
This Masters Paper study aims to analyze Triangle activists, specifically those who are mobilizing for the cause of the African-American community, and the impact digital technology has on said mobilization and police surveillance. As has been documented and is consistent in other places in the United States, are Triangle area activists surveilled, and to what extent? Although the coronavirus outbreak severely limited the survey reach, this paper looks to answer some of these questions and to provide future solutions for the holes that are still missing.

Headings:

Black activism

Police surveillance

Black lives matter

social media activism

Twitter
BLACK ACTIVIST MOBILIZATION AND POLICE SURVEILLANCE IN THE TRAINGLE

by
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Approved by

_____________________________________
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Introduction

Social unrest has had a marked place in human history since even before the inception of the “United States of America”. For generations, individuals and groups have consistently voiced their displeasure with a hodgepodge of American ideals, systems (white supremacy being the most ingrained). Whether it be those fighting for freedom, or the others who fight for the upholding of systems that have kept them comfortable, American “culture” was founded on the vestibules of both resistance and inhumanity. America is a nation built by enslaved Africans, on the land and blood of Indigenous peoples, and for the prosperity and freedom of only whiteness. So it isn’t surprising that in the same breath that this nation demands freedom of speech and liberty for all, it also punishes those who weren’t meant to act on those rights. In a nation where we celebrate the revolutionary war which gave the British settlers the right to their own country and identity of “justice for all”, there also exists a deliberate erasure and silencing of those certain peoples who argue for the same liberties. However, where one positions themselves on this spectrum of revolution has a huge bearing on how they are received in society by both government groups (police, FBI, military, etc), and opposing ‘civilian’ individuals’. In this study, it is my aim to investigate the purported treatment of Black mobilizers in the Triangle area. More specifically, I want to understand how Black activists decide to
mobilize and whether these decisions have a correlation with the potential to be surveilled by police and other authority figures (i.e. UNC administration, local anti-activist groups, etc).

**Research Questions**

1. How has technology and the internet impacted the way Triangle activists mobilize?
2. Are Triangle activists concerned about state surveillance of their digital communication?
3. Do Triangle activists understand the differing risks of surveillance when using various media such as social media, cell phone calls, and chat apps?
4. What recollections do Triangle activists have about incidents of being digitally surveilled?

**Literature Review**

Modern technology has revamped the way we interact and socialize with each other and the world. The modern cell phone, computer, tablet, and other mobile devices, affords users access to potentially view and interact with a trove of information and people. Both the devices themselves (flashlight functions, camera, audio, etc, physical capabilities), and the supplementary applications that can be loaded onto them, offer great advantages incomprehensible before the 21st century. The sheer range of applications and their potential affordances
are massive and as Gen-Z (and younger millennials) gain more capital in American society, their phone / mobile habits dictate a slew of social norms that are erupting.

**Progression of Activism**

Activism has taken on many faces and activists have enlisted a slew of differing tactics to fulfill their purpose. The forms of activism and the activities groups and individuals partake in vary immensely. Notably, Milošević and Žeželj of "Civic Activism Online: Making Young People Dormant or More Active in Real Life?" note “some demand very little, i.e. “soft activism”, such as expressing one’s opinion or persuading others, whilst others demand a lot more, i.e. “hard activism”, such as starting a petition or rallying.” (Milošević-Đorđević, L. Žeželj 113)

As technology has advanced, the manner in which activism is executed has greatly transitioned. In the piece “From tear gas to tweets: 50 years in the evolution of US activism”, the author, Jessica Mendoza details the specifics of how US activism has changed over the last 5 decades, and how it has changed the course of American life. Jessica drew inspiration for the story while on a cross country drive from California to Washington, D.C. Along the way, Jessica and her group members stopped at museums, historically rich towns and cities, and monuments, to gather the necessary information needed to write this comprehensive piece on activism. One of the biggest revelations Mendoza reached is that the issues activists are protesting have not changed as much
over the last few decades as one would expect, and that the fundamentals of activism (the process) has not shifted as much.

