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“In the Wake of George Floyd”

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“In the Wake of George Floyd” UTRA Research Output Report

In 2020, George Floyd was brutally murdered by white cops in Minneapolis. The killing, simply a continuation of a long history of racial violence and murders, dubbed a “modern-day lynching”, sparked a global outcry, manifesting in protests and social movements that focused on addressing systemic racism, police brutality, and the broader inequalities faced by Black and Brown and other marginalized communities. Rhode Island, a relatively small state, became an important site of activism, especially in its capital, Providence. The project I worked on, titled "In the Wake of George Floyd: Responses to Anti-Black Racism in Rhode Island," situated Rhode Island within the larger national discourse, focusing on the racial and social justice movements that emerged in response to George Floyd’s death. It specifically aimed at documenting the protests that took place across Rhode Island, exploring their resonance within the

community, and investigating the state's history and present engagement with racial injustice. As a research assistant in this project, I primarily focused on the documentation and analysis of protests, movements, community and legislative responses across the state. I was thus able to contribute to the documentation of public demonstrations and uncovering why Floyd's death resonated so deeply with Rhode Islanders.

This research project, formally titled "In the Wake of George Floyd: Responses to Anti-Black Racism in Rhode Island," was initiated by the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) at Brown. The project aims to map the anti-racist social movements that emerged in Rhode Island post-George Floyd's murder, documenting protests, counter-responses, and the involvement of marginalized communities. It also looks into key recurring themes and issues, such as defunding the police and increasing police accountability, and how this was reflected in community responses and legislation. It focuses not only on mobilizations and public demonstrations, but also on how local communities of color and other marginalized groups experience racism, discrimination, and violence in Rhode Island. By capturing the responses of different organizations and institutions, including Brown University, the project explores the relationships between activism, institutional responses, and legislative changes. Finally,

it aims to record these responses, by creating a lasting digital archive as a resource for future scholarship. During my time in this project, my primary responsibilities were centered on editing interview transcripts, managing a detailed database to track legislation, community responses, and reforms, and helping analyze community responses to police violence and systemic racism in Rhode Island. My work would be focused on ensuring that the narratives of these movements would be preserved and made accessible to both the academic community and the public at large.

Throughout the duration of the project, I handled primarily qualitative data, in the form of interviews and news reports. I also spent most of my time reviewing interviews with leaders from social justice organizations participating in the statewide Black Lives Matter movement, including groups like DARE, BLM RI-PAC, COYOTE, and Uprise RI. I also edited the transcripts and video captions for these interviews, ensuring accuracy and clarity in how these leaders' perspectives were presented. These interviews formed the core of the project's documentation of the local response to George Floyd's death, and also served as analytical tools for understanding how race, violence, and activism intersected in local communities. Moreover, I was responsible for researching broader community responses and legislative changes and reforms, extending our research beyond the immediacy of protests. I analyzed how the demands

made by community members—such as calls to defund the police and remove resource officers (SROs) from schools—translated into concrete legislative action. This involved tracking developments in local laws and police incidents, updating the spreadsheet with the latest information as new reforms were passed or incidents of police violence were reported, such as updates to the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights (LEOBOR) and other police reforms. I organized this data into a comprehensive spreadsheet, which served as a repository for the project's research on legislative changes, community responses, and incidents of police brutality. I also categorized the data into four key areas: community responses, legislation, reforms, and incidents of police brutality. By structuring this data into clear categories, I made it easier for the team to analyze the connections between different aspects of the protests and their aftermath, and to facilitate future access to this data. Moreover, every article I used I also converted into Permalinks, to preserve the digital data for future referral. This made the database a living document, one that could continue to inform the project's analysis even after its initial phase was complete. This approach provided a clear framework for the project's ongoing analysis and allowed the team to trace the impacts of the Black Lives Matter movement in Rhode Island.

I believe my work in managing and updating the database was important for providing the project with a foundation of data, in order to analyze community responses and legislative reforms. One of the most notable pieces of legislation I followed was LEOBOR, a highly controversial statute that provides a series of protections to police officers during disciplinary proceedings. In the wake of the murder of George Floyd and as protests against police brutality intensified, this law became particularly significant, and was challenged and reformed as community members highlighted the importance of police accountability in the state and across the country. I found that in the summer of 2024, Governor Dan McKee signed a series of LEOBOR reforms into law, which include expanding police misconduct hearing panels, increasing suspension lengths for serious offenses, and allowing police chiefs to release video evidence and public statements. While these reforms are the first significant changes to the law since 1976, some Rhode Island lawmakers, activists, and community members feel that this is still not enough to address and prevent police misconduct. It was interesting to find the connection between public outcry and policy change, which helped in our understanding of the long-term impacts of the George Floyd protests.

A key component of the project was the creation of a digital archive that would serve as a historical record of the protests and the responses to them. During my time in

this project, I worked extensively on the development of this archive, contributing to the writing of research findings and helping to shape the narrative of the [website](#) that hosts this information. The website, a collaborative effort by the research team, is designed to be both informative and accessible to the public, providing a space where the events of 2020 and their aftermath can be explored in depth.

Throughout the project, I worked closely with other team members, including Professor Patsy Lewis and my direct supervisor Tarika Sankar, as well as other students working on the project. I also communicated frequently with the community leaders we interviewed, to ensure that the interviews and transcripts were as informative and accurate as possible, to precisely reflect the perspectives of those involved in the protests. By maintaining this communication, I was able to gather additional information, added as footnotes of the interview's transcripts, that enriched the project's findings.

One of the key questions of the project was why Floyd's death resonated so deeply with people in Rhode Island, a state with its own complex history of race relations but not often seen as a focal point for national discussions on race and policing. The project's findings and analyses revealed that many Rhode Islanders viewed Floyd's death as part of a broader pattern of systemic racism and police violence that

extended beyond state lines. It also shed light on the specific experiences of communities of color in Rhode Island, highlighting instances of racial profiling and police violence that had occurred in the state long before, and after Floyd's murder, such as the [2022 arrest of Armando Rivas](#), [the 2021 shooting of Dominic Vincent](#), and [the 2020 collision with Jhamal Gonsalves](#).

Ultimately, during my time on this project, I worked to help enrich the project's digital archive but also to provide a deeper understanding of the specific challenges and experiences faced by communities of color in Rhode Island. My work in managing the data spreadsheet, and transcribing and editing the interviews, was done with the goal of ensuring that the voices of ordinary Rhode Islanders, many of whom have long been marginalized in discussions of race and policing, would be preserved and that the lessons of 2020 would continue to inform discussions of race and justice in the years to come. Overall, this project, and my work within it, aimed to create a living archive that not only preserved the voices of activists and community leaders but also provided valuable insights into the ways in which public protests can lead to meaningful policy change.