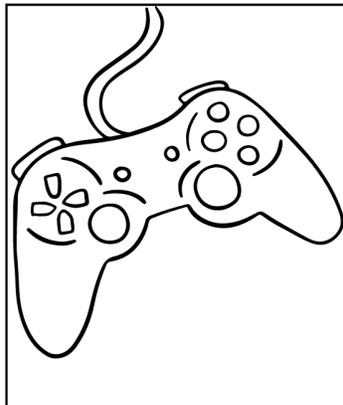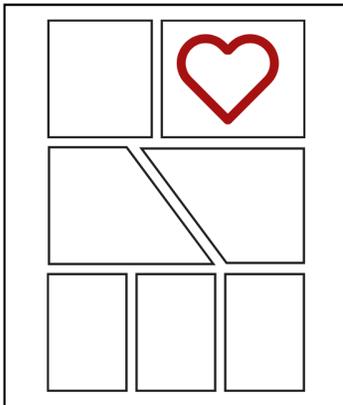**Emerging Media for Social Justice Storytelling**

By

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Abstract

Within the past 20 years, new forms of media have emerged and gained widespread popularity - graphic novels, video games, and podcasts. Whereas theatre, film, and radio served as the traditional method of sharing stories for social justice, emerging media present new possibilities. What are their strengths? What are their limitations? What are some best practices? How do emerging media forms further inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility? This thesis explores these questions and the theme of social justice as love.

The process of creating this thesis project consisted of three parts: interviews, supplemental research, and personal reflections. To best understand this topic, I interviewed people who are actively using the emerging media forms that I identified - graphic novels, video games, and podcasts. I then investigated academic journals and online publications to provide context for each emerging media form and the subject of social justice storytelling. Lastly, as a "social justice storyteller" and user of emerging media, I provide personal reflections that reference my past experiences and the observations I've made through this research process.

My major findings reveal that while emerging media are powerful vehicles for empathy, they should be assessed from the perspective of creators and consumers. Video games are a technologically demanding medium for creators but are highly engaging for consumers because they offer a multisensory experience and the ability to experience how choices play out, positively and negatively. Graphic novels require creators to develop expertise with a storyboard format but are accessible for consumers with various literacy levels because of the combination of visuals and short text used, which encourages engagement with diverse stories. For creators, podcasts require strong journalistic skills but have low barriers to entry because of their audio format, the simple tools that can be used in their creation, and the lack of industry gatekeepers.

Acknowledgments

I could not have created this thesis project without the support of Dinesh Sabu, Sam Harshner, Author X, Neil Jones (Aerial_Knight), Lee Hawkins, Nick Szuberla, and Carolina Sánchez. I am extremely grateful for the generosity of these individuals and for the time, insights, and encouragement they shared with me. As this thesis is the last requirement of my last graduate school journey, I would like to thank anyone who believed in me and contributed to my growth over these past 18 months. Lastly, I would like to thank *you* for reading this thesis and for exploring emerging media for social justice storytelling. Love.

Contents

Introduction

For the past decade, I have worked as an actor and director whose passion was sharing stories for social change. I directed plays that addressed sexual assault, human trafficking, bullying, state violence, and homelessness. Yet, as years passed, I became unsure about the impact of those stories, especially when they were presented in the confines of a theatre. Though theatre has origins as a public space for discussion and entertainment, it's now become a venue that caters to the wealthy. "Classic" plays are recycled with half-hearted attempts at modern-day relevance in order to keep money flowing from mostly old and mostly White donors. Couple that with high ticket costs and you have a recipe for exclusion. I noticed that theatre was dying and my passion was seemingly dying with it. "If not this, then what?" I would ask myself. I was searching for an answer. Then, while researching affordable housing issues, I found a possibility.

"Rise-Home Stories is a groundbreaking collaboration between multimedia storytellers and social justice advocates seeking to change our relationship to land, home, and race, by transforming the stories we tell about them" (*Rise-Home Stories Project*, n.d.). I read these words on the homepage of the Rise-Home Stories website and thought, *this can't be real, it's too good to be true.* It was true. Activists, nonprofits, and artists of different disciplines had come together from across the country to explore the idea of home. While the stories that the collective created touched on housing policies, environmental issues, and community cohesiveness, they were more than just words, they were experiences. These experiences took shape in five formats: "Alejandria Fights Back!, a bilingual children's book, Dot's Home, a narrative-driven video game, But Next Time, a nonfiction podcast, MINE, an animated web series, and Steal-Estate, an interactive online experience" (*Rise-Home Stories Project*, n.d.). Video games? Podcasts? An interactive online experience (whatever that means)? I was blown away by how housing justice

could be approached from so many different angles and by using different forms of media, which weren't theatre or film, but something else entirely, something that I've now come to identify as "emerging media."

This thesis examines three forms of emerging media - graphic novels, video games, and podcasts - and how they can be used to promote social justice storytelling. Whereas theatre, film, and radio served as the traditional method of sharing stories for social justice, emerging media present new possibilities. What are their strengths? What are their limitations? What are some best practices? How do the aforementioned emerging media forms further inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility? This thesis explores these questions and the theme of social justice as love. My core belief is that by using emerging media, nonprofits, activists, and communities can tell stories for social justice in a more engaging and accessible way. Such stories have the potential to raise awareness, educate, inspire, heal, connect, and spread love. As there hasn't been a lot of scholarship on this topic, especially any that covers several forms of emerging media, my hope is that this thesis is particularly timely.

Approach

The process of creating this thesis project consisted of three parts: interviews, supplemental research, and personal reflections. I began by interviewing people who are actively using the emerging media forms that I identified - graphic novels, video games, and podcasts. While not every interviewee may label their work as explicitly for "social justice," their stories do have some social justice implications. I then investigated academic journals and online publications to provide context for each emerging media form and the subject of social justice storytelling. Lastly, as a "social justice storyteller" and user of emerging media, I provide personal reflections and context along the way, creating a process-oriented autoethnography. This means that I'm going to unabashedly analyze my personal experiences to make sense of this topic.

I intend for this to be an anti-academic paper. I say this because we have been conditioned to believe that academic papers must be written in a formal tone and use a 3rd person narrative that obscures a writer's identity. However, that approach doesn't help me connect with my intended audience - everyday people - and the spirit of emerging media, which encourages innovation and self-expression. This is why I will blatantly use the "I" personal pronoun and include anecdotes to not hide my voice and experiences with each medium. As it is a priority of mine that this thesis is engaging and accessible, I include visuals when possible and attempt to use clear, common terms. I do my best to define any terms that might be loaded or confusing; I question these terms, unpack them, and personalize them. As much as I want the written words to be accessible, I also recognize that people have different literacy capabilities, which is why this thesis is also formatted as an audio story. This version can be accessed at hiimharsh.com/work.

      To read this paper is to accompany me on my journey of understanding. I start each section of this thesis with a personal reflection about each medium and then provide context, a discussion, and some takeaways. I seek to be helpful by providing examples of applications of emerging media, best practices, and the theories behind their use. It should be noted that while the observations I share are supported by interviews and research, they are still subjective. I encourage you to question my findings and explore these mediums for yourself.

Concepts

Let's define some terms and theory. Unless cited otherwise, these are my personal definitions:

- **Emerging Media** - An evolution of previous forms of media in ways that promote <u>inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility</u>; these media forms have been developed or popularized within the last 20 years.

- **Inclusion** – when people are involved, respected, and cared for – not just for what they can share but for who they are.

- **Diversity** – the noticeable and less noticeable/unnoticeable differences between people.

- **Equity** – fairness; the fair distribution of resources, especially money, to create conditions that allow all people to thrive > survive.

- **Accessibility** – meeting people where they are at; designing goods and services so that people with a range of abilities can participate.

I view equity and diversity as the outcomes of accessibility and inclusion. In this way, accessibility (to access) and inclusion (to include) function as verbs that help realize equity and diversity.

- **Social Justice** - Any action that furthers love. To love is to understand, to cherish, to uplift, to share, and to collectively thrive. Author and activist, bell hooks, offers support for this definition in her book, *all about love*. bell hooks writes that to love is to care about the "collective good" no matter how big the collective is - a nation, a city, a neighborhood, a room. She asserts "that all the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic" and that "if all public policy was created in the spirit of love… individuals would come together and map out programs that would affect the good of everyone" (hooks, 2001, pp. 98–99). Standing in opposition to love is

fear, which is "the primary force upholding structures of domination." Instead, choosing to love is to liberate ourselves from this mentality and "move against fear… to connect - to find ourselves in the other" (hooks, 2001, p. 93).

- **Storytelling** - Stories have the power to make people think, feel, and act. People make sense of the world around them by gathering their thoughts, emotions, and experiences to create "mental structures called frames." Stories can "activate mental frames that influence social action" by stimulating a person's senses and sparking "empathetic responses" - the ability to understand or feel the experiences of others (Gladwin, 2020). When information is presented in an engaging way, individual frames can shift and public dialogue can occur. As more individual frames overlap, a new "social frame" is created, which expresses the shared values and desires of a group of people (Gladwin, 2020). Amazing, right? When considering what the essential elements of a story are, what comes to my mind is plot, conflict, and characters. What are the sequence of events that unfold and how does one action trigger the next? What are the problems that exist or obstacles that arise? Who are the characters involved and what do they want?

Graphic Novels

Growing up, I was so obsessed with superheroes that my family often struggled to get me out of the house without me first wearing a cape. The comic book adventures of Spider-Man and the X-Men became my escape from everyday life. These were outcasts who wanted to do good, something I could relate to. As a teenager, I began reading long-form graphic novels that challenged me to reflect more critically on the world. First, it was Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, a dark political thriller with superheroes of questionable morals and traumatic pasts - sexual assault, child abuse, mass murder - hey, I said it was dark. Then, in English class, I was unexpectedly introduced to *Maus*. *Maus*, created by Art Spiegelman, is subtitled "A Survivor's Tale" as it depicts the journey of his parents enduring the terrifying hardships of the Holocaust, as recounted by his father. In his illustrations, Jews are drawn as mice, Germans as cats, and Polish people as pigs - establishing a cruel hierarchy. Art's story jumps between present-day conversations with his aging father and harrowing accounts of death and survival in Auschwitz. *Maus*, more than any textbook, helped me understand the history of the Holocaust and feel a full range of emotions along the way: fear, pity, love, shame, anger, and joy. It has stayed on my bookshelf ever since.

Figure 1: Frame from *Maus* (Admiraal, 2022).

In an article titled, *Using social justice novels in the ELL classroom*, Brandy Barter-Storm and Tamara Wik discuss how graphic novels are gaining more acceptance in the English language arts field. According to Brandy and Tamara, studies have shown that graphic novels require a "lighter cognitive load" and "increase students' motivation to read and engage deeply with texts" (Barter‑Storm & Wik, 2020). A combination of "shorter sentences" and "intentional art" helps people understand the information that is presented. The visuals and text found in graphic novels "lower the obstacles" to engaging with social justice topics and motivate people who might struggle with their reading comprehension to continue to read (Barter‑Storm & Wik, 2020). Indeed, a core strength of the medium is found in its accessibility and engaging delivery.

Another strength is found in the ability of graphic novels to reflect a reader's identity - literally and visually. Brandy and Tamara reference how graphic novels can "[give] voice to minorities and those with diverse viewpoints" by "[presenting] alternate views on culture, history, and human life" (Barter‑Storm & Wik, 2020). Such diverse viewpoints validate the existence of underrepresented groups and provide a gateway into the lives of others. It can be emotionally impactful when graphic novels act as "a mirror for [English language learning] students to see themselves" (Barter‑Storm & Wik, 2020). This mirror can also spark empathy for others outside of the demographic represented in a graphic novel. Educator Peter Carlson has stated that when visuals and text are used together "a reader can more readily employ empathy," largely because images are more "sensational" - they allow people to feel more deeply (Garrison & Gavigan, 2019).

As a form of emerging media, graphic novels increased in popularity by 15% from 2016 to 2019 (DeFrance & Naumann, 2019). There are now numerous graphic novels that cover social

justice issues and sites exclusively devoted to the category. Websites like socialjusticebooks.org and bookriot.com have published lists of social justice graphic novels. Between the two sites, over 90 titles were featured (Cahill, 2020; Teaching for Change, 2023). Examples of recommended social justice graphic novels include:

- *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang

- *Aya* by Marguerite Abouet and Clement Oubrerie

- *Citizen 13660* by Miné Okubo

- *La Lucha: The Story of Lucha Castro and Human Rights in Mexico* by Jon Sack and Adam Shapiro

- *March: Book One* by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell

- *Climate Change: A Personal Journey Through The Science* by Philippe Squarzoni

- *Infidel* by Pornsak Pichetshote, Aaron Campbell, Jose Villarrubia, and Jeff Powell

- *Gender Queer* By Maia Kobabe

- *Lighter Than My Shadow* by Katie Green

- *Race to Incarcerate: A Graphic Retelling* by Marc Mauer and Sabrina Jones

These graphic novels explore racial identities, the civil rights movement, incarceration, corruption, African joy, queerness, climate change, mental health, and xenophobia - the fear of those that are "foreign." Even though the subjects are different, the impact of the stories is similar; they each create a bridge to understand more about the experiences of others. The more we can understand others, the more deeply we can love them. On my research journey, I spoke to writer and illustrator, Author X, to gain a better understanding of how they used a graphic novel to speak about the social issues that are personal to their life and the lives of those they care about (X, March 4, 2023; Appendix A).

Figure 2: Profile of Author X.

Author X requested that their identity remain confidential. They have experience working in fields that uphold the fair treatment of others and are a scholar of social justice movements. Though they possess skills as an illustrator and designer, this was the first time they created a graphic novel.

Author X created a graphic novel for their nephew shortly after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Amidst the protests that erupted at that time, they received a letter from their nephew describing how he didn't like the property destruction that was occurring and how, from his point of view, the people involved were violating rules. Author X realized that the information their nephew was getting was limited to what was shared in his classroom and sought to provide additional context. Author X expressed, "I wanted to both affirm the things that were right in his mind but also upload some history and give him some information to consider, not change his mind, but provide context for what he was seeing." Instead of just talking about it, Author X thought the best thing to do was to create something tangible for their nephew - a graphic novel.

