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THE RHETORIC OF THE DOUBLE-VOICED: STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY IN THE SILENT

PROTEST PARADE

by

Shelby R. Crow

A thesis in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Communication Studies

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2021

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ABSTRACT

The Rhetoric of the Double-Voiced: Strategic Ambiguity in the Silent Protest Parade

by

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Utah State University, 2021

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Department: Language, Philosophy, and Communication Studies

This thesis examined strategic ambiguity in the Silent Protest Parade of 1917. The formation of the Silent Protest Parade was to illuminate racial violence and the lynchings of African Americans. The Silent Protest Parade protesters marched in complete silence, which served as a powerful overarching rhetorical strategy. By transcending the limitations of spoken language, protesters' employed other strategic forms to communicate between opposing audiences. I argued that strategic ambiguity helped the Silent Protest Parade protesters to navigate the challenge of living in a racist society.

(49 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

The Rhetoric of the Double-Voiced: Strategic Ambiguity

in the Silent Protest Parade

Shelby R. Crow

Examinations of historical social movements offer great insight into contemporary social justice activism. In this thesis, I analyzed the Silent Protest Parade of 1917. The Silent Protest Parade consisted of approximately 10,000 African American men, women, and children who marched in complete silence to illuminate racial violence and the lynchings of African Americans. I argued that through the concept of strategic ambiguity, protesters were able to communicate between African American and powerful White audiences, many of whom held racist beliefs and attitudes.

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Shelby R. Crow

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Chapter I

Introduction

The Rhetoric of the Double-Voiced: Strategic Ambiguity in the Silent Protest Paradeⁱ

During the early to mid-twentieth century, there was a substantial rise in labor tensions between African Americans and Whites. On July 1, 1917, in East St. Louis, a large White mob congregated at a predominantly African American community intending to stab and lynch as many African American men, women, and children as possible (Osofsky, 1965). After twenty-four hours of violence, the White mob cut off all water supply in the area and set fire to the community. Consequently, numerous homes owned by African Americans were burned to the ground, sometimes with the occupants still inside (Osofsky, 1965). History and race scholars suggest that the East St. Louis riot resulted in approximately 200-250 African American' deaths (Williams, 2017). The East St. Louis riot, along with the many lynchings of African Americans, led to the formation of the Silent Protest Parade (Corbould, 2007; Wilfred, 1981).ⁱⁱ

The Silent Protest Parade was organized by the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) with the help of St. Phillips Church clergy people in New York (Wilfred, 1981). In 1909, the NAACP was created by multiracial civil rights activists, such as W.E. B. Du Bois and Moorfield Storey, to raise awareness of lynchings, racist groups, and oppressive institutions. The NAACP (2021) writes that its mission is to:

[P]romote equality of rights and eradicate caste or race prejudice among citizens of the United States; to advance the interest of colored citizens; to secure for them impartial suffrage; and to increase their opportunities for securing justice in the courts, education for their children, employment according to their ability, and complete equality before the law. (Library of Congress, para. 1)

The NAACP aimed (and continues to strive) to promote political, social, and economic equality for individuals on the African American/Black identity spectrum (Blain, 2015).

The Silent Protest Parade took place on Saturday, July 28, 1917, at one p.m. in New York City with approximately 10,000 African American men, women, and children protesters. Protestors began on fifth Avenue and ended at Madison Square, which is about a two-mile endeavor (Williams, 2017). Women and girls wore long-white gowns, whereas boys wore a white shirt-pant set (Williams, 2017). Besides the men who carried drums to ensure a solid pace for the protest-parade, male protesters followed closely behind the women and children and wore black suits (Williams, 2017). The majority of the Silent Protest Parade's mission was to illuminate the lynchings of African Americans and racial violence in the South (Corbould, 2007). Organizers assumed a large urban city, such as New York City, would be an effective place to appeal to African American and powerful White audiences, many of whom held racist beliefs and attitudes. Professor of History and African American studies scholar Chad Williams (2017) called the Silent Protest Parade "a stunning spectacle" (para. 19). By demonstrating such strategic approaches, the Silent Protest Parade:

[D]eclared that a "New Negro" had arrived and launched a black public protest tradition that would be seen in the parades of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s and the Black Lives Matter marches of today. (Williams, 2017, para. 20)

Thus, the Silent Protest Parade relates to an ongoing scholarly discussion of African American rhetoric and marginalized groups that participate in social justice activism.

Throughout the Silent Protest Parade, protesters marched in complete silence, which served as a powerful overarching rhetorical strategy. Though silence seems not to speak or punctuate, marginalized social activists may employ silence to communicate more profound and subversive meanings to different audiences (Wander, 1962). While maintaining silence, protesters used various rhetorical tactics to communicate with marginalized African Americans and powerful Whites. Written mottoes that consisted of religious language were a prime form of

protesters' rhetoric. A few written mottoes read: "Pray for the Lady Macbeths," "Thou shalt not kill," and "We march because by the Grace of God and the force of truth, the dangerous, hampering walls of prejudice and inhuman injustices must fall" (Library of Congress, 2021, paras. 1-3). Given the historical racist laws and customs placed protesters at risk for racial violence. Protesters' motive was to illuminate racial inequality while also navigating racist law enforcers. Notably, the Silent Protest Parade did not appear to result in a single arrest. The protesters' rhetoric was exceptionally creative for responding to the delicate rhetorical situation of the twentieth century.

Scholars have contributed critical essays of rhetorical strategies that African Americans employ for the mere safety of their livelihoods (Bacon & McClish, 2006; Freedman, 1977; Heath, 1978; Wright, 2011). However, few have discussed other rhetorical forms that occur when there is collective silence. An examination of the Silent Protest Parade offers a new lens for understanding the intersectional constraints of advocacy and marginalization during the early-twentieth-century. Although a historical movement, attention to the Silent Protest Parade helps scholars understand contemporary social movements and more strongly appreciate and remember a significant African American protest. Griffin (1952) explains that analyzing historical social movements allow critics to "learn something more about orators—even about great orators—whom we may come to see from a new perspective, since they rarely speak except within the framework of a (social) movement" (p.188). While I recognize that racist conditions constrained protesters ability to speak, examining the Silent Protest Parade demonstrates the great lengths that marginalized social activists will go through to protest against racial inequality.

