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Sustainable Hope: An Analysis of the Rhetorical Process of the Forward through Ferguson Commission Report

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Abstract

This project focuses on the *Forward through Ferguson Report*, a commission report written by appointed commissioners after the protests of the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO. While the first chapter of my thesis focuses on the report itself and commission reports as a genre, the second chapter analyzes the most recent report, the State of Police Reform, from an ecological lens. Throughout the project, I kept returning to the question Susan Wells posed in a recent interview with *Composition Forum,* revisiting one she first asked in her oft-cited 1996 essay: what do we want from public rhetoric at this time? This thesis explores the ways the common struggles within and surrounding these reports, including the *Forward through Ferguson Report,* offer insight to answering Well's question, as well as offering insights into how discomfort and messy processes are necessary parts of public rhetoric, writing, and community engagement.

the night. However, Nate, you aren't off the hook quite yet because there's still a dissertation to do.

Most importantly, I owe my deepest gratitude to Dr. Lauren Obermark. She was there before this project was ever written on paper. Being a graduate mentor and thesis chairperson is a lot like being a spouse without the tax breaks. She was there to help pull me through the writer's block, offered support day and night, and was attentive to my needs. Her commitment and brilliance reach far beyond these pages. She is the best mentor and friend a student could ask for.

Teaching With Ferguson, 2014

    In August of 2014, I was preparing for my third-year teaching as an adjunct professor in the St. Louis area. Like many other adjuncts, I was employed at multiple campuses. Two of the colleges I taught for were located in distinctly different areas of St. Louis with vastly different students and campuses- one in South County and another in North County. In my South County class, all of my students were white; all but one was under the age of 23. The campus was well-resourced to meet students' needs, containing large classrooms with laptops for every student and a computer lab and writing services located on the first floor. The campus even housed a large faculty lounge for adjuncts, like myself, to work. My class in North County consisted of 12 middle-aged African American women. All of them were professionals working for non-profits or as teacher aids in the St. Louis Public School District, and all 12 were working on a bachelor's degree in education. The course was a hybrid class, meeting once a week with most of the work being completed online. However, in contrast to my South County experience, the Internet service on campus was not consistent, and for most of our class meetings, the Internet was not working at all on campus, making it a bit challenging to help students navigate through the online material for the week. There was no computer lab or writing services available, nor was there an academic advisor on site. I had just moved to St. Louis a few months prior, but I would soon find out that these drastic differences between campus locations were common. These differences between the campuses illustrated the city's long history of racial tension, and how racial tension is codified into the physical spaces of the classroom and woven into the fabric of education.

As the semester kicked off, so did the protests of the death of Michael Brown, an eighteen-year old living in Ferguson, Missouri, just a few miles away from my North County class. During one of the first class meetings, the topic of the protest came up. The topic of writing was pushed to the back burner and the rest of the class time was spent with the students expressing their grievances and frustrations about what was happening in their community. Although I had been teaching for three years at this point, I did not know what to do or how to respond. So, I just listened.

Michael Brown's death was never brought up in my South County class until November when the second wave of unrest and protest escalated because Darren Wilson, the officer who killed Brown, was not indicted. At this point, many of the protests were expanding to other regions of St. Louis. Within my own neighborhood in South City St. Louis at the time, Black Lives Matter signs began popping up in people's yards. I also saw many of those same signs torn down by other neighbors. The events of Ferguson were now rippling into everyone's daily life. What was becoming clear, from battles over signs, to casual conversations, to my classrooms, was that Ferguson itself--as place, as event, and as social movement--was a deeply rhetorical issue.

My South County students were writing their last argumentative research paper, and many wanted to write counter arguments to the Black Lives Matter movement. I was conflicted on what to do. I have always considered my classroom an open space for debate. I expected bigotry and prejudice to enter into those classroom spaces, and I felt confident that I could handle bias and racism with care. But, this was different. We were not just discussing abstract notions of social justice issues; we were talking about deep rooted issues in our own backyards. I didn't feel equipped to facilitate the discussion. I

didn't know how to explain to my student whose dad was a police officer in St. Louis and was concerned about his safety that those he was protecting didn't feel protected. I didn't know how to negotiate my students' narratives among my disparate classes. I didn't know how to be an ally to Black students and articulate an anti-racism message in a white-space; in particular, a white-space, like academia, an environment where diversity and acceptance is preached, but following a white ideology is expected. So, I shut down the discussion without having the tools to meaningfully communicate the nuances of the tension of Ferguson. I asked my South County students to choose a different topic. I cringe when I think about my decision now- choosing silence over discomfort in that rhetorical moment. As a white woman, it was difficult, but also necessary, to navigate these discussions in academic spaces and through these rhetorical constraints.

From Rhetorical and Pedagogical Discomfort to a Study of "Forward through Ferguson"

The discomfort I felt from this pedagogical moment- not knowing how to navigate through that difficult rhetorical space- lingered with me years after. For the first time in my teaching career, I felt unable to "fix" the situation. The discomfort lingered for quite some time, and I found myself reflecting and lamenting over the situation often, even months later. Years later, I would realize that the discomfort and lamenting provided me with a better perspective. Mark Charles, a member of the Navajo Nation, social justice advocacy blogger, and a 2020 United States presidential candidate, has spoken and written about the concept of lamenting and the ways lamenting can be used to address the imperfections in our democratic system. We hear about an issue and rush to

fix it. Charles argues that it's important to sit in that sorrow. That discomfort is good for us because we need to make sure we fully understand the issues. He says we need to not only hear the history but understand what's been broken and the depth of the problem in order to fix it. He gives an analogy: if you see a crack in the wall of a house, you can get some plaster and try to cover up the crack. But, if the crack keeps happening, you have to recognize it's not the walls; it's the foundation that's broken. You need to go down into the basement and investigate what the real cause is. Lament, he argues, is the tool that allows us to go down into the basement and face all the issues (Charles).

I decided it was time "to go down into the basement," examine all of the complexities of that pedagogical moment and face the discomfort. I decided to return to school and registered for Rhetoric and Social Justice with Dr. Lauren Obermark, who has written about her experiences teaching at a campus near Ferguson, Missouri and the ways the Ferguson events moved her to "intentionally and meaningfully" bridge "teaching, research, and the local community." It was in her class that I was introduced to the *Forward through Ferguson Commission and Report*. To abate the ongoing protest, on November 18, 2014, Missouri's Governor Nixon called upon seven individuals to form a task force, eventually named "The Forward through Ferguson Commission." (And often called, simply, the commission). The commission collected a myriad of narratives and opinions, researched previous conflict resolutions on community racial issues, and held both private and public meetings to come up with a systematic, multi-pronged plan to address the racial inequity the region of St. Louis refused to address, in Ferguson and other areas of St. Louis City and County. A year later, on September 14, 2015, the Forward Through Ferguson (FTF) Report was released to the public.

What intrigued me about the report was that the appointed commissioners faced similar challenges to those I felt when I was teaching but on a larger and public scale. I kept coming back to the question Susan Wells posed in a recent interview with *Composition Forum,* revisiting one she asked first asked in her oft-cited 1996 essay: what do we want from public rhetoric at this time? Hundreds of commission reports have been published in the United States, yet none of them have proven to be sustainable. I view the common struggles within and surrounding these reports, including the FTF report, as offering insight toward Well's question.

Often, commission reports lean on the elusive language of unity- one that eradicates differences, and thus, erases the concerns of marginalized communities. A more direct declaration in the report of the racist practices and explicit examples of police brutality would provide the start of the type of disruption that causes interrogation to the status quo. There needs to be enough of a disruption that forces viewers to consider how we treat each other and our relation to one another. The "disruption" of the Ferguson protests caused discomfort; the national spotlight on St. Louis's segregation created discomfort. While the goal of the commission report is to address the city's issues, elusive rhetoric in a public text can become a distraction from the necessary feeling of discomfort. Creating a task force and writing a report creates a feeling of self-satisfaction; it feels better to believe that something is being done than feeling the sorrow, shame, and discomfort that comes from being still and listening. It fosters a feeling of hope, but the genre of a commission report, the rhetorical creation of it, does not automatically allow space for analytical reflection, lamenting, and rhetorical action. I argue that rhetoricians can help commissions like FTF become an effective text,

providing space for citizen participation, and specifically more agency to minority

groups, in the democratic process. Likewise, the rhetorical study of commission reports

as a genre, and the connected complex rhetorical processes of the commissions

themselves, meaningfully contribute to the theorization of public rhetoric and writing in

the current divisive and difficult political and social moment.

