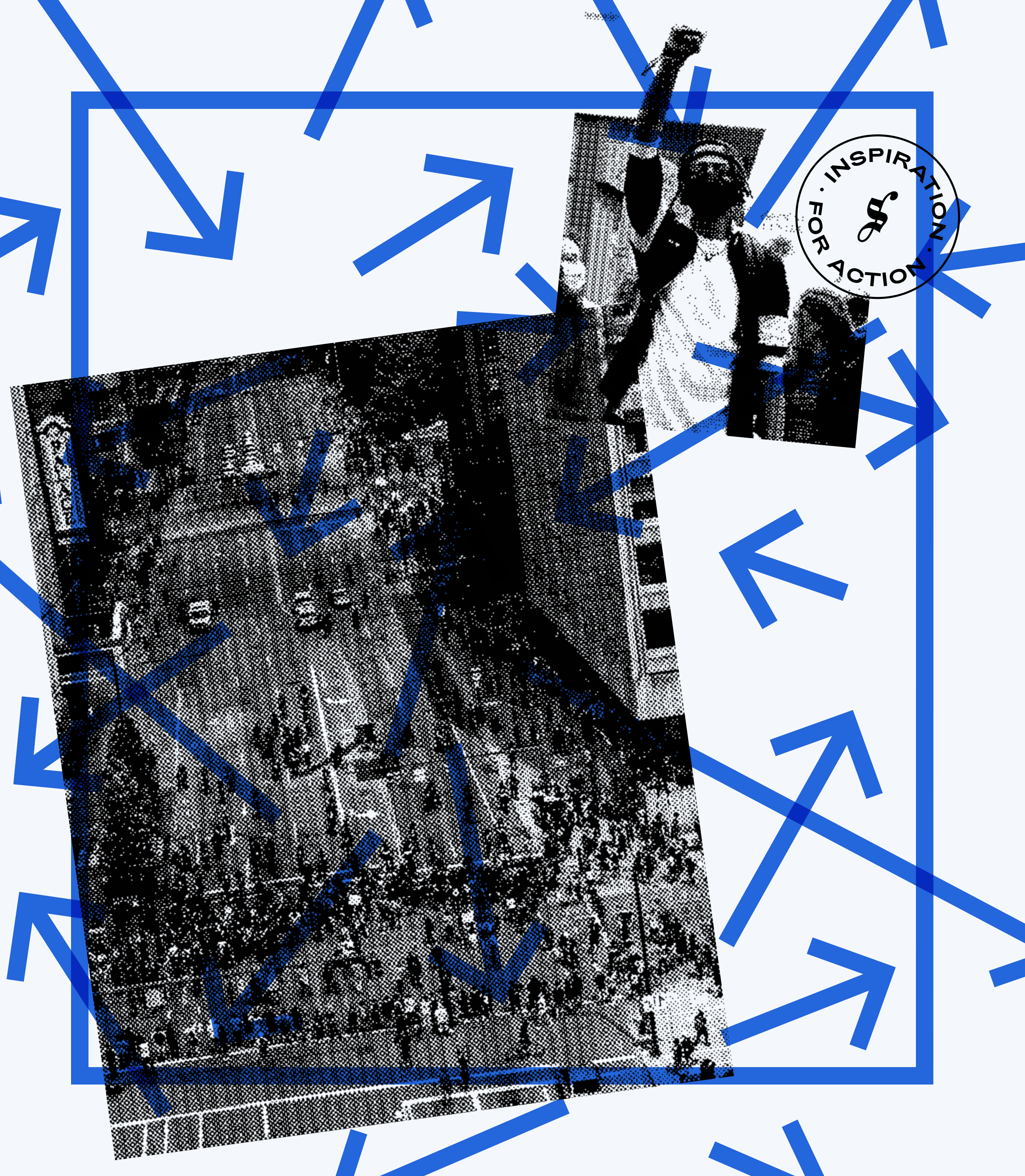




Off-White Paper No. 1.5

Distributed, Not Divided: A Case for Cohesive Activism

**PROGRESS
REPORT**

From Sylvain Labs, nontraditional business intelligence with matching tips and tools to help you implement learnings at work.

