I created #BlackLivesMatter with Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, two of my sisters, as a call to action for Black people after 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was posthumously placed on trial for his own murder and the killer, George Zimmerman, was not held accountable for the crime he committed. It was a response to the anti-Black racism that permeates our society and also, unfortunately, our movements.

Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.

We were humbled when cultural workers, artists, designers and techies offered their labor and love to expand #BlackLivesMatter beyond a social media hashtag. Opal, Patrisse, and I created the infrastructure for this movement project—moving the hashtag from social media to the streets. Our team grew through a very successful Black Lives Matter ride, led and designed by Patrisse Cullors and Darnell L. Moore, organized to support the movement that is growing in St. Louis, MO, after 18-year old Mike Brown was killed at the hands of Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson. We’ve hosted national conference calls focused on issues of critical importance to Black people working hard for the liberation of our people. We’ve connected people across the country working to end the various forms of injustice impacting our people. We’ve created space for the celebration and humanization of Black lives.

The Theft of Black Queer Women’s Work

As people took the #BlackLivesMatter demand into the streets, mainstream media and corporations also took up the call, #BlackLivesMatter appeared in an episode of Law & Order:
SVU in a mash up containing the Paula Deen racism scandal and the tragedy of the murder of Trayvon Martin.

Suddenly, we began to come across varied adaptations of our work—all lives matter, brown lives matter, migrant lives matter, women’s lives matter, and on and on. While imitation is said to be the highest form of flattery, I was surprised when an organization called to ask if they could use “Black Lives Matter” in one of their campaigns. We agreed to it, with the caveat that a) as a team, we preferred that we not use the meme to celebrate the imprisonment of any individual and b) that it was important to us they acknowledged the genesis of #BlackLivesMatter. I was surprised when they did exactly the opposite and then justified their actions by saying they hadn’t used the “exact” slogan and, therefore, they deemed it okay to take our work, use it as their own, fail to credit where it came from, and then use it to applaud incarceration.

I was surprised when a community institution wrote asking us to provide materials and action steps for an art show they were curating, entitled “Our Lives Matter.” When questioned about who was involved and why they felt the need to change the very specific call and demand around Black lives to “our lives,” I was told the artists decided it needed to be more inclusive of all people of color. I was even more surprised when, in the promotion of their event, one of the artists conducted an interview that completely erased the origins of their work—rooted in the labor and love of queer Black women.

Pause.

When you design an event / campaign / et cetera based on the work of queer Black women, don’t invite them to participate in shaping it, but ask them to provide materials and ideas for next steps for said event, that is racism in practice. It’s also hetero-patriarchal. Straight men, unintentionally or intentionally, have taken the work of queer Black women and erased our contributions. Perhaps if we were the charismatic Black men many are rallying around these days, it would have been a different story, but being Black queer women in this society (and apparently within these movements) tends to equal invisibility and non-relevancy.

We completely expect those who benefit directly and improperly from White supremacy to try and erase our existence. We fight that every day. But when it happens amongst our allies, we are baffled, we are saddened, and we are enraged. And it’s time to have the political conversation about why that’s not okay.

We are grateful to our allies who have stepped up to the call that Black lives matter, and taken it as an opportunity to not just stand in solidarity with us, but to investigate the ways in which anti-Black racism is perpetuated in their own communities. We are also grateful to those allies who were willing to engage in critical dialogue with us about this unfortunate and problematic dynamic. And for those who we have not yet had the opportunity to engage with around the adaptations of the Black Lives Matter call, please consider the following points.

Broadening the Conversation to Include Black Life

Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes. It goes beyond the narrow nationalism that can be prevalent within some Black communities, which merely call on Black people to love Black, live Black and buy Black, keeping straight cis Black men in the front of the movement while our sisters, queer and trans and disabled folk take up roles in the background or not at all. Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement.

When we say Black Lives Matter, we are talking about the ways in which Black people are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. It is an acknowledgement Black poverty and genocide is state violence. It is an acknowledgement that 1 million Black people are locked in cages in this country—one half of all people in prisons or jails—is an act of state violence. It is an acknowledgement that Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families and that assault is an act of state violence. Black queer and trans folks
bearing a unique burden in a hetero-patriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us is state violence; the fact that 500,000 Black people in the US are undocumented immigrants and relegated to the shadows is state violence; the fact that Black girls are used as negotiating chips during times of conflict and war is state violence; Black folks living with disabilities and different abilities bear the burden of state-sponsored Darwinian experiments that attempt to squeeze us into boxes of normality defined by White supremacy is state violence. And the fact is that the lives of Black people—not ALL people—exist within these conditions is consequence of state violence.