In this chapter, I begin with a historical overview of a commission report as a

genre. Next, I take a closer look at the context of the report before diving into the analysis

of its content. Building on public rhetoric and the intersections of rhetoric and politics, I

argue that there is a lack of discomfort and space for reflection and lamenting in the

Forward through Ferguson report, which leads to stagnant participation once the report is

published. Some prominent rhetorical practices are absent in the commission report,

including negotiations of narratives and rhetorical participation. Without these two

practices, the possibility of a commission being a dynamic living document becomes

stifled.

II. COMMISSION REPORTS as Publics and Processes

Before diving into the report, I want to highlight what a commission report is. The

genre of a commission report is common in the American governmental system, usually

at the level of local government. Once civil unrest in a community escalates to the point

where no compromises or solutions appear possible, public leaders, media, and most

recently, the general public, call for the creation of a task force or commission. The

executive branch then appoints citizens as members of a commission board. They are

given the task of writing a report, addressing issues in the region, explaining how these

issues intersected, and identifying a plan of action (Lupo 23-37). In *Flak-Catchers: One-Hundred Years of Riot Commission Politics in America,* political scientist Lindsay Lupo analyzes five "riot commissions" in the United States over the past century.[1] Lupo introduces the term "riot commission politics" to help explain "the commission's failure to produce any significant changes" (37). She breaks this process and the challenges they face into three stages: processing, content, and outcome. The processing stage refers to how the executive branch utilizes commissions- do they provide commissioners with enough resources and time to conduct a full investigation or do they set them up for failure? Content refers to the actual report the commission produces. Content should be analyzed for "what is included, what is excluded, images shown, stories told, societal conditions explained, and so on" (Lupo 37). The final outcome stage refers to the point in the process where the report is released to the public. At this stage, questions are posed, such as "what, if anything, is put into action after the release of the report?" (Lupo 37).

Interesting connections for rhetoric and writing emerge here, especially in terms of understanding the networked nature of publics (Rice; Rivers and Weber; Warner). A commission report is to be a place where all publics (or agencies) are listed. The report indexes community organizations and resources, which help readers see where publics intersect and ripple through one another. If one public/agency is having difficulty making progress in one area, citizens use the report to see what other publics/agencies are doing and then collaboratively work together to address the issue. Ideally, the commission report is a starting point for change, as it both traces and creates new intersections

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[1] I use Lindsay Lupo and other scholars have used the term "race riots" for consistency purposes. I feel hesitant about referring to the post-Ferguson protest as race riots because it frames the protests in a negative light instead of rhetorical actions and resistance.

between public agencies. Long-standing conversations in writing studies about process

and product connect to the study of commission reports, as well (Rivers and Weber;

Groban) A commission report is supposed to be a living document; the report itself is not

the final product. Instead, the aim of the report is to create a space where different public

entities (public leaders, community organizations, and citizens) converse, either digitally

or face-to-face, on the commission's recommendations on implementing change.

Historically, though, most commissions' recommendations are never

implemented. In all of the riot commissions Lupo reviewed, none were effective in

instating substantial (or any) progress. Yet despite this ineffective track record, almost

every time a "riot" receives national attention, a commission is formed. According to

Lupo, commission reports traditionally are used as "a form of symbolic politics" with

little follow through. Instead of holding public leaders accountable, the report acts "to

evade responsibility" (239). Because the appointing of a commission appears to be taking

action, protesting declines, as well the anxiety of non-protestors. While a commission

report appears to calm the unrest and tension, it silences the political demands and

concerns of its citizens in the process. Often commissions depoliticize protests and shift

the focus of the discourse away from race and instead attributes the riots to economic

conditions. In other words, the focus shifts to social classes and the concept of race is

erased.

My point here is not to dismiss the genre of a commission report as a completely

ineffective text. In her last chapter, Lupo argues that each commission report succeeded

in certain areas even if they fell short of producing sustainable change. What's often

missing from these political analyses, though, is an understanding of how the report's

rhetoric shape citizens' views of community issues, particularly issues concerning racial

disparities. While political theories, such as Lupo's, have helped scholars and policy

makers understand commission reports at a macro-level, I suggest that rhetorical

methodologies allow for a necessary analysis of these texts and processes at a micro-

level. Rhetorical methodologies provide insight on the ways commission reports in

general, and the FTF Report specifically, can be used as a rhetorical reciprocity of

networks working toward democratic results.

III. Collaboration and Listening in the Process of the Ferguson Commission and Creation of the FtF Report

The historical overview of the traditional roles and challenges of a commission

and a commission report covered above provides a wider opening into understanding the

context and process of the Forward through Ferguson Commission Report. The

commission chose the title of Forward through Ferguson because they believe that

"progress in the St. Louis region runs through Ferguson" and in order to move forward,

the racial tension that rose to the surface after Darren Wilson killed Michael Brown must

be addressed. Despite some St. Louisans feeling what the commissioners call "Ferguson

fatigue," the commission asserts that Ferguson "represents a collective awakening to the

issues" (*Forward through Ferguson Commission Report* 8). In a research process that

will sound familiar to many rhetoricians, especially those who use ethnographic or oral

narrative methods, the commission gathered information, both quantitative data and more

qualitative personal stories, conversational interviews, and opinions from citizens in the

Ferguson area. Seventeen meetings with town hall setups held over a one-year period and over 2,000 participants expressing their concerns and sharing their narratives. Through this data, the commission compiled signature "priority calls for action," addressing each issue and outlining a plan through a racial equity lens. Commissioners indexed these priorities into three categories: Justice for All, Youth at the Center, Opportunity to Thrive, and Racial Equity. Under each category, the commission provides an overview of the issue, each supported with data and numerical evidence explaining what this issue is, how it impacts the region, and what should be done. Beneath each call is a list of accountable bodies.

THE EXPERT TESTIMONY, RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP, AND LIVED EXPERIENCE COLLECTED BY THE COMMISSION REVEALED THE FOLLOWING:

- In the United States, immigrant communities and ethnic minorities often become disproportionate targets of the traditional crime control model that uses physical force (Simmons, 2010). New York City's Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) found that while Blacks comprised 23 percent of the city's population, they represented 55 percent of reported victims of alleged police misconduct from 2008 to 2013; Hispanics were 29 percent of the population and accounted for 26 percent of complaints; and Whites were 34 percent of the population but only 9% of the alleged victims of police misconduct (N.Y.C. Civilian, 2014). In 2013, 53 percent of all complaints against police departments were for alleged misconduct in use of force (N.Y.C. Civilian, 2014). The most severe of these instances of use of force resulted in the death of a civilian.

- Police-involved deaths are generally investigated through a two-pronged approach. The first investigation, which is aimed at determining whether an officer has committed a crime, is usually conducted internally by detectives from a homicide squad or force investigation squad (L.A. Police Department, 2014; Katz, 2015). The first stage may be conducted by a neighboring department if the officer's own agency is too small and doesn't have the resources (Sullivan, 2014; Katz, 2015). With the findings of this investigation in hand, the local prosecutor determines whether to file charges against the officer through procedures that might involve convening a grand jury, depending on the jurisdiction (Sullivan, 2014). The second investigation considers whether or not the officer

effective" (Katz, 2015; Hough et. al., 2010).
- Opinion polls taken after the death of Michael Brown demonstrate that significant cross-sections of the public did not have confidence in the investigations into the shooting (Pew Research, 2014; Peter Moore, 2014). For example, 76% of Black people surveyed by the Pew Research Center had little confidence or no confidence in the investigation of Mr. Brown's shooting (Pew Research, 2014). In a poll by YouGov, less than half— only 42%—of Whites "trust[ed] the justice system to properly investigate" police-involved deaths, while a mere 19% of African Americans had such trust in the existing system (Moore, 2014).

These findings prompted the Commission to draft several calls to action to change use-of-force investigations in an effort to create a fairer justice system and improve citizens' trust and confidence in the investigation process for use-of-force incidents. In addition to the inputs noted at the beginning of this document, these recommendations are based on the research and work of a group of former U.S Attorneys and Assistant U.S. Attorneys based in St. Louis with the intent of avoiding even the appearance of impropriety in the prosecution of use of force cases.