In the same article it was noted that, “The trip took 13 days and spanned more than 3,200 miles. Hours of interviews with former and current activists showed us that while the blueprints for battle have changed, the issues many people are fighting for have not. In 1968, the goal was to raise public awareness about the struggle of marginalized communities. Activists then used music, art, and writing as well as protests to bring that struggle forward. In 2018, the dream is not just recognition but representation. Activists today are using the ballot box in a bid to address inequality from positions of power. They also have technology to magnify their impact online, in the streets, and in political discourse.” (“From tear gas to tweets: 50 years in the evolution of US activism)

As expected, Mendoza comes to the realization that activists of 2018 are using the resources around them to their advantage. The causes may be different, but the fundamentals of change are the same. In “From tear gas to tweets: 50 years in the evolution of US activism”, Mendoza also notes that in the late 1960’s soft activism may have resembled eclectic fashion choices, posing and answering questions for magazines, wearing statement pieces, or even taking pictures with individuals of other races, but in 2018, (soft activism) looks like a tweet, or a rainbow flag, or (hard activism) running for office (as a woman or minority).

Regardless, the advantage afforded from internet activism is grand. The internet is global and with a connection, you can access (for the most part) any
person, community, or group you’d like. This is the premise of all big social media sites. When Twitter opened its digital doors in 2006, they had one goal: to give users all around the globe the opportunity to share their thoughts with anyone, no matter who, what, or where they were. The only stipulations: these thoughts would be contained in 140 character posts called “Tweets”, and users only needed access to devices with internet capabilities to participate. The same year, Facebook (originally created as a social platform for Harvard students), also wielded itself to all users over the age of 13. The draw for Facebook? An all encompassing platform where constant sharing, commenting, and “friending” could occur without the post constraints of Twitter.

These two platforms were revolutionary. The internet was always a place where some social interactions were possible, people could contact each through email and chat boxes, eager kids and teenagers created loudly colored web pages and graphics and littered them around for unsuspecting friends and family to stumble upon, and more. Yet, these circumstantial almost -- painful -- online social activities of the preceding decades (before the 2000’s) are hardly comparable to the massive social networking opportunities that arose at the advent of Twitter, Facebook, Myspace (may they rest in peace) and others.

Socializing transformed from being tangible, physical, and with a few hundred people, to ‘digital’ and potentially with billions of people. Although it may not have been clear at the start of their rise, by the late 2010’s, the fabric of social reality massively shifted. Take these shifts for example: According to Statista, at the end of 2005, Facebook had “only” (if one million people can be
reduced to “only”) 1 million users. In 2012, Facebook had on average one billion unique users a month, in 2019 -- **2.45 billion a month** -- that’s more than a third of all recorded humans on Earth. By comparison, Twitter has about 350 million unique users a month, exponentially smaller, but still massive. If users have both platforms, there’s a potential for about two and a half billion people to interact online at any given moment. Add in other platforms like Tik Tok, Instagram, What’sApp, and more, with a sweep of a finger or a click of a button, can do pretty much anything without expelling much effort. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that with all of these affordances, people with access all over the globe and for a myriad of reasons, flocked and cemented their presence on these social media platforms.

That’s the beauty of the internet and it’s no surprise that users are taking advantage of this medium for activism. Some of the advantages of internet activism include--but are not limited to--decreased spending costs (the internet is free!), rapid and widespread exposure, and active homogenous participation.

In the advent of activism, it was imperative that groups had the funding necessary for performing their tasks. Imagine being a woman’s suffrage activist in the early 1900’s. You live in New York City and do not have steady transportation options. The telephone and the car have yet to be invented and the mail service and news companies are your primary modes of connectivity. All of the information about meetings and plans are sent through arduous mail processes and nothing is instant or free of cost. Every letter you send or
newspaper you buy, has a cost. In the book, “Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age”, authors Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport relay:

“...no matter the kind of action, almost all protest forms in history have required people to come together physically (boycotts as a potential exception) to accomplish collective ends, and have required organizers and participants bear the non-negligible costs in doing so... Whether these costs come in the form of risk, stress, time, or actual money to travel or procure supplies, they have been relatively high throughout the history of protest.” (Earl and Kimport, 66)

The same still exists today, but the need for funds for the facilitation of these events is somewhat reduced with the affordances of not only the internet, but countless other objects of technology. Groups can gain donations online using applications such as GoFundMe, Venmo, Cash App, and more. They can gain more supporters or members through social media, post information about their upcoming plans, or even educate the masses... right at their fingertips and at little to no cost.