When Black people get free, everybody gets free

#BlackLivesMatter doesn’t mean your life isn’t important—it means that Black lives, which are seen as without value within White supremacy, are important to your liberation. Given the disproportionate impact state violence has on Black lives, we understand that when Black people in this country get free, the benefits will be wide reaching and transformative for society as a whole. When we are able to end hyper-criminalization and sexualization of Black people and end the poverty, control, and surveillance of Black people, every single person in this world has a better shot at getting and staying free. When Black people get free, everybody gets free. This is why we call on Black people and our allies to take up the call that Black lives matter. We’re not saying Black lives are more important than other lives, or that other lives are not criminalized and oppressed in various ways. We remain in active solidarity with all oppressed people who are fighting for their liberation and we know that our destinies are intertwined.

And, to keep it real—it is appropriate and necessary to have strategy and action centered around Blackness without other non-Black communities of color, or White folks for that matter, needing to find a place and a way to center themselves within it. It is appropriate and necessary for us to acknowledge the critical role that Black lives and struggles for Black liberation have played in inspiring and anchoring, through practice and theory, social movements for the liberation of all people. The women’s movement, the Chicano liberation movement, queer movements, and many more have adopted the strategies, tactics and theory of the Black liberation movement. And if we are committed to a world where all lives matter, we are called to support the very movement that inspired and activated so many more. That means supporting and acknowledging Black lives.

Progressive movements in the United States have made some unfortunate errors when they push for unity at the expense of really understanding the concrete differences in context, experience and oppression. In other words, some want unity without struggle. As people who have our minds stayed on freedom, we can learn to fight anti-Black racism by examining the ways in which we participate in it, even unintentionally, instead of the worn out and sloppy practice of drawing lazy parallels of unity between peoples with vastly different experiences and histories.

When we deploy “All Lives Matter” as to correct an intervention specifically created to address anti-blackness, we lose the ways in which the state apparatus has built a program of genocide and repression mostly on the backs of Black people—beginning with the theft of millions of people for free labor—and then adapted it to control, murder, and profit off of other communities of color and immigrant communities. We perpetuate a level of White supremacist domination by reproducing a tired trope that we are all the same, rather than acknowledging that non-Black oppressed people in this country are both impacted by racism and domination, and simultaneously, BENEFIT from anti-black racism.

When you drop “Black” from the equation of whose lives matter, and then fail to acknowledge it came from somewhere, you further a legacy of erasing Black lives and Black contributions from our movement legacy. And consider whether or not when dropping the Black you are, intentionally or unintentionally, erasing Black folks from the conversation or homogenizing very different experiences. The legacy and prevalence of anti-Black racism and hetero-patriarchy is a lynch pin holding together this unsustainable economy. And that’s not an accidental analogy.

In 2014, hetero-patriarchy and anti-Black racism within our movement is real and felt. It’s killing us and it’s killing our potential to build power for transformative social change. When you adopt the work of queer women of color, don’t name or recognize it, and promote it as if it has no history of its own such actions are problematic. When I use Assata’s powerful demand in my organizing
work, I always begin by sharing where it comes from, sharing about Assata’s significance to the Black Liberation Movement, what it’s political purpose and message is, and why it’s important in our context.

When you adopt Black Lives Matter and transform it into something else (if you feel you really need to do that—see above for the arguments not to), it’s appropriate politically to credit the lineage from which your adapted work derived. It’s important that we work together to build and acknowledge the legacy of Black contributions to the struggle for human rights. If you adopt Black Lives Matter, use the opportunity to talk about its inception and political framing. Lift up Black lives as an opportunity to connect struggles across race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality and disability.

And, perhaps more importantly, when Black people cry out in defense of our lives, which are uniquely, systematically, and savagely targeted by the state, we are asking you, our family, to stand with us in affirming Black lives. Not just all lives. Black lives. Please do not change the conversation by talking about how your life matters, too. It does, but we need less watered down unity and a more active solidarities with us, Black people, unwaveringly, in defense of our humanity. Our collective futures depend on it.

Alicia Garza is the Special Projects Director for the National Domestic Workers Alliance. She has been the recipient of multiple awards for her organizing work in Black and Latino communities, receiving the Local Hero award from the San Francisco Bay Guardian and the Jeanne Gauna Communicate Justice award from the Center for Media Justice in 2008. She has twice been honored by the Harvey Milk Democratic Club with the Bayard Rustin Community Activist award for her work fighting gentrification and environmental racism in San Francisco’s largest remaining Black community.