For Author X, "social justice" is a process that begins as soon as someone has an "actionable grievance" - "a wrong that needs to be right." Author X conveyed that it felt "unjust that my nephew's conclusions about those around him engaging in protest was limited to his classroom," that he was "uninformed." Their thought process was that their nephew didn't know what was occurring and should know; if he didn't "bad things could happen to him." In this way, an actionable grievance "starts with a matter of the heart" - someone has to care enough to act and have enough hope that a situation can be improved. Author X sensed that their nephew was

being "swept away" by a current of anti-Black ideas and could use new information that spoke of

the importance of protest and community. For Author X, it was key that the information

presented in their graphic novel be "targeted" (to the issue), "timely" (of the moment), "tailored"

(to their nephew), and "localized" (to their nephew's hometown - Milwaukee, Wisconsin).

Figure 3: Title and first page of Author X's graphic novel (X, 2020, pp. 1-2).
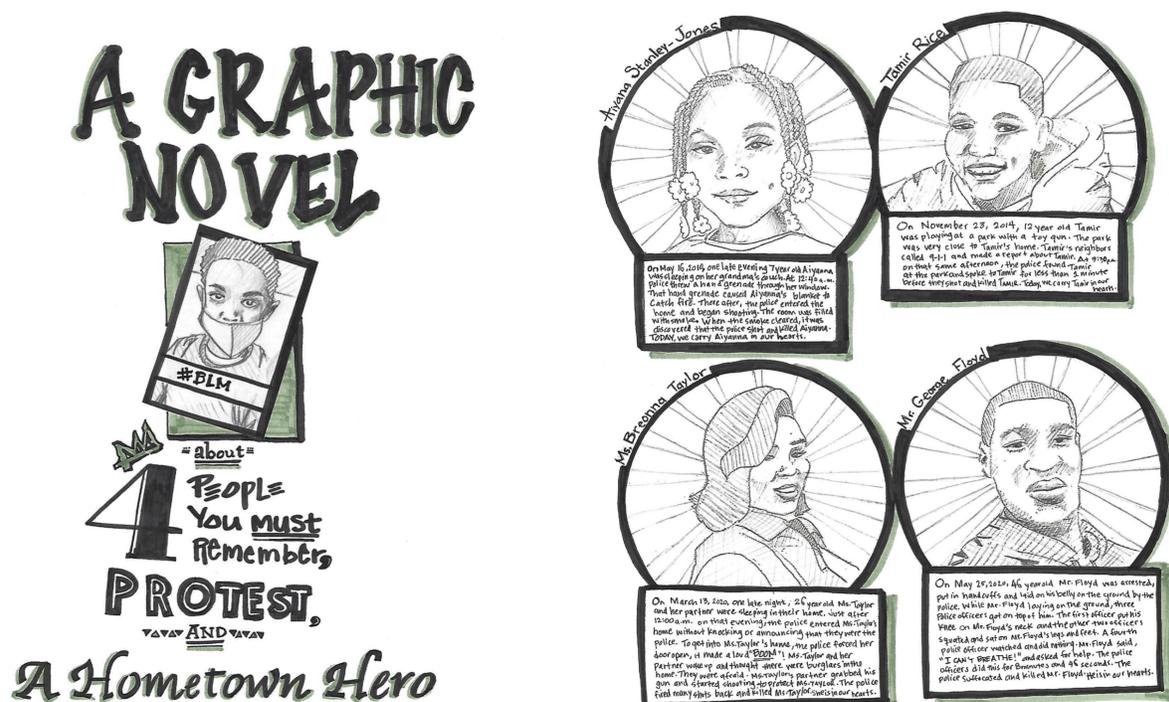
The title of Author X's graphic novel is *A Graphic Novel About 4 People You Must*

Remember, Protest, and A Hometown Hero. According to Author X, the graphic novel is about

"the location of Black life and when it comes in contact with law enforcement." As victims of

police violence are often dehumanized, creating the graphic novel allowed Author X to restore

their humanity and give their nephew new information to consider. To best tailor the story to

their nephew, one of the main characters of the story is a kid that looks just like Author X's

nephew. In this way, their nephew can see himself positioned in the center of the story.

Author X's graphic novel highlights the importance of protesting both in the digital and physical worlds. The story depicts the true sequence of events that unfolded, starting on June 6, 2020 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with a physical protest that was organized by teenage children. Teenagers and some adults gathered outside of a Metro Market grocery store and "shared the rules for a safe protest" before starting to march. While marching and raising "their voices to ask for justice for [George] Floyd, [Breonna] Taylor, Aiyana [Stanley-Jones], and Tamir [Rice]" the protests were confronted by "an elderly woman [who] blocked the protesters' path with her car" (X, 2020, p. 3). This woman exited her car, refused to move when asked, and then spat in the face of "one of the protesters, a 17 year old Black student" - 3 times (X, 2020, p. 4).

The incident was recorded and swiftly shared on social media, going viral. "A woman named Shavonda saw the video on Facebook" and then managed to find the woman's Facebook page; her name was Stephanie. Shavonda wrote on Stephanie's wall and "confronted Stephanie with the fact that [she] spit on a Black kid." Stephanie's response was to call Shavonda "ignorant" and imply that "the Black [person] she spat on had done something to make [her feel] unsafe" (X, 2020, p. 5). As a mother, Shavonda was deeply upset with what she witnessed on the video and Stephanie's response to being called out, so she shared her feelings with her friends and made a plan to visit Stephanie and talk. Here, Author X illustrates that protesting can fluidly move back and forth between digital and physical spaces.

Figure 4: Digital protest occurring on page 5 of Author X's graphic novel (X, 2020, p. 5).
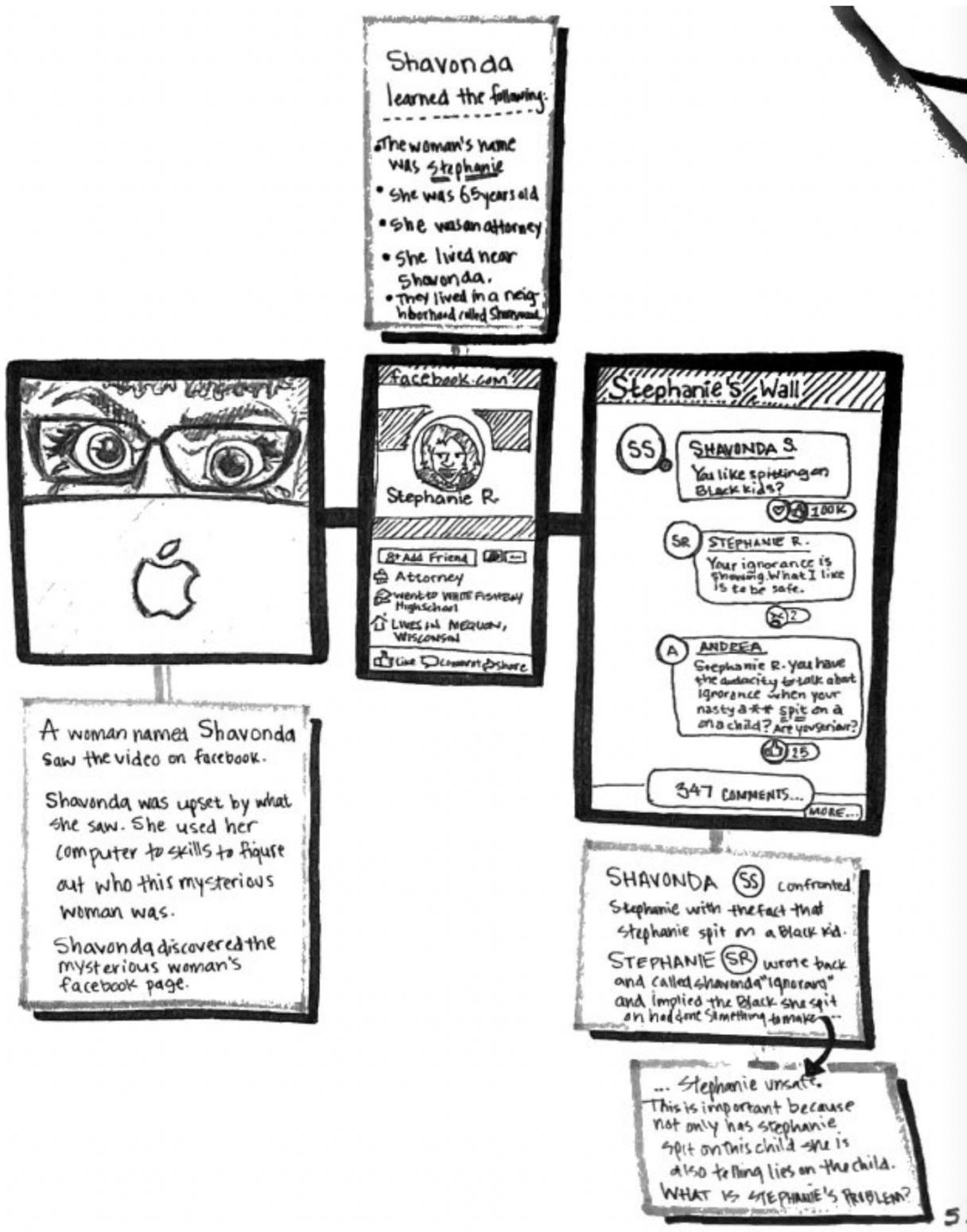
Author X emphasized that part of the story is about making choices; "you have to choose what to do, working through big feelings to do something in the physical world," digital world, or both. The act of spitting in a child's face is a violent, traumatizing, and hateful act. What does it mean for a White woman to spit on a Black child's face three times in 2020, during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how do people respond to such an event? Author X used the medium of a graphic novel to explore this question and show that protesting is a response to injustice. Author X identifies Shavonda as the "hometown hero" because "she worked through her big feelings, protested in both the digital and physical worlds, and gathered her friends to create and execute a plan to hold Stephanie accountable" (X, 2020, p. 9).

When speaking with Author X, they communicated that one of the strengths of graphic novels is that you can direct people's attention frame-by-frame and shrink a story to a sequence of moments. By progressing through frames, you can narrow the focus, slow someone down, and "adjust someone's vision." In essence, a comic book is a collection of annotated snapshots without any music or other audio dramatizing the information presented. A lack of dramatization was important to Author X, who expressed, "I don't like to feel like I'm being manipulated." Instead, they wanted to present facts that can be verified in an engaging and interactive way. They view their graphic novel as interactive because it is tangible - you can touch it, "you can edit it, you can scratch it out, you can black it out, you can rearrange it, take it apart [and] annotate it." Personally, aside from annotating a graphic novel, I've never witnessed anyone interacting with a graphic novel in the ways Author X described, but I do admire the idea behind wanting to present a story that can be engaged with and altered. I can imagine this sort of interactivity happening with digital graphic novels more than physical ones.

A principal limitation of graphic novels that Author X referenced was the number of specialized roles a person must take on to create within this emerging media form. A person must assume the roles of organizer, artist, writer, and researcher, or they must find others to occupy those roles. In this sense, while graphic novels may be accessible to read, they are a challenge to create. Creating a graphic novel requires a multitude of skills and a "luxury of time." To begin to undertake such a task, here's a checklist of considerations that Author X offered up:

☐ What story am I telling?

☐ Who are the people in the story?

☐ What data gets included?

☐ Where do I stop short of dramatizing?

Then, prepare to shrink your world to the four corners of a page. This is no easy task and requires careful deliberation. In comparison to video, which can quickly compile many moving frames with the push of a button, graphic novels must be painstakingly laid out, frame-by-frame. Good luck!

When reflecting on the entire experience of creating their graphic novel, Author X noted that their nephew "carries the stories with him today," especially as he is "experiencing anti-Blackness in school." Author X never sought to dramatize an issue that placed his nephew against all White people or invoke feelings of hatred in any way. Their intent was to "provide context, memorialize a moment, [and] teach him about the relationship of people online," people involved in protest. By drawing from their lived experience, centering the story on what was local, and including familiar characters, Author X found a way to educate and inspire empathy. From my viewpoint, it was love of their nephew and community that inspired Author X to create

a graphic novel and it was a greater understanding that they wanted their nephew to receive - of Black life, of protest, and of history.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Takeaways

When I think about **inclusion** and graphic novels for social justice storytelling, I'm most struck by how it's possible for people to publish their own stories. Sure, there are gatekeepers in the industry, but as Author X showed, it is a medium where you can <u>do it yourself </u>with only some paper and a pen. And for those who don't want to draw by hand, there are free/low-cost online programs like StoryboardThat, Canva, and MakeBeliefsComix. **Diversity,** to me, was highlighted by the range of stories that fill the graphic novel landscape and provide visibility for underrepresented groups. For example, in the Young Adult Library Services Association's 2015 Great Graphic Novels for Teens List, 43 out of 57 graphic novels featured "characters of color." However, while the diversity of characters in graphic novels has increased, the diversity of creators is lacking. On the same 2015 list, only 12 of the 57 graphic novels were created by writers or illustrators who identify as "people of color" (Garrison & Gavigan, 2019). In consideration of **equity** and creating conditions that allow people to thrive and not merely get by, graphic novels require a "lighter cognitive load" - they are easier to process than traditional novels. This is because of the medium's use of strong visuals that provide context clues about what's going on in the story and short sentences that feed manageable chunks of information, piece by piece. Lastly, graphic novels can be viewed as a highly **accessible** form of emerging media as they can be enjoyed by people with a range of literacy levels and are available in both print and digital formats.

Video Games

In high school, I remember playing an online game called *Guild Wars* and having the ability to design my own character, one that was tall, stylish, and had my brown skin tone. It felt thrilling to create myself - or rather an ideal version of myself - and find community by completing quests with people from around the world. While *Guild Wars* helped me to feel seen and connect with others, *Bioshock* was a much darker game, one that tested my morality. Throughout the game, you encounter "Little Sisters" - young, genetically-altered orphan girls who have a penchant for chaos - and are forced to either "harvest" or "rescue" them. Harvesting means that you get a large immediate reward for killing them while rescuing entails sparing their life for a potential future reward. All the while, your audio narrator is dehumanizing the girls and encouraging you to harvest them to become more powerful. What would you do?

Figure 5: Screenshot from *Bioshock* gameplay (IGN Guides, 2012).