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Distributed, Not Divided: A Case for Cohesive Activism

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ABSTRACT

Cohesion Beyond Company

Our first Off-White paper explored the importance of building cohesion irrespective of proximity, providing business leaders with tools and insight to build cohesion across four domains: environment, culture, technology, and rhythm. This same principle can be applied to social movements, which are increasingly distributed and require a great deal of cohesion in order to make widespread progress. While cohesion in a business setting is focused on increasing productivity, social movements require cohesion in order to synchronize and rally people together as a unified force. Cohesion is critical in helping activists build a shared narrative across the domains of environment, culture, technology, and rhythm. Cohesive activism allows for demands to be heard more clearly, to be taken more seriously, and ultimately, to be implemented more thoroughly.

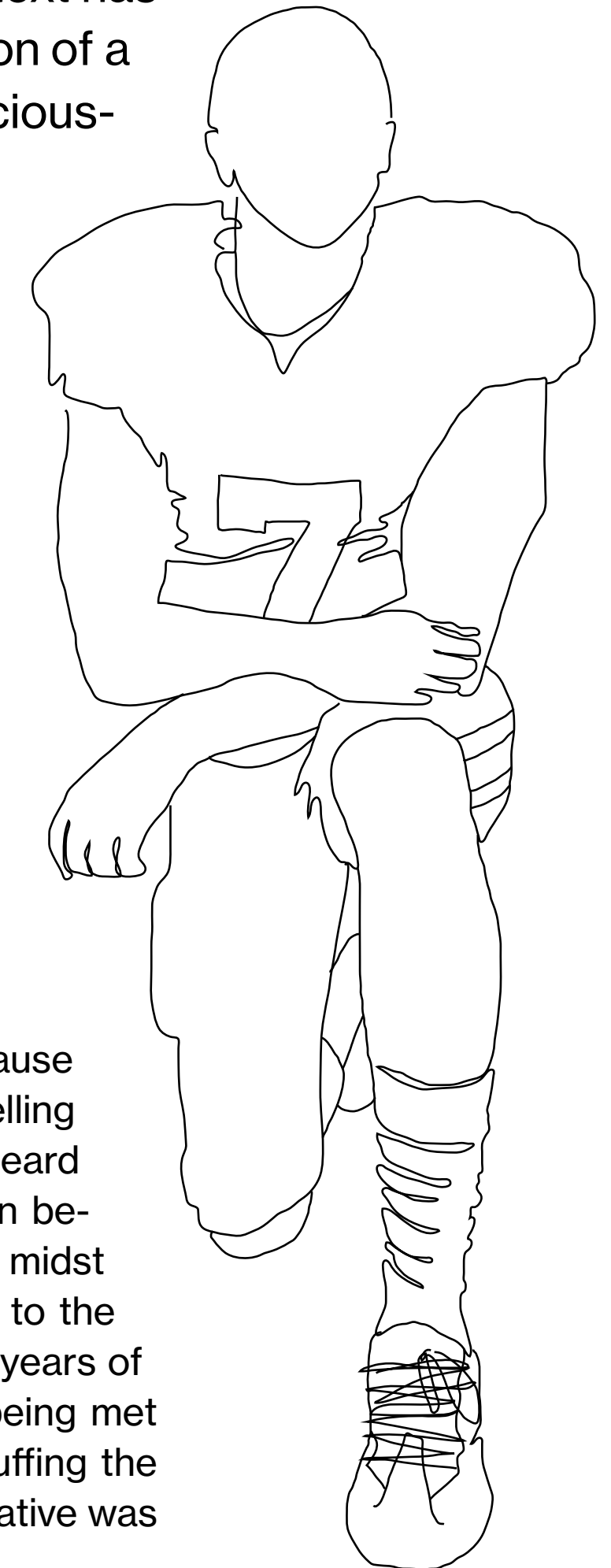
INTRODUCTION

Cohesion and the Ongoing Pandemic

In our first Off-White Paper we explored the power of creating cohesion in distributed environments, focusing specifically on its importance and execution in the newly distributed workplace created by the global pandemic. However, that context has become further complicated by the elevation of a preceding pandemic into the public consciousness. Widespread systemic racism has plagued Black people for far longer than COVID-19.

Like much of the world, we are deeply and viscerally affected by the death of George Floyd, a saddening and traumatic reminder of the regular brutality with which our country treats its Black citizens. In various forms and fashions, brutality has always been the centerpiece of the American banquet; Floyd's untimely death was simply another node in a longstanding tradition. What has changed, however, is our collective response. The narrative clarity of this particular eruption of activism has made this crisis of injustice more obvious to the broader society for the first time in a long time.