Alicia comes to NDWA after serving as Executive Director of People Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER) in San Francisco since 2009. Under her leadership, POWER won free local public transportation for youth; fought for a seat at the table in some of the most important land use decisions affecting working-class families; beat back regressive local policies targeting undocumented people; organized against the chronic police violence in Black neighborhoods; and shed light on the ongoing wave of profit-driven development that contribute to a changing San Francisco.

In 2013, Alicia co-founded #BlackLivesMatter, an online platform developed after the murder of Trayvon Martin, designed to connect people interested in learning more about and fighting back against anti-Black racism.

Alicia currently serves on the Board of Directors for the School of Unity and Liberation (SOUL) in Oakland, California, and is a contributing writer for WarTimes magazine. She serves as trusted counsel for organizations across the country looking to build their capacity to lead and win organizing campaigns. When she’s not scheming on freedom, Alicia enjoys dancing, reading and writing—and scheming some more.
Alicia Garza, whose 2013 Facebook post in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s killer, George Zimmerman, created a hashtag that later became a rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter movement, is arguably now one of the most influential civil rights leaders of this century. Garza, 36, and her fellow co-founders have since expanded their fledgling racial justice group, Black Lives Matter Global Network, into a national organization with dozens of chapters. BLM members have pushed for criminal justice reforms and worked to elect black candidates to public office. Their activities during the 2016 campaign pressured Democratic presidential hopefuls to publicly acknowledge the movement and the racial disparities it is trying to change.

Since the election, BLM has remained on the front lines, challenging police policies that discriminate against people of color and stepping up to oppose the white supremacists emboldened by the actions and rhetoric of the Trump administration. I caught up with Garza in late August, a few weeks after a young white nationalist plowed his car into a crowd of anti-racist protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia—a protest the local BLM chapter helped organize in response to a white supremacist rally held simultaneously.

**Mother Jones:** What did you take away from Charlottesville?

**Alicia Garza:** The thing that shocked me was that these [white supremacist] folks were willing to be seen. Historically, aggressors shield their identity, because they know there is only a certain amount of hate and violence that is acceptable above ground. But now you see people in khakis and button-down shirts—people who could be my neighbors—which tells me that they feel empowered and emboldened because of the political climate. Trump basically said, “Come out to play.” So that’s what they did.

**MJ:** Trump compared the white supremacists to groups on the left such as Black Lives Matter. What potential consequences do you see here?
AG: Conservatives have been repackaging and remessaging racism for 30 years. Now, to talk about race is racist. Under that framework, you can equate Black Lives Matter with the Ku Klux Klan. As long as conservatives are successful in obscuring the dynamics, the impacts, and the consequences of racism, we will continue to have these false equivocations. The president is pushing that message, as well as laws and policies that help to enshrine that message. Jeff Sessions is dismantling consent decrees against the police, and increasing and expanding the rights of law enforcement in ways that contrast [with] civil rights doctrine. That is dangerous not just for black people, but for any group that has ever been marginalized.

MJ: The right has begun to use the term “alt-left” to refer to antifa groups and others that use violent tactics at alt-right rallies. Does that change how you think about counterprotest tactics or whom you choose to partner with?

AG: The term “alt-left” has been adopted on the left as well, and the consequences are far-reaching. It’s not helpful to have a conversation about violence or nonviolence in a vacuum. Our protests are called violent even when they aren’t. So this conservative project of obscuring power relationships and dynamics has gotten everybody confused, and some people on the left aren’t clear who they’re fighting and what they’re fighting for. They are saying, “We can’t be violent in response to violence,” but not actually addressing the racial violence these groups have carried out—not just in the last six months but for the last couple hundred years.

You also have conservatives pushing this narrative because they want to distract from the coalition they’ve built that could dismantle everything we hold dear and true in this country. What happened in the Bay Area [in August]—which I considered to be a very successful response to the presence of white nationalist, white supremacist, and patriot groups—was that people did not get bogged down in this question about violent or nonviolent that obscures the relationships of power. People remembered that we have an enemy that we’re fighting—and it’s not each other.

MJ: Trump has argued the left will want to take down statues of George Washington, who owned slaves, or Christopher Columbus, who led a genocide against Native Americans. Do you disagree?