TO THAT END, THE COMMISSION ISSUES THE FOLLOWING CALLS TO ACTION:

Assign Attorney General As Special Prosecutor in Use of Force Cases
The Attorney General shall serve as the special prosecutor in all cases of police use of force resulting in death, officer-involved shootings resulting in injury or death, or in-custody deaths.
Accountable body(ies): County Prosecutors and Office of Attorney General

In the introduction, the report nods to its rhetorical nature, especially in terms of the networks it builds between publics and its in-process nature. For instance, the report states that one of the benefits of the commission's work was putting "all of this information into a larger context, so that individual citizens and community leaders can make sense of it" (*Forward through Ferguson* 9). The commission, however, also warns in the introduction of the report, though, that they "do not know for certain if these calls to action are the answer" and "the path will change" because it "is the nature of efforts

like this," but they believe they are "the best starting point, the beginning of a path toward a better St. Louis" (*Forward through Ferguson* 8).

In the introduction of the report, the creators explain that the two key rhetorical practices they used while putting the report together were collaboration and listening, practices that they emphasized must be used for the St. Louis regions to come together in solidarity and continued as the calls for action are carried out. Undertaking collaboration and listening to create this report was no easy task; not only was the region reeling and divided in the immediate aftermath of Brown's death and the non-indictment of the officer who killed him, but also because St. Louis has long been among the top five most segregated major cities in the country, and opinions on the prioritization of state policies regarding racial equity are vastly different throughout Missouri. While the commission makes it clear at the beginning of their report that its function is not to place blame on any individual person, it becomes difficult to not place blame while still identifying calls to action and the accountable bodies to see that these issues are addressed. The commission's task was to remain unbiased, but objectivity, especially in a text created for a wide audience, is a tall order, as my analysis of the report will soon reveal.

A prominent component to public rhetoric is the formation of rhetorical partnerships through rhetorical listening of citizens and the negotiation of their narratives written in texts. In "(Re)Writing Local Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Histories: Negotiating Shared Meaning in Public Rhetoric Partnerships," Laurie Grobman discusses the process of uncovering marginalized narratives and the ethical questions that arise when negotiating memories and meaning among citizens and "with official and dominant discourses that were already and always at play" (242). These rhetorical partnerships

stem from locating shared interest. Grobman warns, though, that even after a shared

interest among the publics is identified, rhetorical questions of control and power of the

narratives arise, such as "Whose stories? Whose voices? Whose discourse? Whose

authority?" (243).

One of the obstacles for a commission report as a genre is to uncover all

narratives and recognize the social construct of a community's history and memory of

events. As Grobman points out, "Local community racial and ethnic histories are

complicated and complex 'third spaces'; as these community histories, wholly dependent

on collaboration, are researched, written, and rewritten, meaning is negotiated through

shared shifting, fluid, and sometimes unequal relations of power among the many

constituencies and participants" (244). The Forward through Ferguson's commission

report allowed citizens to participate by giving them the opportunity to share their

narratives and experiences in order to help the commission analyze the issues in the area.

While writing the report, the commission noted the citizens were actively questioning

what would be in the report, but there was a desire to take action in addition to

participation in the report: "As we listened, it quickly became clear that people in

communities all across the region not only wanted to talk about these issues, and needed

to talk about these issues, they also wanted to do something about these issues" (*Forward

through Ferguson* 8). Not only did the FTF commission uncover this common tension in

public discourse between talking and taking action, they also shared that the

commission's work provided a solution of sorts, a space that both merged rhetoric as talk

and rhetoric as doing: "What had been missing was a forum—and a process for engaging

all that pent-up energy, frustration and vision…. Conversations that in the past might

have been heated and contentious have been conducted [through the FTF Commission] with a sense of purpose, obligation, and resolve" (18).

However, while the citizens were able to rhetorically participate in the process of the report, there was little to no rhetorical agency for them in the commission's final product. In Well's interview with *Composition Forum*, she discusses the precariousness of our current political situation and the importance of "figuring out how any writing subject, whoever, could enter into a sphere of discourse with people who were not in our immediate circle and hope for some kind of efficacy" (2). In other words, public rhetoric is considered persuasive if it invigorates public discourse. Prior to the publication of the report, citizens practiced rhetorical agency via physical action (protest) and words (editorials, conversations, protest signs). With commission reports, in general, there is agency in the process but as the report moves toward wider sharing and publication, citizen agency begins to dissolve and the entrance into the discourse begins to shut, especially for marginalized groups. In other words, collaboration and listening can only go so far as participation in public rhetoric. Once a report is published and moves toward policy intervention and social change, where do these more process-based rhetorical practices go? What happens to agency for citizens within the commission reports? And how do racist ideologies surrounding the report limit what it can accomplish once it is released and viewed as a finished product rather than an ongoing process?

IV. The Struggle of the FtF Report as Published and "Finished" Document

The Forward through Ferguson commission stated in their introduction that they applied a racial equity framework when writing their recommendations for the report. They provide a list of what they considered, including, "Who does this recommendation

benefit? Does this recommendation differentially impact racial and ethnic groups? What is missing from the recommendation that will decrease or eliminate racial disparities?" However, a review by the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* points out the commission doesn't explicitly state if and how public leaders use a similar framework. The editorial board poses the question: "Should there be a formal racial equity framework process? It would surely be controversial, and the commission did not recommend one" ("The Ferguson Commission"). The report never explicitly acknowledges how the issues of Ferguson emerged or acknowledges that decisions concerning laws, public spending, and infrastructure in St. Louis were made without considering the ways these policies affect marginalized groups, particularly black citizens. If the recommendations in the report had been instituted, it would have fixed many of the current issues. A formal racial equity framework process, one that is to be used when considering public policies now *and* future policies after the publication of the report, would ensure racial equity becomes an integral part of the public policy discourse.

This is another example where the commission report follows the traditional parameters of balance and unbiased, which, as rhetorical scholar Ersula Ore points out, isn't really balanced. In *Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric, and American Identity,* Ore presents historical case studies of lynching, demonstrating that anti-black racism and violence has constituted Blacks as non-citizens and American identity has been constructed by dis-identifying from blackness. She introduces Brent Staples work, "Just Walk on By" that explores the relationships of racial-spatial practices. When walking through predominantly white neighborhoods, Staples uses tropes of whiteness as a tactic by whistling classical tunes of Antonio Vivaldi to ease white delusions that his

commanding black body is not dangerous. Using examples from President Obama's speeches, Ore demonstrates how leaders in public roles, who are forced to be aware of the cost of deviating from the expectations of white ideological code, used 'whistling' as a rhetorical tactic of managing black stereotypes navigating through rhetorical constraints (Ore). This rhetorical tactic of "whistling" is often used in the rhetoric of this report to appease the white governmental officials and the anxiety of white readers who are requesting solutions for the disruption and discomfort caused by the Ferguson protests. The elimination of this discomfort through such "whistling," like the absence of a recommendation for a formal racial equity framework for future policies mentioned above, eliminates the growth and sustainability of the report.

Recall that Lupo emphasizes that all commission reports are living documents, and the FTF Commission does view its work in this way. The report states:

> The process has led to new connections, new ideas, new understanding, and a new vocabulary with which to talk about the issues we face. It has created new awareness of resources and tapped into deep wells of political will and personal conviction. It has highlighted an appetite for change and a new sense of urgency. This report, and the policy changes we have called for, will be part of the legacy of the Ferguson Commission. We hope that this process of engagement will equally be part of that legacy. (18-19)

The report notes multiple times that the commission's task was to *identify* solutions, not to execute them. The past tense verb choice implies that the commission has completed the task they were appointed to do: they "created," they "tapped," and they "highlighted." Although the commission viewed the report as a starting point in implementing their

recommendations, the report's publication seemingly closed the door on further

discourse, demonstrating an inherent conflict that arises between process and product, as

scholars and teachers in rhetoric and composition know all too well. Although the FTF

Commission does not have the authority to implement their recommendations nor the

power to hold anyone else accountable for changes to take place, the burden of keeping

the varied "powers that be", such as police departments, municipal governments and state

officials, accountable falls upon the citizens. The word "legacy" also implies that the

commission has completed their part of the task, and the rest will be given to the citizens;

the commission believed they left citizens with an entrance into the discourse, and that

ends their role, even though the commissioners have more power and connection to make

sure political leaders are held accountable for following through on the recommendations

made by the commission.

     With this power dynamic and the well-established dominance of white ideologies

in institutional contexts, I now move to rhetorically analyze some moments in report

through the lens of anti-racism. Drawing on work about race and citizenship by

rhetorician Ersula Ore, as well as insights about racial disparity from Native American

public intellectual and politician Mark Charles, I extend the theoretical discussion of

collaboration, listening, and public rhetoric by digging deeper into the role that race and

racism circulates, sometimes silently or subtly, and sometimes overtly, in these processes.