In this thesis, I argue that strategic ambiguity enabled Silent Protest Parade protesters to navigate the challenge of living in a racist society. Specifically, the use of written mottoes

conveyed subtle resistance to racist Whites: protesters' use of religious, written mottoes and protesters' use of written mottoes to illustrate African American innocence and White culpability in lynchings. Next, the leading sketch portrayed religiosity, which enabled protesters to encourage critical reflection among Christians and resist racist Whites. And finally, protesters' construction of color through clothing appealed to archetypal notions of light and darkness. In addition, as with their other rhetorical strategies, protesters' use of color and clothing signaled appeals to religiosity. Women and children were dressed in conservative, white clothing, which is associated with innocence and is typically derived from Christian doctrine (Sweeney, 2005). Through strategically ambiguous written mottoes, a powerful sketch, and use of color and clothing, Silent Protest Parade protesters were able to appeal to Whites in power while maintaining a clear resistance to white supremacy.

To explicate this argument, this thesis unfolds in four parts. In the upcoming section, I will discuss my methodology and how I approached my artifact of study. I offer a review of the academic literature on polysemy and how it impacts the rhetoric of social justice activism. While there are different types of polysemy, strategic ambiguity will be the focus. Then, I offer my analysis of the Silent Protest Parade, in which I will demonstrate how protesters demonstrated other rhetorical tactics to communicate between opposing audiences. Specifically, I suggest that written mottoes, the leading protest-parade sketch, and color and clothing combined allowed protesters' to be strategically ambiguous. Finally, I will review my thesis's implications and its relation to race and social justice activism scholarship.

Chapter II

Methodology

Rhetorical criticism is an important methodological and humanistic approach for understanding, critiquing, and making sense of our social world. While rhetorical studies have evolved from approaches, such as Neo-Aristotelian; most critics agree about the rigorous process that rhetorical criticism entails (Jasinski, 2001). Foss (2017) offers an exceptional conceptualization of rhetorical criticism. She (2017) writes:

Rhetorical critics are interested in discovering what an artifact teaches about the nature of rhetoric—in other words, critics engage in rhetorical criticism to make a contribution to rhetorical theory. Theory is a tentative answer to a question we pose as we seek to understand the world. It is a set of general clues, generalizations, or principles that explains a process or phenomenon and thus helps to answer the question we asked. (p. 7)

Rhetorical criticism serves as a thorough approach to derive meanings from existing artifacts (e.g., texts, images, words). I will be taking an ideological approach for this thesis project – specifically about how the Silent Protest Parade protesters navigated an ongoing racist, White-dominated era. Ideologies are a set of ideas and beliefs held by differing groups in society (Foss, 2017). Scholars that employ an ideological method of criticism will “look beyond the surface structure of an artifact to discover beliefs, values, and assumptions it suggests” (Foss, 2017, p. 237). I relied on a compilation of images, Silent Protest Parade flyer, newspapers, and texts for this thesis project. An image of the Silent Protest Parade was gleaned from the official NAACP (2021) website and is managed by the NAACP Foundation Board of Trustees. Other sources that I extracted images, newspapers, and texts are managed by universities or authenticated history and governmental sites. The collection of images, newspapers, and texts held enough substance for pursuing a rigorous thesis project.

Chapter III

Polysemy and the Rhetoric of Social Activism

Critics of the late twentieth century aimed to illuminate the importance of examining how rhetors appeal to multiple and possibly opposing audiences (Ceccarelli, 1998). Ceccarelli (1998) explains that “[r]ecognizing that the text with multiple meanings can represent more than the problem of miscommunication, these critics have promoted ‘polysemy’ as a theoretical construct worthy of our closest attention” (p. 396). Unlike scholarly critiques of monosemy, which examines the intended meaning of a text and “sees the viewer as ultimately passive and unable to participate in social change” (Mckerrow, 1989, p. 107), polysemy “seems to originate with the basic idea that ‘multiple meanings’ exist for a single text” (Ceccarelli, 1998, p. 396). A polysemous view of rhetoric is a valuable concept for critiquing both the multiplicity and rhetorical functions of texts. For example, Fiske (1986) claims, the production of television is inevitably polysemous due to socioeconomic class, gender, and/or race of audience members. Differing identities or social groups lead to viewers formulating differing meanings from media (Fiske, 1986). Although polysemy is necessary for rhetorical-critical work, Ceccarelli (1998) suggests that scholars need to be more specific about how they are employing the concept.

In her analysis “Polysemy: Multiple Meanings in Rhetorical Criticism,” Ceccarelli (1998) argues that scholars use polysemy in different ways. Ceccarelli (1998) offers examples of specific scholars that employ polysemy differently. Fiske (1986) states that polysemy assumes subjugated audiences have the power to resist dominant ideologies. Specifically, Fiske’s (1986) explanation of polysemy is: “Those who come to the experience from the domain of power may see only legitimization, while those subjected to power can ‘take the signifying practices and products of the dominant’ and ‘use them for different’ social purposes” (p. 399). In contrast to

Fiske's understanding, Solomon (1993) characterizes polysemy as a strategic and deliberate "instrument" for rhetors to persuade differing audiences (Ceccarelli, 1998, p. 396). In analyzing the film, *Places in the Heart*, Solomon and McMullen (1991) argue that Robert Benton, the director, played an integral role in how audiences constructed meaning. Benton designed the movie to let "viewers with disparate attitudes and ideologies... find very different meanings in it" (Solomon & McMullen, 1991, p. 341). For example, Benton used the pros and cons of feminism to demonstrate "that we are all... an uneasy composite of conflicting views and attitudes" (Solomon & McMullen, 1991, p. 351). Through polysemy, Benton appealed to a common ground between conflicting audiences.

By drawing heavily on polysemy scholarship, Ceccarelli (1998) introduces three types of polysemies: resistive reading, hermeneutic depth, and strategic ambiguity. Resistive reading occurs when audiences have partial agency to create meaning of a text, which can be a form of resistance to hegemonic (dominant) cultures (Ceccarelli, 1998).ⁱⁱⁱ Critics who engage resistive reading generally examine how audience members may resist dominant messages from mass media (Ceccarelli, 1998). Next, hermeneutic depth focuses on how audiences "should read a text" (Ceccarelli, 1998, p. 408). Scholars Rowland and Strain (1994) note that hermeneutic depth assumes that opposing audiences will engage with texts differently. For example, during her time as first lady, Michelle Obama faced many adversities given the historical nature of the role as both White and feminine. Hayden (2017) argues that Obama's maternal appeals were polysemous in that their meaning depended on the racial context in which they were interpreted. White feminists critiqued Obama's maternal rhetoric as reaffirming intensive mothering, which are institutionalized beliefs that are "profoundly oppressive to many women with children," such as "the mother must always put children's needs before her own" (Hayden, 2017, p. 16). In

contrast, African American feminists rejected this, claiming Obama's rhetoric challenged negative images of African American motherhood in contemporary media, pop culture, and politics. Strategic ambiguity is the last form of polysemy and the type focused upon in this thesis. Strategic ambiguity is created by the rhetor to ultimately unite or appeal to two or more conflicting audiences (Ceccarelli, 1998). Because of strategic, ambiguous texts, protesters can appeal to "hostile and friendly audiences" while also gaining recognition from contemporary media and news outlets (Edgerly et al., 2011, p. 314).