Another important factor that Earl and Kimport state are the costs associated with activism itself haven't been eradicated, but can be reduced using the internet. “Innovative uses of the Web for protest can substantially lower the costs associated with participation, and can allow for meaningful collective action without consequence.” In addition, the need for partnership in activism is huge. Person X may be the face of the movement for global warming, but there are countless other persons involved in her struggle. In the earlier days of
activism, it was imperative to find your community because it allowed for the fostering of ideas and shared commitments between team members.

In “Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age” they use the term “co-presence” as a reference to the idea that “collective action requires the coordinated efforts of many people.”, and that physical togetherness was a huge factor in activism of the past. Yet, Earl and Kimport argue that in the age of the internet, this “physical” togetherness is unnecessary. Rather, that true “meaningful collaboration” can be created without copresence. This is not referring to physical marches and rallies, but instead to the garnering of signatures for petitions online, email campaigns, mass text writing, etc., which can be achieved on the internet. What could be achieved through the use of both avenues (physical and online)? And with all of these advantages, what are the disadvantages?

**Brief History of United States Black Activism & Surveillance**

For the purpose of this paper, I began by taking a deep dive into the demise of civil rights leaders in the 1960’s and 70’s and Ferguson activists. At the advent of the 1960’s, black social justice organizers were continuing to make monumental strides towards the desegregation of the American south. They were mobilizing in masses and beginning to see more tangible improvement, especially after the huge supreme court win of 1954 (Brown v. Board). The mobilization of Black activism angered an investigative bureau led by J. Edgar Hoover, [and unquestioned by the Kennedy brothers] the mastermind
behind large scale surveillance attempts of the mid 20th century such as “COINTELPRO”. This, in combination with an ignorance Kenneth O'Reilly recounts in a Southern Historical Organization journal article “The FBI and the Civil Rights Movement during the Kennedy Years--from the Freedom Rides to Albany“ as:

“Ignorance about the realities of life for black Americans in the South and a sensitivity to hard political facts explain, in part, the Kennedys’ caution with regard to civil rights in general and the protection issue in particular. Their stance cannot be fully understood, however, without reference to the policies and values of J. Edgar Hoover and the other federal officials who ran the FBI. By failing to challenge those attitudes, the Kennedys sanctioned FBI notions about the proper role of the federal government - the idea that the government had de facto authority to spy on civil rights activists but had little authority to protect them from the segregationist terrorists who worried John Lewis and his fellows out on the movement's front line in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia.” (The FBI and the Civil Rights Movement during the Kennedy Years--from the Freedom Rides to Albany)

The temperament in the federal government ranged from willful nonchalance which started with the Kennedys, and growing suspicions about potential “danger” caused by supporters of desegregation. The former nonchalance brought on questions of the federal government’s responsibility to protect civil rights leaders. Would they be overstepping their boundaries? O'Reilly
states in “The FBI and the Civil Rights Movement during the Kennedy Years--
from the Freedom Rides to Albany” journal article:

“The Kennedys were interested in avoiding confrontations and managing
the struggle for black equality in the South, so they accepted Burke Marshall’s
notion of how federal power could be used. What this meant in practice with
regard to the FBI was clear enough. The Kennedys exerted little pressure on the
FBI to protect civil rights workers, while they constantly pressured the FBI to
do more of the thing that J. Edgar Hoover wanted to do all along - spy on
civil rights workers. By not mobilizing the FBI on the protection front the
Kennedys thought they would be more likely to avoid confrontations. By
mobilizing the FBI on the surveillance front the Kennedys thought they would
have a better chance to manage the civil rights movement.” (The FBI and the Civil
Rights Movement during the Kennedy years)

Instead of addressing the issues presented by civil rights leaders, the
Kennedy duo believed surveillance would stifle any potential wrongdoings by
said community. Essentially, extinguishing the house next door to that of the one
that’s burning—because you never know if it could catch on fire.