     As I mentioned previously, commission reports are mandated to be "objective"

and "unbiased." They struggle under the impossible weight of listening to and integrating

the voices of black stakeholders, who are most affected by the issues identified in the

report. This difficult task becomes even more complex considering the creation of a

commission report is constructed within racist structures and need to appease a white audience consisting of government organization and anxious citizens' concerns about public protests. Following the release of the FtF report in 2015, there was little mobilizing of the movement and little to no progress was made after the report was released. While listening and collaboration were a large component of the process, there is seemingly disconnect with how to connect this listening and collaborating to the report as a published product. In the five-year assessment of this report, the suggested actions to "addressing the use of force" contained some of the lowest rankings toward progress. It's important to note that this action is arguably the most central one in relation to the events of Ferguson, both the killing of Michael Brown and in terms of the protest that followed. It's one of the actions that would ignite the most emotions and cause the most discomfort in its readers. Also, on the most recent assessment of the call for actions, the commission reported that only 5 of the 89 recommendations have been met in the past year (Hemphill). The issues of race were barely mentioned at all in this section; in fact, the phrase "racial profiling" was mentioned once and tangled together with a string of other issues, where it was easy for "racial profiling" to get lost in the shuffle.

Furthermore, it is in this section on "addressing the use of force" where "black community" is replaced with just "community." In one particular section, the commission attempted to address the reasons why the use of force needed to be addressed, stating that "Relationships between law enforcement and the community become strained when force is—or is perceived to be—used to resolve a situation that could have been resolved through alternate means" (26). The stylistic choice to place hyphens before the clause creates textual distance from the two perspectives. It also draws attention to "or is

perceived to be" and creates doubt on the claims of police brutality and an intolerance for the protestors' demands.

The commission's explanation ends with the line, "The uses of force toward the lethal end of the continuum should be used only in the rarest, most dangerous of situations" (26). It's important to note that the report cannot circulate or be understood separately from pre-existing discourses surrounding Brown's death. This sentence, with Brown's death in mind, implies that Michael Brown was a "most dangerous situation" and saying lethal force is "rare" further excuses the ongoing violence of unarmed citizens. Even when the report doesn't reference Brown's death directly, the report is in direct conversation with comments that Wilson made about Brown looking "a demon" and acting dangerous (Sanburn). When the rhetoric of the report reflects the narrative of the police, it seems to imply that Wilson's reasoning for shooting Brown remains valid. Implicitly, the report, then, prioritizes the narratives of the primarily white law enforcement over the black community, who is most affected by use of force. By giving agency to the police force on the issue, the black community's position as citizens become more precarious (Ore).

V. Conclusion

Commission reports are created during tense times of community disruptions and discomfort. The goal is to bring solutions and "peace" to the community, but, perhaps, it is easy to forget that peace can involve discomfort. Peace is part of a moment of growth and any type of substantial and sustainable growth and progress comes with discomfort. In her final chapter, Lupo argues that "The mass of America is both unwilling and unable to fully process why a riot occurs. They will not sit down with the sociological literature

to deconstruct why, in a peaceful democratic system, thousands took to the streets to burn… Instead, they wait for a government response to figure it out for them" (242). Instead of appealing to white anxieties, the commission has the potential to be a text for reflecting on white attitudes towards black citizenship. A commission report is already an impulsive response to protest, but it doesn't have to be used as another tool of civility and decorum that masks unbalanced power. Although as Lupo points out, the public may be waiting for a commission to interpret protestors' demands and to simplify a complex issue, the fact of the matter is that our democratic system and its historical violent use of policy towards the black community is long and complex.

A commission report is one of the rare rhetorical public texts and platforms that does not need to rely on its performance and appeal to a white audience to remain a living document and obtain sustainability. Rather, it has the power of being a rhetorical text that interrogates racial power dynamics and creates an entrance into the discourse for marginalized voices, drawing these voices from the outskirts and pulling them in closer to the center to amplify their concerns and demands. In other words, it has the potential to diversify the traditional white space of public political discourse.

While politicians may worry that discomfort and lamenting will turn off their constituents and possibly cost them an election, commissions are free of that burden. Besides voting, a commission and the report it produces is one of the closest forms that the public has in collaborating directly with politicians and applying pressure to politicians to pass public policy agendas. If the report lacks the type of disruption that creates spaces for reflecting and lamenting, public leaders may ignore it, but the rhetoric of the report sticks with and later reflects the publics' opinions on race and also silences

the voices that need to be heard the most in the report. To use Charles's analogy of

lamenting: the commission cannot address the racial practices in St. Louis as just a crack

in the wall that can be covered up. The foundation is broken. In order for change to occur,

we must go down into the basement and investigate what happened. By allowing reports,

like *Forward through Ferguson,* to remain living, in-process documents rather than

"finished" products, it will come closer to enacting change; similarly, it is through the

disruption and discomfort of lamenting that sustainable hope and growth occur.

Chapter 2
The Aftermath: Five Years Later

 Ideally, the commission report is a starting point for change, as it both traces and creates

new intersections between public agencies. Sustainable change requires that the rhetorical

process continues. Part of that process, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, is figuring

out how to navigate through difficult rhetorical spaces. It requires listening and

lamenting; it means meaningfully dwelling in discomfort. Five years after the release of

the FTF report, the FTF commission has continued fostering their ongoing, multiyear

rhetorical partnerships with community leaders and reform advocates. What makes

change more difficult with commission reports, though, is that they are working with

many organizations who are not always sure how they intersect or how they should work

together to promote change. In other instances, a hierarchy of command is already put in

place. With a commission report, though, in order for change to happen, they must first

identify stakeholders, recognize how these stakeholders intersect, convince these

stakeholders that it is best for them to work together, and then come up with a plan where

all stakeholders agree. In other words, the structural inconsistencies of a commission get

in the way of sustainable change.

       An ecological perspective identifies the complexities of the rhetorical process,

making it collaborative and ongoing, creating "more rhetorically robust work" (Rivers

and Weber 190). An ecological approach creates awareness of the ecological power of

institutions and the formation of publics through the concatenation of texts. This

ecological approach tries to negotiate constraints and navigates through obstacles, and it

provides a new perspective on rhetorical invention.

Long-standing conversations in writing studies about process and product connect to the study of commission reports, as well (Rivers and Weber; Groban) In "Ecological, Pedagogical, Public Rhetoric", Rivers and Weber discuss public "mundane" text from a rhetorically ecological framework. Rivers and Weber define an ecological perspective as one "that sees change as advocated not through a single document but through multiple mundane and monumental texts" (187). The writers argue that these support documents are a crucial part of supporting publics and promoting public rhetoric ecologies. Publics exists because of the way texts reference and build off one another. It is the circulation and interplay of texts that cause publics to emerge. In other words, when one text mentions or builds off another, the information gets circulated more. More people start to talk about the topic, and more change takes place. Often, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when change happens because it does not occur in one isolated instance. Rivers and Weber assert that it is necessary to recognize the intersection of the systems and how change in one system can ripple into another.

Using an ecological framework, Rivers and Weber analyze the Montgomery bus boycott by providing a list of "mundane" activities and texts that led to Rosa Parks arrest, as the text and activities that followed afterwards. Rhetorical action needs a rhetorical network to act as a catalyst to mobilize a social movement. To keep the rhetorical pace requires a circulation of texts, communication between people, sharing of narratives and circulation of resources to inform and motivate a variety of audiences. In other words, change did not just happen because of one text or one single action.

Similarly, the rhetorical process of implementing change through commission reports nods to an ecological process and rhetorical nature. As mentioned in my previous

chapter, a commission report serves as a nexus of community organizations, political leaders, and citizens. The report helps readers identify where publics intersect. The goal is to get them to collaboratively work together by first having readers/viewers consider their relation to one another. Through this, space emerges in the report where different public entities collaborate on the commission's recommendations on implementing change.

As my previous chapter mentioned, change has been slow since the release of the report.   Out of the 89 recommendations the FtF outlined in their report, only five of the recommendations have been met in the past five years. The area that has seen the least amount of progress are the recommendations "addressing the use of force." (Hemphill). While change is difficult, a commission provides space for reflection on what has worked, what has not worked, and how to move forward. Can the text serve as momentum to crawl through the messy, nonlinear process towards change?

