is fake. It is time to let delusionists cling to their delusions while the rest of us advance. All the community engagement in the world will not appease people who are incapable of hearing a “No.”

## Afterword

What was the point of writing all this? I have felt a burning compulsion to write the truth as it has been revealed to me. Many prefer the delusions, but I am one among many who are offering reality for those who choose to see it. Crawling back into this headspace after the nightmare of the last 3-4 years was no mean feat. I hope that I am stronger for it, but I spent a lot of time mourning the time I lost trusting people who refused to accept and adapt. Things fell into place when I realized that people did not truly mean “stay and fight to win,” but “stay and fight because we enjoy fighting.” That was when I decided that it was time to back away for good, and why I have continued to be relatively disengaged. People wonder about the accountability of walking away, because it is human nature to defend oneself. However, there is a point in time when defense means protecting one’s energy, and understanding the nature of sunken costs.

I used to believe in reconciliation, not matter how much it costs. Other people believed in returning aggressions, and usually for good reason. I now understand the truth: people cannot reconcile with maladaptive people who demand the “right” to be superior, and will enforce that “right,” regardless of the consequences. They will undermine every effort for equilibrium because they only understand contention, chaos, and control. Many like to smugly argue that BIPOCQ targets just need to

be patient. Unless those people intend to restore our finances, career paths, relationships, and fertility, they are demanding the right to control our lives by playing into their insecurities. If it takes people forever to do the right thing, they never thought they had to change their behavior and they never thought that they would get caught. White people questioning their existentialism is no longer interesting to me.

People do not seem to understand that the whole point of advocacy and activism is that people want an injustice to stop. They think people crave all the attention because that seems to be their only goal after doing absolutely nothing to change anything. Receiving attention and praise is not activism because most activists receive neither. There are some tokens that are kept around for photo ops and meeting “legitimacy,” but most are punished with derision, poverty, and/or death. Advocacy seems to have devolved into justifying people’s right to existence to those intent on disrespecting it. This dominant narrative work is not about solving racism, but coercing the targets into internalizing racism. Respectability politics make targets feel like we are not doing enough, nicely enough, neatly enough, or wearing the right clothes. Accountability advocacy notes the patterns of abusers, and abusers intentionally respond poorly to any recognition that abuse is irrational.

I heard a lot of arguing that people were “learning” and “love is stronger than hate,” and other cliches that amount to BIPOCQ dehumanizing ourselves instead of respecting our honest response to poor behavior. Know this: if social cognition has not clicked in enough for people to understand that they are not entitled to the “right” to control others by 2025, it is not

going to happen, not for any substantial period of time. If someone knows that some action causes pain and continues to do it once informed, what is there to assume except that such a person enjoys causing pain? People have spent a lot of time and energy—as well as other resources—trying to get maladaptive people to change. If someone is incapable of change, they need to stop entertaining themselves with the pain of BIPOCQ activists. People like that are not “doing the work” or evolving; they are getting off on the power *not* to change.

Some people wonder about being “down with the struggle.” A reasonable thought is this: in a world of multiple billionaires, the only reason people are struggling is because abusive people refuse to either share or manage their insatiable greed. Abusive people are generally maladaptive and they demand that there are no voices against them that have any prominence—regardless of their “side of the aisle.” No one should give them air time, but they own the airwaves to make sure that they propagandize everyone. Thus, no one should be “down with the struggle” because people should be appropriately disgusted with people who demand dominance, regardless of their own powers and capabilities. The real reason that nobody can rest is because those accepted by the dominant narrative cannot be sated. What I have learned about the abuse dynamic is that it only ends when the target leaves. Therefore, continuing to try and “fight” is a recipe for exhaustion.

As for Black people, we have finally gotten to the point when our appointed roles are no longer acceptable, but everyone keeps manically trying to stuff us back in our place, angry at our resistance. Fortunately for us, we have realized that for those

who earnestly believe that people should have to go through them as some kind of barrier to prove our worth, all we have to do is ignore them for the spell to be broken. We finally understand that when we are hurt by people, we should check to see if they would care if we showed them that they hurt us. If we no longer feel safe, we express within our own community and among those with whom we feel safe. “Post-racial” would mean that there was no retaliation for calling out racist white behavior—especially as Black people are actively stalked for wrongdoing.

For those who want to waste everyone’s time and energy with “not all,” Demographer Stephanie would like to remind them that 1) anomalies are not trends; and 2) it is statistically impossible to spend a substantial amount of time around antiracists in a racist system. If people are only “fragile” or “vulnerable” after exploiting and abusing people of color, maybe those types should not have power they cannot manage, but really, they just seem like creeps looking for an excuse. Those who keep telling people to wait for the world to change—and expect grace and patience instead of changing—are actually manipulators. Most “community engagement” stopped because BIPOCQ responders stopped being compliant in our responses and praising pictures. Apparently, our voices are only wanted if we stroke the egos of our oppressors, and that was untenable after a while.

Just like people do not understand a world they do not control, they also cannot comprehend a world where BIPOCQ residents are not constantly struggling to be seen as human beings. No one can penetrate such a mindset, and we need to stop trying. The reality is that no one seems to believe that *white* people should sit still while being attacked by everyone without remorse; just

## AFTERWORD

us. It is emotionally unhealthy to maintain dialogue with people who expect you to stay calm while they attack and denigrate you.