Regardless, this nod was more than enough for J. Edgar Hoover. With
increased experience wire-tapping, sending harassment calls, etc., the FBI
began their foreplay into surveillance with the Freedom Rides in 1961 and
continued on for the greater part of the 1960’s. Investigators invested a multitude
of resources and tactics for surveillance and intimidation, orchestrated extortion
and blackmail attempts, and even went as far as hiring reformed convicted persons as undercover agents.

In the case of Fred Hampton and the Black Panther party, Hoover hired William O. Neal as a counterintuitive officer. He worked as a bodyguard for Hampton and when he disclosed to the FBI that the Panthers were not doing much more than offering free meals to their communities, Hoover demanded that they fish for more. In the same breath they orchestrated distrust within and violence by the Black Panther party with other groups in hopes of the groups disbandment. As he began to gain significant traction as a respected leader, in 1969, the FBI assassinated Hampton in a raid whilst he was sleeping in his apartment. Although the Black Panther Party drummed up a surmountable amount of controversy as many regard their not having any resistance to employ guns and violence as necessary for their cause and that they had reason to be surveilled, the massive range of subjects the FBI studied (from the non-violent Freedom riders, to Martin Luther King, SNCC, and dozens more), is a trend that has transgressed into the twenty first century and representative of a larger scale issue.

In the 2010’s the same culture surveillance of activists still exists. The only difference is the monumental strides in technology. The capabilities of the FBI and other police affiliated institutions for surveillance improved exponentially with the introduction of digital surveillance (surveillance that requires the use of higher resolution “digital” cameras and technology). Unsurprisingly, this trend of surveillance of activists and Black activists has carried on into some of the
biggest movements of the twenty-first century. Namely, the mid 2010’s activist movement “Black Lives Matter” (BLM) which sprang up after George Zimmerman was acquitted of the murder of teenager Trayvon Martin. After the judgement, there was an enormous online response and pretty soon, the hashtag became a slogan for the movement against police brutality. This heightened black activist mobilization introduced a new array of suspicion amongst authorities and when this activism found its way onto the streets of Ferguson, they once again began to surveil. The purpose of said surveillance isn’t necessarily known (to me), I can merely speculate, but the activists began to grow suspicious of the activity.

According to the 2017 article “Exclusive: Internal Documents Show Police Spied on New York Black Lives Matter Group” by Brandon Patterson:

“In August, the Black Lives Matter Global Network chapter in the Rockland County, upstate New York, filed a federal lawsuit claiming police in Clarkstown, a city of about 84,000 people, spied on its members unlawfully for at least a year, from January through December 2015. The documents show that the police department’s Strategic Intelligence Unit— established in 2013 between the department and the county DA’s office to gather intelligence on suspected criminals—conducted social-media surveillance on BLM activists and continued to do so even after the unit’s supervisor was told by the lead detective in the prosecutor’s office that the surveillance had to stop.” (Exclusive: Internal Documents Show Police Spied on New York Black Lives Matter Group)

In the same breath, there have been six Ferguson protest leaders who have died in the last four and a half years. Although only two were homicides
(three were suicides, one was an overdose, but the correlation between their occupation and their untimely demise is clear), it's important to note that many other protestors have reported they've received anonymous threats and been placed in other dangerous situations. Patterson also notes:

“BLM activists elsewhere have long suspected that police were monitoring them, but the Clarkstown documents constitute some of the clearest evidence yet of such surveillance. According to a November 2015 police intelligence report, the special unit used a “geofence” twice that month to monitor Twitter and/or Instagram feeds of individuals it determined were affiliated with the BLM movement. Geofences, which businesses use to create targeted advertising, allow users to track social media posts within a given time frame, and store and analyze time and location data. The intelligence report does not specify how many people were tracked in each instance. A report for the following month shows that police tracked the social media activity of Black Lives Matter activists on six occasions. The goal, according to the reports, was to disrupt potential violence.” (Exclusive: Internal Documents Show Police Spied on New York Black Lives Matter Group)

If there exists evidence of Ferguson activist surveillance and other activists around the United States in the present day and the past, could the same be occurring in the Triangle area?
Research Methods

I wanted to get a mixture of general and specific qualitative data, so the research was intended to be split into two phases. There would be a survey portion and a follow up interview portion for activists who designated that they would be interested. The underlying motivation of the research would be to get a first-hand understanding of how triangle area activists mobilize and the tools they use to do so. Due to the potential visibility of this paper, and the potential harm that could befall participants, I did not request names, ages, or other data that could aid in their identification (emails of willing interview participants were taken on a if-then basis). In addition, the survey was designed to both gain clarity on the relationship between mobilization methods, and police surveillance, but also to compare these findings to the activists' perceived understanding of basic surveillance information. The idea behind this was to gauge (on a small scale) whether people’s mobilization tactics were not only a factor of a slew of relational circumstances but because of their surveillance knowledge capacity.