The commissioners needed to analyze exigencies, make choices and adaptations and think about their audiences; all of these rhetorical actions are ways Wells argues that rhetoricians should "respond to change in the possibility of public discourse" (5). Wells points out that rhetorical interventions are time bound. Discourses will change. Practices of knowledge change. Rhetorical inventions must change, as well because "initial exigencies fall away and become muted" (Wells 5). In other words, rhetorical interventions must change too so that initial demands are not silenced. Therefore, the commission had to try a new approach.

A few reports have since been released since the original FTF was published five years ago. Often these reports were short documents, updating readers/viewers on the

progress of the calls for action. Questions regarding how to assess and measure the amount of progress have emerged, though. Out of the Ferguson Commission emerged the organization Forward through Ferguson named after the original report and "designed to be a catalyst for the infrastructure needed to make lasting positive change in the St. Louis region as outlined in the report" ("Next Steps"). The organization released its first results of the progress in August 2018 in a document they called the State of the Report. The Forward through Ferguson organization aimed for the State of the Report to serve as "a report card and accountability tool assessing police and systems actions" on the original FTF's calls for action ("The State of the Report" 3). They concluded that majority of the recommended implementations were "lagging and many regional actors have not yet significantly aligned to the Commission's system-level roadmap for change" ("The State of the Report 2). From the town hall meetings that took place after the release of The State of the Report, many citizens called for further explanations and a deeper analysis of the report's results. While the results in the State of the Report identifies what still needs work, those numbers did not provide citizens with a clear idea of went wrong or help them envision a plan to move forward. Therefore, the commissioners worked toward creating a follow-up document they called the State of Police Reform (SOPR).

The SOPR focuses on answering the questions: what changes regarding police reform have taken place? What factors have helped and harmed the progress of the report? The report's 40-page document concluded that the policing institutions in the St. Louis region had not made sufficient progress toward a more racial equitable system. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the calls for action listed in the "Justice for All" section in the original report contained, "use of force, training, response to mass

demonstration, anti-bias and cultural competency, use of force investigations, officer

wellness, use of technology, and community policing" ("Forward through Ferguson" 12).

The report concisely highlights what progress has been made since the publication of the

FtF report, noting that out of the 47 signature priorities, only five of them had seen

significant implementation. Yes, these numbers may feel lamentable, but those

lamentable numbers are why the document itself must remain living, and why

commission reports should be approached as ongoing documents rather than finished

products.

In the next chapter, I take a closer look at the progress that has been made after

five years. I turn to the Forward through Ferguson's latest report, the State of the Police

Report (SOPR) document to explore how the commission kept a rhetorical process going.

In this report, the new board members lean into a rhetorical ecology of tracing problems

using narratives and visual aids instead of viewing data and events in an isolated moment.

I begin by comparing the FTF uses of a linear method and text-heavy approach to the

ways SOPR leans into a rhetorical ecology of tracing problems and progress by using

visual charts and community narratives. I analyze the intersecting and overlapping of

quantitative and qualitative data in the report constructs an ecology rather than a finished

product. I argue that the charts and visual aids in the report illustrate an ecological notion

of accountability. In other words, it views accountability as something more networked

and complex and does not view each individual action in isolation as seen on the charts in

the report. Next, I analyze the organization's rhetorical choice to pair the voice of experts

and researchers with the voices in the community, specifically those of the black

community. I argue that this rhetoric tactic and rhetorical inclusion acknowledge that the

black community are major stakeholders and that their experiences matter. Finally, I

explore the difference in tone between the FTF report and the SOPR. Unlike the FTF, the

tone in the SOPR is firmer and explicitly addresses the issues that the FTF danced

around, including race and police brutality. The report directly calls on individual leaders

to step up and views its responsibility as a commission to both praise and criticize

political and community leadership. I argue that the SOPR report's rhetorical reflection

and willingness to critique and rethink the work of the original FTF report is what makes

the SOPR strive to be an ecological document

I argue that commission reports demonstrate that public rhetoric doesn't happen

in a single moment but are continuous with multiple contributors and multiple audiences.

The release of the SOPR shows how commission reports can be multivocal, ecological,

and unruly- and in that way, they become documents used as a rhetorical reciprocity of

networks working toward democratic results.

Co-Creation and Reciprocity: Interviews as Insight into Process

Working closely with Dr. Lauren Obermark for the past year, I was inspired by her work,

particularly, "Public Rhetoric in the Shadows of Ferguson" where she discusses the

significance of collecting narratives, as an "in-the moment historical record." Her work

focuses on the creation and development of her Rhetoric and Social Justice course, which

introduces students to the study of rhetoric by putting "public rhetoric and writing at its

heart" aligning the lens of the class to focus on Ferguson. (Obermark) The article brings a

new pedagogical perspective to research and makes it a more discursive rather than a

linear process. The article challenges the traditional definition of rhetoric as a means of

persuasion and instead frames rhetorical exchanges as a need to grow and to learn. It

frames rhetoric as a process, one that includes struggle and uncomfortable conversations. It pushes the notion of rhetorical exchanges, attempting to extend it beyond listening. The article also provides a new perspective on who can do rhetoric and how they can do it. Obermark explores the ways in which the academy can build rhetorical partnerships with local communities. Her research demonstrates the ways in which community voices meaningfully contribute insight into rhetorical theory through reciprocal engagement and co-creation where scholars learn from and with those in the surrounding community. She argues that these "local, public voices and insights that the field must make more of an effort to center, listen to, and learn from, revising contemporary rhetorical theory and pedagogy accordingly" (Obermak). Through this reciprocal engagement with the community, scholars and students are able to see how social movement intersects with public rhetoric practices.

An important aspect of her methodology is on "co-creation and reciprocity" (Obermark). She utilizes Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher's method of conversational interviews. Conversational interviews reflect a more participatory model where the interviewer has the chance to learn from and with the interviewee and build rhetorical partnerships. Furthermore, this method of interviewing "can offer a mode of rhetorical intervention into social justice issues" (Obermark).

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to take her Rhetoric and Social Justice class- a course in which her research stemmed from. For one of the course assignments, she asks students to become what Groban calls "rhetorical citizen historians" and asks us to interview people in St. Louis about Ferguson and how it intersects with rhetoric (Obermark). The interviews we conducted were semi-structural. In other words, the

structure of the interviews was more conversational, the interviewees had more agency and were able to take the conversation in other directions than the questions the interviewer posed. This method required me to enter the interview with an open mind and required me to let go of full control of where the conversation would go and what type of responses that I assumed the interviewee would provide. I was there to learn- not simply search for responses that would support my assumptions. Each student gathered interviews and were collectively archived. She noted that these documents may feel incomplete, arguably similarly to the "living document" the FTF is supposed to be- a document that should not be considered "complete" (Obermark). The class was encouraged to reflect on our current definition of rhetoric and to be aware of how rhetoric is used as we listen to our interviewees.

After the completion of my assignment, I started to rethink how knowledge is constructed. It wasn't in a book or just speaking to someone in the community. By listening to what people had to say and analyzing all the interviews collectively through our archive, I was able to see how rhetoric is not about the finished product, but about a process that is ongoing and at times uncomfortable and messy. Through the collection and archiving of these interviews, we the students were able to acquire a new understanding and knowledge about our understanding of the events of Ferguson and interrogate our static perspective of rhetorician tradition and theory. Through these assignments, I was able to understand that the rhetorical tradition is dynamic and constantly changing with the present social movements. Rhetoric, specifically public rhetoric, is more than just one document and one single event. Instead, it is "an ongoing, interconnected activity" (Obermark). Rhetorical tradition is not linear- it's discursive and

sometimes a bit messy and incomplete. But it's the messiness and incompleteness that makes it dynamic and continuous.

These assignments made me start to approach my research with questions rather than pre-set arguments in mind. Through the assignments in this class, I realized that the best way to acquire knowledge about the commission report was to listen and to engage with those who created it. While the commission reports and scholarship provide information on the structural framework of the process and creation of the commission report, I believed hearing from the commissioners themselves would provide a better understanding and insight on the process and some of the systemic challenges a commission faces. The type of meaningful reflection and lamenting that has taken place by the commissioners since the report has been released has never been discussed. My hope was that my conversations with commissioners would provide a historical record of the rhetorical process. I wanted to explore the messy and incomplete part of this discursive process and how its messiness and incompleteness makes the rhetorical process dynamic and continues.