A primary component of rhetors using strategic ambiguity is so that audiences will derive meaning from a text in a way that (is) appealing to them" (Ceccarelli (1998, p.404). The engagement of strategic ambiguity allows "social groups to gain pleasure from their support of the text (even though that support derives from different interpretations of the text's meaning), and the 'author' (rhetor) of the text benefits from the increased popularity" (Ceccarelli, 1998, p.404). Notably, social activists that are part of dominant groups tend not to rely on social ambiguity for safety. Rhetors using strategic ambiguity is not to push one meaning but instead allow a text to be open to interpretation. Edgerly et al. (2011) offers an example of how marginalized rhetors appealed to anti-immigration, often White groups and other marginalized audiences (e.g., queer, BIPOC groups). In 2006, U.S. Republican James Sensenbrenner introduced harsh immigration laws, which provoked an array of immigrant rights protests around the U.S. The fear of what the outcome could be, (un)documented immigrants that participated in the protests relied on strategic ambiguity for precautionary measures. While protests differed slightly around the U.S., most protesters carried banners, signs, and U.S. flags. One banner read: "A new Civil Rights and workers' rights movement is on the rise" (Edgerly et al., 2011, p. 321). As these examples show, polysemy can help critics explain various rhetorical acts.

Strategic Ambiguity and African American Rhetoric

Strategic ambiguity is particularly helpful for rhetors that are part of marginalized groups, such as African Americans (Squires, 2002). The origin of African American rhetoric stems from the historical enslavement and racist conditions (Hayden, 2017). Squires (2002) describes African American rhetoric as forming “hidden counterhegemonic ideas and strategies” from powerful, racist White audiences (p. 454). Understanding these rhetorical strategies originates from the pre-emancipation Signifying Monkey narrative. The Signifying Monkey symbolizes African Americans that draw on the “ambiguity and indeterminacy of language and suggests that the oppressed can gain rhetorical power by appropriating the discourse of the oppressor” (Bacon, 1999, p. 271). For example, the Signifying Monkey is “a trickster figure” that “depends on linguistic ambiguity, irony, indirection, and implication—to trump others” (Bacon, 1999, p. 273). The Signifying Monkey anecdote is a chief feature of African American vernacular (Bacon, 1999). African Americans may use the Signifying Monkey as a rhetorical strategy to communicate to different audiences.

An understanding of African American folklore and idioms are critical for acquiring a “double-voice,” which can help African Americans coexist “between two linguistic spheres” (Bacon, 1999, p. 274). An element of strategic ambiguity is African American rhetors learning what it means to have a “double-voice,” a term coined by W.E.B. Du Bois (2008) and rooted in his concept of double-consciousness, in which he writes:

[T]o merge his (referent: African Americans) double self into a better and truer self. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being curses and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (p. 9)

A double-voice requires African Americans to also be fluent in White discourse (Houston, 2012).

In his analysis of Booker T. Washington's Atlanta compromise speech, Stob (2018) explains that contemporary scholars argue Washington's rhetoric was "ultimately detrimental to the interests of African Americans" (p. 146). However, Stob (2018) notes that Washington's oratory was not only commended by White audiences but also by African Americans. In Washington's (1895) Atlanta Exposition Address, for example, he utilized the rhetoric of hands, which foregrounds the education of head, hand, and heart when speaking to both African Americans and Whites. The rhetoric of hands is a rhetorical and nonverbal strategy:

[T]o speak out," which is typically used by African American rhetors when speaking to both African American and White audiences. The head, for instance, might signify intelligence, the eyes might signify insight, and the heart might signify compassion. (Stob, 2018, p. 149)

Washington (1895) announced to Whites that educating head, hand, and heart would allow African Americans to "buy your surplus land," to "make blossom the waste places in your fields," and to "run your factories" (para. 4). Stob (2018) argues that Washington's rhetoric simultaneously "positioned blacks as wage slaves to white overseers" as well as empowered African Americans to appear respectful to Whites (p.157). Consequently, African Americans "would be able to buy land, forming a new generation of owners; ... they would be able to move into the factories of industrial America, not simply as laborers but as managers" (Stob, 2018, p. 157) Stob's (2018) analysis offers an example of how African American rhetors convey significant messages to both African American and White audiences.

Being proficient in both African American and White discourse can be a strong rhetorical strategy to appeal and navigate the pressures of opposing audiences (Bacon & McClish, 2006). Differing audiences usually consist of powerful White cisgender males that instill contribute to

instilling white superiority in America and those in marginalized groups (e.g., African Americans) (Bacon & McClish, 2006). In 1779, enslaved African Americans petitioned for liberation rights to the White male governors of Fairfield County, Connecticut. Bacon and McClish (2006) write that enslaved African Americans referred to themselves as “Humble Petitioners” who “beseech,” “entreat,” and “look up to” the “fathers of the People” (p. 6). While African Americans attempt to resist racial oppression, they also realize the futility of appealing to powerful White audiences (Bacon & McClish, 2006). As McClish and Bacon (2006) state, to try and abolish slavery in the South, African Americans made sure to include the White southern audiences because they are “likely to be more receptive to an African-American interlocutor” (p. 325). African American rhetors typically focus on diluting racial equality messages to appeal to all audiences (Ceccarelli, 1998; Meyer, 2007).