Below, I have outlined 12 of the 13 survey questions (the 13th contained email information and therefore is not useful for this study):

*The questions with stars are multiple choice*

1. Are you an activist (present or past)?

2. Please describe your activist activities and the community/people you serve(d), this could range from participating / organizing protests, progressive art, etc.
3. What tools do you use for your activist work? (Internet, applications, social media, etc?)

4. Why do you use these resources?

5. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you see/hear the word “surveillance?”

6. What about “privacy?”

7. During many notable Black led activist movements throughout history, hundreds of activists have been intensely surveilled by the FBI, CIA, and other government agents. Do you know any of the history of surveillance in activism?

8. (If yes) You noted that you are aware of the history of surveillance in Black activism. Please describe any insights you’re comfortable sharing.

9. (If no) You noted you are not aware of the history of surveillance in Black activism. Why is this the case?

10. Have you or someone in your organization ever been suspicious of being surveilled? *

   a. Yes, No, Prefer not to answer

11. How does activist surveillance occur? Do you have any ideas?

12. Would you be willing to participate in an in-depth interview? *

   a. Yes, No

The experiences of triangle area activists were the primary motivators and data points intended for the survey. I also wanted to get the perspectives of activists who have mobilized in recent years, namely during the booming digital
age (2010’s), and were also of legal age. Therefore, my survey was limited to individuals who were between eighteen and thirty-five by targeting college age / late teen organizations in the Triangle and the greater UNC community.

When designing the questions, an effort was made to differentiate the survey and interview by designing more broad questions to maintain a level of consistency (for comparison purposes). For the interview questions, the intention was to provide an open ended question, to which the respondent could provide details as they see fit. If more details were needed, I would ‘comfortably’ ask for clarification.

*The full list of interview questions can be found in the appendix.

**Results & Discussion**

Unfortunately, (what is assumed to be due to the covid-19 outbreak), I did not receive responses from any organizations and individual activists whom I reached out to. Therefore, my pool of survey respondents were undergraduate students primarily between the ages of 18 and 24. If users selected that they were not activists, they were then taken to the end of the survey and not asked to answer any subsequent survey questions. This decision was made in hopes of reducing unnecessary traffic to the survey. If we were to get data from people without activist backgrounds, the results would be skewed.

Of the participants only nine of seventeen noted that they are (or have been in the past) activists. Of these four expanded on their activities. One
participated in protests and the other is a filmmaker and participant in the creation of the “Silence Sam” film.

**Commonalities: *Figures can be found in Appendix***

All six respondents listed social media as one (if not the only) resource they use for activism. All of them referenced technologies that require the use of internet compatible devices (mobile phones, tablets, computers). There was a clear association with digital technologies and of these respondents only one noted using a non-digital form of mobilization in addition to technology. Of these six, five noted that they use these technologies because they are useful and offer benefits of speed, reach, and access to a surplus of valuable information.

When asked what they think of when they see or hear “surveillance”, there was a variance in “definition”. Some responded: “Black list”, “Big Brother”, “Police”, “Government”, “Watching over”, and “Tracking”. These individual definitions show a consistent basic understanding of the fundamental concept of surveillance which is to watch or “look over”. On the other hand, two delved deeper into their definitions, one definition extended to describe the tracking of Google data, social media, and phone calls. This individual has a more complex understanding of surveillance, because they directly called out techniques employed by law enforcement in the past (seen by Ferguson law enforcement for example). The other referenced what they perceive to be planned intimidation and restrictive motivations of those in power (including police) as signifiers of “surveillance”.
When asked the same question but pertaining to privacy, there were a few notable response that piqued my interest. These responses specifically called out privacy being something the individual has ownership over. The responses stated: “Self-determination”, “Being able to search and move freely on the internet and in real time without the fear of being monitored by law enforcement”, “Facebook” (assuming this is in reference to the past findings of Facebook gathering and distributing private user data) “I don’t think we have privacy”, “Right”, “That being taken away through technology today”, “right to my own information”. Considering that four of the six marked having previously (or currently) having fears about being surveilled (one did not and the other did not answer the question).