I completed my IRB training and submitted a proposal to the IRB board arguing that to understand and theorize how people develop and use commission reports, the field must continue to collect first-hand perspectives. Therefore, I proposed a study with data to be collected. I argued that these individual narratives are important for scholars and the public to develop a fuller sense of the effectiveness of commission reports and how the report's rhetoric shape citizens' views of community issues and impact how they participate.

My goal was that through the collection of these interviews, rhetoricians and composition theorist, community organizers, and the general public could develop goals and approaches to learning and to using rhetorical techniques to produce effective commission reports that produce sustainable change. I planned to use a semi-structured interview as I did for my course assignment in Dr. Obermark's class. In my proposal, I planned for the interviews to last 30-60 minutes. I would give subjects the chance to opt to participate in the interview in whatever mode they would feel most comfortable (in-person using audio or video, or via written text/email). Also, in my proposal, I noted that subjects could opt to include their names and identities in the research, or they could choose for their identity to remain undisclosed. Finally, I noted that the data would be stored on a password-protected computer, and both my sponsor and I would have access to the data.

A NEW DIRECTION

Initially, my plan for the second chapter was to interview the current commissioners of the Forward through Ferguson organization. By the start of the new year, I had been working on this project for a little over 9-month. However, in March 2020, as I was scheduling interviews with the commission members, the coronavirus emerged in the United States, and a national emergency was called, in which gatherings of 50 people or more were cancelled and citizens were encouraged to practice social distancing to prevent the spread of the disease. In response to state demands, many of the Forward through Ferguson's upcoming events were canceled.

While I wanted my supporting evidence to be primary sources, without a substantial amount of data from interviews and attendance of the FTF events, I decided it

was not possible to form an argument or claim on what little primary data I had. Instead, I had to rely on my research and investigative skills to garner enough information to assess the commission's rhetorical process to circulating the report and updating the public on the progress towards the calls for action since the release of the report five years ago.

THE CONTENT OF THE SOPR and the Rhetoric of Data Display

In the FTF report, the signature calls for action were written in alphabetical text. This rhetorical choice made the calls to action appear like a checklist. When viewers saw how little was accomplished, frustration and questions emerged about how much was being accomplished. While that frustration is valid, and the SOPR validates that anger, they utilize charts and graphs to help viewers understand the information from an ecological lens instead of viewing each act as a separate isolated incident. For instance, by placing all progress and events in a chart, it demonstrated that while training goals were fulfilled, the training was not being implemented into police changes. Therefore, they were able to make new recommendations on the next step of what needed to be done. They were able to see that, perhaps, less focus should be placed on training, and the recommendations see less as a checklist, and more focus on taking steps to implementing policy. The report uses charts instead to showcase the data. This is a significant shift from the first report in the rhetoric of data. Its focus is less on how much progress was and was not made and instead on a visual aid to locate exactly where the issues are. In a world where technology is such an integral part of our lives, the rhetorical process is an important aspect to creating effective visual aids. In "The Visual Rhetoric of Data Displays: The Conundrum of Clarity", Charles Kostelnick explores the rhetoric of data display, traces the history of

data display, analyzes data sets through the lens of clarity. Although the rhetoric of data display stems from the rhetoric of science, which typically is made up of scientist rather than rhetoricians, creating data displays entails many rhetorical choices. One of the tasks for designing visual data is to contemplate the knowledge of readers and the way in which readers construct knowledge (Kostelnick).

The creation of the data display replies on the rhetorical tradition. Before designers create it, they must make rhetorical choices and consider the purpose for the chart, the context of the data, and most importantly their audience. The rhetor must consider the ways in which the audience collectively read the charts and data. The process of designing data displays considers social rhetoric "of communal convention-building whereby readers interpret displays through their collective learning, experiences, and values (Kostelnick 1) Creating effective visual rhetorics for the general public can be difficult because designers have to imagine their audience collectively and assume, they share "common interpretive framework, in that their brains are hard-wired to process some design elements better than others" (Kostelnick 3). In other words, they have to predict an outcome where readers respond and interpret the data similarly.

Unlike the first report where data flooded through the paragraphs of the report, the State of Police Reform (SOPR) utilized charts and pie graphs to mark changes implemented in three jurisdictions: Ferguson Police Department (FPD), North County Police Cooperative (NCPC) and St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department (SLMPD).

FERGUSON COMMISSION CALL TO ACTION (CTA) IMPLEMENTATION BY POLICE JURISDICTION

CALLS TO ACTION	FERGUSON	NCPC	SLMPD
Assign Attorney General as Special Prosecutor in Use of Force Cases	N/A	N/A	N/A
Assign Missouri Highway Patrol to Investigate Use of Force	N/A	N/A	N/A
Update Use of Force Statute For Fleeing Suspects	◐	Unsure	○
Establish Use of Force Database	◐	◐	◐
Revise Use of Force Policies and Training	◐	◐	◕
Include Social Interaction Training in POST	◐	◐	◐
Include Implicit Bias and Cultural Responsiveness Training in POST	◐	◐	◐
Increase Police Training Hours	◔	◔	◔
Consolidate Police Training Centers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Create Civilian Review Boards at the Municipal Level	◐	○	◐
Create Civilian Review Boards at the County Level	N/A	N/A	◐
Develop a Comprehensive Demonstration Plan	◕	Unsure	◐

KEY

○ No or little implementation activity that we are aware of

◔ Some, mostly programmatic implementation activity

◐ Blend of programmatic and policy implementation activity or policy change that meets the letter, but not necessarily the intent of the call to action

◕ Policy-focused implementation activity that seems to be leading to culture/systems change

These layering in these charts demonstrate how community leaders and citizens responded to the moment kairotically, and how their reactions had an ecological effect on the police reform landscape. This ecological lens is necessary here. According to Rivers, "rhetorical ecologies works well to describe rhetorical activity that does not follow official channels or otherwise well-worn rhetorical ruts" (Rivers, Ecologies of Race, 1). In other words, in instances where activists begin to feel stuck, especially after working this long towards sustainable change, an ecological approach provides space to reflect and provides a broader view in order to pinpoint exactly what has caused change to subside or stop.

The scores for each call for action was based on qualitative data. A brief glance at the graphics illustrates that the work that has been achieved focuses more on programs and training rather than policy. After highlighting the overall results of all three

jurisdictions, the report moves on to focus on each of the three jurisdictions, describing what has changed, what has facilitated progress, and what has prevented progress. These three jurisdictions side by side indicate how different advocacy efforts and key events affected the change in police reform landscape overtime. The Ferguson district saw more rapid changes in leadership positions, particularly for the position of police chief. These charts illustrate the events that happened over time and how those events impacted change and progress.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the FTF report was viewed as a starting point in implementing their recommendations; however, the report's publication seemingly closed the door on further discourse. The SOPR recognizes the ambiguous message presented in the FTF report. In a letter from the Co-Chairs at the beginning of the SOPR, the Co-Chairs admit in the second paragraph that progress has been slow, describing it as "an even mix of steps forward and steps backward" ("The State of Police Reform" 1). The co-chairs arrive at three conclusions from their data collection and reflection of the past five years: people are not happy with the way things are right now, a clearer connection among advocates and their goals need to be made, and an urgent need for effective public safety methods must be addressed. All three concerns are given their own line and placed in bold, all-caps. Strong word choice, such as "dissatisfied" "disconnected" "desperate" rings a sense of urgency and disapproval on the FTF's report at addressing how change will be implemented ("The State of Police Reform")

The SORP report states that commissioners used an epidemiological approach for what they call their rough calculations. "For each of the indicators we selected, we used the 'excess risk' approach to tabulating a cost. We found the difference in a given indicator

for Black St. Louisans and White St. Louisans and calculated the costs saved or gained if the rates among the two were the same " ("State of Police Reform" 9). They build from the UMSL's Public Policy Research Center's findings of the economic loss for St. Louis due to racial disparities. With support from the Community Innovation and Action Center at UMSL, they garnered a list of people they identified as stakeholders and invited these stakeholders to speak to them about police reform in three jurisdictions of St. Louis. Out of those 110 invitations, 57 agreed to participate. During these conversations, they focused on what participants said about advocacy efforts, landscape changes, and key events ("State of Police Reform" 12.) Advocacy efforts focused on how community reformers acted toward police reform, whether advocating or protesting a candidate or policy bill for police reform. The landscape changes included any progress made within the police department concerning police reform. And, significant events constituted events that impacted the progress of police reform in the region.