In the context of social activism, a double-voice can often be demonstrated by using satire and irony. Because African American often rhetoric relies on strategic ambiguity to appear respectful to Whites to stay safe, African American rhetors will employ irony as a way to protect themselves while also calling-out racial inequality (Wright, 2001). Summer (2016) explains that “satire hides its intentions behind a veil of foolishness or absurdity while attempting a coercion that negates its ethical potential...[which] represents lost faith in an audience” (p. 310). Similarly, as Terrill (2003) discusses, “irony does not ask that one thing be seen in terms of another, or that one thing represent another...Rather, it asks that two or several things be presented before the auditor in the same place at the same time” (p. 228). Wright (2001) argues that irony is crucial for traditional, marginalized social activists because it offers contradictions to audiences. Contradictions can either be a form of subversion to hegemonic groups or mere

humor to other oppressed groups. Thus, irony and satire are a form of signification, which is “to say something without saying it, to leave meaning indeterminate” (Wright, 2001, p. 98).

Strategic Ambiguity in the Rhetoric of Silence and Religion

Given the difficulties of appealing to multiple audiences, marginalized rhetors have historically relied upon the polysemous potential of silence and appeals to religion (Ivie, 2011; Minifee, 2013; Pearce, 2000). Specifically, Scott (1972) argues, the ambiguous nature of silence and religion “is an invitation to push a certain meaning as well as an opportunity for others to make meaning” (p. 155). Watson (2011) further notes that the relationship between silence and religion “stems from the identity of the medieval Christian God” (p. 44). Identifiers within the Christian community tend to assert authority to one God, wherein acts of silence symbolize humility (Watson, 2011). Silence can be more difficult to discern than spoken language (Glen, 2004) and “can take on multiple roles, perhaps even multiple roles at once” (Brown, 2018, p. 61). Silence is a nonverbal and sometimes religious performance. Perceptions of silence depend on audiences and act as an expression of resistance to a hegemonic culture and obedience to that same culture (Brummett, 1980; Scott, 1972). Burke (1984) argues that “one introduces new principles [through ambiguous language] while theoretically remaining faithful to old principles” (p. 229).

Polysemous appeals are critical for African American rhetors to confront racial barriers while also averting punishment from powerful, racist Whites. In his analysis, “Towards a Theory of Silence as a Political Strategy,” Brummett (1980) explains that silence is a rhetorical strategy to appear respectful to oppressors. In contrast, Heath (1978) writes that silence can “show a refusal to identify or continue to conform with the dominant ideology” (p. 387). While silence may in part be an act of resistance against hegemony, Cloud (1999) also notes silence “may be a

survival strategy” (p. 182). For example, in an analysis of a neo-slave narrative, African American protagonist Ursa Corregidora’s safest form of resistance to “the alien talk of masculine violence” and “white violence” was through silence, which was also interpreted as a willful submission to White men (Cognard-Black, 2001, p. 54). Cognard-Black (2001) highlights how neo-slave narratives are transferred to act as a catalyst for African American rhetoric.

Like silence, religious rhetoric can be ambiguous. Selby (2001) argues that religion granted African American rhetors “a sense of direction and progress, and envisioned the goal toward which their journey would inevitably lead” (p. 88). Religious appeals that are ambiguous can “attract followers and defend their movements all at the same time” (Pearce, 2000, p. 90). McClish and Bacon (2006) explain how African American activist, Daniel Coker, scrutinized Western beliefs on slavery by using biblical references to “convey complex meanings, [and] exploit linguistic tensions and ambiguities” (p. 320). McClish and Bacon (2006) express that Coker’s religious strategies enticed those who were pro-enslavement by conveying that all humans are created equal. Coker argued that Jesus differentiated between humans and livestock; therefore, African Americans should not be owned or given unequal rights to a White man (McClish & Bacon, 2006). Consequently, Coker’s historical text adds to scholarly understandings of polysemy as a rhetorical form.

Because Western beliefs foreground Christian doctrines, contemporary scholars continue to examine how social activists continue to employ religious rhetoric (Brown, 2011). As Brown (2011) describes, African Americans “continue to recognize Black churches as one of few institutions wholly dedicated to the spiritual, emotional, and social-political betterment of Blacks” (p. 304). In 1955, Martin Luther King Jr. held the role of a prophetic and religious leader who implemented ambiguity into his racial equality speeches, which ultimately furthered the

Civil Rights Movement in the United States (Selby, 2001). Selby (2001) explains that religion played an important role in King's rhetoric in creating identification with those in power while raising awareness of racist ideologies. For African American rhetors, religious appeals are more about revealing racist social structures rather than encouraging Christian ideologies.

African American activists that integrate either silence or religion into their rhetorical appeals can help persuade those in power to effect progressive policy change (Cloud, 1999; Eisenberg, 1984). In 1960, students at Bennet College (a historically black women's college) organized silent sit-ins to demonstrate resistance to the ongoing racial segregation in the United States. Because Christianity is pertinent to Western culture, religion was central to the formation of silent sit-ins (Brown, 2018). Before the first silent sit-in occurred, Bennett women would meet with a clergyman to emphasize "Godly" ways of confronting racial inequalities (e.g., silence). Although Bennett women's public commemoration is absent in the Civil Rights Center due to gender inequities, they influenced did influence other silent sit-ins, which contributed to "achieving equality and justice in Greensboro and across the country" (Brown, 2018, p. 60). Social activism does not necessarily lead to the popularity of marginalized rhetors.

Using Visuals and Strategic Ambiguity in Social Activism

Varied rhetorical strategies, such as visuals, help rhetors achieve strategic ambiguity. Visual rhetoric—which includes sounds, colors, forms, images, banners, and signs, has the power to symbolize a multitude of meanings, even in a distinct culture. Visuals' versatility is conceptualized as a form of non-discursive rhetoric that escapes the constraints of discursive rhetoric (Caivano & Lopez, 2010; Foss, 1986). Yangzom (2016) argues that visual rhetoric in social activism:

[I]s essential to movements; how groups negotiate and maintain boundary through dress; and how the embodiment of dress itself alters political space and civic discourse is imperative to understanding how resistance is performed in creating social change. (p.623)

While Yangzom (2016) offers a close examination of a specific visual - clothing - in social movements, he also draws critical implications of clothing in conjunction with color. Social activists that rely on the ambiguity of clothing and color is a form of protest in an “unthreatening manner” (Yangzom, 2016, p.623). Marginalized social activists that use visuals as a rhetorical strategy can act of subversion and compliance to powerful, often White groups. Consequently, audiences are often forced to assign meaning from other cultural, ideological manifestations because of visuals’ paradox and ambiguity. Visual rhetoric in social activism is an important rhetorical tactic for illuminating social issues in ways that appeal to different groups of people.

The performance of African American rhetoric may differ. However, constituting African American rhetoric often depends on navigating racist groups and violence. The Silent Protest Parade offers an exemplar of how marginalized social activists demonstrate collectivity to advocate for racial equality.