As a further probing into the degree to which people understand the history of surveillance and what it entails, question eight (“You noted that you are aware of the history of surveillance in Black activism. From the responses, I gathered that there was a varied knowledge of the activist history and that there could be a potential correlation to how people protect (or don’t) themselves as activists. Those who have more context provided more detail about “privacy” and “surveillance” in the previous questions. They responded to this question:

“COINTELPRO” (mentioned twice”, “Black Panther Party/Black Liberation Army”, “60’s”, “FBI”, “Civil Rights Movement”, “Fred Hampton”, “The police used an app to pull social media info from folks attending protests around Silent Sam without telling anyone”, “...ordering a police infiltration of the sit in”, “the vice Chancellor
of Security or whatever at the time decided to record me. Police and administrators frequently take pictures of activists.”

Question 11, How does activist surveillance occur? Do you have any ideas?, elicited some interesting responses. “When UNC PD is given money to create a geo-fence that triggers when certain words are mentioned, which can be overridden to include names of activists if they so chose”, “The only thing I know now is that they look at social media”, “I think it occurs by every way possible, infiltrations, tagging emails, sliding into group chats, taking pictures and video”, “daily things from phone cameras to traffic lights”, “Being watched on university for us, being monitored by police and keeping track of your activity” All participants noted “tracking” or “watching” of some sort. Some mentioned more complex surveillance, and others mentioned specific surveillance practices that have been reported as being used by different police departments in the Triangle.

Discussion

Due to the very small survey pool (what I presume to be a result of covid-19 prioritization especially amongst organizations whom I reached out to), the results are not large enough to come to a conclusion. However, from this very quaint pool of respondents, and a very thorough interview with one of them, it is clear that there are both commonalities in mobilization and relationships between Triangle area activists and people in power.
With the information I was able to collect, there are three fundamental takeaways.

1. The level of technological knowledge being varied suggests that there is a potential relationship between surveillance knowledge and the maneuvering of activist interests. Participants who appeared to have more knowledge, more specifically the person I interviewed who had an extensive response about surveillance, mentioned the use of encrypted communication platforms (names of which I will not share for privacy reasons). This participant was the only one who noted that they used technology of this kind and showed a deliberate action against surveillance. Others did mention geo-fencing and social media surveying but it isn’t clear if any of their interactions were affected from knowing that they could be surveilled.

2. Some of the pieces identified as infringements of privacy and surveillance are coincidentally being put into practice by one if not all police departments in the Triangle. As noted above some identified geofencing, social media tracking, stoplight / traffic tracking, and others as surveillance tactics employed by police departments. Although only one specifically mentioned the name of one of these tactics, of the three police departments important to this study all employed tracking operations that incorporated one of those responses in some manner.
The figure below from 2015 extracted from an ACLU document entitled “Unwarranted: The State of Surveillance in North Carolina”, describes which departments use what surveillance tactics and a definition of each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Tracking</th>
<th>Stingrays*</th>
<th>GPS Cell Phone Tracking*</th>
<th>Automatic License Plate Readers*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapel Hill PD</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Durham PD</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<td>Raleigh PD</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Police department surveillance chart.