While I was a "gamer" in my adolescence, I have played video games sporadically in my adult years. As such, I felt out of touch with the medium and was curious about what kinds of games have emerged and if any of them relate to social justice. What I found surprised me. There

are numerous games that have emerged that are not just about entertainment but something greater. Screen Rant published an online article that covered the "10 Best Video Games That Discuss Social Issues" (Wilds, 2022). On this list are games that deal with police surveillance and government control, mental health issues, trauma, whitewashing, immigration, queerness, and discrimination. Such games put players into positions where they must make a series of choices. For instance, when you play as an immigration officer in the game *Papers, Please*, you are tasked with deciding whether people will enter a country or not. Each day, there are more rules presented and you are given limited time to make decisions that affect peoples' lives.

Figure 6: Screenshot of *Papers, Please* (Wilds, 2022).

The way people speak about creating video games is evolving as well. The Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth recognized the importance of video games as a vehicle for social change and created an online course called "Games for Good: Video Game Design & Social Justice." The course offers students in grade 10 and above the opportunity to learn how to develop video games that further diversity, equity, and inclusion (*Games for Good: Video Game Design & Social Justice*, n.d.). Simply put, it seems like people are starting to give a shit about

others, and it's awesome. When scanning the video game landscape, it became clear to me that new voices are being shared and that creators are challenging players to grapple with ethics, morality, and history. This is the intent behind *Dot's Home* - one of the five projects of Rise-Home Stories that initially inspired this thesis.

According to the production team, "*Dot's Home* is a single-player, 2D, narrative-driven video game that follows a young Black woman in Detroit living in her grandmother's beloved home, as she travels through time to relive key moments in her family's history where race, place, and home collide in difficult choices" (Dot's Home, 2021). The game is structured into different chapters, each highlighting a particular housing issue - redlining, urban renewal, and gentrification (Williams, 2023). To clarify terms, **redlining** is the practice of denying people financial services based off the area they live in, **urban renewal** is the forceful clearing of areas that are "less desirable" to make "improvements," and **gentrification** is where the original, less-wealthy residents of an area are priced out of a neighborhood and forced to leave to make way for more privileged, wealthier people. When playing *Dot's Home*, you bear witness to all of these issues and how certain choices made in the past - such as renting or buying - have a ripple effect in the present. And while time-travel isn't a new concept, it is almost always exciting.

Figure 7: Screenshot of time travel in *Dot's Home* (Dot's Home, 2021).
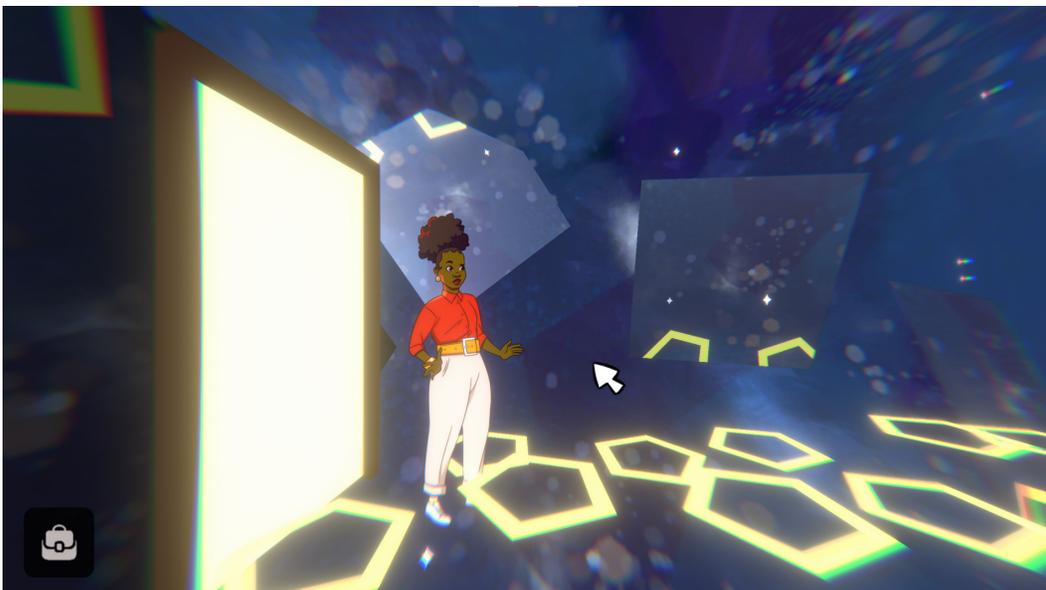
The team behind *Dot's Home* sought to create "an interactive experience" that "allows players to see the harmful systems that dictate our relationship to race and place, through the eyes of those that are most impacted" (Dot's Home, 2021). In this case, the people most impacted are Dot's family and neighborhood community, which we witness changing over time. Supervising Producer, Paige Wood, expressed that there was a clear intent to show that there were historic "barriers to letting people and families have the same choice of opportunity as anyone else" (Noel, 2023). The *Dot's Home* team wanted people to understand that the housing systems in place were not fair and continue to be unjust. Time-travel is a helpful device that empowers players to reflect on the question: "How did your family end up where they are today, and how much choice did they really have in that journey?" (Dot's Home, 2021).

Figure 8: Reviews of *Dot's Home* (Dot's Home, 2021; Rise-Home Stories Project, n.d.)
"*Dot's Home* provides both validation and insight into how housing inequality manifests for people of color in the U.S."   - Kotaku   "The Rise-Home Stories Project has created something often impossible in the gaming industry: a fully-fleshed out narrative video game created by people of color for people of color…The game tackles housing inequality, gentrification, racism, and generational trauma with elegance and empathy."   - Wired   "*Dot's Home* has a goal of validating the experiences of young Black and Brown people by recognizing a system that is stacked against them. It also aims to expose this complex system through game mechanics."

- i-D

"*Dot's Home* is an inspiring example of how the power of games can be leveraged to transform the narratives that shape our culture and society for a more equitable future."

- Unity Blog

"Being a person of color, an immigrant, and teacher myself this game and the story really resonated with me."

- Gamer

"I just wanted to thank you for creating *Dot's Home*. I just played through it this morning, and I really enjoyed how it took a really complex issue and broke it down into a digestible narrative format."

- Gamer

"I really enjoyed this. As someone who has a grandmother in a neighborhood like this, it really hits close to home (no pun intended). I would love to see more games made like this."

- Gamer

"Reminds me of educational games from the 90's at school. As a Real Estate Professional myself, it's interesting to me to see the concepts of generational wealth and the things that held so many back for so long play out in a concise narrative. Not a great game, but an awesome experience. Would suggest everyone swing through it and learn a thing or two about blockbusting and how gentrification affects folks."

- Gamer

"This is a very well made game revolving around real world issues and what other people go through. I am glad that these sorts of experiences can be made public in such a way, as it can open the eyes to people. Well Done Developers!"

- Gamer

"Why is this free? Why is this game free? I have got so much from this free game than all the games I've paid for in the last three years. Can someone help my brain understand this."

- Gamer

"This game was very straightforward. Not particularly mindblowing with the mechanics or even the writing, but there's a certain charm here that I can't explain. Dot is such an interesting (and unintentionally hilarious) protagonist and I love seeing her journey into the past. The game has its funny moments, but also does a good job of highlighting the importance of community in our lives. It made me want to leave my own apartment and learn more about those in my building and neighborhood. There's a piece here around an abundance mindset as well as the importance of collective power that I think is really dope. Very cut and dry, would def recommend."

- Gamer

I loved reading these reviews from online publications and individuals. It was clear that *Dot's Home* is having an impact on people and helping others understand real-world issues in an engaging way. Since it was launched, *Dot's Home* has received praise from the gaming community and several accolades; it was the winner of Games for Change's "Game of the Year" and Apple's Cultural Impact Award. I think a large part of the success of *Dot's Home* is that the story of *Dot's Home* is personal for the team behind the game; the circumstances and characters are inspired by family members and their histories. The character of Dot ("Dorothy") is actually based off of the grandma of the Co-Lead Developer of the game, Neil Jones aka Aerial_Knight. Neil shared, "when we were coming up with *Dot's Home*, I was telling them about my grandma,

she grew up in Detroit, and we character modeled after her" (Jones, 2023). I was able to connect

with Neil and discuss his career and video games as an emerging media for social justice

storytelling (Jones, March 7, 2023; Appendix B).

Figure 9: Profile of Neil Jones (Jones, n.d.).
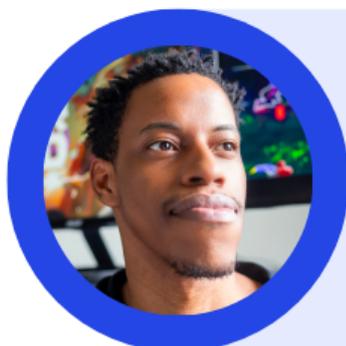
Neil Jones aka Aerial_Knight is a "Detroit based Games Developer, Designer and Artist." "[He] aims to create interesting short story games for an underserved market." Neil served as the Co-Lead Developer of Dot's Home. The first solo indie game he developed was *Aerial_Knight's Never Yield*, which was released on May 2021 after two years of heartfelt work. Neil is listed as one of the Black Voices in Gaming - a list curated by the nonprofit of the same name.

I should clarify that for Neil, he doesn't love the term "social justice," not because of

what it represents, but because of what follows when you hear the phrase. Neil mentioned that

using such terms can have the opposite intended effect and actually "shut down a conversation."

While Neil's personal work isn't explicitly tied to the term "social justice," he recognized that a

shift occurred when he was at events and observed how Black kids would play his game,

Aerial_Knight's Never Yield, and then run around excitedly shouting that the character looks like

them. He now creates games for Black youth to see themselves represented and "feel [that] a

piece of [their] culture is in the gaming industry so that they can feel comfortable pursuing a

game industry job one day if they want to." In this sense, "social justice" can exist in the act of

helping others feel included and inspired to not only be consumers of content but creators too.

Sounds like love to me.

When asked about working on *Dot's Home* - a game that is more overtly tied to social

justice - Neil said they were "really upfront with what [the video game] was. The audience going

into it knew what to expect, it's not like they were expecting [an] Iron Man adventure, and they

got a social justice thing." One of the strengths of the game that Neil identified is that it explains history and shows it to you in a way that is harder to do in conversations: it "[helps] people understand where this problem came from because you know you get into arguments with people… but there's so much to explain that you actually can't sum it all up, but a game like this can sum it all up and show you." *Dot's Home* is about progressing through time and understanding the root of certain housing problems while facing "predatory practices and exploitation." Along the way, players are faced with making choices "that will affect Dot's journey to buying or selling her grandmother's home" (Williams, 2023). The choices the players make will then determine the game's ending.

Figure 10: Screenshot of decision-making in *Dot's Home* (Dot's Home, 2021).

The ability for gamers to make choices is a key strength of this emerging media form. Unlike other forms, where your only choice is to progress in one direction towards the same outcome, video games grant players "agency" - an ability to make choices, ideally with *some* positive outcomes. Agency was at the forefront of the producers' minds as they wanted the

choices that players made to call into question an "individual versus collective relationship to land and home" (Williams, 2023). Do you make choices to benefit yourself or your community? *Dot's Home* isn't telling you what to feel or what to do, but merely showing that your choices matter and that the systems in place restrict people's agency. The hard reality is that even if you feel like you "make the right choices," you can't win a game with "a system that's rigged against you," with an "American housing system [that] wasn't created to benefit us" (Castilla, 2023; NLIHC, 2022). The artistic team found that "video games [are] one of the best mediums to interrogate agency and help young folks understand that "Black and Brown Americans had limited choices, particularly around housing" (Castilla, 2023).

When speaking about the limitations of the media, Neil expressed that "with games there's a big on-ramp." To illustrate this point, here's a checklist to consider. If you check all of the points, congratulations, you *might* be ready to play a video game! Do I:

☐ Know how and where to access video games?

☐ Know how to download video games?

☐ Know how to play video games?

☐ Have the money/resources to afford video games?

☐ Have the appropriate computer or console to play video games?

☐ Have an internet connection to access/play video games?

While engaging, video games can be more intimidating than card or board games. There are new controls, rules, and technology to learn. It's a tall order and the rules change with every video game. Unlike other emerging media forms that offer up a consistent experience - once you read one graphic novel, you know how to read another - each video game is unique in format and

playstyle. It's the emerging media form that requires the most engagement from a participant. However, the challenge and learning rewards can also be extremely exciting and fulfilling.

Here are some pro tips for people who want to use video games for social justice storytelling.

- <u>Understand your primary audience.</u> The team behind *Dot's Home* was clear that the game was designed for Black and brown youth. This doesn't mean that the game can't be enjoyed by others, simply that the story and characters relate to the lives of the primary audience.

- <u>Consider your characters.</u> As Neil discovered, when people see themselves reflected in stories, they get excited. Representation is exciting - it validates the identities and existence of others and can help people feel a sense of belonging. When considering what characters to include, follow your heart. There's a reason why Neil models his characters after family and friends- they are who he loves and knows best.

- <u>Don't pretend it's something it's not.</u> People don't like to be misled. If it's clearly a game with connections to social issues, say so.

- <u>Mix medicine with sugar.</u> If you have a message to deliver, give people a reason to stick around and hear it. Neil advises that "people play games to escape… they just want to be the hero in some situation, not deal with whatever is going on in life." It's important to still position people as heroes and interject excitement. If you have a social message to share, try to make the game immersive.

- <u>Think about marketing.</u> Think about your game's story, style, and gameplay. Keep it simple and see if you can explain each in one or two sentences.

- <u>Envision the gameplay.</u> Neil knew he wanted to create a 2D running game with simple controls. The game wasn't as focused on plot and complex controls as much as style and flow.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Takeaways

From speaking with Neil, I learned that the video game industry is not very **inclusive** due to the lack of career opportunities available and the number of technical skills a person needs to possess. As a person who exists in an industry with numerous barriers to entry, Neil expressed that "[he] never wanted to be indie, [he] had to be indie." **Diversity** among video game creators is another noticeable issue. A "2017 Developer Satisfaction Survey conducted by the International Game Developers Association" found that video games creators who responded to the survey are mostly male (74%), White (68%), heterosexual (81%), and around the age of 35 years old (Wirtz, 2023). I hope that the industry shifts to encourage more creators from varied backgrounds and identities, which will allow for the expression of more diverse characters, stories, and culture. I've learned that one of the main strengths of video games is how the medium asks users to make real-time choices related to **equity**, injustice, morals, and ethics. Such choices come with questions: As a video game protagonist, are you acting with love or hate, care or carelessness? Are you dismantling structures of oppression or furthering them? Are you a hero or a villain or something else entirely? Video games are multisensory experiences that require active participation and reflection. In terms of **accessibility**, video games can be an intimidating medium because of the technology needed to source and play games. That being said, there are many games out there that are simple to learn, free/low-cost, and mobile friendly.