The spirit of activism caught fire and spread because George Floyd's death was embedded within a compelling and cohesive story. This is not the first time we've heard the words, "I can't breathe," spoken by a Black man beneath the bent knee of a police officer. However, in midst of a pandemic respiratory virus, these words strike to the core of a universal fear in this moment. Add to this, years of peaceful protest at the knee of Colin Kaepernick being met with derision, only to see the knee of an officer snuffing the spark of life from the eyes of a Black man. This narrative was



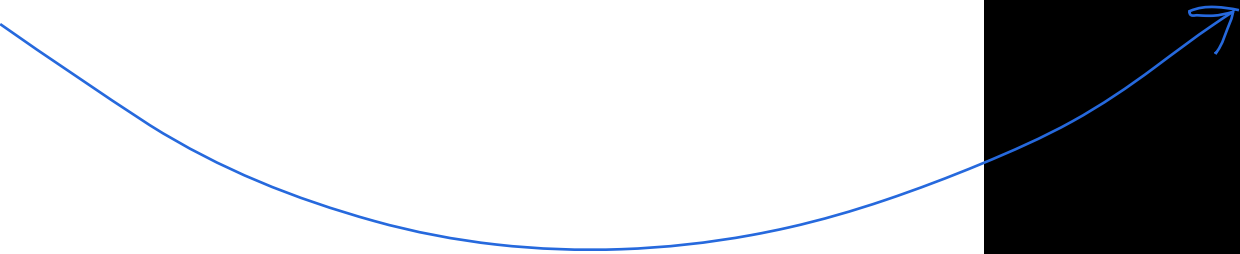
immediately clear to a deeply socially conscious generation of young people, and sent shockwaves throughout our society.

This narrative has been so emotionally stirring and clear that it has triggered a rush of empathy and urgency, yielding what many consider to be the largest public display of human solidarity in the country since the peak of the Civil Rights Movement.

Part of what made the Civil Rights Movement so effective was that it was triggered by an inciting event and sustained its energy over a considerable amount of time. The lynching of Emmett Till arguably set off the eruption that fueled Rosa Parks, the boycotts, the sit-ins, and the school integrations that resulted in landmark civil rights legislation. If George Floyd’s death is creating a similar eruption and demand for change, how do we sustain this energy through a cohesive activist effort?

This question led us down an interesting train of thought – what if the idea of cohesion we’ve applied to companies during the COVID-19 crisis could also apply to social activist movements? In which ways are the domains we explored for business – environment, culture, technology and rhythm – applicable to activism? What are the marks of a cohesive movement? What happens when a movement lacks cohesion? And what can history teach us about how to align against a common vision, irrespective of place?

The question we set out to answer is:



HOW CAN DISTRIBUTED MOVEMENTS

→ *build cohesion*
→ *maintain it*
→ *and translate the initial eruption of activism into meaningful change?*

PART ONE

A Tale of Two Movements

We should start by re-examining the concept of cohesion as it was explored in our first Off-White paper. A brief summary: *Cohesion is the feeling of unification that an individual has of being aligned with others against a common purpose.* There are four domains that companies can invest resources into, in order to build cohesion across teams: environment (where we work); culture (the values that connect those who do the work); technology (the tools for completing the work); and rhythm (the ways of working together).

Historically, we've over-relied on *proximity* to create cohesion in companies because sharing a physical space naturally plays into the ways people bond and develop richer relationships. As a result of COVID-19, however, we've not been able to be proximate. But, by adapting each domain in line with the needs of a distributed workforce, cohesion can be built and strengthened, regardless of proximity.

Proximity is a luxury that companies must now learn to operate without; for activist movements, this dispersion has almost always been the case. While activism typically starts at the local level, movements that successfully yield noteworthy societal changes require large-scale cohesion. The notable difference between developing cohesion in a work setting vs. developing cohesion in an activist setting is *what cohesion is in service of*. In a work environment, cohesion is in service of *productivity*, where leaders equip teams with tools to work together more effectively, increase efficiencies, and deliver better work faster.