*Automatic License Plate Readers (ALPR’s):

“Can capture thousands of license plates per minute, scan the license plate number for any red flags and store the photo indefinitely with a time and location stamp. By widespread use of ALPR’s through the stored data, government agencies could effectively map out an individual’s location and movements over a period of time. Without constraints on how that information can be used or how long law enforcement can store it, location data is ripe for abuse.” (Unwarranted: The State of Surveillance in North Carolina)

*Cell Phone Location Tracking:

“Location information is data about a person’s whereabouts that is monitored and stored through cell phones and the Global Positioning System (GPS) to track a person’s movements. Cell phone or GPS location information can provide real time location of a person and monitor if a person is stationary or moving.” (“Unwarranted: The State of Surveillance in North Carolina”)
*Cell Site Simulators (Stingrays):*

“Mimic cell service provider towers and tricks any cell phone in the vicinity into broadcasting back to the device its unique identifying number and other data. Because of the extreme secrecy surrounding the use of Stingrays, it is unclear exactly how much data is reported back to law enforcement using the device but it is certain that Stingrays can locate phones with precision and record their movements over time.” (“Unwarranted: The State of Surveillance in North Carolina”)

This data shows that departments in the Triangle area are recorded as having specifically targeted cell phones (and their data) to identify the locations and movement of civilians in the Triangle area. When the primary mode of activist mobilization occurs on mobile devices and social media, it begs the question of whether these populations are targeted.

3. Pictures and videos are potential target points for surveillance. One of the tracking methods mentioned above (ALPR’s), directly seeks to take pictures and live footage of cars so as to determine the identity of the occupants. Although the primary purpose can be assumed to relate to traffic and other vehicular activities, how could this data be used when looking to garner more information about activists? In addition, during the interview and in the survey response, the participant mentioned on several occasions witnessing police and UNC administration videoing and capturing photos of them and other co-participants.
UNC police are complicit in surveillance, but the extent to which is unclear. From the interview performed and after watching the Silence Sam documentary directed by Rhodes, Jeremiah and Courtney Staton, it is clear that UNC PD has somewhat of a stake in the surveillance of campus activists. From the police infiltration where a police officer dressed in plain clothes and framed himself as an idle supporter of the Silent Sam movement in hopes to gain information, to the watching of Campus Y facilities during a time when activists were placing “political” banners on the building (then taking them down), and other instances reported in the Silence Sam film, UNC PD and administration have (or had) a clear agenda. This agenda which is discussed several times in the aforementioned film, has eerie similarities to past tactics mentioned earlier in the document (FBI infiltration of the Black Panther Party / versus UNC sending an Officer (who posed as “Victor the Mechanic” to get inside information), intimidation of activists, and suspected tracking of participants in the Silent Sam resistance.

**Conclusion**

Due to the very small survey and interview pool, there are no definitive conclusions that can be made. There does seem to be a potential relationship between how activists mobilize and their greater understanding of technology, and a clear agenda by police departments in the Triangle to collect data on its citizens with or without their knowledge. Considering the lack of definitive results, I will refrain from labeling the research complete but rather a beginning for the
investigation of surveillance and the complicity of police departments and UNC administration.

There is still a lot more that needs to be done in continuation of this research project. It is my hope that in the future, more activists and groups can be surveyed (in order to garner more data and a clearer picture of the extent to which surveillance does occur). With this continuation, we can garner more insight into the knowledge levels of activists pertaining to surveillance and the correlation between the mobilization tactics they employ. Using this data, there are a slew of possibilities!

I would like there to be a crash course and/or online resource for activists to take and use where all things surveillance and protecting privacy are discussed. Preventative measures would have to be taken that only activists (people on a need to know basis) would have access to the course. This course would be useful for gathering data and providing data on how to maneuver the activist landscape as safely as possible. This education tool will aid in helping to prevent as much surveillance as possible on high risk Triangle activists.
Bibliography


Appendix

Interview Questions:

- Can you tell me how you became an activist?
- In general, how would you describe your experience as an activist?
- As an activist, have you ever considered location (being in the Triangle area) as a factor in how you were/are received or treated?
- How would you define the relationship between mobilization, technology, and activism?
- What are some obstacles that you’ve faced as an activist (if any)?
- Have you had any encounters with law enforcement?
- How have you coped with visibility?
- Do you have any concerns about surveillance?
- Did you have any concerns about your safety?

Interview Responses:

Question 2:

Please describe your activist activities and the community/people you serve(d). This could range from participating / organizing protests, progressive art, etc.

- Participating in protests

- I served the homeless community, food insecure communities, family’s affected by gun violence communities, ban the box, raise the age within the juvenile system and more

- Most of my organizing comes through filmmaking. I like to focus on stories featuring people of color, but especially young black activists uplifting their local communities. I also considered myself an organizational activist. When I worked full-time, I organized within the company to try to create a more blatant culture of racial equity; this ranged from tweaking do-nows to strategy meetings with the co-presidents of the company. I also served as temporary mentors for other young artists of color in the Triangle.