Podcasts

My favorite podcast is *Ear Hustle*. The podcast was launched in 2017 and has the distinction of being the "first podcast created and produced in prison" (Radiotopia, 2021). *Ear Hustle* offers an inside look into the everyday lives of people in California's San Quentin State Prison. By listening, I learned about the euphoria of prison catalogs, the heartbreak of visiting rooms, the impact of criminal records, the experience of death row, the potential of restorative justice, the complications of queerness, and the comfort to be found in the uncomfortable. I learned about interior design, fashion, food, hygiene, comradery, insects, letters, intimacy, parenthood, and the hustle to thrive and not merely survive. I learned about how people who are incarcerated would navigate finding friendship, love, and meaning, all while grappling with their past and their current realities behind bars. *Ear Hustle* featured the voices of people living, longing, and reflecting. It featured a co-host who was incarcerated at the time and music created by a production team from within the prison. It was a true community effort and something that inspired people to want to share their stories. For me, *Ear Hustle* serves as an example of the power of community storytelling and how we can understand each other's humanity if we're curious and willing to listen.

Figure 11: An episode of *Ear Hustle* (Radiotopia, 2021).

SEASON 7 · JUNE 9, 2021

Episode 60: Home for Me Is Really a Memory

How do you live a meaningful life when nearly all of it is spent behind bars?

In an article published in *The Crisis*, the National Alliance for the Advancement of Colored People's official magazine, writer Jazelle Hunt created a list of the "8 New Social Justice Podcasts to Keep You in the Loop." Jazelle mentions how these podcasts have emerged in response to the crisis that Black communities are experiencing "on three fronts - the coronavirus pandemic, police/White supremacist violence, and a precarious political landscape" (Hunt, 2020). In 2023, I can type in the phrase "social justice podcasts" in Google and lists just like the one Jazelle created will pop up: "6 Social Justice Podcasts You'll Wish You Knew About Sooner," "40 Best Social Justice Podcasts You Must Follow in 2023," "Listen Up: 12 Podcasts About Race, Social Justice, and Black History," 10 Best Social Justice Podcasts for Advocacy-Minded Pros" - you get the point. Social justice podcasts have *emerged* to such an extent that they are seemingly everywhere - a sign that people are more than ever willing to speak about social issues openly and globally. And in case you're wondering, here's Jazelle Hunt's original list of social justice podcasts to keep you in the loop (Hunt, 2020):

1. COVID University of New York

2. Driving the Green Book

3. Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America

4. The Tight Rope

5. How To Citizen with Baratunde

6. Sounds Like Hate

7. Black in Appalachia

8. Black Lives Matter presents: What Matters

Not only can you learn about social justice through listening to podcasts, you learn by creating them. Schools have started to experiment with students creating their own podcasts to

deepen their understanding of social issues, all while connecting with people of different lived

experiences and gaining technical skills. For example, a class project at the College of

Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln entailed 165

students working collaboratively over the course of a semester to create a podcast called "And

Still We Rise." Each episode of the podcast "features the story of a different woman impacted by

the Nebraska criminal justice system" (Van Loon, 2022). Students were able to interview women

who were alumni of a program run by a nonprofit called RISE, which helps people who are

formerly incarcerated reenter society. Through the experience, students learned about mass

incarceration and the awful constraints and stereotypes that follow people that have been branded

as felons. Their hope? To share stories that break down those stereotypes and help create a more

"inclusive and welcoming society" (Van Loon, 2022). To better understand the podcasting

process and its potential for social good, I connected with Lee Hawkins (Hawkins, March 10,

2023; Appendix C).

Figure 12: Profile of Lee Hawkins (Marquette University, 2022).

Lee Hawkins is an independent journalist, author, and now - podcaster. "He is a four-time winner of the National Association of Black Journalists' 'Salute to Excellence' Award. [Lee] was also part of a reporting team that was recognized as finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting about the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre." The title of his upcoming book is NOBODY'S SLAVE: How Uncovering My Family's History Set Me Free.

Lee has been creating a podcast titled *What Happened in Alabama*. When asked about

what the podcast is about, Lee responded, "the project is pretty much my investigation into the

intergenerational effect of slavery, Jim Crow, and the great migration on my family. The question

'what happened in Alabama?' derives from when I was a kid and my dad would have

nightmares, and in the morning I would ask him what he was dreaming of and he would say: Alabama." Alabama has been a site of trauma for Lee's father and family. The effects of slavery and Jim Crow followed Lee's father when he relocated to Minnesota. While raising Lee in a predominantly White neighborhood, Lee's father used corporal punishment (physical punishment) as a way to keep Lee behaving "perfect" in a society that was looking for any excuse to punish him. The experience of enduring corporal punishment stayed with Lee and motivated him to uncover where the act came from. Through *What Happened in Alabama*, he spent 9 years investigating his family's history "all the way back to the 1600s and [then he] followed it forward."

The journey led Lee to connect with Black and White family members on both sides of slavery as they revisited the past. I was curious about if the process has helped Lee to feel lighter, freer, and perhaps even healed. Lee noted that "healing is not a linear process. There is no destination to healing. Some days you feel completely healed, some days I think of my dead father... But this process of discovery is a powerful endeavor. It shows you pieces of yourself that you would never have recognized had you not gone through this. And I think for me and a lot of the family members who have participated, on both sides of slavery, because a big part of this project is the White members of my family who enslaved my family and who I'm related to by blood - it has been cleansing for all of us." Lee exists in a pivotal point in the history of the United States as he bridges generational and racial divides while being the "first in [his] bloodline, 18 generations, to have equal rights to a White person." The circumstances are at the forefront of Lee's mind, especially as he shares truths about this country's White supremacist history.

Lee acknowledged that the stories and information he's sharing in his podcast will be difficult for some to face. The information presented will be especially hard for White people who feel like society has become too political. *What Happens in Alabama* "forces the understanding that White people in this country had a 400-year advantage" and disproves the idea that "every American is entitled to life, liberty, and happiness… It's going to show that there was a dual reality, that there were two tracks in the American story." All of this information is shared through the lens of one Black family and one Black man who endured generational horrors and "still succeeded, not because of America but despite America."

When asked if Lee would consider this to be a social justice podcast, his response was that he didn't like the way that sounds. To Lee, a "social justice podcast" conjures up the image of people giving opinions about topics related to social issues, which is "easy." Opinions don't take much work to dish out. Lee said the harder process is "to investigate and gather information and then tell a story that gets people the information and allows them to draw their own conclusions from the devastating truth that you've gathered." Lee isn't trying to preach or "regurgitate the same ideas" he's already heard with "tired language." Lee's experience as a journalist definitely informs his perspective. The field of journalism values objectivity and anything that is opinion-based is subjective. What isn't subjective though, are the truths that Lee shares through his family's stories - stories that have social justice implications.

I shared my definition of social justice with Lee - "any action that furthers love" - and asserted that his podcast does further love. I propose that through *What Happened in Alabama?* he is connecting with relatives on both sides of his family, healing through the process and helping to facilitate some healing. Alabama is a site of generational trauma for Lee's family and yet, through the process and product, Lee is helping to build understanding, which is a key

element of love. After all, if you don't understand someone, how can you love them? Lee appreciated my take and affirmed that "when you can provide information to people that's one of the highest forms of love." He expressed, "there is a contingent of people who will feel - whether I want them to feel it or not - they will feel that I built some understanding and love." Lee doesn't want to tell people how to think or feel, but a deepened understanding of history is a probable outcome, at least for some. The other outcome? Hate.

"It's a podcast that could also inspire a great deal of hostility and condemnation and controversy," Lee shared. This is because the podcasts "will require many White Americans to sort of look through a much clearer lens at the truth of what America is and isn't, what America was and what America wasn't." Despite Lee's family's patriotic past - Lee was "born on an airforce base at the height of the Vietnam War when [his] father, who wasn't born with voting rights, enlisted to serve his country" - he anticipates that some may view his story as anti-American. Yet, Lee insists that asking for "equality and justice and civil rights for all… is not an anti-American approach, it is a pro-American patriotic approach." He references that "when Colin Kapernick kneeled, he wasn't condemning the American ideal, he was condemning America's inability to live up to that ideal, which is the highest form of love you can show for this country." The *highest* form of love is truth and accountability. Some may say that this is "tough love" and that "this podcast shows tough love for White Americans;" but Lee didn't create this podcast to cater to White Americans. He's clear in the intent: "My podcast is doing citizens of the world a favor by illuminating the truth at the family level of one Black family."

One of the reasons Lee chose to use podcasting to tell his family's story was because of the "explosive growth" of the medium over the past decade. With the advancement of new technology, Lee shared, "I want to be where my listeners are." As a form of emerging media,

podcasting can reach millions of people all over the world and "in different stages of listening capacity." People can enjoy podcasts while commuting and performing different tasks. The medium doesn't place a large stress on people's mental capacity in the same way that video games do. There are no choices to be made aside from pausing, rewinding, and forwarding, and no visuals and text to grapple with. When I asked Nick Szuberla, the Executive Director of Narrative Arts - a nonprofit dedicated to social justice storytelling - about podcasting as a form of emerging media, he offered that audio is a "powerful tool" that intrigues people - "when you play audio for people in a room they kind of listen. It's a fun way to listen to a story" (Szuberla, 2023). On the creator's end, it's also "affordable" and "a little easier to edit." Nick says that "if you want people to be empowered and edit their own stuff, audio is a little less of a complex lift" than video.

One thing I learned about podcasting is that the hardest part isn't mastering the technical aspects of the medium, it's "learning how to do journalism." Sure, you can create a podcast and spout off opinions, but if your goal is to enlighten others and share stories grounded in facts, you have to learn how to research and how to interview. Lee's process includes hours of intensive research into news articles and archives, and then hours of preinterviews with people over the phone, where he can understand them and their family's history better. Lee noted, "when we have that initial conversation, I share information with them, so they feel invested in it, so they learn some things in the process of talking to me. And usually when people have learned something in the process of talking with you, they want to do more, they want to be a part of it. If you can give people a deeper insight into their genealogy, that has transformative power because many people walk around the world in a state of confusion never really knowing where they come from. And so if you can give people even kernels of information about the people who

came before, usually they're grateful." The beauty of Lee's process is that he's not trying to just extract information, he's trying to add value to peoples' lives. In many cases, he finds that with all of the research and conversations he's had with other family members, he often knows more about a person's ancestors than they do.

After speaking with Lee, here are some pro tips I learned for new podcasters:

- <u>Do your research and preparation</u>. One of Lee's strategies is to "drop something along the way that shows them that [he] respected their story enough to do the extra work." This could be a piece of new knowledge or something about their past that they may have forgotten. Showing others that you have done your work starts to build trust and excitement. Don't be lazy!

- <u>Add value</u>. What, if anything, can you share with your subject that they didn't already know? For Lee, he was able to provide insight into people's ancestry that they didn't already have and also, in some cases, share recordings of family members that had passed away - recordings that would be cherished because they allow people to hear their loved ones again.

- <u>Do a lot of listening.</u> It's not about you, it's about the subject of your interview. Listening is one of the most important things to do to get people to be their authentic selves. Listen "to guide the conversation, but not dominate the conversation." It's important to "recognize the pivot points and the points when you need to shut up and let people talk." Particular topics can be uncomfortable to speak about and lead to silence, but instead of habitually breaking the silence, give your subject the time to work through their emotions and speak.

- Show don't tell. As an example, Lee mentions that "it's much better to bring a [person] in to talk about their father's murder 30 years before than to write that their father's been murdered. The shaky voice, the pauses in between words, the joy, the memories, all of that plays into if a podcast is effective and authentic, and powerful."

- Ask yourself if you are furthering stereotypes or defying them. Stories have the power to affirm what people already perceive or challenge them to consider new realities. Lee's story is unlike many narratives of Black families shared in music, film, and television. Lee's family is full of investment bankers, college professors, journalists, school superintendents, and professional athletes. Lee didn't start from "the bottom" and experience unemployment, welfare assistance, or public housing. By sharing a story that "challeng[es] the prevailing narrative about the Black family and the Black family system," Lee's story allows us to consider that wealth doesn't heal the pain of slavery or shield someone from racism. Such liberation can only come from uncovering your roots.

- Keep it personal. Lee said that there's a reason behind why his book is called "Nobody's Slave, How Uncovering My Family's History set Me Free." He went on to share further wisdom: "You can't take on too much. You can't be all things to all people, you can't serve the world's problems with every story you do, but you're right, you can bring authenticity by speaking about what you know in the most iconoclastic and nuanced parts of your life." To be iconoclastic is to be radical and non-conforming.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Takeaways

There are no gatekeepers preventing people from publishing their own podcasts and the audio tools involved can be learned in a matter of days. In this way, podcasts are an **inclusive**

form of emerging media with low barriers to entry. With many different voices entering the

podcasting landscape, the industry features **diverse** content creators and consumers. The

analytics company, Nielsen, found that the podcasts have grown exceedingly popular amongst

"Asian American, Black, Hispanic, people with disabilities and LGBTQ+ podcast consumers"

over the past decade. On average, people from these identity groups will now spend 3 hours

listening to podcasts weekly (Nielsen, 2021). By sharing a range of perspectives with others,

podcasts can help shift people's mental frames and further **equity**. Through the power of hearing

real people speak, listeners can gain a better understanding of different lived experiences, history,

social issues, fairness, and humanity, which will inform how they choose to treat others and

advocate for causes. This is of course dependent on how objective or subjective a podcast is and

the journalistic integrity of the podcaster. Podcasts are an **accessible** form of emerging media that

can be enjoyed at a person's leisure and often while multitasking. They are also free to access as

long as a person has an internet connection, a phone or a computer, and the patience to listen to

(or fast forward through) a few advertisements. As podcasts are primarily delivered in an audio

format or via written transcripts and can be accessed without leaving one's home, podcasts can

be enjoyed by people with different abilities/disabilities (Nielsen, 2021).