1. Think: The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial; Pro-ADA activists crawling up the steps of the US Capitol Building to force legislators to see them in 1990; HIV/AIDS activists selecting the National Mall for the AIDS Memorial Quilt.
2. It's worth saying that this, in itself, can be incredibly fraught territory. Often, the most impactful content is the most brutal; there's significant (and justified) [outcry regarding the trauma](#) that can be triggered when content depicting Black victims of police brutality is brazenly shared. Similarly, well-intentioned acts of solidarity [run the risk of drowning out the voices](#) and information that is most critical to be consumed and heard. There is no simple answer to this issue.
3. Rhythm is particularly important in social movements because activism isn't necessarily conducted by a sole entity. It is worth noting that the work of the civil rights movement was actually accomplished by a broad array of organizations (e.g., NAACP, SCLC, SNCC, CORE), each with its own set of leaders, membership, operating principles, and politics. While landmark moments like the March on Washington for Freedom and Jobs in 1963 were [collaborative](#), there were moments where friction arose over how best to resolve the movement's grievances.
4. [Oxytocin](#) is the neurochemical responsible for empathy as well as the phenomenon of "narrative transportation." When the brain synthesizes it, people are more generous, trustworthy, charitable, and compassionate. When stories meaningfully capture our attention, oxytocin enables us to resonate emotionally with the characters.

This is not the case for activism, where cohesion is in service of *narrative building*. The goal for leaders is to build alignment, so that activists are able to speak with a unified voice (messaging, demands, etc.) to increase both their bargaining power and their leverage. In the same way that cohesive teams make production more effective, cohesive activist movements make societal change more effective: a strong narrative means demands are heard more clearly, taken more seriously, and, ideally, responded to more thoroughly. In this way, each of the four domains serves a critical purpose in helping to build a cohesive narrative.

Environment: The places and spaces in which activists gather together.¹

Culture: The shared ideas, values, and principles that connect the broader activist group.

Technology: The tools that support the work of distributed activism.²

Rhythm: The dynamics that facilitate collaboration and cooperation between activists.³

Ultimately, cohesive narratives are what allow activism to both stick and scale. Storytelling is fundamental to the human experience: it's how we make sense of the world and the mechanism through which we share our understanding of it with others. So, when stories are cohesive – when the dots all connect and are stripped of superfluity – they are very easy for people to latch onto. An effective story is powerful because it (1) captures our attention; (2) fosters empathy; (3) motivates us to help others; which then (4) enables large-scale cooperation.⁴

Cohering a Movement for Civil Rights

Consider the civil rights movement, arguably the best example of cohesive activism in modern American history. While our collective memory is quick to distill the movement into a set of sanitized vignettes of figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, the reality is a far richer (and overtly political) story.⁵

The movement's major legislative accomplishments were not achieved through the actions of a lone few, but rather through the distributed actions of many. The leaders that emerged during this period cohered the anger, frustration, and fear borne out of Emmett Till's lynching into a groundswell of activism. By meticulously exposing the consistent violence and indignity of everyday Black life in the Jim Crow South, the movement was able to align against a cohesive narrative that sustained the energy stirred up in the wake of Till's murder.

The movement accomplished this by creating alignment between discrete protests across each of the four domains:

Environment

The movement staged all of its activism in public spaces (e.g., municipal buses, downtown lunch counters, public schools) and disrupted "business as usual" to force everyone to acknowledge just how pervasive injustice was for Black people.⁶ Furthermore, they built cohesion through Black institutions like churches, colleges, and universities. These environments were places of relative safety and refuge, making them optimal for recruiting and organizing.

Culture

The movement built a shared culture grounded in an ethos of

5. Perhaps you saw the [recent tweet](#) that posits that photos from the civil rights movement are often distributed in black and white to make them feel as if they were taken a long time ago.
6. Part of what drove change during the civil rights movement was that the demonstrations were simply [bad for business](#). Companies lost money because of the efforts of everyday activists. Blacks accounted for 75% of Montgomery, Alabama's bus system, which lost upwards of 40,000 fares per day for the entire duration of the 381-day boycott. Woolworth's in Greensboro, NC, reportedly [lost \\$200,000 \(\\$1.75 million in 2019 USD\)](#) in revenue due to the sit-ins and boycott. Slowing down a few core businesses had a ripple effect on the broader local economies of the South and put pressure on officials to change the laws.



nonviolence, adorned in the uniform of one's Sunday best, and scored by a set of hymn-inspired "freedom songs."⁷ This not only gave them moral high ground, but also (and more importantly) connected them to each other and to a noble cause greater than themselves.

Technology

They leveraged the relatively new medium of television to dramatize and elevate the movement into the American mainstream, understanding that their success depended on collectively producing press-worthy, movement-generated content.