Chapter IV

Conveying Subservience and Resistance in the Silent Protest Parade

The Silent Protest Parade protestors employed strategic ambiguity to appeal to African American and White audiences. Utilizing strategic ambiguity allowed protestors to maintain their overarching rhetorical strategy: silence. Cloud (1999) explains that although marginalized protestors will employ silence for safety, they will employ other types of subversive rhetoric to address social issues. In the case of the Silent Protest Parade, protestors used other communicative forms, such as written and visual communication, to communicate while

maintaining their silence. More specifically, protesters carried banners with various mottoes, placed a sketch at the forefront of the protest-parade, and used specific colors and clothing attire. Such rhetorical strategies were crucial for appealing to opposing audiences. While African American audiences are a diverse group, the protesters' rhetoric was essential for uniting African Americans' current realities during the early-twentieth-century (e.g., racist policies, customs, lynchings). Protesters engaged with creative and rhetorically ambiguous strategies to navigate the contentious situation while making efforts to protect their livelihoods from powerful, racist Whites. An examination of the Silent Protest Parade helps scholars explain the nuances of how marginalized social activists navigate the constraints of advocacy.

Written Communication

Mottoes

Protesters employed strategic ambiguity by displaying mottoes to transcend the limitations of spoken language. Mottoes are synonymous with slogans, which are “imperative statements ...they are single words or short phrases with the imperative mood strongly implied” (Bowers & Ochs, 1971, p.22). Mottoes can either be written, such as on a banner or sign, or expressed through spoken language. Mottoes allow versatility for a rhetors' delivery and allows for open interpretation; mottoes are a useful rhetorical form for strategic ambiguity. Denton (1980) explains that one motto serves many functions and will tell different narratives depending on the audience. Hungerford (2015) refers to the use of mottoes in social justice activism as “[representing] contradictions regarding the forces of hegemonic authority and an oppressed voice of resistance” (p.104). Marginalized activists often rely on written forms of mottoes to demonstrate resistance to hegemonic groups while promoting an allyship with marginalized

groups (Hungerford, 2015). Silent Protest Parade protesters marched with a variety of different mottoes on both big and small banners. As opposed to spoken communication, written mottoes may suggest more of a denotative meaning at the forefront. However, I argue that protesters' utilizing strategic ambiguity unveils how written mottoes can contain powerful subversive meanings. Protesters demonstrated two recurring themes for showing how written mottoes convey subtle resistance to racist Whites: protesters' use of religious, written mottoes and protesters' use of written mottoes to illustrate African American innocence and White culpability in lynchings.

Throughout the protest-parade, protesters constructed most written mottoes by emphasizing one of the United States' constitutional beliefs: Christian and biblical references. Some examples of Christian, written mottoes that were carried throughout the protest-parade were: "We have Church property worth 76,000,000," "Unto the last of my brethren," "Mothers, do lynchers go to heaven?", and "The great contradiction – the love of God and hatred of man" (Martin, 1917, para. 4-47). The U.S. government leaders were primarily White and emphasized Christian doctrine throughout the constitution, traditional political deliberation, and laws. Foregrounding written mottoes in Christianity served as an advantage for appealing to White audiences. Specifically, such religious rhetoric appealed to U.S. Christian values, which were often instituted by Whites.

Protesters' construction of religious mottoes also reinforced male-dominating language. The Silent Protest Parade's focus was not necessarily about promoting gender but racial equality. It is unknown if protesters used male language as a generic form to include everyone. However, I argue that it was a powerful rhetorical strategy to appeal to powerful White, Christian males. Megarry (2017) explains that women social activists are more subject to "male interjections and

harassment” if a submissive role is not performed (p. 1071). Examples of these types of mottoes said: “The great contradiction—the love of God and hatred of man” “A square deal for every man,” and “The world owes no man living, but every man an opportunity to earn a living” (Martin, 1917, para. 8- 44). Conventional teachings of Christian vernacular often neglected feminist pronouns, such as she, her, and herself (Ono & Sloop, 1992). Women protesters showed compliance with expectations for women during the early-twentieth-century and specific biblical chapters, like 1 Peter 3:1 and Titus 2:3-5. Mottoes that simultaneously situated in Christianity and male superiority was beneficial for appealing to Christian men. Engaging with Christian doctrine and gendered language challenged White supremacy while reinforcing patriarchy. Protesters’ rhetoric highlighted that citizen rights primarily should depend on gender and not race.

Other written mottoes emphasized African Americans’ innocence and White culpability in recent lynchings and racial violence. Examples of written mottoes that highlighted African Americans’ innocence read: “Your hands are full of blood,” “Race prejudice is the offspring of ignorance and the mother of lynching,” and “The Negro has never betrayed the flag, attempted to assassinate the President or any official of this government” (Martin, 1917, para. 27-46). Protesters’ use of these written mottoes functioned to persuade Whites to reflect on their participation in racial violence and lynchings. Integrating biblical vernacular and parts of the constitution was also a significant part of subversion in protesters’ rhetoric. One motto highlighted one of the biblical commandments: “Thou (Whites) shalt not kill” (Martin, 1917, para. 4). The ten commandments are “idealized guidelines” that Christians are expected to ethically follow throughout the duration of their existence on Earth to be subject to an afterlife (Ali & Gibbs, 1998, p. 1553). Another written motto stated: “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their Creator with certain

unalienable rights. That among those are LIFE, LIBERTY and the pursuit of HAPPINESS” (Martin, 1917, para. 15). In the U.S. Declaration of Independence, the referent “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights” emphasizes a type of natural right that is fundamental to every human and cannot be impeded on by the law or government. The latter half of the motto, “Life, Liberty, and Happiness,” was the bedrock of Abraham’s Lincoln Gettysburg Address. Protesters not only exposed how the logic of white supremacy is inherently flawed but also held White Christians accountable for committing racist acts and killings.

Protesters’ use of written mottoes played on satire and irony, which further enabled them to creatively highlight African Americans’ innocence while maintaining silence. Donoghue and Fisher (2008) suggest that such language by marginalized rhetors often “[critique] a reality with wit, irony and sarcasm. With satire, irony and sarcasm become ‘militant,’ often times professing to approve the very things we actually wish to attack (oppressive institutions, laws, and customs)” (p. 232). In the Silent Protest Parade, an African American protester invoked ironic language through a banner referencing Shakespeare. The motto read: “Pray for the Lady Macbeth’s of East St Louis” (NAACP memorandum, 1917, para. 44). Lady Macbeth is an important character from one of William Shakespeare’s plays during the seventeenth-century, in which she plays a role in encouraging her husband to commit regicide. Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband with remarkable effectiveness, overriding all his objections; when he hesitates to murder, she repeatedly questions his manhood until he feels that he must commit murder to prove himself (Chamberlain, 2005).