Social Justice Storytelling

While researching the topic of emerging media, I learned about something called digital storytelling - a process where community members are empowered to learn how to use different media forms like photos, videos, and audio to tell their own stories to contribute to research and a greater understanding of social issues. This movement started in the 1970s and 1980s as a way "to increase access to art for marginalized communities" and spark social change. On a personal level, digital storytelling participants can "make meaning of their lived-experiences" and feel empowered to tell their own stories, thereby "increas[ing] their well-being" and "promot[ing] resilience." On a broader scale, digital stories can further social justice by raising awareness, educating others, and "challeng[ing] negative and harmful stereotypes" (Fish & Syed, 2021). I view the use of emerging media as the next step in the digital storytelling movement. With new media comes new possibilities for how stories are told, what audiences are reached, and who is involved in the storytelling process.

There are two parts of emerging media for social justice storytelling. The first is learning about emerging media, which we covered previously. The second is learning how to be a social justice storyteller. To offer guidance on what this entails, I connected with Nick Szuberla (Szuberla, March 7, 2023; Appendix D).

Figure 13: Profile of Nick Szuberla (Animating Democracy, n.d.; Narrative Arts, 2021).

Nick Szuberla is the Executive Director of Narrative Arts - "a non-partisan social justice organization dedicated to challenging injustice by empowering communities to address issues that affect their lives." Nick has experience working with a variety of media, including radio, live performances, and documentaries. "His projects focus on creating public space where people can tell their story in their own voice." Nick has trained "more than 500 youth and adults in the use of media arts as a community development tool," especially in rural America.

With over 30 years of experience in creating media for social justice, Nick has a lot of wisdom to share. Here's one of his pieces of advice: sometimes you have to be "a little bit savvy." After receiving letters from prisoners about the human rights violations they were experiencing, Nick and his collaborator Amelia Kirby started a radio show in 2001 called *Calls from Home*. Nick and Amelia didn't want to engage in a battle with their very White and very pro-prison community about the issues surrounding prisons, so they thought, "if we just put on people's voices talking to their loved ones, it's far more powerful." And they were right. Hearing the voices of the loved ones calling in and sharing news from home helped humanize the people who had been trapped in prisons and "really wore down the opposition." Listeners started to connect the stories they heard "with their own stories because some of them have loved ones who are incarcerated." The show has continued for over 20 years and transcended racial lines because of Nick and Amelia's simple yet savvy approach; "it wasn't issue-oriented, it was really just based on creating a space for people to share and tell stories" - stories filled with love. As Amelia noted in a feature in the Guardian, "It's difficult to hate someone when you hear their grandchild tell them they love them on the radio" (Hackman, 2016).

Savviness? Check. Simplicity? Check. Here are some more best practices that Nick offered when creating stories for social justice:

- Don't lecture - "If you start by telling people what to think, it doesn't bring [them] into the conversation." Share information in an engaging and accessible way and let people come to their own conclusions.

- Highlight the positive - Nick identified that the "feeling of pride is a building block of organizing" and that if a person "start[s] to feel good about [their] culture, [they'll] fight

for it." How are the stories you're telling informing others about an issue *and* uplifting peoples' cultures?

- Go local - Nick explained that "the stories you hear from your neighbors are what inform your reality. And if [you are] only talking to Fox News or NPR, [you] start to get kind of homogenous in [your] view of the world." First, talk to your neighbors! Then, think about how you can focus on local issues and engage your community in the process of story making and story sharing.

- Invest in sustainability - Stories for social justice should be "told and created by those who are close to the issue." The process isn't about "parachuting in" and extracting stories, it should be sustainable. The beauty of working with people to tell their own stories is that they will be there "for the long haul" and be empowered as creators. Think about what sorts of media training and storytelling tools you can offer to build community power.

- Open up the second act - The second act is the dialogue that occurs after the media is presented. Are there ways that people can engage in dialogue online or in-person after experiencing your story? Are there any forums, groups, or meetings planned?

- Be accountable - Social justice storytelling is not "about putting communities at risk" and acting without consent. Be aware of how the stories you tell might affect the lives of others in positive and negative ways. Is anything you're sharing confidential?

- Check your ego - The process of making stories shouldn't be about "the glorification of a brilliant individual" (aka you) or "about being ideologically correct." It's also not about trying to fit peoples' stories into a neat box when there are layers to their lives.

Future Exploration

As I spoke with Nick, he referenced three key parts of storytelling: the process where the story is created, the viewing of the story, and then the dialogue that occurs after. What strikes me about social media is that it is an emerging media form that consists of both story and dialogue, all in one. This is because what makes social media "social" is that it serves as an open forum where people can comment on, like, and share the stories they come across.

It was my original hope to explore social media in this thesis project, but I need more time to study the medium. I'm amazed by how platforms like Instagram and Tik Tok allow someone to create, post, and stream with just a few clicks of a button "while also reaching out to and communicating with a much larger audience than they would normally have access to" (Gonzalez, 2020). The beauty of these platforms is that they offer a glimpse into the lived experiences of others via short and engaging videos. Spencer West's work is a prime example of this. Spencer is a "gay/disabled content creator" who uses Tik Tok and Instagram to share what it's like to live with a disability and advocate for a society that is accessible for all (West, 2023). His joyful, humorous, and informative content has helped him amass 4.3 million followers and 91.2 million likes on TikTok. I'm excited to learn more about other content creators like Spencer.

Figure 14: Spencer West TikTok Video: "How I drive a car with no legs" (West, 2023).
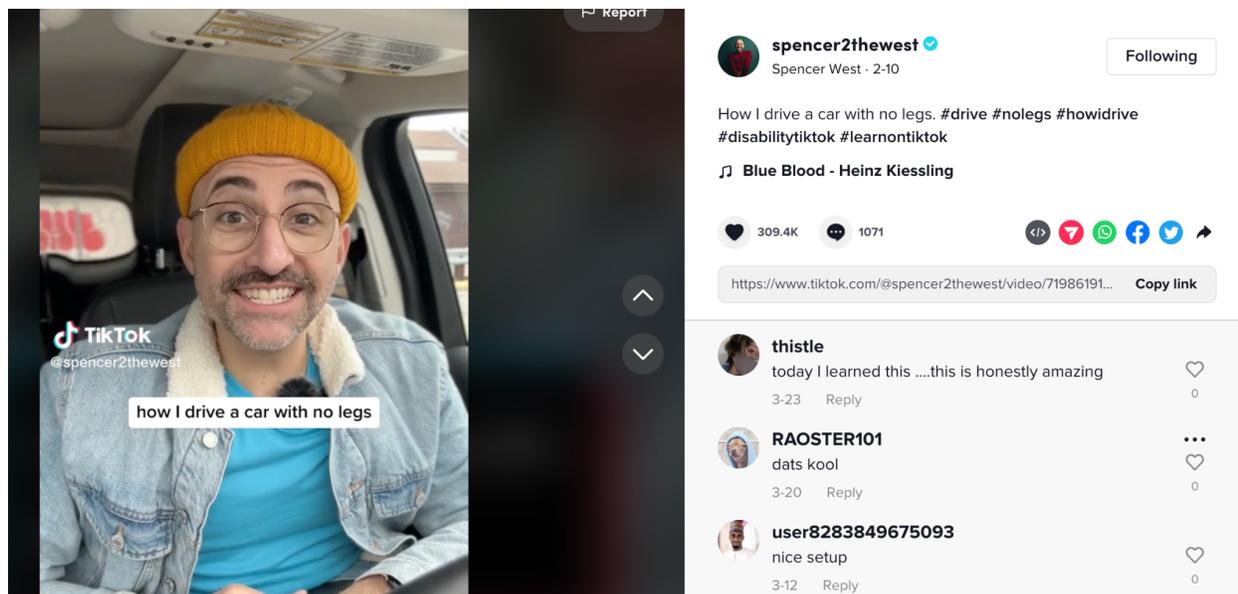
Conclusion

I have three questions I now ask whenever I enjoy media: 1) Was I engaged?, 2) Did I understand what was being communicated to me?, and 3) Would it be likely that I can create something similar? In an ideal world, the answer to all of these questions are "yes." In reality, it depends on the media form and the content produced.

Of all of the forms of emerging media I explored, I consider video games to be the most engaging because they activate multiple senses by mixing animated visuals, audio, and text. As highlighted by *Dot's Home*, video games also require that users make choices about how to proceed and experience how those choices play out, positively and negatively. In comparison, graphic novels only use visuals and text to convey a story, while podcasts only use audio. Even though graphic novels can be touched and annotated, they do not encourage much interactivity or choices to be made aside. Podcasts are a convenient media to consume but provide the most passive experience as the only choices a person needs to make are whether to rewind, pause, fast forward, or resume. When thinking about what emerging media form to use, I recommend asking: How can this media stimulate multiple senses to open people up to receive new information and what choices does this media allow a person to make? This is the heart of engagement.

If video games are the most engaging emerging media form, they are also the hardest to create as they require a lot of technical knowledge and tools. Video games are also harder to access and learn in comparison to the other mediums explored, though the rise of mobile gaming is helping to even this out. Podcasts, being primarily an audio form, can be accessed and created with just a smartphone, and graphic novels can be accessed in print and digital formats and created with just paper and pen. However, technology and materials aren't the only

considerations you must make to use these forms of emerging media. To tell impactful stories, you need to develop storytelling skills, gain knowledge and experience with the social issue(s) you're exploring, and work collaboratively with your community. As each one of the people I interviewed shared, it is important that these stories are personal and local.

Whenever we share our stories with others to build understanding, we are furthering love and committing an act of social justice. I can clearly say that I want to tell stories that start with "a matter of the heart" (Author X), make little kids jump with joy from seeing themselves reflected (Neil Jones), and have journalistic integrity (Lee Hawkins). I'm inspired by graphic novels that can be enjoyed by people with a range of reading levels and that focus your attention frame-by-frame, video games that engage multiple senses and allow you to make choices, and podcasts that can be created without many barriers to entry and harness the power of peoples' voices to reach others emotionally and intellectually.

Time will tell if nonprofits, activists, and communities choose to use emerging media for social justice storytelling. My hope, however, is that people try: try to embrace new storytelling forms, try to protest in digital and physical spaces, try to inspire people to be creators and not just consumers, try to understand their family's history, try to engage their local community, and most importantly, try to act with love. With that, let's go forth and create.

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Appendix A: Author X Interview Excerpts

Author X did not consent to having our conversation recorded but did consent to having their words transcribed. The excerpts below are the phrases and sentences I was able to transcribe during the interview.

- I started drawing very young.

- I make a lot of graphics for t-shirts… I wanted to wear it on the outside of my body, just not in my head.

- One of the things he wrote to me about was about the Black Lives Matter protests; the property destruction he didn't like. From his point of view the people involved were destroying things, violating rules.

- It sounded to me that he was being swept away by this current, being swept away by these anti-Black ideas.

- Rules are important. Having an organized effort is important.

- I wanted to both affirm the things that were right in his mind but also upload some history and give him some information to consider, not change his mind, but provide context for what he was seeing.

- I thought the best way to do it was not talk.

- He carries the stories with him today.

- He's experiencing anti-Blackness in school and the story provides background.

- The Graphic Novel is about the location of Black life and when it comes in contact with law enforcement and the nature of Black people's relationship with law enforcement and the history of that is different, it's unique.

- This is about giving information for him to download about the struggle.

- This kid looks like my nephew.

- …Humanize the people who are dehumanized in the way that Breonna Taylor is told…

- You can edit it, you can scratch it out, you can Black it out, you can rearrange it, take it apart, annotate.

- I don't like to feel like I'm being manipulated.

- These are facts, they can be verified, there is no music dramatizing.

- It's important that it be targeted, timely, tailored, and localized.

- Images that provide an inroad - these are my people.

- It feels unjust that my nephew's conclusions about those around him engaging in protest were limited to his classroom, to be uninformed…

- Actionable grievance - he doesn't know, he should know, if he doesn't bad things could happen to him.

- Actionable grievance - a wrong that needs to be right.

- Social justice for me would be the culmination of a series of things: First, someone who sits in view of something or experiences something that is unjust, something that demands…

- Starts with a matter of the heart.

- Once someone experiences that, they have to have hope, hope that they can do something about, a series of thoughts, feelings that lead them to action.

- Hope derived through witnessing counteractions in history.

- You can have better hope and faith to do the same thing. You feel like you can do it because people like you have done it before.

- Doing something about something you care about, an actionable grievance something you experience or bear witness to.

- I don't want to dramatize an issue that situates him against all White people.

- Protest education.

- Provide context. Memorialize a moment.

- It teaches him about the relationship of people online.

- It's the act of spitting in a child's face that is traumatizing… violent… thinking back to the 1960s… What does it mean to spit on someone's face in 2020, during the pandemic?

- You have to choose what to do, working through big feelings to do something in the physical world.

- Strengths: We're going to shrink it to just this moment… Raise people's awareness… Intention… Connection… Slow down… Speed it up… Narrow the focus.

- Video can capture much more… A moving frame.

- You have to draw more frames.

- You can slow someone down, you can break up the frame, you can annotate… you can adjust someone's vision.

- What did it take to bring this novel into existence? The physical novel: Images, story.

- Organizer, artist, writer, researcher.

- You need the luxury of time.

- Shrink your world to the four corners of this paper.

- Substantive value: What story are you telling? Who are the people in the story? What data gets included? Where do you stop short of dramatizing?

- Actively affirm Black lives.

- The relationship with the individuals.

- The importance of creating from experience.

- The opportunity to be in the thick of it.

Appendix B: Neil Jones Interview Transcript

H:

What made you want to create that story (*Never Yield*)?

N:

Well you know, at first, I just wanted to make something cool. I was really struggling to find a space in the game industry. It's not a really inclusive industry, historically, where there's a lot of opportunities, not specifically just Black people, but for people like not from the LA area. If you don't live in that bubble it's hard to get in. Every group has certain struggles in the game industry, some harder than others, you know, but it is what it is.

But you know I was having a really hard time, I was about to turn 30, and you know when you get a certain age, you're like, "what am I doing?" I spent 10 years trying to do this game stuff and I wanted to have at least something to show for it. I was like I'm going to put all my energy into this one thing and go all in on it. And if it works out, I'll keep going with this game development stuff but if not, hey I gave it my best shot and can't nobody be mad at me and I have something to show for it. The initial concept of it came from that

The actual gameplay was me trying to figure out what can I make relatively quickly and would work kind of well, and how can I make it cool? I wanted a character that reminded me of myself. I base all of my characters off of family members and friends.