Rhythm

The movement forged a sense of solidarity and community that made it possible for several civil rights organizations to collaborate on large-scale demonstrations and campaigns. Their synchronization made it possible to do big things, like lead thousands in a five-day, 54-mile march from Selma to the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery, attempt to register nearly 17,000 Black Mississippians to vote despite rampant violence and intimidation, and gather a quarter-million people for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Ultimately, it was these specific, thoughtful choices that created a throughline capable of sustaining the movement's energy long enough to implement meaningful change at the federal level: the civil rights legislation of the 1950s and 1960s were direct products of community organizers across the country building a cohesive movement that continues to influence Supreme Court decisions as recently as June 2020.⁸

Occupy Disjointed

The power of cohesion becomes even clearer when we compare the civil rights movement to the more recent Occupy

7. It is worth noting that the civil rights movement was deeply connected to popular culture. Its leaders and most outspoken advocates were practically celebrities, appearing on [late-night shows](#) and mainstream news programs like [60 Minutes](#). Pop music was also key to the movement's cultural power with artists like Sam Cooke, Nina Simone, Bob Dylan, Harry Belafonte, and many others contributing to the call for justice through their music and their support.
8. "The court ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects gay and transgender workers from workplace discrimination. The court considered two cases concerning gay rights, *Bostock v. Clayton* and *Altitude Express v. Zarda*, and one case concerning transgender rights, *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*." ([The New York Times](#))

9. Another tricky space: tone-policing. Paul Graham's [Hierarchy of Disagreement](#) helpfully demonstrates that focusing on tone serves little value in evaluating an argument. But all activist movements are subject to both good- and bad-faith criticism; avoiding overtly incendiary energy and language are two ways to mitigate a form of the latter. There are myriad, valid counter-arguments to this idea, and it's a subject of much debate within both activist and political circles. There are no clear answers.

movement. This moment in American populism was born in the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2008, emerging as a protest movement against economic inequality. And while it did spread across the country, it failed to coalesce into anything beyond the initial grievance because of the looseness of its narrative.

While the civil rights movement was able to sustain its narrative, the Occupy movement ultimately failed at leveraging the same domains to build cohesion and maintain the energy needed to spur meaningful reform.

Environment

The Occupy movement got off to a great start. Occupy Wall Street's grievances were aimed at the entire financial industry, so it made sense to stage the protest at Lower Manhattan's Zuccotti Park in the heart of New York City's Financial District. However, as the movement expanded geographically it lost its strategic ground, focusing less on specific institutions or bad actors responsible for inequality, and devolving into a disparate collection of municipal park encampments.

Culture

Rhetorically, Occupy was a populist movement that defended the cause of the 99%; but culturally, it embodied an anarchist spirit, walling off a lot of potential mainstream support.⁹

Technology

While Occupy leveraged technology (specifically social media) to facilitate its rapid rise, it ultimately undermined its ability to crystalize into something cohesive. For the moment in which Occupy held the world's attention, its tech-driven fragmentation resulted in unfocused critiques, competing messages, and ill-defined tactics.

Rhythm

Occupy's fierce adherence to decentralization made it difficult to build connective tissue between its sprawling "network" of chapters. Without a semblance of coordination, the movement was unable to scale into something greater than the sum of its parts.¹⁰

Ultimately, while there are cultural remnants of the Occupy movement – namely, language like "the 99%" and "the 1%," as well as the mainstreaming of ideas like the "Fight for \$15" (minumum wage) – it was never able to ignite a cohesive narrative that could sustain pressure long enough to enact any meaningful change.¹¹ There were no new consumer protections, no tax increases on capital gains, no oversight of the ultra-wealthy. Said plainly, it was a failure with regard to the aims of the activists.

The civil rights movement is proof that you need not be proximate to speak truth to power; the mistake of the Occupy movement was conflating distributed activism with distributed goals: the movement was so ill-defined that it came to represent countless grievances by countless parties. It's hard to hold power structures to account for corporate bailouts and student loans and a terrible job market and low wages all at the same time, especially when the core of your process entails indefinitely camping out in public spaces.

Both movements serve as powerful case studies for building cohesion across the domains of environment, culture, technology, and rhythm. Beyond capturing collective attention, sustaining the energy beyond an initial flashpoint requires a focused, unified effort, with common approaches, values, and language. This begs the question: What are the nuances of each domain that determine if a movement is cohesive?