The parallel between the fictional character, Lady Macbeth, and the “Lady Macbeth’s” of East St. Louis refers to the White women that stood on the street sides and cheered for White men to lynch and set fire to a predominately African American community in East St. Louis

(Meier, 2017). Protesters placed “pray” and “Lady Macbeth” in the same written motto, which is an act of subversion. Using “pray” in conjunction with “Lady Macbeth” emphasized White women condoning murder. Because of the verse “Thou shalt not kill,” protesters’ rhetoric is ironic because it showed White women breaking the laws of Christian doctrine. In the Shakespeare play, Lady Macbeth was constructed as intrinsically evil, which perpetuates the reality that the women of East St. Louis were also, in fact, innately evil. In this motto, protesters’ rhetoric also highlighted African Americans’ knowledge about historical poetry, theater etiquette, and poets. Hall (2021) argues that the exclusion of African Americans being taught about Shakespeare is “inextricably linked to the experiences of slavery, freedom, Jim Crow segregation, and the battle for equal rights” (para. 1). Protesters’ example of Macbeth illuminated White women culpability in the East St. Louis riot.

Next to the “Pray for the Lady Macbeth’s of East St Louis” motto was another sign that said: “Mothers, do lynchers go to heaven?” (Martin, 1917, para. 54). Protesters ironically combined the words “mothers,” “lynchers,” and “heaven.” Identifying Christians are taught that committing murder is both illegal and a biblical transgression. Protesters’ rhetoric acts as a reminder to Whites that they not only broke a commandment of the Christian God but are reminded about the heaven/hell dichotomy. By strategically constructing the written motto as touching on biblical vernacular, lynchers, and mothers, protesters also questioned White, Christian mothers’ childrearing practices. This type of ironic language does not necessarily demand an answer but illuminates how White, Christian mothers’ childrearing beliefs are incongruent with biblical teachings. Thus, biblical verses, such as “thou shalt not kill” in conjunction with white supremacy and lynchings, cannot reside together.

Protesters' rhetoric demonstrated the exhaustive lengths that go into the protection of marginalized social activists. Using written mottoes was a powerful rhetorical strategy for simultaneously avoiding punishment, integrating subversive meanings, and inculcating racist Whites. Royster and Cochran (2011) explain that African American women activists over time have "linked their own futures to the future of all human beings and who have linked, as well, their own social obligations for action to the global human enterprise" (p.228). African American rhetors may approach social justice activism differently; however, the end goal is often too similar: to remain safe from racist groups and be considered equal to their White counterparts. As Royster and Cochran (2011) conclude, African American social activists "are endowed with the dignity of being human and innately deserving of universal human rights" (p.228).

Visual Communication

In addition to written mottoes, visual images were a chief component of the Silent Protest Parade protesters' rhetoric. Visuals as a rhetorical strategy help "tap into the shared visual knowledge of the society they [social activists] are rooted in" (Doerr et al., 2013, p. 3). Doerr et al. (2013) further explains that visuals "lies at the center of protest tactics" (p.3). Employing visuals can help social activists communicate to various audiences (Doerr et al., 2013). Protesters used visuals to not only maintain their silence but also to demonstrate resistance and subservience. Two specific visuals are showcased throughout the protest-parade: a leading sketch and particular colors through clothing attire.

Leading sketch

At the forefront of the protest-parade was a unique black and white sketch displayed on a large banner. The sketch was done by political cartoonist and commentator William Charles

Morris. Besides being the only sketch presented, the sketch was confiscated at the beginning of the protest-parade by police officers. Though it is unclear why the sketch was removed, it undoubtedly had to do with its persuasive potency. Specifically, the sketch proliferated throughout traditional media even after the protest-parade ended. I argue that the sketch played a crucial role in depicting the East St. Louis riot's reality. The sketch still circulates in contemporary archives that speak to the Silent Protest Parade (Blackbird, 2021; Hellraisers Journal, 2017; NAACP, 2021). These facts illustrate the sketch's importance.

This sketch assumes to be both a referent of the East St. Louis riot while also pleading to Whites in power to take action to curb oppression of African Americans, like President Wilson. The sketch showed a troubled African American woman on her knees with her eyes closed and arms parallel to the ground. She also had two small children close to her. On their knees, one child had their face buried in their palms while the other child is standing and holding the African American woman's waist (See Figure 1). A side angle of President Woodrow Wilson is also depicted in the sketch. He shows a rather grim facial expression while holding up a fist with one hand and a slightly crumpled piece of paper that reads: "The World Must Be Safe For Democracy" in his other hand (New York History, 2021). Off on the horizon, the sketch showed flames and buildings with the words: "East St. Louis" (New York History, 2021).

This particular sketch portrayed religiosity, which enabled protesters to encourage critical reflection among Christian and resist racist White audiences. One of the most apparent demonstrations of Christianity is the woman kneeling. History scholars often highlight kneeling as a Christian, performative act of showing humility. Rios (2015) visits the connection between kneeling and humility through one bible verse in particular. He (2015) recites Philippians 2:2-3 (2021), which states: "[C]omplete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love,

being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (para. 1). In addition to her kneeling, the woman’s arms are open, and her palms face forward. Embracing open arms is both a vulnerable and sacrificial position often tied to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Rios, 2015). Religious scholars explain that Jesus on the cross with his arms open is a test of ultimate sacrifice (Lumsden, 2010; Tinajero, 2013). The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was considered sacrificial yet admirable for the longevity of the “Body (humankind) of Christ” (Rios, 2015, p. 14). Beyond the sketch’s demonstration of religiosity, it conveys African Americans’ vulnerability and lynchings as an unwanted form of sacrifice. In particular, the Christian God is the ultimate figure who determines who is to be sacrificed, not powerful, racist Whites. This is apparent in 1 Samuel 2:6, which reads: “The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up” (para. 1). The woman on her knees also displayed unwanted sacrifice by bowing down to someone in power as a means for help. Thus, this holds essential reflections for Christian, racist Whites and their violence against African Americans.