The *Never Yield* title relates to my story of trying to make this thing and kind of evolved from there.

H:

Who's pursuing the character?

N:

Initially, the story is about this random character and you don't know what he's running from or why he's running. I didn't think people needed to know, you can figure it out throughout the game. It was important for me to put no dialogue in the game. You see these mini cutscenes and you try to piece it together.

The only thing I really told the marketing team was something was stolen from him, he took it back, and now these people hunt him down, and he's about to expose them, and be like yo look what's going on. Story was never the biggest factor for me. In summary, in the middle of the game you find out that you haven't only been playing as yourself you have been going back and forth between this character who looks exactly like you, who's your twin brother who has also trying to detain you, trying to bring you back because the thing you have is the historic powers of your family, they're trying to take something away from you, trying to take your history and make it your own. So it's very poetic, if you're looking for that but also if you're not looking for that it doesn't beat you across your head.

I like very simple stories. Things I can explain in a sentence and then put layers on top of it that can be deep if you want it to be deep.

H:

Something that I think is so cool when I read your bio is that you are interested in creating games for an underserved market. Can you talk about that, what that market is and why you do that?

N:

Growing up, if anybody goes back and looks at games around the times I was playing games, all of the characters were White men and I didn't really have a problem with it, I didn't

really realize it until I got older. I was like man, I really did play as a White guy so much. As a kid you don't really realize it because you can't miss something you never had. And I'm still not really mad about it because I know where it comes from. But, you know, I see kids now who play *Never Yield* and I know it sounds corny and it sounds made up, but there's literally been kids that say that character looks like me. I've been at events where kids play the game and then run around saying "I'm aerial knight! I'm aerial knight!" and I'm like yo that's not the character's name but I feel you. And I never cared about that social aspect of it of trying to make it for the little Black kids of the world until I saw that and I was like alright maybe I should kind of focus on this and you know serve this market that clearly does not have any examples.

Now I'm trying to just focus on what I liked as a kid, what I know to be true about the audience that supports me.

H:

And like creating from your own personal life, your personal experiences?

N:

Yeah, you know what you know best.

H:

And something as simple as having a character that people can relate to can be enough.

N:

Yeah, I mean it's got to be cool, it's got to have your culture in it. I use that that it's got to have your culture in it loosely because you know not all Black people have the same culture but you can have themes of that in there.

H:

What you would say are some of those cultural themes in *Never Yield*?

N:

Rhythm, stuff sounding good. I have artists singing over tracks over different levels. Some things don't need to be talked about, you know, like the two character's relationship there's a lot of like looking at each other and then knowing what's going on with that. If you watch a Black person play the last level, especially on Twitch, they lose their minds. If you watch somebody from another culture they're like oh ok that's pretty cool. It just feels different for some people.

H:

Thinking about the phrase of social justice - what the heck is social justice - do you think about that phrase at all when you are creating games or just in general?

N:

I mean, man, we just making games, it's not even that deep. The only thing that we contribute really is having little kids have - not a voice - but like - little Black kids can look at this and be like that character looks like me or a piece of my culture is in the gaming industry so that they can feel comfortable pursuing a game industry job one day if they want to.

People have different definitions for social justice. Some people want actual governmental change, some people want to be represented more in all forms. I feel like social justice covers a lot of things and a lot of people. It's hard to put it under one big thing and support everything with this one title which is why I think nobody really likes it.

H:

That's what I feel too. That it's too big of a phrase sometimes and that we get lost in the terms - like "equity" - they are loaded terms.

N:

Exhausting terms. It's like whenever you hear those terms, it comes with a fight - somebody's about to start arguing.

I used to hate White republicans and then I started understanding that they weren't even mad at us. They just want to keep what they got. And then they got mad because we were mad that they just wanted to keep what they got. And I'm like you got it in an unfair way, it was never fair. And they're like I understand, this has nothing to do with me though. And I'm like I get you, I'm not mad about you, I feel like we're all just mad at this ethereal thing that can't none of us change but we always going to fight about.

All of that ends up being put on that phrase that kind of pushes people away and I try to stay out of it, I'm like yo I just make games, I'm just trying to live my life.

H:

For me social justice is any action that furthers love. That's it, that's how I define it.

N:

I feel you. I think one of the issues is that everybody has to agree, even the people who are on our side. You say that statement, but then people will be like, I agree, but also this and also that, and then it becomes this loaded thing with what you said but also a thousand other things.

H:

Thinking about *Dot's Home*, which does fall into that terminology of "housing justice," how does it feel to be involved in a project that was more explicitly about justice.

N:

I feel like it was really upfront though with what this thing was. The audience going into it knew what to expect, it's not like they were expecting Iron Man adventure, and they got a social justice thing.

My grandma Dot - Dorothy - that's who they based *Dot's Home* off of. And when we were coming up with *Dot's Home*, I was telling them about my grandma, she grew up in Detroit, and we character modeled after her.

H:

You mentioned that *Dot's Home* is very upfront with what it is. How would you describe what it is?

N:

I would say that it's a way to understand a situation. Games are helping people to understand historical events more than books can. Like Assassins Creed - it's like altered history but still accurate.

Dot's Home kind of shows you the difference between how people talk about their house now and like how they got there. You go back in time and you see your grandmother at one age and then another age and you get to talk to her and see where she was living and the progression of their family got to that position. You know time travel is kind of played out but I feel like in this way it's all about story anyway, so it helps progress and help people under where this problem came from because you know you get into arguments with people and say hey historically Black people haven't had x, y, and z, but there's so much to explain that you actually can't sum it all up, but a game like this can sum it all up and show you.

H:

Are there any other games that have widened your perspective or lens on something?

N:

Yeah there's this game called Mafia 3. It's about a Black mafia in New Orleans, standard video game story where someone gets betrayed and he has to hunt down and kill everyone and - whatever - the interesting thing about Mafia 3 is the environment - I've never seen so many Black people, Black characters in a game and how they interact with each other, and the music they listen to, how they talk, how they go about solving problems, in a really realistic way, now this isn't historically based, but you play and it you're like that's kind of why my grandpa acts like that, that's the era he grew up in, you get to understand the era more than you understand historically the landscapes.

H:

You mentioned before the power of video games as compared to books, can you speak some more about the strength of video games, the power of video games?

N:

I think there's different categories of it, like my grandmother and my aunties know pacman and those types of video games, but our generation knows the change up where it turned into movie-type things, where these are stories, these are characters, you can like live through events. You'll never be on a beach in Normandy, but when I think of that situation - raiding Normandy beach in WWI or WWII - I feel like I have a better perspective on how that went down than past generations who weren't there. Just because I seen the bodies, I know how they had to roll up on the beach, even if it's not 100% accurate, I feel like this medium makes you feel it more than a book or movie or anything.

H:

It actively immerses you in it, right?

N:

Yeah, it puts you personally in that situation. There's been a couple of really great examples of where games are going. Last of Us 2. It's so emotional, it makes you do things that you don't want to do, it makes you the bad person, how you kill these people, and like people screaming for help and you find out that you're the bad guy. I remember these situations vividly, me playing as Ellie and doing those things, even though I didn't want to do those things - just thinking can we just go home. But I never felt like that with a movie, I never felt like that with a book of like why am I doing that, I want to stop doing this, as a human.

H:

There's all of these morality decisions that you are faced with when playing video games. I think I first faced that when I played Bioshock.

N:

Oh yeah, the little sisters?

H:

The little sisters! Do you save them, do you extract them?

N:

I think that's when a lot of people first faced that, they were like "I don't know what to do" and they just sat there for a really long time considering what to do. But in a book or a movie or whatever, you don't have that choice.

H:

Do you think that could be a challenge with some of these video games - how to balance it be engaging and not turning people off?

N:

You can get anyone to play anything with the right kind of marketing. But you know, it's medicine and sugar. If you're going to give them medicine, give them some sugar with it too. That's why I always aim for making sure it's fun, and then if I'm trying to tell a deeper story then I'll put that in there here and there but I'm not going to ruin someone's day. Because you have to remember with video games people play these games to escape their terrible lives. They just want to be the hero in some situation, not deal with whatever is going on in life, just be this other person, but you don't want to be this other person if their life is worse than yours, right? That's not really appealing. You play these games to be a stronger person in an imaginary realm. You don't want to play as someone who is weaker than you in real life or has a worse life than you unless you actively want to play a horror zombie-type thing, but no one wants to be surprised like that.

H:

Something that I remember you said in an interview you did is that if you try to appease everyone, you appease no one. Something that I'm learning through some of these interviews about working from your own personal experience, your own world, and not trying to be too broad, the more specific the better in some cases.

N:

I feel you. That's really accurate. I feel like that's why rap took off. It was telling a really specific story. Rap didn't start off by saying, hey I'm going to tell the story of a Muslim girl in

this other country, I'm going to tell this story of an Asian man who's going through - it was like I'm about to tell my story, I'm about to tell what's going on with me right now. And then, the whole world gravitated to it - it's a different sound and I like what they're saying. It's like I was saying, if you go too deep, then people won't rock with it, but it can be really simple, so people can gravitate towards it naturally and apply it to what's going on in their situation and then if they want to look deeper they can. I feel like that's what Wu-Tang did a lot, where they were like this is what's going on but you can also look deeper if you want to.

H:

I'm curious about some of the limitations or barriers that might come up with this medium.

N:

I think with games there's a big on ramp. You got to know how to play games, how to download them, how to access them. For America it's pretty affordable but in other countries $10 is a lot - that's a big ask. I feel like there are a lot of barriers - you have to have a console most of the time and then some of these things have to online all of the time - there's a lot of barriers to get people there it's not like a board game or a card game where someone can just buy it and then they got it forever and they can show other people. And, showing other people, if you have a console, then they have to come over to your house and then play it, I think that's why streaming took off. But doing something yourself feels different than watching someone else do that.

…

I never wanted to be indie, I had to be indie. I have an appreciation for people who choose this. Like me telling someone how much work this is, they'll never understand. During the launch of *Never Yield*, people were saying that this is a nice little game - it's really small, it's

simple - but it took me like two years and I slept for 2 hours a night sometimes for long periods of time.

H:

The last thing I wanted to ask you was two fill in the blank questions:

I make video games because ___

N:

All I know how to do.

H:

Social justice to me means ___

N:

Social justice to me means including everyone*

H:

What does the asterisk mean?

N:

That asterisk means don't add anything to this statement. People are going to take it too deep. I think that's the exhausting part - the asterisk. I can support all people without bringing up something that's going to make it harder to do that. I think some of these phrases go against what we're trying to do. Are we trying to be right or are we trying to get shit done? I can get more Black people in the game industry if I chill out with certain phrases and terms - even though I might agree with them - as soon as we use them it shuts down a conversation.

Appendix C: Lee Hawkins Interview Transcript

H:

I was curious about why you chose podcasting as a medium to tell *What Happened in Alabama*.

L:

It's a medium that has gained a lot of traction and it allows me to get exposure to another audience of people who read books and talk about books and do a lot of information sharing among each other, so basically I wanted to expand my audience.

H:

Was this your first time foraying into the podcasting realm?

L:

Yeah pretty much, I've never done a long-form podcast series, I have never done my own originally-recorded and produced podcast.

H:

What do you think is one of the powers of podcasts?

L:

It's hard for me because this is my first major podcast but I would say the numbers, the numbers, and the explosive growth we've seen over the past decade. Now we're in a situation where we need content because we now have the technological capacities to reach millions of people and I guess now that we're there there are a lot of opportunities for content providers to move into this space. I want to be where my listeners are.

H:

I think there's also something nice about hearing someone's voice come through.

L:

Yeah, I think so, video is also very powerful, but podcasting allows you to reach people who are on their commutes and in different stages of listening capacity. Yeah, podcasts are something that can be listened to during whatever people are doing.

H:

Can you talk a little bit about wanting this to be a cinematic podcast?

L:

Yes, I want people to feel that they're just as engaged, entertained, and enlightened as they would be if they were watching a movie. I don't want it to sound wonky or clunky. I want it to have a fluidity that almost tricks people into thinking they're watching a movie, except it's just an audio experience.

H:

Does that involve layering sounds and music?

L:

The core of the foundation of everything is the actual writing and the reporting. The access that you've gotten. If there is someone that's been murdered, it's much better to bring a child in to talk about their father's murder 30 years before than to write that their father's been murdered. The shaky voice, the pauses in between words, the joy, the memories, all of that plays into if a podcast is effective and authentic, and powerful.

H:

Seems like a lot of people want that feeling of authenticity.

L:

Yeah, well it takes work. It takes a lot of journalistic work. A lot of intellectual and spiritual honesty to get authenticity. If you're doing a podcast about personal finance, it's easier to achieve, but if you're talking about someone who was lynched, it's a lot harder.

H:

Why is it harder?

L:

It's harder because people tend to close off those very intimate painful details of their lives. It's much easier to discuss what the Fed could do a week from now than it is to talk about burying your father and walking up to that casket and barely recognizing him because of the terrible make-up job that was done by the funeral director as an 11-year kid and now your 80 years old and you're being asked about that murder you never discussed before. To get a person to be authentic under those circumstances requires a great deal of skill, patience, compassion, empathy, listening, understanding - all of those things that we don't all have.

H:

Would you be able to give me a short synopsis of what your project is?

L:

The project is pretty much my investigation into the intergenerational effect of slavery, Jim Crow, and the great migration on my family. The question "what happened in Alabama?" derives from when I was a kid and my dad would have nightmares; and in the morning I would ask him what he was dreaming of and he would say "Alabama" because my father was raised in the 1950s era Alabama, which was the Jim Crow era. He moved to Minnesota when he was 12 when his mother tragically died and as a result of that he left Alabama behind but he brought a

lot of the rules of Jim Crow to Minnesota with him. And I was raised under the rules of Jim Crow and there wasn't a lot of room for mistakes. I was a Black kid in a predominantly White neighborhood but I also spent time in the Black community and my father just felt that I needed to be, you know, perfect in order to make it as a Black man in America. So corporal punishment was used and that was painful for me and I always wanted to know where corporal punishment came from, so I launched an investigation into my family's history and I went all the way back to the 1600s and I followed it forward.

…

This process started in 2015, so it's been 9 years since we've been doing this. There are a lot of stories. Stories within stories.