The Outcome Stage

As mentioned in my previous chapter, the process of a commission report reflects a similar process to ethnographic or oral narrative methods. Through the data that is collected, the original FTF compiled signature "priority calls for action," and outlined a plan through a racial equity lens. Commissioners indexed these priorities into three categories: Justice for All, Youth at the Center, Opportunity to Thrive, and Racial Equity. The report reached over 200 pages, which is quite a bit of information for the average person to digest unless they were already passionate about reform.

Lupo found in her research, as well, that while it is important for audiences to understand the intersections of racial inequity locations, most readers will seek out

information on one particular topic over the other. Lupo uses the commission reports from the LA 92 riots as an example. Out of the four commissions formed after the LA riots, the one that received the most public attention was the Webster-Williams Commission, which focused solely on law and order "and sought to answer questions of law enforcement breakdown- why did the riot escalate? What could the police have down better?" (Lupo). Again, people look to commissions to simplify the complicated. Instead of addressing their assessment of progress in all three categories, the new commission board decided to focus solely on issues regarding policing reform in the SOPR report. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it's important to note that police reform is arguably the most central Signature Call for Action in relation to the events of Ferguson, both the killing of Michael Brown and in terms of the protest that followed. It's one of the actions that would ignite the most emotions and cause the most discomfort in its readers.

A New Report, A Continued Process: Comparative Analysis of the Forward through Ferguson Report (2016) and State of Police Reform Report (2019)

Seven key events were used to track the progress of police reform from 2014-2019. Those key events included Michael Brown's death, Darren Wilson's indictment, the passing of Senate Bill 5 (which limited the amount of traffic fines and fees that goes towards a city's budget), the amendment of Senate Bill 5, the release of the Ferguson Commission Report, the Stockley Protests, and the election of Wesley Bell as county prosecutor ("State of Police Reform" 14).

Instead of trying to analyze progress in an isolated moment, the charts of the timeline events help illustrate the rhetorical ecology of landscape change of police

reform. Key events are incorporated in the chart, helping track the rate of change in the police reform landscape.

Darren Wilson Is
Not Indicted   SBS Is Passed

Ferguson
Commission
Report

Stockley Protests

Wesley Bell Is
Elected County
Prosecutor

Michael Brown
Is Killed

SBS Is
Amended
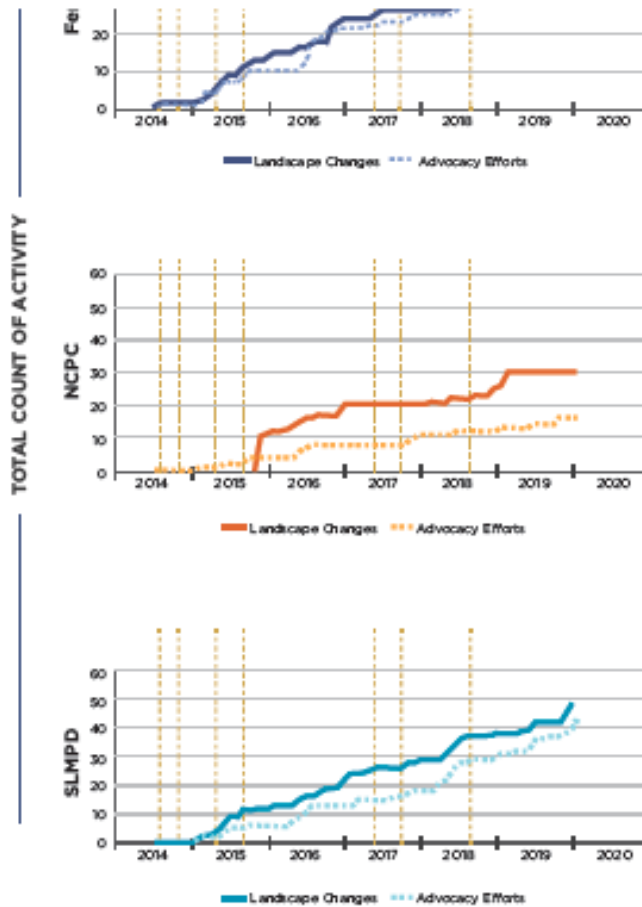
(2014) conditions varied so much.
However, we can learn something
about how regional events impacted
department change and what sped
things up and slowed things down.

In **FERGUSON,** we see how reform
can be facilitated by a legal mandate
like the Consent Decree. We also see
how the restrictive procedures of
that mandate can also slow things
down. In addition, Ferguson is an eye-
opening example of extreme volatility
in leadership (seven chiefs in five
years) and how that degree
of upheaval can impede reform.

The birth of the **NCPC** is a story
of growing more organically from
community-oriented roots catalyzed
by strict accreditation standards and
regional demands for change.

SLMPD'S size leads to particularly
complex dynamics including a larger
leadership structure (e.g., mayor +
chief + public safety director) that
often precludes a strong, consistent,
and clear commitment to one
platform; a nearly constant flux
of legal action both spurring and
slowing change; and an oftentimes
oppositional police union.

TOTAL COUNT OF ACTIVITY

Fer

Landscape Changes   Advocacy Efforts

NCPC

Landscape Changes   Advocacy Efforts

SLMPD

Landscape Changes   Advocacy Efforts

Each jurisdiction had specific key events that impacted the condition of the policing landscape change, as well. In fact, these graphs, as the report notes, tell different narratives of reform for each jurisdiction. In the Ferguson Police Department, for instance, seven chiefs were rotated in and out of the position over the course of five

years. Obviously, such rapid departures stalled much of the implementation of reform and shift in institutional culture ("State of Police Reform" 14). It is the qualitative data from community narratives that provide a much broader understanding of the issue than quantitative data could. The intersecting and overlapping of stories and numbers elucidating one another is a way the report is an ecology rather than a product.

ECOLOGICAL ACCOUNTABILITY

While the FTF report makes it clear at the beginning of their report that its function is not to place blame on any individual person, it becomes difficult to not place blame while still identifying calls to action and the accountable bodies to see that these issues are addressed. The list of accountable bodies in the FTF report were ambiguous, including "department executives" "Missouri Legislative" "Missouri Department of Public Safety" "Local Governments" and "Municipal Public Departments" ("Forward through Ferguson") One of the barriers listed in the SOPR report is that there are many "organizations working in the police reform space with little unified voice of consensus on where to focus energy" ("State of Police Reform" 17). Again, this lack of community direction consensus stems from some of the ineffectiveness of the initial report. The SOPR found that many of the programs and practices that were implemented lacked oversight and monitoring, as well as a lack of support and direction for programs or plans to implement policies. The report identifies the rifts in assessments from policing leadership and institutional counterparts, which further fractured the trust between community and police ("State of Police Reform" 17). The SOPR report's willingness to critique and re-think the work of the FTF report are reflexive moves that are part of the

way the SOPR strives to be an ecological document- one that is focused on process rather than an end-product.

The barriers in the SOPR report include "extreme turbulence in leadership" and "focus on programs and practices over policy" ("State of Police Reform") The layout of the facilitators and barriers juxtaposed to each other, clearly illustrates the lack of progress is due to those in power. The SOPR explicitly calls out the lack of policy reform in police departments. "Programs and informal changes in practice are easier to implement than policy changes. It's tempting to point to a long list of programmatic efforts as evidence of commitment to change. But when these efforts are not undergirded by policy changes, programs and informal practices can easily erode when resources dry up or individual champions leave" ("State of Police Reform" 16). The report argues that this is not enough. What will make a difference, they claim, are "leaders who are willing to make bold statements" and "engage in conversations with community members from across the ideological spectrum" ("State of Police Reform" 5). The report calls such actions "short-term wins." They go so far as referring to these short-term wins as "low-hanging fruit." Aiming for only the low-hanging fruit instead of focusing on a strategy to reach higher "is the behavior of short-sighted leaders who care more about their present-day popularity than making sustainable change" ("State of Police Reform" 6). This type of unruly rhetoric interrogates the status quo and directly classifies the work that has been completed so far as "short-term wins." ("State of Police Reform" 6).

The report explicitly identifies community and police leadership by name as key players in the spurring and stalling of policing landscape change. The SOPR explicitly names leaders who have taken steps toward FTF's police reform call to actions. For

example, Wesley Bell is mentioned four times through the report. Charts indicate that the

policing landscape changed dramatically after he was sworn in, as well as when Chief

McCall stepped down from his position and Jason Armstrong became the new chief.