AG: I think we have living monuments to the Confederacy in the White House, in our Justice Department, in our state legislatures, and in our Congress. So where does it end? In regard to the statues, I think everything helps. Things like renaming holidays and removing statues are really a part of a culture-change strategy that I think is important. But it can’t stop there. We can change Columbus Day to Indigenous People’s Day, but if we’re not doing the work to make sure that indigenous nations have sovereignty in this country, or self-determination, or that they have a quality of life
that mirrors that which we afford to rich white professionals, then it is merely symbolic. Whether it's toppling monuments or closing the education gap or closing the school-to-prison pipeline, we need to uproot white supremacy everywhere that it lives. That's also why it's important for us to fight for reparations for black people every day—until we get it.

MJ: But how do you do that?

AG: The first step is continuing the steps that Ta-Nehisi Coates took [in The Case for Reparations]—helping people understand that it's not just about giving money to black people. It's about transforming systems that disenfranchise black people from the wealth we create.

MJ: Every year since 1989, Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) has introduced a bill that would create a congressional commission to study the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow and make recommendations about what to do about it—including, potentially, paying black people.

AG: I appreciate that he's done that. But that's never going to pass. Which is exactly why a robust culture-change strategy is necessary.

MJ: So how can activists convince politicians to be more progressive on issues of race?

AG: We have to build stronger relationships. There's a distrust of policymakers on the left because so much time is spent on politics rather than actually improving people's quality of life. At the same time, policymakers don't do enough to build relationships with organizers and often call on them in a transactional way that damages relationships that can produce better policy.

“Black Lives Matter is still leading resistance in this moment. I can't say the same thing about the DNC.”

Part of where the right has been successful is in building a movement that feels like home for those who are a part of it. Our strategies should learn from the right. It's not effective to only interact with policymakers when they do the wrong thing. Relationships can be built on both ends, with different outcomes. Shifting political power in this country ultimately has to be rooted in getting out and talking to people outside our echo chambers. It means building the largest coalition possible. We need organizers in our political system, our criminal justice system, all throughout our economy.

MJ: What has Black Lives Matter accomplished this year.

AG: We participated in getting black and brown people to state legislatures, to city councils, to school boards. Everyone is trying to figure out how to operate under a new set of political conditions, but Black Lives Matter is still leading resistance in this moment. I can't say the same thing about the DNC. I think the question actually is “What does the rest of the progressive movement need to do to make sure it's not just BLM that's leading those fights?” We don't measure growth based on whether CNN is covering us. We measure it based on how many people see themselves as a part of this movement. In that regard, we're growing.

MJ: What changed for the movement after Charlottesville?

AG: Fighting against white supremacy in the form of Confederates monuments has created the opportunity to uproot white supremacy in its structural form. It has also brought people's attention back to the role that Trump and his administration are playing in furthering explicit support for white supremacy, and in creating more room for it. It's not lost on me that there was a video captured of a traffic stop where an officer jokingly said to a white woman, “Don't worry, ma'am, we only kill black people.” When the election happened, people became more focused on Trump’s antics than on the strategies he was using to continue to move his agenda. When we have people in the labor movement sitting on Trump's business councils, it's confusing for the left—where do you stand? Are you for fascism or are you against it? There's no middle ground here. There's no “both sides” here. There is a right and a wrong
when it comes to people’s dignity, people’s humanity, and their right to life. So there are still many on the left that need to do some real soul searching to decide how they’ll be known in this moment.
Don’t Try to Do Everything at Once and other advice on activism from Alicia Garza of Black Lives Matter

By Ann Friedman
There are two narratives of women activists in this political moment.

In one telling, women are at the forefront of the resistance. The day after Trump's inauguration, thousands of women (some in pink knitted hats) took to the streets of every major American city with a promise to oppose whatever this president hoped to achieve. They came home from the march and stuck political signs in their suburban lawns for the first time. They are the reason Trump's approval ratings are so low.

In another telling, the pink-hatted women protesters were stragglers who arrived late to activism. They hadn’t bothered to attend any rallies against police violence or marches for LGBT rights in the Obama era, but they were finally showing up for social justice now that they felt personally threatened by a president they never thought would get elected. And the jury is still out as to whether these women will continue to show up as their election outrage fades.

Activists at the forefront of women-led justice movements that predate this president, like Black Lives Matter, see some truth in both of these narratives. They want to grow their ranks, which means welcoming new activists. But they want to remain focused on people who are most threatened by the current regime. And they don’t want their years of work erased by stories about how women are flocking to social-justice movements for the first time.