10. The Tea Party movement that formed in response to the Affordable Care Act in 2009 successfully aggregated and translated its grassroots energy into seats of power at the state and federal levels and set the tone for political discourse throughout the 2010s.

11. While there have been a few noteworthy federal-level actions designed to protect the financial interests of consumers since the late 2000s – specifically the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act and the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau (CFPB) – both were enacted before the Occupy movement emerged in the fall of 2011.

PART TWO

Building Distributed Cohesion for Activists

Unlike workplaces, social movements have always been distributed across multiple geographies. In this way, distribution is not a new reality to navigate. What is new, though, is the distribution of leadership and organizational structures of social movements, novel features of activism that are increasingly birthed from (and live within) social platforms.

For example, Black Lives Matter (BLM) has embraced the idea of a “leaderful movement” in which each of us can be leaders in our own way. This isn’t semantic – BLM has thrived in no small part due to its lack of centralized governance. Any person can organize or protest in service of the movement. But without central governance, it’s even more crucial that a movement is cohesively aligned against what is shared – the narrative driving the impetus for social change.

In this section, we’ll apply our learnings from our first Off-White paper on distributed cohesion to activism, with thought starters on how the four domains of environment, culture, technology, and rhythm can contribute to a thriving and effective social movement.

Environment

12. Emotional synchrony is made possible by mirror neurons, which allow us to inhabit the emotions, sensations, and movements of those around us. When we see others sad or happy, we often feel some of that. When we see others move, we actually approximate those movements in our mind. When we see someone eat something, we can almost taste it. We are, in a sense, able to inhabit the experiences of those around us and this creates an almost emotional hive mind.

At the grassroots level, environment plays a significant role in building cohesion within a social movement. When activists have the benefit of proximity, they become connected through the phenomenon of emotional synchrony.¹² It is through shared experiences in the same places and spaces that activists build a sense of connection and solidarity with one another.

But cohesion can be built across a movement’s distributed efforts as well. Commonalities between the environments in which activism is organized and staged can meaningfully connect people in different communities to the movement beyond what might be happening in their backyard. Ultimately, the environments where activism happens become symbols that unify the narrative and inspire people in other locations to join the effort as well.

Action Step:
Synchronize places and spaces across the movement.
Places and spaces are incredibly powerful in connecting the emotions of people who come together in a shared physical environment. By establishing patterns for which physical locations to occupy across an activist movement, leaders can connect the grievances of the people in one place to the demands of those in another and drive action in a third.

The lunch counter sit-ins of the 1960s began at Woolworth’s in Greensboro, NC, led by college students at North Carolina A&T University, but soon expanded throughout the entire American South. By focusing their disparate acts of protest on a single space – department store restaurants – they created the narrative cohesion needed to amplify their cause more broadly. Lunch counters became a symbol of the injustice of segregation.

BLM is taking a similar approach in the current moment. Some of the spaces to which they’re drawing attention are the private residences of elected officials and historical monuments. Throughout the country, activists have made it a point to take their grievances regarding police brutality directly to the homes of mayors and members of Congress who have the power to enact meaningful reform. They’ve also led the charge in toppling public monuments that honor the lives and legacy of individuals whose actions have been harmful to Black people.

THOUGHT STARTERS
FOR COMMUNITY
ORGANIZERS

What are the local environments you can use to symbolically connect your local activism to the broader movement?

What types of environments best illuminate the grievances at the center of this movement?

Culture

- 13. This is great! A feature, not a bug!
- 14. [“There is a long tradition of Sunday best in the African-American community](#) dating back decades before the civil rights movement,” Mr. Ford said. “In that sense,” he said, “the organizers of the march were not playing respectability politics as much as declaring ownership over their own history.” (*The New York Times*)
- 15. A succinct quote that captures this idea well: “... So some chapters are more focussed on the education system. Some are more focused on working with sex workers who are abused. So, different chapters might take on different issues, but there is this throughline of valuing Black life and understanding that we are not a monolith but being radically inclusive in terms of chapter makeup.” —Opal Tometi, Black Lives Matter Co-Founder ([The New Yorker](#))

At its core, activism is local. While patterns of grievance often appear across the board, things that are specific to the lived experiences of particular communities often determine how activism manifests there. As such, local nuance is unavoidable in distributed activism.¹³ Culture, then, is a critical binding agent that ensures that distributed activism is not divided.