H:

With this process of interviewing family members and family members who you've never met before, how did you prepare for that?

L:

Well, I do a lot of preinterviews, so prephone call conversations with people and read articles. A lot of time I know more about their parents' lives than they do, or I should say, their ancestors' lives, not necessarily their parents but people who came two and three generations before them. So because I understand the culture of the family, I often have a sense of how they fit into the family system before I talk to them. And then I have a phone conversation with them just to get a better understanding and when I talk about their lives I get a sense of what aspects of that I want to focus on in the interview. I do a lot of looking through different things. If someone had a grandfather who was murdered I pull every document I can about that murder, I read up on it. And then when we have that initial conversation I share information with them, so they feel

invested in it, so they learn some things in the process of talking to me. And usually when people have learned something from in the process of talking with you, they want to do more, they want to be a part of it. If you can give people a deeper insight into their genealogy, that has transformative power because many people walk around the world in a state of confusion never really knowing where they come from. And so if you can give people even kernels of information about the people who came before, usually they're grateful. It's important to do a lot of listening.

…

For me, I do all that preparation before, and when I do that preparation if I drop something along the way that shows them that I respected their story enough to learn about their grandfather or to say one thing about their parents. Or you know a lot of times I've interviewed their parent before their parent passed away. Most of the time I've interviewed that parent, I've interviewed them about incredibly deeper subjects that are near and dear to their heart, for hours. So that person I'm now interviewing who is the son or daughter has lost their parent and one of the things they cherish is that recording I was able to provide to them - that has their mother's voice talking for two hours about things that touched at too tender of a place to discuss with her children.

H:

So you're almost a bridge in a way.

L:

In some cases, yes. Information is always a bridge. When you can provide information to people, that's one of the highest forms of love, especially when that person has no connection or little connection to a deceased loved one - anything you can provide. I think what I'm trying to

say is, it's different when you're interviewing family but the same golden rule applies: the interviewee needs to know that you respected their story enough to do the extra work. And to do a lot of listening. Once you do the work, it's still important that you get on the interview and do a lot of listening, to guide the conversation, but not dominate the conversation.

H:

Right, to adjust as it flows.

L:

I guess, but to recognize the pivot points and the points when you need to shut up and let people talk. Because silence is uncomfortable as well. So when people have a subject they don't want to talk about, when things become silent, it's important for the journalist to shut up and put the subject in a situation when they have to keep talking.

H:

So to refrain yourself from filling the silence to allow your subject to work through it.

L:

Yeah, allow your subject to keep talking.

H:

You've gone through the process of recording all of this content, and I know your book is called "Nobody's Slave: How Uncovering My Family's History Set Me Free," so do you feel freer now? Do you feel relief? How do you feel?

L:

Healing is a not linear process. There is no destination to healing. Some days you feel completely healed, some days I think of my dead father. It's not like I'll ever stop mourning for the loss of my dad and for the childhood I never had, you know, a lot of those things. But this

process of discovery is a powerful endeavor. It shows you pieces of yourself that you would never have recognized had you not gone through this. And I think for me and a lot of the family members who have participated, on both sides of slavery, because a big part of this project is the White members of my family who enslaved my family and who I'm related to by blood - it has been cleansing for all of us.

Do I walk around feeling as if I've conquered all of the deep and meaningful questions, the existential questions of the age? No I don't. But I do think I'm in a much better place than if I didn't know why my parents used corporal punishment and how corporal punishment ties into the American story, as an American and a person who loves America.

H:

Would you consider this to be a social justice podcast?

L:

No, I wouldn't. I don't like the way that sounds. I don't like that. It's a podcast that is an investigation into American history and the impact of one Black family and one Black man. But it's not an advocacy journalism vehicle. Social justice is an aspect of the process of democracy but it is not - I just don't want to be in the business of making it about that. You see, I'll tell you one thing, it's easy to give an opinion, right? We all have them. You can sit down and talk to people all day about their opinions. It's easy to give an opinion. It's much harder to investigate and gather information and then tell a story that gets people the information and allows them to draw their own conclusions from the devastating truth that you've gathered. And so I think that to call this a social justice podcast would almost be evoking that kind of laziness that I'm talking about that makes people want to get on a podcast platform and spout off opinions because that's the easy part, right?

H:

So that phrase makes you think about that?

L:

That phrase to me. If I'm going to listen to a social justice podcast - and this is just my interpretation of what that means to me - I feel like I'm going to be preached to. I want to be enlightened, I want original material, I don't always want people to regurgitate the same ideas I've heard. It doesn't mean that If I hear a social justice podcast that there won't be things that I hear that are new, but most of the time I won't. Most of the time I expect to hear a bunch of people talk about Black bodies and anti-racism and all of the words that are in the lexicon that are beaten to death, the tired language, the virtue signaling and all of the identity politics that make people intolerant of the opposing sides. That makes people feel like they have to carry their ideology around like a badge of honor on their sleeves without leaving room for a thoughtful conversation with people they disagree with. So, I don't know, a social justice podcast, it just seems like a loaded term for me and something that I would put distance from. Want to distance myself from.

…

For me, as a journalist, if I sound like I'm hostile to that term or hypersensitive, it's probably because I'm a journalist and I've been a journalist for more than twenty years. Maybe I'm old school, but I came up in an environment where objectivity was still an important piece or the foundation of what I do. I'm not an editorial writer. Consistently, my work is trying to be as objective as possible. And I don't know if I'm right. The answer could be different tomorrow, but that's how I feel.

H:

For me, social justice is any action that furthers love.

L:

Ok, I love it.

H:

Something that I think about your podcast is that I think it does further love. And I say furthering love with regards to your podcast because you're connecting with your relatives on both sides, you're healing through the process and you're helping to facilitate some healing and you're going to a site of pain and kind of uncovering that. And through this you're helping to build understanding - and I tie love with understanding too.

L:

No, I think that's good to hear and I'm so happy you hear that way. And I certainly won't object if I'm able to build love and understanding. When I started this process with my team - people are a bit younger than me - which means they came up in a different kind of era of journalism education. And I had somebody ask me a couple of times in a meeting if there was ever a time when I thought I might explode. It was when someone said what do you want when this podcast is over, what do you want the listener to feel, how do you want the listener to feel - what do you want them to do after this. And I didn't like that because I didn't want to get in people's heads and tell them what to think. The story is the story and shouldn't change because of the outcome you want. Now building understanding and love, I do believe that there is a contingent of people who will feel - whether I want them to feel it or not - they will feel that I built some understanding and love.

But the information that I'm sharing in my podcast is information that is very difficult and has been very difficult or America to digest for 400 years. And the premise is basically that America was founded in the institution of White supremacy. And that for all but 60 years of the country's existence it has been a White supremacist country. And that's not a political statement, that's a fact. My father was born in 1948 in Alabama and did not have equal rights to a White person. My family has been here since the 1600s, I'm the first in my generation to have equal rights to a White person - I'm the first in my bloodline, 18 generations, to have equal rights to a White person. So there's that and the idea of rape, that Black women were raped, there's the idea that 25% of the average African blood is European, there is the idea that African Americans have never been compensated for the rape and the murder and the free labor. There's the truth that African Americans served in wars. You know, when Kennedy said ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country, he should have used African Americans as the primary example of patriotism - he should have used Indigenous Americans who have the highest amount of military service of any american and these are people who this country committed genocide against. Right? And these are very very difficult concepts to accept.

If you're a White person who believes that our society has become too focused on White and the racial differences and too political, this is a very very difficult podcast to listen to because it forces the understanding that White people in this country had a 400-year advantage. Right? And if you've been told that you were raised in a country of liberty and justice for all and that the highest degree of happiness that every American is entitled to is life, liberty, and happiness - this podcast is going to disprove that. It's going to show that there was a dual reality, that there were two tracks in the American story. Actually more than two tracks, because women

couldn't even get a bank account without their husbands' approval, or a credit card, until less than 30 years ago or something.

When you're a White person who listens to this podcast and you hear a story about a Black family who went through slavery and went through jim crow and then through the generations bought land and farms and had patriarchs murdered and had all kinds of horrific things happened and still succeeded not because of America but despite America, that's hard.

I come from a family of Black people who are all investment bankers and college professors, and journalists and school superintendents, and you know, I have a cousin who is a hall of fame boxer, a cousin who was 11 years in the NFL, and people who are millionaires, people who bought land and they were they were born in 1909 and had separate houses on lakes. These are people who did this despite all of the things that were against them. That's a hard story to digest if you believe that this country was rooted in equality and justice for all. Especially if you're a White person who's having a hard time in America. It's going to be hard for people to hear this story because it's also going to tell the story of a young Black boy who was raised primarily by his father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather. It's not the story of -

I've never been unemployed, I've had a family member be unemployed, I don't know anything about a housing project, I don't know anything about public assistance, I don't know what it feels like to be raised by a single parent, I don't have that existence. I came out in a beautillion, you know. And I don't know 't know about the achievement gap, the opportunity gap, I was class president all four years, I was youth governor of the state of Minnesota. A lot of these things are challenging the prevailing narrative about the Black family and the Black family system. And when I talk about corporal punishment I talk about corporal punishment as a response to White

supremacy not out of hatred for children but out of concern and protection for children and how that relates back to slavery.

So this is a really hard process and there will be people who find love, but it will require many White Americans to sort of look through a much clearer lens at the truth of what America is and isn't, what America was and what America wasn't. And to accept that is not something that many White Americans even want to do, they just want the issue to go away, not all, but I've met many of them who do. So it's a podcast that could also inspire a great deal of hostility and condemnation and controversy.

…

If you look at the list of African Americans who have been under surveillance by the United States government, what is the crime? Because if you think about it in this country, all we're asking is equality and justice and civil rights for all, which is not an anti-American approach, it is a pro-American patriotic approach. When Colin Kapernick kneeled, he wasn't condemning the American ideal, he was condemning America's inability to live up to that ideal, which is the highest form of love you can show for this country, yet it is viewed as anti-America. America is a country that the founders set up in hopes that one day we would strive to become that perfect union.

What I'm telling you is that I don't expect it to be as loved as we would like, it's possible that there will be many people who will feel that way and who are touched by it but you will probably have a great deal, if they even decide to listen to it, of people who question me and attach me and call me an anti-American when I was really born on an airforce base at the height of the Vietnam War when my father, who wasn't born with voting rights, enlisted to serve his country.

H:

It reminds me of this phrase of tough love in some sense.

L:

Well some people would say that this podcast shows tough love for White Americans. But to be frank, I'm not making this podcast for White Americans. We as a society have done too much to cater to the feelings or the guilt or whatever of it is of White Americans. This isn't for White Americans, this is for Citizens of the world. If there are White Americans who want to listen to this, great. If they don't want to listen to it, that's fine too.

…

My podcast is doing Citizens of the World a favor by illuminating the truth at the family level of one Black family.

H:

I'm thinking about the importance of conveying truth by focusing on your own perspective, not trying to go broad, trying to go specific.

L:

Yeah, that's why my book is called Nobody's Slave, How Uncovering MY Family's History set ME Free. And that's what I always tell people, I don't know if everyone can relate to this, I don't know if anyone can relate to this. If they do that will be powerful but if not maybe they will learn something from my experience. You can't take on too much. You can't be all things to all people, you can't serve the world's problems with every story you do, but you're right, you can bring the authenticity by speaking about what you know in the most iconoclastic and nuanced parts of your life.

…

Podcasting is a much younger medium and I'm deeply encouraged by the number of young people who are stepping into this space and I think you try to do as nuanced material as you want but I feel like the real key is to get in reps and hours, make as many podcasts as you can, make mistakes, try new things, experiment with different approaches, because it takes years to develop a craft. I spend most of my time in this medium learning.

H:

Would you say that it's been a fairly accessible medium to learn or was there a big barrier to entry?

L:

Well it's unfair for me to really say it's been accessible without pointing out that I have a team of really gifted people working around me who do a lot of the storyboarding and the synthesis of the story and how it should be presented. It is accessible for that reason and also because I always strive to maintain an openness with the people I work with. The hardest part of this is learning how to do journalism, it's not about the medium. It's much easier to learn a new medium than to learn the foundational aspects of how to be a journalist.

Appendix D: Nick Szuberla Interview Transcript

N:

My training in media and social justice started in 1991 at Antioch College. And Antioch is a small artsy college in Ohio. They had a history that went back to the 1960s, connected to the video advocacy media movement. It kind of went back to the 1960s and 1970s, these civil rights and social justice groups across the country started to use port-a-pack video that was mobile. So one of the stories you always hear, a story I like to think about, is the coverage of the Vietnam War was different and therefore the response of the public was different because for the first time media technology could move out to the field. It wasn't just stuck in the studio. And so you started to get more first-person views. At the same time, artists like Nam June Paik and Black Panthers in Chicago, Media Consortium Lab, started to use the power of low-cost video to tell stories, to document. So that's one way of the movement. And then that wing, you can think of that, in my mind, some of it is propaganda, some of it is first-person expression. And then another part of it would be folks like Julia Reiker, who was the early feminist media maker in the 60s. And then you have Harlan County, USA, which was considered the first real political documentary in the US genre. So that's the beginning of propaganda/storytelling, however you want to think about it.

And then the third wave that I fall into or wish to fall into is grounded in community animation, which has its roots in decolonizing. So it was these Black French colonized communities who started to think about how do you decolonize? And they started to come up with the notion of community animation.

And the North America media movement kind of pick ups that thread with the Inuit up in Canada where VISTA workers start to use video not as a propaganda tool, not as a tool for

community expression, but as a community development tool. I can record 10 stories about healthy eating, and we can do a screening that night of those stories and we can start to build community. And the community power comes out of who is gathering those stories, the dialogues that are occurring, and the power of - hey, we've always been marginalized - but now we can turn off the lights and show the government 6 stories that we recorded about how their policies are hurting us.

I think of those - the expression is part of media, which kind of blurs with a lot of activism. The propaganda - documentary, I have a brilliant idea, I'm going to do an essay and put it out to the world. And then the community animation wing of using media not as a tool to tell people what the framing is but as a dialogue discourse tool.