As one of the co-founders of Black Lives Matter, Alicia Garza is an expert on how to draw more people into the fight for justice. In her day job, she serves as special projects director for the National Domestic Workers’ Alliance. Prior to that, she was executive director of a labor organization called POWER (People Organized to Win Employment Rights) in San Francisco, where she led the fight for free public transportation for youth, pushed back against policies targeting undocumented immigrants, and demanded fairness in real-estate development. In 2013, after Trayvon Martin’s killer was acquitted, she founded #BlackLivesMatter alongside Opal Tometi and Patrisse Cullors. The group, which came to greater prominence after the protests of Michael Brown’s killing in Ferguson, Missouri, now has 40 chapters worldwide.

In January, Garza wrote a widely circulated essay admitting her frustrations with the initial messaging about the Women’s March. But, she wrote, “I decided to challenge myself to be a part of something that isn’t perfect.” She wants to build a movement of millions at a time when the right has labeled #BlackLivesMatter a “terrorist” group, the left is still often slow to show up in solidarity, and “woman” is both a powerful unifying identity and one that is too broad to be meaningful.

I called her up to talk about how she’s navigating the Trump era, and to get her advice on how the rest of us should handle the overwhelming work still to be done.

Nine months into this presidency, I’m wondering if new activists — white women in particular — have stepped up in the way that you’d hoped and given them space for.

Well, it’s complicated. [Laughs.] For me personally, being a black woman and a black queer woman, I feel like I live in this perpetual state of limbo where I want to believe that this country can be different. Then when I walk outside of my house every day, I’m like, How are we ever going to get there? That never goes away. And so have white women acted differently since being given the room to act differently? Yes and no. An example of that is this whole controversy with the Tina Fey sketch. Obviously it’s satire, right? Obviously she’s trying to bring forward these major issues that are plaguing our country and have been for a long time. And yet the way in which she is operationalizing that is perpetuating and reinforcing it.

I agree, and yet celebrities have never been perfect political figures. I’m more interested in nonfamous people who want to stand against Trump’s policies. I think many of us have gotten good at voicing our opposition on social media or privately among friends. Not everyone is showing up at hearings and protests, though. The intentions or high-level beliefs might be good, but the actions still haven’t caught up.

I’m seeing a lot more people step up and say “I want to do X or Y or Z,” but there’s also some hesitancy around really addressing the things that need to be addressed. And to be specific, in the wake of Charlottesville, we’re like, oh, yes, neo-Nazis are horrible. The KKK is horrible. But if we were to start to get into a conversation about prisons, then people start to waffle. Or if we were to get into a conversation about how schools are resourced, people start to waffle. So there’s still a lot more work to do. With that being said, there’s also still not enough clarity on how can people do it differently. I’ve been spending a lot of time trying to figure out how to be really concrete about that. Because it’s one thing to say, “Well, you’re not doing it right.” And it’s another thing to clarify what the “it” is.

It’s not always easy to meet people where they’re at — we all come to these issues so differently. Can you talk a little bit about who you were before “organizer” was one of the first words in your bio? I tell people that I could’ve been Condoleezza Rice, and then I found the movement and I’m so glad that I did. [Laughs.] I came up at a time in this country, and particularly in California, where there was a lot of conversation happening about, “Are we a melting pot or are we a salad bowl,” you know?
The search for the perfect multicultural metaphor.
Right. There was this whole thing around multiculturalism and a real effort to infuse our schooling with these frameworks. But part of who we are is that we are a bunch of people who come from different places, and we converge in America, under the promise of liberty and justice for all. My framework, before I was an activist, was “Everybody should be treated the same.” I grew up in Marin County, which is a wealthy suburb of San Francisco. Incredibly diverse, but not where I lived. Liberal and conservative all at the same time. And my family is a mixed family in a whole bunch of ways, meaning my parents are a mixed-race couple, so my dad is a white, Jewish man and my mom is a black woman from Toledo, Ohio. Growing up in a school that was majority white, my understanding of the world was that I was different, but that differences shouldn’t be talked about because it’s uncomfortable. In my community that’s certainly how a lot of people thought: That individual achievement is a result of hard work and perseverance, and also that it’s actually okay for resources to be concentrated in particular places because you earned it.