Culture is often described as “everything a group shares.” This includes values, stories, and even ways of interacting. Culture typically forms organically when groups have the luxury of proximity; establishing culture across a distributed group requires that leaders be more explicit about the ideas, values, and principles that define the movement and how they contribute to its narrative. Establishing what defines the in-group versus the out-group makes it clear to all parties — both new and existing — how to participate in the movement and how to meaningfully contribute.

The civil rights movement was built on a culture of nonviolent civil disobedience. And while many of its activists earnestly believed in these principles at first, over time some were forced to splinter and take different courses of action. You didn’t need to be a Southern Baptist to work with Martin Luther King Jr.’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference in organizing and demonstrating for the movement, but you most definitely had to be on board with nonviolence.

Action Step:
Define and drive toward a single-minded vision.
Local nuances and individual lived experiences can inadvertently let a unified vision take new interpretations, drifting among separate groups. To combat “story drift,” leaders must clearly articulate the overall purpose and vision of the movement, so that the narrative remains cohesive, irrespective of place. The efforts by BLM have had a clear vision from the outset: hold police accountable for their actions — ideally by defunding them and channeling those resources to professionals better suited for addressing public safety and community well-being (e.g., social workers, public health experts, etc.).

This doesn’t mean that there isn’t a place for local flavor and nuance. In some parts of the South for example, activists attend BLM demonstrations dressed in their Sunday best and adopt a more celebratory and joyful tone. In the cities of the Northeast, however, activists are more apt to be in casual clothing, engaging in scathing group chants, and carrying signs. Both groups are still fighting for the same thing — an end to police brutality against Black people — they’re just doing so in their own respective styles.¹⁴

The successful push to repeal New York’s 50-a is a great example of this. At demonstrations across the state, activists made one of their core demands the repeal of a statute that kept police department personnel records secret. While this particular law was specific to New York, the narrative surrounding their protest was cohesively tied to the broader BLM movement.¹⁵

THOUGHT
STARTERS FOR
COMMUNITY
ORGANIZERS

How can leaders define the local objectives of a decentralized movement?

How can leaders connect local nuance to the goals of the broader movement?

Technology

16. In the United States, police killing civilians is sadly quite common. At the midpoint of 2020, the [police have already killed over 500 people](#). George Floyd's death while in the custody of the Minneapolis Police Department was a local incident that blew up into a national one because of the bystanders who captured it on camera and shared it on social media.
17. See: the Minnesota Freedom Fund unexpectedly raising over \$30m in the immediate aftermath of George Floyd's death. This is an increasingly common occurrence ([RAICES experienced the same thing](#) in the wake of the border crisis a few years ago), as is the inevitable, foolhardy [backlash](#) about transparency and accountability. (You try figuring out what to do with \$30m when your annual donations have never exceeded \$200k!)

In the context of activism, technology's primary function is to build cohesion by mitigating distance and allowing for distributed activism to feed into a single central narrative. Activism is less concerned with getting different people in different places on the same page about how to use technology, and more interested in using technology to align and empower everybody on what they need to know and what they can do about it.

Across all successful activist movements, technology is most effective when it takes a local story that is clear and specific and amplifies it into a symbol for the larger societal issue.¹⁶ For the civil rights movement, that meant ensuring that the violent backlash to its peaceful demonstrations was captured on television for national broadcast. And for BLM, that has meant helping specific hashtags and resources trend locally and then nationally by flooding social feeds with related content and commentary.¹⁷

Whether technology is being leveraged as a signal booster, acting as a hub for distributing key updates, or serving as a watchdog to keep the powerful accountable for their actions, its value stems from its ability to connect something happening locally to a broader narrative that isn't defined by place.

Action Step:
Leverage technology to amplify important stories and maintain the movement's focus.

In a society where attention is among the scarcest of resources and news cycles run 24/7, local stories about regular people are quick to be buried and forgotten. By leveraging the power of social media to spread far beyond local awareness and generate support, activism can swell far beyond local boundaries and help connect the dots for people on bigger issues worth discussing in the mainstream.

When Michael Brown was murdered by the police in 2014, the nascent and decentralized movement self-organized and attracted activists and journalists from around the country to descend upon the tiny St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, MO. A town that few outside of that region had ever even heard of, Ferguson became the nexus of anti-police brutality protest in a matter of days and converted a lot of people from spectators into activists overnight.

Through the effective use of social media tools like Twitter, the BLM movement has meaningfully fueled distributed activism around the country and the world following local incidences of police brutality. By sharing content and resources, pooling economic resources, and engaging in real-time discourse organized through specific hashtags, the movement has managed to turn local events into inciting moments that fuel the movement's cause.