Figure 1. *East St. Louis Sketch*

Protesters' use of this sketch subtly emphasized implicit resistance— particularly with the woman on her knees and chest and arms open while looking up to President Wilson. By showing a woman on her knees reaffirmed white superiority and African American inferiority. The portrayal of the woman holds subtle subversive meanings. On April 02, 1917, Wilson declared a war against Germany. In his speech, he said “The world must be safe for democracy” (British Library, 2021, para. 3). Wilson spoke about the world being “safe for democracy,” but it implicitly does not include African Americans. The lynchings and racial violence that Wilson refused to address implied safety for only White citizens. An African American writer, orator, and political activist, Hubert Harrison, wrote about Wilsons' hypocrisy and the East St. Louis riots. He (1917) said: “Negro's contention in the court of public opinion is that until this nation itself is made safe for twelve million of its subjects the Negro, at least, will refuse to believe in the democratic assertions of the country” (para. 1).

This sketch offered many subversive connotations. One of the most powerful meanings derived is that it undeniably blames Whites for lynchings and racial violence. While assigning blame, protesters' do not forget their lack of place and power in a racist society. It was important to highlight African Americans' subservience to Whites for protection. Asking for help requires Whites to face their complicity with racism. Whites – especially racist Whites, made it nearly impossible for African Americans to hold positions of power. Thus, Whites' providing protection was crucial for the livelihoods and future of African Americans.

Protesters placing this sketch at the forefront of the protest-parade highlighted the powerfulness of strategic ambiguity. This sketch simultaneously encouraged two identifications: identification between African American audiences and the kneeling woman, and between White

audiences and Wilson. Integrating the sketch was a creative strategy for illuminating racism while also strategically appealing to racist Whites.

Colors and clothing

Protesters displayed two colors of clothing throughout the protest-parade: black and white. Clothing was coordinated according to other classifications, particularly gender and age. Women and children protesters were clothed in either a white dress or white shirt-pant set. Marching behind were men dressed in all black suits. The cohesive nature of color and articles of clothing stems from the protest-parade organizers. Most African American protesters were recruited primarily through African American/Black churches (NAACP, 2021). To reach African American audiences outside of the church, Primary executive and protestor Reverend Dr. Charles Martin produced a flyer to have posted around New York days before the protest-parade. Martin (1917) offers an explicit explanation of the protest-parade attire. The flyer says: says: “The Children will lead the parade followed by the Women in White...[t]he laborer – the professional man...will march on foot to the beat of muffled drums” (para. 3). Gibson et al. (2015) explains that a professional man necessitates black suits, specifically within the early-twentieth-century. The unification and large number of protesters illustrated a powerful performance that could not be overlooked.

Demonstrating physical notions of light and darkness appears in different ways. variously. Particularly, protesters’ construction of color through clothing appealed to archetypal notions of light and darkness. Osborn (1967) explains that the portrayal of light and dark will unintentionally speak beyond the intended audience. Light “relates to the fundamental struggle for survival and development. With light...one is informed with his environment, can escape its dangers” (p.3). Darkness contrasts with light and is a visual representation that conveys darkness

and fear, “making one ignorant of his environment” (Osborn, 1967, p.3). Light and darkness are often expressed through the colors: white and black (Osborn, 1967). Protesters’ use of white and black illuminated African Americans’ deaths while also proposing a better future is to come.

Protesters used color to juxtapose light and darkness. The color black often serves as a representation of death and mourning. Having male protesters dress in black signaled mourning for the large number of African Americans’ lives lost at the hands of powerful, racist Whites. Not including the East St. Louis riot, lynchings were also happening across the country in places such as Waco, Texas, and Memphis, Tennessee. In 1916, seventeen-year-old Jesse Washington allegedly raped and killed a White woman, Lucy Fryer. After Washington’s conviction, White observers grabbed Washington, chained him up, and stabbed him profusely (NAACP, 2021). Washington was ultimately lynched in front of Waco’s city hall. In the early-twentieth-century, White mobs would host events to publicize African Americans’ lynchings (NAACP, 2021). The significant number of male protesters illuminated lynchings and made it impossible for Whites to refute the apparent racial violence in the U.S.

Protestors wearing black and white clothing also appealed to notions of past and present. Darkness was conveyed through black suits, whereas women and children protesters wearing white at the front of the protest-parade acted as a representation of light. Osborn (1967) explains that it is inevitable that with darkness, there will soon come light. Like seasons, there will be varying degrees of hot and cold. Osborn (1967) writes, “the extreme variations in heat and cold, all give seasonal contrasts a complex and powerful potential for symbolizing value judgments rising from hope and despair, fruition and decay” (p.10). By positioning dark behind light, protesters illuminated lynchings and racial violence and foreshadowed a reality of racial equality. In the 1917 flyer, Martin writes that “We march because we want our children to live in a better

land and enjoy fairer conditions than have fallen to our lot” (para. 4). Protesters displaying the color black acted as a reminder that the stories of racial violence and African American lynchings’ would not be forgotten. In addition, protesters illustrated a potential future of White and African American civility.

As with their other rhetorical strategies, protesters’ use of color and clothing signaled appeals to religiosity. Women and children were dressed in conservative, white clothing, which is associated with innocence and is typically derived from Christian doctrine (Sweeney, 2005). Revelation 19:8 says “And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (ESV, para. 1). The expression of white in the Christian bible holds gendered connotations; it also focuses on the innocence of children and how they are a gift from the Christian God. Psalm 127: 3-5 states:

Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court. (ESV, para. 1)

The symbolism of white clothing is an appeal to Christians. Bunyasi and Smith (2019) refer to Barbara Reynolds’ *Washington Post* article, an African American author, ordained minister, and journalist who speaks to the rhetoric of responsibility. Protesters’ rhetoric adheres to the rhetoric of responsibility, which is “particular behavior and personal comportment, including proper dress, as tools of resistance” (Bunyasi & Smith, 2019, p.189). Protesters appealed to Christian/gender norms through their constructs of color and clothing, which helped them advance their social justice agenda.

Protesters rejected spoken language in the Silent Protest Parade and instead employed verbal (i.e., mottoes) and visual communication (i.e., leading sketch, color, and clothing) as an alternative path for communication. Protesters’ rhetorical approach enabled them to advocate for

racial equality while also navigating the dangers of resisting powerful, racist audiences. The ambiguity afforded by their silence and visual and written communication helped protesters confront the challenges of the early-twentieth-century by conveying subservience and resistance between opposing audiences.