Chief Moss for the FPD's district was also identified as influential and credited him for

their progress with working with protestors and organizing. The SOPR takes

accountability to a more specific place, both in its criticism and praise. It shifts the notion

of accountability to focusing on policy changes, as well. It shifts the view of

accountability as something more networked and complex instead of placing blame on

one individual for one isolated event.

RHETORICAL PARTNERSHIPS

In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways rhetorical partnership is a significant

component to public rhetoric. These rhetorical partnerships are constructed through the

process of rhetorical listening, collaboration, and the negotiation of narratives in what

Grobman calls "complex third spaces" (244). It's vital to be aware of dominant

discourses and the ways these discourses silence marginalized narratives. The obstacle a

commission faces is uncovering all narratives and the ways a community's history affects

the social construction of these memories and narratives. The unequal relations of power

can make it difficult to negotiate meaning among participants. Racist ideologies can

hinder the accomplishment of public rhetoric and limit the ongoing process of the

document.

While citizens rhetorically participated in the initial stages of the FTF report, it

left citizens little to no rhetorical agency to participate after the report was published. If

participants, specifically those Wells describes as individuals "who were not in our immediate circle and hope for some kind of efficacy", are not given space to enter into the discourse, public rhetoric becomes less effective and persuasive because it does not invigorate public discourse (3).

One of the differences between the SOPR and the FTF report is that the SOPR pairs the voice of the experts and researchers writing the report with the voices in the community. Including community voices, specifically those of the black community, in the report helps others see them as stakeholders. And, as stakeholders, they are more willing and persistent in the circulation of the report. The circulation of the report, or the more people who learn about and engage with the report, continues the life and dynamics of the report and prevents change from becoming stagnant.

In the SOPR, for instance, the commission highlights what factors have helped and hindered the implementation of change. They argue that a resounding influence of police reform has been activism involvement, as well as "close and persistent public scrutiny" from the community ("State of Police Reform"). In the FTF report, the majority of the accountable bodies the commission identified were those in public office; the ways in which citizens could participate and help with change was not included. This shift in rhetoric acknowledges that citizen agency and participation in community activism accounts for a significant and necessary factor in implementing sustainable change.

On the flip side, the SOPR argues that one of the barriers to accomplish change has been the disconnection among community entities and police departments, regarding who is accountable and how to move forward. The SOPR states that many of the police

they interviewed perceived the lack of progress to stem from mixed messages from community entities. The commission petitions that community consensus needs to be clear on demands because competing demands can "create confusion that can be used as an excuse for inaction" ("State of Police Reform" 6). Instead of placing full responsibility on those advocating for change, it is shared with the police for using it as a reason to remain inactive.

Throughout their overview, the report included organizations and committees that are often overlooked. For example, when discussing the policy changes for the Consent Decree in 2016, the report provides space for the concerns of the Neighborhood Policing Steering Committee who "had been officially formed, but often felt cut out of that process and unheard when they were allowed in" ("State of Police Reform" 22). The interviews and narratives they collected also helped them identify those who were slacking. "…Mayor Knowles, according to many interviewees, is in favor of the status quo and has been oppositional to the #Ferguson reform agenda in many ways" ("State of Police Reform" 22)

A Shift in the Narrative: From Smoothing Over Difference in the FTF to Community Conversation in the SOPR

One of the reasons the FTF was unable to ensure that racial equity became an integral part of the public policy discourse was because it did not explicitly provide a formal racial equity framework process, one that is to be used when considering public policies now *and* future policies after the publication of the report. The FTF never explicitly acknowledges how the issues of Ferguson emerged or acknowledges that

decisions concerning laws, public spending, and infrastructure in St. Louis were made

without considering the ways these policies affect marginalized groups, particularly black

citizens.

The FTF leaned on the elusive language of unity and focused on solidarity,

ignoring the power dynamics among different community discourse and the well-

established dominance of white ideologies in institutional contexts. Instead, it follows

what Ersula Ore defines as the traditional parameters of balance and unbiased, which is

not fairly balanced. The rhetorical tactic of "whistling" in the FTF report eliminates the

disruption and discomfort necessary for the growth and sustainability of the report.

As noted in the previous chapter, issues concerning police officers' use of force

was arguably the most central concern in relation to the events of Ferguson, both the

killing of Michael Brown and in terms of the protest that followed. It's one of the actions

that would ignite the most emotions and cause the most discomfort in its readers. The

way the issue of use of force was addressed implicitly creates doubt on the claims of

police brutality. However, in the SOPR, the drastic military tactics used on the Ferguson

protestors weren't mentioned in FTF, but SOPR describes the police's response "with

dogs, snipers and tactical vehicles. Their use of the 5-second rule, which prevented

protestors from standing still for more than a few seconds, would eventually be found

unconstitutional in a lawsuit brought by the ACLU…." ("State of Police Reform" 20) In

addition, underneath the list of barriers for progress is a photo of protestors with a Black

Lives Matter sign and one protestor on his knees as another one pours milk in his eyes to

help the burning from the tear gas sprayed by police. The photo adds a new dimension to

public rhetoric of the genre of commission reports, illustrates it as ecological, and more invested in rhetorical partnerships.

Although the reports are in direct conversation with the pre-existing discourses surrounding Michael Brown's death, the FTF did not directly address Brown's death in the Justice for All section of the report. While the rhetoric of FTF reflects the narrative of the police "killing of Michael Brown" is used seven times throughout the report. Unlike the FTF report where the words "race" and "black" were noticeably absent in the Justice for All Section, the commissioners of SOPR were not afraid to call out the racist practices and explicit examples of police brutality and utilize disruptive and unruly rhetoric to interrogate the status quo.

While the previous report emphasized that change takes time, there is more of a sense of urgency in the SOPR. The new commissioners of the SOPR found in their interviews that "compared to 2016, people don't think the region has advanced down the path to Racial Equity" ("State of Police Reform" 6). Using the community's pessimistic outlook on community change, the report urges leaders that plans and policies for police reform need to be implemented right away because "public safety remains a top concern for residents with a district of law enforcement high in communities of color" ("State of Police Reform" 6). This urgency further dismantles the traditionally racist structures that constructs the process of a commission report.

Besides the community's perspective on the progress of police reform, the SOPR addresses the economic concerns of racial inequity. The racial disparity in the city is costing over $17 billion dollars. While two pages of the SOPR highlight the cost of racial

inequity in education, police/court reform, healthcare, housing, and income, the focus is still on race, and only used as one of the many arguments on why the entire region should care about progress. Also, the order of these reasons is worth noting. The community's concerns (particularly those in the black community) are listed first before economic reasons, unlike the FTF report where economic concerns precede the demands of protestors.

In the section titled "FPD: A Tale of Legally Mandated Change and a Frenzy of Leaders", the commissioners begin with "Ferguson was the epicenter of the protests that erupted after the killing of Michael Brown in August of 2014. In the days, weeks, and months that followed, public outcry grew around the issues of civilian-law enforcement relations, use of force law, the militarization of police, response to demonstration, and the targeting of Black residents in the justice system" ("State of Police Reform" 20). The phrasing of "frenzy of leadership" in the title, and the words "protests" and "outcry" in bold blue lettering indicate a shift in the narrative from the FTF to the SOPR. Part of this shift is due to the inclusion of community narratives which identified Brown's death "as a powerful moment of consciousness raising and growing conviction that things had to change" ("State of Police Reform" 20).

The differences in the rhetoric used in the two reports demonstrates that the purpose between the original FTF to the current SOPR report has shifted from calming non-protesting anxiety to boldly addressing police reform. The traditional white ideological expectations typically found in a commission report were shattered with the SOPR's anti-racism message continued presence throughout the report. This disruption

forces readers to consider their relation to one another and allows space for analytical reflection, lamenting, and rhetorical action.

Conclusion

To answer Wells' question, we as public rhetoricians need to continue to analyze exigencies and never stop asking the question because there will never be one final answer. Instead, commission reports demonstrate that public rhetoric is dynamic and constantly changing with the community that uses it. By using a rhetorical ecological lens, we are better able to trace the problems and progress of issues, such as community policing. Commission reports reflect the ecological power of institutions and are most effective when engaged with the community.

I hope to fulfill my goal of interviewing the commissioners to help me understand the ecological notion of accountability and the complexities in it. My aim is to continue my involvement and research on the web of rhetorical acts produced by a commission report and the ecological accountability and progress it produces.

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