THOUGHT STARTERS FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS

- How can leaders most effectively use social tools to amplify local stories to capture national attention?
- How can organizers empower local activists to help them uncover the stories worth sharing broadly?

Rhythm

18. If you spent any time on Twitter or Instagram in the early days of the George Floyd protest, you probably saw a ton of links to [Black Lives Matter resources](#) shared by many, along with a flurry of multi-image infographics used to educate and inform on the movement. You might have also seen the [meme commentary](#).

In distributed activism, rhythm is often the most effective way to scale impact. Because activist work manifests across so many different arenas (e.g., youth programs, legal defense funds, policy advocacy, community organizing), achieving meaningful reforms requires disparate interest groups and organizations to always be on the lookout for new alliances and opportunities to coordinate with others who share their high-level goals. In doing so, they must create new rhythms that allow them to work together toward these shared goals in a way that leverages their individual strengths and processes.

With a range of different focus areas and vantage points, rhythms between activists are most often established through the media they collectively consume. The content that spreads through social networks often plays the role of lingua franca for the many people engaged in the multifaceted work of activism.¹⁸ As such, it is imperative that we build a corpus of content that keeps the movement aligned and facilitates collaboration.

Action Step:
Curate shared resources for mutual inspiration.

What we see, read, and watch affects what we're inspired to do, so it's critical that those sources stay diverse and that teams continue sharing inspiration with the rest of the group. If healthy circulation of information is stunted, disparate groups may feel that they're fighting individual battles, constantly starting from scratch.

The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) has taken this exact approach by serving as a space for Black organizations to come together to debate, discuss, and develop a shared movement-wide strategy. As an umbrella organization, M4BL creates space for all of the activist groups pushing for dif-

ferent reforms across the spectrum of the Black experience. Activism can take place in the streets or in the state house, and the hub that M4BL has created allows for each of those approaches to be aligned.

THOUGHT STARTERS
FOR COMMUNITY
ORGANIZERS

What have we learned that could be relevant or actionable for activists in other locations or domains?

How might we create ongoing artworks and documentaries to help the spread of our message?

CONCLUSION

Sustaining Energy and Making Lasting Change

A week after his murder, a video of George Floyd’s daughter Gianna went [viral](#). In the clip, she sits on a man’s shoulders, holding his hands and saying, “Daddy changed the world.” It’s emotional to watch, and underscores the story of the movement. George Floyd was murdered. In the aftermath, a new energy for activism has emerged. It is diverse, widespread, and teeming with energy, so much so, that it is difficult to fully make sense of how we got here. But regardless of what has triggered the moment we’re in, it’s undeniable that we are here.

History tells us that we still have a long way to go. While some cities are [reviewing their police budgets](#), [adjusting operating procedures](#) for responding to non-criminal 911 calls, and in some cases, [disbanding the police force entirely](#), the Black Lives Matter movement is still at odds with a significant amount of cultural inertia. Activists lose steam, allies become distracted, and good-faith contributions are often more symbolic than meaningful.

The future success of the BLM movement hinges on the ability to sustain momentum over time: to extend beyond the initial flash point of George Floyd’s murder into a cohesive, clearly defined narrative around the injustices that Black people in this country face. This is not a new fight, but it is a fight that many are willing to acknowledge for the first time. For the leaders and organizers already engaged in the fight for Black lives, building cohesion with new members of the movement will be the determining factor in the success of that fight.

- 19. The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) has a set of resources to help activists protect themselves physically and legally as they participate in direct action. Additionally, they link out to specific local organizations around the country engaged in activism work to help bring attention to their efforts and facilitate collaboration.
- 20. There has been ample, valid criticism of the cascade of changes that have happened in the wake of George Floyd’s murder. [Cities](#) have painted #BlackLivesMatter on their streets; [white celebrities](#) have stepped down from voicing Black characters; [social platforms](#) have announced a change to internal language guidelines; [realtors](#) will no longer use the term ‘master bedroom’; [COPS](#) and [Live PD](#) have been cancelled. These fall into the category of ‘nice-to-have’, and represent a shift in the cultural baseline. But for an organization that demands accountability for police departments – the re-evaluation of the institution of policing, even – what are these but distractions? It’s worth saying that there isn’t common consensus about this issue. Neither Black people nor BLM is a monolith. Many celebrate these changes.



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