Chapter V

Conclusions

Highlighting historical narratives of African Americans is crucial for understanding contemporary racism. Scholars who do not consider past stories of African Americans/Blacks miss out on significant parts of modern rhetorical discourse. In addition, including past stories of the subaltern challenges the pattern of forgetting them. Pearl (2000) argues that there will be an attempt to eradicate African American narratives that highlight the racist history of the U.S. because it threatens White's power. Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a contemporary social movement organized by three Black women, two of who identify as queer. The board President of BLM, Patrisse Khan-Cullors (2021) explains, that "Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum" (para. 2) and privileged folks need to take charge to remind the world of Black historical and present-day stories. Cullors (2021) writes on the *Black Lives Matter* website that such action will demonstrate African American/Black "everlasting contributions" to the U.S. and demand to no longer be "left out the political process" (para. 6).

The preceding analysis has demonstrated how the Silent Protest Parade protesters' rhetoric contributed to racial justice. Despite racial violence, policies, and lynchings, protesters showed creative tactics to illuminate racist White's culpability while ensuring their safety. Religious rhetoric was a critical part of protesters' protection. The ambiguity of religious rhetoric

helped protesters appeal to U.S. foundational beliefs and Christian, sometimes racist Whites. This analysis further indicates how the rhetorical form, silence, does not hinder marginalized rhetors but instead offers an alternative path to social justice activism. Written mottoes, the leading protest-parade sketch, and colors and clothing combined portrayed resistance and subservience. The interpretation of these rhetorical strategies depended on the audience; thus, strategic ambiguity was particularly useful for protesters.

There has been a significant lack of rhetorical analyses that examine the Silent Protest Parade. In contrast, there have been many analyses of the Silent Sentinels protest of 1917 (Godfrey, 2020; Palczewski, 2011; Stillion-Southard, 2007). The Silent Sentinels was a primarily White women suffragists' movement that fought for the right to vote. While analyses of the Silent Sentinels protest deserve attention, I argue that the Silent Protest Parade has been overlooked and relates to an ongoing discussion of how contemporary racism continues to manifest. The Silent Protest Parade is referenced for laying the bedrock of recent anti-racist movements (NAACP, 2021; Williams, 2017), necessitating more close examinations.

The analysis of the Silent Protest Parade protesters' silence relates to an ongoing discussion among social movement scholars and scholars of polysemy, specifically strategic ambiguity. Ceccarelli (1998) explains that "sometimes the case that strategic ambiguity helps maintain a social order that is oppressive to one or more marginalized groups" (p. 409). However, scholarly examinations of social movements need to consider the identity of social activists. Strategic ambiguity may open a space for marginalized activists to illuminate social issues without punishment from hegemonic, powerful groups. The protest-parade's primary organizer stated that "We march because we want our children to live in a better land and enjoy fairer conditions than have fallen to our lot" (Martin, 1917, para. 4). Strategic ambiguity was

incredibly pertinent to the protester's rhetoric because of Whites' continuous rejection of African Americans' rights to racial justice and community safety. While employing strategic ambiguity may not necessitate immediate social justice, I argue that it transcends beyond surface-level social change. Protesters' utilizing strategic ambiguity illuminated systemic racism and oppression, which provoked protests and further opened up discussions within spaces of power for years to come (NAACP, 2021).

I recognize that the African American community should not have to craft their rhetoric to appeal to powerful White groups. An analysis of the Silent Protest Parade offers a glimpse into the harsh reality and rhetorical situation facing this community. Also, looking at the Silent Protest Parade broadens scholars' understandings of social activists that concern safety during the act of protest. White social activists do not have to navigate the unfortunate reality of African Americas in the U.S. When examining social movements, scholars should first critically reflect on whether social activists' rhetorical strategies are crafted because they have status or power (Hatzisavvidou, 2015). Though there is no rhetorical strategy that is superior for all social activists, scholars should pay close attention to whether rhetors' identity is more valued and protected in society. As Hatzisavvidou (2015) writes, the rhetoric of marginalized social activists "create opportunities for debate and they animate the possibilities for public discourse and therefore expand argumentation" (p.512).

Despite racial advancement since the Silent Protest Parade, contemporary African Americans/Black activists experience similar fears during protest. Mann (2020) refers to Christopher Coles, an activist, and poet in Rochester, which he said during a Black protest to Whites: "This is not a video game. For some of you all that come here, you come because it's an elective. We come because it's survival" (para.1). Further, the BLM website calls for African

Americans/Blacks to review safety tips before protesting. BLM leaders (2021) write: “prepare a plan, stay safe, and look out for one another, always. #WeKeepUsSafe, and together, WE will end white supremacy” (para. 1). Historical and contemporary understandings of African American/Black social justice activism often encourage caution and strategic rhetoric to remain safe when appealing to powerful people in power, particularly Whites. Future scholarship could examine how contemporary BLM activists navigate this type of tension during social justice activism.

There is tremendous pressure on African American/Black rhetors to be the sole catalyst of social change, particularly in the context of racial equality. In 1918, the Dyer Anti-lynching bill was introduced, which was “An act to assure to persons within the jurisdiction of every State the equal protection of the laws and to punish the crime of lynching” (NAACP, 2021, para. 3). However, the bill was soon halted by an individual in the senate (Masur, 2018). It took over 100 years to finally go into writing to pass the Justice for Lynching Act. African Americans/Blacks have spent hundreds of years crafting rhetoric in hopes for racial equality and justice. Challenging systemic racism requires privileged folks to release power and open up spaces so that African Americans’/Blacks’ stories can be told.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Disclaimer* The Silent Protest Parade could have appealed to other marginalized groups. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I will be focusing on a specific marginalized group, being African American audiences. In addition, I will use the referent 'African Americans.' Although I recognize that not all audiences were African Americans, the historical context and literature uses "African Americans" but could also include Black audiences from other continents. Disclaimer* It is important to note that protesters' rhetoric highlighted how ambiguity operates on a spectrum. While not all banners and signs consisted of ambiguous language, I argued that the protesters' utilization of strategic ambiguity opened up the discursive space to integrate more explicit statements. Disclaimer* I recognize that I offered a contemporary perspective when examining the Silent Protest Parade. It was difficult to find historical interpretations of this protest-parade; however, I argue that this did not detract from the findings of my research.

ⁱⁱ Historically, the Silent Protest Parade was first referred to as the "Negro Silent Protest Parade."

ⁱⁱⁱ Hegemony refers to "the cultural, intellectual, and moral direction exercised by the dominant classes over other classes" (Becker, 1984, p. 69).