…

I picked up in the 1990s where the cost of video had come down. For the first time, there was a little bit of philanthropic funding - very little in the 90s - it's such a huge field now. In my era, I worked with a lot of the documentary filmmakers - most of them were coming out of the 70s - and the funding for documentary film was the National Endowment for the Arts for an expressive cultural piece, the Ford Foundation for a political piece, the MacArthur Foundation for more a of a political piece, and then niche funding. Back then, I think there were 100s of documentary filmmakers. Now, it's everyone. I think some of that is because the medium is very interesting and became more interesting, more vérité, and another thing is that by Netflix and all of these things - it's affordable. They can buy a doc film for 3 million whereas to produce one episode of a zombie show costs 17 million. And I think Sundance and groups like that elevate it.

I dedicate most of my time to trying to do community-based media making.

H:

Community animation work, right?

N:

A little bit, yeah, I mean I try. It's tough. It's just the way groups think about media. You end up, you know if you're working with advocacy groups, a lot of times they just want content. And so as a media maker, we try to push the process-oriented work, getting media tools into people's hands, but the way funding works sometimes you just end up making content. It's a mixed bag.

There's youth media. We have the Coastal Youth Media program where we train young people to make media. That's very process-oriented.

H:

What kind of media?

N:

Podcasts (using audio), documentaries (using video), some photo projects, it's a little bit of a mix. I really like audio. I've always found audio to be a powerful tool, pre-podcast even. When you play audio for people in a room they kind of listen. It's a fun way to listen to a story. And it's a little easier to edit. In a community media-making process, if you want people to be empowered and edit their own stuff, audio is a little less of a complex lift. Video is a heavy lift because it takes a lot of file space and all of that jazz.

H:

You have a lot of experience in the radio realm, correct? We're in this scenario now where podcasting has kind of taken over in a way. What do you think of this transition from radio to podcasting and maybe the beauty of it or the lack of beauty of it?

N:

I think community radio still is a very powerful tool. Again there was a lawsuit filed and it wound its way through the courts and eventually to the FCC, for low-power community radio, so that was about 10 years ago, and that opened up thousands of licenses to communities to open up radio stations that have a very small blueprint.

The one I would say that I'm most interested in, that I follow, is in Takoma, Maryland. It's a neighborhood in the bubble of DC. They filed for a low-powered FM station. I think they have 30 volunteers. It covers a 2 mile area. Artists, poets, storytellers, retirees, all program this. You can look at it as a content thing, but it's also a community development thing. Like think about all of those relationships of people hanging out, people listening while they're working on their painting or writing their poetry, but they're listening to their neighbors. Super local. As we look at this world of misinformation, a lot of what you see from psychologists and sociologists is really the stories you hear from your neighbors are what inform your reality. And if I'm only talking to Fox News or NPR, I start to get kind of homogenous in my view of the world. If I hear from my 90 year old neighbor talking about making jam and my new Ethiopian neighbor playing some of their regional music, it starts to open up my senses, that this is a complex world and truth is - and I think culture has that real effect on people, of getting us out of feeling super siloed. One of the challenges of things like NPR is the average listener has a net worth of 80,000 a year, and it's White.

There's a lot of examples of community radio being used as an organizing tool, as a community development tool. I started a radio show with this woman Amelia Kirby in 1999 or 2001 actually that was just prisoner families calling in. We renamed it "Calls from Home." It was a response to us getting letters from prisoners about human rights violations. And then we were

trying to balance our community in that area was super White, they were super behind the prisons. So what we didn't want to do was get into a battle with the community about this. We were trying to be a little bit savvy. So we were like, if we just put on people's voices talking to their loved ones, it's far more powerful. "So honey I made a pie today." "Hey Jane, I'm calling in to tell you your son scored a girl in soccer." So suddenly it's not about position - it's not about the prison industrial complex. It really wore down the opposition. It was funny when we first played the show or talked about doing the show, we got a couple of threats, from people you knew - that's how it is in a small town - and some of them called in to apologize. And now I would say that show is kind of a beloved show because they also started to connect it with their own story because some of them have loved ones who are incarcerated, and it kind of got over the racial - because the state had talked about how bad these prisoners were and racialized it. That show is still going today, so it's like 20 years. The reason it's still going - for one, there's a couple community organizers who push it, moms, who have kept it going, but it was very simple, it wasn't issue-oriented, it was really just based on creating a space for people to share and tell stories.

I'm very political and push for different issues but I think if you start by telling people what to think, it doesn't bring people into the conversation. And I think where media is so powerful is as a community dialogue tool. So you jump forward to podcasting. We have a local news site called Shoresides (shoresides.org) that is all podcasts primarily, almost all volunteer produced, covering the coastal North Carolina region.

H:

It's hyper-local too, right?

N:

I wish it was hyper-local, there's parts of it that are. It's more regional. To me, in my mind, if it was hyper-local we'd be honing in on a neighborhood, or somewhere where people would be crossing paths. It's a little tougher with rural areas. A lot of media models in the social justice wing are very urban-centric.

I think podcasting within the social justice realm still has a lot of space to be explored. I think the content part - like hey, I have a particular issue - the propaganda side - both the right and the left are there. That's not a question. I think the community side of podcasting is not fully articulated. You know I had one of our youth media participants, it turned out that her grandmother was my neighbor. So I went over to her house and it turned out she had an Alexa in her kitchen. And I just said "Alexa play Coastal Youth Media and her granddaughter was the third voice in.

But I think there's a barrier with the audiences I'm interested in getting to podcasts. You need to have someone in your model who can put effort into organizing people to listen to the podcast. It's not just going to happen organically. You have to have a community engagement person who can help that podcast reach the audience that you're really trying to reach.

Let's say that you create a hyper-local podcast or even just a regional podcast. In the progressive wing, it probably happens in the right wing, the usual suspects show up. People who have money, people who are high information seekers. But to actually get to grandma and folks, that takes work. We haven't figured out how to do that yet on the podcast front. But I just think it has a lot of possibilities.

H:

What do you think those are?

N:

Well, one is it's affordable. It can be created at home and the distributive network is immediate to your neighbors. The threshold of literacy to use it is fairly low. I mean a lot of these podcast platforms have actually built-in studios. So I think there's that. I think the medium is too focused on individualism and then the other is monetization. It's just a lot of the language around podcasting is monetizing. And to us, the power of course, is grassroots power building.

I'm never too wed to any one particular type of media tool. It could be a cellphone, it could be a port-a-pack video, it could be a low-cost camera. It's more about what is the organizing process.

H:

I gather that helping communities to tell their own stories, to have their own voice is really important for yourself, for your organization. Why do you think that's so important? As opposed to someone else coming in and being just like hey, let me do this for you.

N:

In community organizing and then in media making, there's this kind of notion that people parachute in and start to do work in a community. The difference between that and having people in the community do it is one, those people in the community will be there for the long haul. I think that part of being of a community is that you have some degree of accountability to the community you're telling stories about. So I'm not going to run off to California and then send that story back to you. Though that has a role, I don't deny that.

I think that if you're trying to build power and if you are trying to take on systems of oppression, you need to build local community power. So then having organizers take up media

tools, take up storytelling tools, even theatre, and start to do that has a different power dynamic than having some professional media makers come in from out of town and do it.

The other part to me is that there is a longitudinal impact. There's actually a study in Milwaukee that when people participate in community media making, cable access, where they are doing public good work. Even after they stop their community media making, maybe they don't do community media making for 30 years, what happens when you pick up a camera, or a recording device, or you start to make a theatre program, suddenly you have mobility in your community that you didn't before. So if you're a kid from Ethiopian who just immigrated to (neighborhood), just because someone hands you a little microphone or a tape recorder, now you can start to go out into your community and interview: the police officer, people at the street corner, a group of people who you weren't familiar with, who were outside your community. And with that mobility comes inside knowledge into your community, how it really works.

I think that the weaving that occurs, the kind of community building through local media making is just so much different than watching something on Netflix. So if I go down to my local community center, the second act is the dialogue that occurs after the piece. And I don't think that happens as much when I sit at home and watch Netflix. And I think there's a lot of social isolation in rural and urban communities and that having community storytellers - a community theatre company and youth media program - all of these start to create new public spaces where dialogue occurs

The only pivot I would say is that sometimes communities have stories that because of power dynamics - oppression, fear, culture - that inside communities don't want to tell. And you are fearful of being blacklisted, like hey I'm going to live in this community for the next 30

years, I need to work here, I don't want to tell this story. And that's where I do think outside

documentary filmmakers can really play a role. Kind of investigative journalism.

H:

You talked about two parts, the first part is the viewing, the process where the story is

created, and there's the dialogue that occurs after making the piece. With social media being an

all-in-one - the art and the dialogue - what do you think of that?

N:

I think social media for journalism, for artists, for organizers, there's like some challenges

to it. You can still create hyper-local communities through social media - closed groups, groups

that are focused on a specific neighborhood. I think that a couple of the challenges that come

with social media is people taking their eye off creating content for the local and more trying to

join in on national dialogue or just trends or what not. Which I think for community media,

people love content about their own region. The challenge is it getting drowned out. Social

media and the internet changes the whole field of journalism. Newspapers start to die. So then

you start to get zombie papers that are named for a local thing but there's nothing behind it. Out

of that has come a movement to rebuild the journalism field. So across the country people are

creating hyperlocal and local newspapers and print online. And they're doing it by doing high

community engagement, really meeting with the community. The other is that they're finding

that the most powerful part of building a local journalism outfit is the targeted email newsletter.

You still need the reporter who is willing to go to the city council meeting and understand what

is happening and share that with the community. Social media can't help us understand that. The

same is of course for community media making. We can watch a big documentary from Frontline

about wage issues but then if you go to your own community, you still need to hear the stories about how it's playing out in your area.

I think that social media made the space very rich but it didn't really address the need to work on community. Underneath all of this is that if you're doing social justice media making it's tied to some form of community organizing, power building. I'm not just out in the world trying to… maybe you get something started… but it eventually links to people who are trying to challenge the systemic issues of our community.

H:

So that's the ultimate endpath. You might start with thinking I'm going to raise awareness or educate the public, but where this is leading is the organizing part.

N:

Absolutely. All of this stuff is iterative. You are never the first person who shows up in a community. You're building on other storytelling. We try to accelerate the process and amplify so that we're moving an issue forward. One example earlier in my career was working with a group of youth who were taking on the fact that their community was going to lose their water to a coal company. And the first thing that you realize as you go out into this community with these kids - who have mobility, the know everyone, they have the camera, and I'm just watching - the first thing you realize is that this community, which is pretty much any community in the world, if you start to go out and talk to elders and what not, they have a whole fucking analysis about how these corporations have operated, the games they'e played, the whole thing. You don't need to go to the University of Kentucky sociology department to go and get an economic, political analysis. That shit is out, the community has it.

And then they know what their opposition says. So they already know the opposition's story. I guess what I saw is that the youth were able to get the political analysis from their community and then tie it to a problem. And then there were organizers whose job it was to build power in some form and so they were able to link up with those youth and then connect the dialogues that were happening and some of the breaking of the silence of the issue. And then someone will raise their hand and say I'm not afraid, I'm going to speak up. It's often called airing of the grievance. That initial airing of the grievance is the building block for community organizing. And a lot of times in that community media, we call it positive community mirroring - we're going to show you something good.

That feeling of pride is a building block of organizing. If I start to make you feel good, people start to feel good about their community. One of the really powerful parts of local media making and storytelling and theatre, especially theatre - if I start to feel good about my culture, I'll fight for it. I will stand up. So when I read the paper and I just see the criminalization and racialized storytelling about Black youth - that constant negativity is a) setting them up if they ever get caught in the judicial system - the jury is just going to hit them just out of knee-jerk reaction. But you also start to feel bad; if I'm constantly being hammered on in the media system, you've got to have a local culture that resists that, that has a sense of pride. So I think that's very powerful to make people feel good about the community they live in with storytelling. H:

I've been grappling with the concept of social justice. For me, it's any action that furthers love. For you what is it? How do you conceive of it? You've just talked about the importance of pride and positive community mirroring, and if people feel good about their culture, they'll fight for it, and the importance of things being local - what do you think of it?

N:

At the meta level, my framework for social justice is moving the center to a more just position. So the center is a little bit of hegemonic marginalization. So you have the center of things, the belief that we should have a massive system of criminal justice, and that people should be incarcerated, and it's about safety. So that's how the center is grounded. And it's grounded there through culture, through policy, through the ability to do state violence. And then, in my view, we're on the margin of that, the edge, producing stories that question that. And if at some point you put enough questions on that and you chip away at it, the center will have to shift to keep power. And so you're constantly in that battle of how can we keep moving the needle. And we would have to keep reinforcing. It's a fight. So that's why big level thinking of we're in a big fight. We're working locally but I need to be aware of how national and global things work. At the more, at the local level, I think of social justice as people having an immense sense of pride about their community and who they are. That they will fight for themselves and their community. That they feel that they have the tools to do it and that it's rooted in their culture. That it's rooted in their neighborhood, in the food they eat, how they dance, I would tie it into the love thing because I think love is part of the culture framework. If it is separate then you are kind of in an ideological thing. For me, social justice has to be tied to family (however we define it), community, and sense of relations with each other and changing those relation dynamics.

H:

So if you were to fill in the blank, Social justice is _____?

N:

Social justice is communities having power to make decisions about their communities.

…

I think podcasting, especially if you dip into where people are using podcasts at some sort of hyper local level. Even if it's just one really good example where someone has cracked it. I've heard that the migrant community is using hyper local podcasting and also hyper local SMS texting like a kind of a news service but it's just for 700 migrant workers in one region in California. But I haven't found write-ups.

H:

What is social justice storytelling and what is it not? I just want to draw that distinction.

N:

I think that a form of social justice storytelling is rooted in community, it is told and created by those who are close to the issue, who are directly connected or linked to the issue. It is accountable to the community it is telling the story about, and it is connected to community organizing and power building. It is not just storytelling for the sake of storytelling. It is linked to some sort of activity that is challenging the systems of power or in itself is connected to building grassroots power. It's not about the glorification of a brilliant individual, who is a documentary filmmaker. It is not about putting communities at risk - so it's not about shooting something about sex working and then putting it out there without any accountability to what risks might be entailed to those folks. It is not about being ideologically correct. It's not following message boxes, because we are letting people tell their stories, and we're digging into those stories. So people may not fit into a particular framework that someone might have ideologically; it's giving space for story and experience. And what we believe is if you dig around in that, they actually do have a grievance or connecting point that we can build off of. In all of that, if there is no

dialogue, if there is no community building, it's not community media making. You're just putting stuff into the ether.