So what happened to change your thinking about power and privilege?
When I was 12 I got really involved in the movement for reproductive justice, because there was a debate happening in my school district about whether or not to provide condoms in the school nurses’ offices, which contributed to a larger national conversation around family values. Were we going to support comprehensive sex health education that talked about a range of experiences and lives? Or were we just not going to talk about it at all? And in this little, wealthy suburb of San Francisco that was generally liberal, people got real conservative, real quick. “I don’t want my kid to talk about sex at school.” Well, why not?

There’s a common theme here: “Sex, we’re just not going to talk about it. Race, we’re just not going to talk about it. Class, we’re just not going to talk about it.”
A lot of my peers were already having sex at 12, so it was like, “Why would you not talk about it?” Because people are doing it. So then we just went, let’s talk about it. How does that work? But to be honest, having the frameworks that I talked about earlier, I think that was reflected in the work that I did. Very race-neutral. Very class-neutral. And also still in the frameworks of who “deserves” and who doesn’t. When I look back on it, I’m like “Oh, Jesus. Sorry for anybody I’ve harmed.”

For me and for many of the feminists I know, reproductive justice was our way into activism. And then we broadened the lens as we began to understand how these issues play out along lines of gender identity, race, class, sexuality. After you do that, it’s really easy to get overwhelmed. This has always been true, but it feels exceptionally difficult this presidency. No one wants to create a hierarchy of causes they believe in, yet there are only so many hours in the day. I’m wondering how you personally decide what is worth your time and resources right now?
The way that I answer it is based on what I think will unlock other opportunities. I know that every fight is not the final fight. I know that there’s not a silver bullet that’s going to cut across all these things and make it so that we don’t have to deal with them again. And I also know that I don’t have to work on everything. So a lot of my work is based on strengthening and building a really broad movement, like a movement in the millions, so that I don’t have to feel overwhelmed about the scale of the problem because we have people working in every lane possible. It took me a long time to figure out that I didn’t have to do everything, that it was actually a lot more helpful if I did a couple things really, really well than a whole bunch of things really badly, or nothing at all because the whole thing was overwhelming.

The idea of picking a few lanes and staying in them for the long haul is very appealing to me. But then I think about my lived experience — how I consume the news, or the emails I get that are saying “We need your presence today at this thing” — and it’s so hard to feel sure of where I can really bring my value and skills to bear.
For folks who are newer to the movement, newer to activism, that feeling that you just described is real. Sometimes we feel like we have to take on everything. The situation you describe is totally overwhelming, which is why I unsubscribed from a lot of that stuff. I need to create an environment where I can be my best self, and that means being unapologetic about saying no to things that don’t serve me or move me closer to my purpose and the things that I care about the most. You have a lot of agency over how you participate, and it’s important not to be a perfectionist in that arena. Because what happens to folks like you and me is that we can try to take it all on and then get so tired and stressed out and full of anxiety that we can’t do it anymore. And the consequence of that is really astounding. What happens in this moment if people are burned out? Under this administration, in this political climate, what happens if people can no longer do the work of getting rid of Trump and Trumpism, and building the country that we all deserve?

I shudder to think about it. But you’ve been able to keep momentum up for Black Lives Matter, and one thing that I think is so uniquely effective about BLM is the decentralized nature of the organizing. How are you feeling about that model at a time when there is so much centralized national support for white supremacy?
Honestly I feel like we’re in a moment where we need both. I say this to people all the time: The reason that we created Black Lives Matter in that way is because we wanted to build a sense of empowerment and self-determination. Early on in the development of Black Lives Matter, we set up some social-media pages that we intended to offer information about anti-black racism and state-sponsored violence, so people really understood what it looked like concretely in our present time. And we would get lots of inquiries — every day — from people who would say “I’m a white teacher in Louisville, Kentucky and I want my students to know that their lives matter and I’m wondering if you know how to do that.” And I’m like, I’m not a teacher. But here are all these teachers that are contacting me. Why would I not just remove myself from the center of that and put y’all in relationship to each other so that teachers can figure that out with teachers? That’s your lane. That’s what you know how to do.
It's about recognizing the expertise that each individual brings to the fight.
What does it mean to build a force more powerful than white supremacy? We do need a way that we are coordinated. We also need a way in which we break this dynamic where people want to look to one person to tell them what to do. As long as we organize ourselves in that way, I think we'll be not successful because it doesn't encourage innovation. It doesn't encourage experimentation. And it also doesn't encourage relationship building.

Maybe there doesn't have to be one label bringing us all together if we all have shared values but different lanes.
That's right. That's right.