- Participated in protests and done some organizing.
Since [redacted] freshman year at Carolina has been working with a number of anti-racist organizations, such as Defend UNC and Take Action Chapel Hill, as well as serving in public service positions, like the Campus Safety Commission and Multi-Cultural and Diversity Outreach Committee in Student Government. [redacted] most recent victory is participating in the Lawyers Committee on Civil Rights suit that dismissed the $2.5 million dollar Silent Sam settlement.

Question 3: What tools do you use for your activist work?

- social media, email
- Social media
- All of the above
- Internet, social media, Adobe Premiere
- Internet and social media and email
- Social Media Primarily, Sometimes Paper Flyers

Question 4: Why do you use these resources?

- People around my age pay attention to this most
- It’s quick to send information out & get results
- Adobe Premiere helps me edit any media I am creating. They just increase my access to knowledge and make the process of putting together media or resources easier to complete. I use social media when I feel like I have to. Social media still seems to be one of the easiest ways to connect with the most amount of people.
- For information to understand topics and know what events are taking place.
- Social Connections & Wider Reach, also Solidarity.

Question 5: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you see/hear the word surveillance?

- big brother
- Watching over
- Government
- Police. I think about the police and others in power using surveillance as a tactic to intimidate or restrict the work of activists so that we cannot actually challenge the power structure by which those in power are upheld.
- Tracking google searches, emails, social media and possibly phone calls. Tracking data too.
- Black List

Question 6: What about privacy?

- right to my own information
- That being taken away through technology today
- Right
Facebook (As in Facebook does not provide privacy). I don’t think we have privacy. In general, I feel like the United States has an entitlement problem. And, I think that entitlement problem influences attitudes towards privacy. Those in power may feel entitled to interrupting the privacy of citizens, especially the privacy of marginalized communities.

- Being able to search and move freely on the internet and in real time without the fear of being monitored by law enforcement
- Self-Determination

Question 7: During many notable Black led activist movements throughout history, hundreds of activists have been intensely surveilled by the FBI, CIA, and other government agents. Do you know any of the history of surveillance in activism?

- Yes
- No
- No
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes

Question 8: You noted that you are aware of the history of surveillance in Black activism. Please describe any insights you’re comfortable sharing.

- I know the FBI surveilled anyone who seemed like a threat to white supremacist power structures. I think the FBI hired a photographer who was close to Dr. King to give info on the Civil Rights Movement. The FBI surveilled Muslim neighborhoods in Chicago. The FBI kept notes on Fred Hampton, who spoke adamantly about the need for education and for cross-racial alliances (None of which are criminal or reason to be shot in bed).

- The police at UNC used an app to pull social media info from folks attending protests around ""Silent Sam"" without telling anyone.

- UNC surveilled its black activists and pro-black activism by ordering a police infiltration of the sit-in. I think they may have surveilled my teacher while we were making the Silence Sam film (There were times when her office seemed to have been searched, etc). I think I used to be followed from the Campus Y to ""Silent Sam"" - me and Alexander - when we were co-presidents at the Y.

- When the banners were being taken down by police and I started filming the interaction, the Vice Chancellor of Security or whatever at the time decided to record me.

- Police and administrators frequently take pictures of activists.
I think one of the most notable ones I know about is J Edgar Hoover's COINTELPRO program. The program gathered information on groups and individuals and shared it with other agencies. Also, in an attempt to discredit notable activist and organizers they would spread misinformation and flat out lies. They also infiltrated organizations to disrupt movements. All of this has been proven by scholars and activist that were active in the 60’s.

MOVE Africa, the Black Panther Party/Black Liberation Army, and Marcus Garvey’s organization were all infiltrated and surveilled per COINTELPRO to prevent the destruction of the US empire.

Question 10: Have you or someone in your organization ever been suspicious of being surveilled?

- Yes
- No
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes

Question 11: How does activist surveillance occur? Do you have any ideas?

- Being watched on university for us, being monitored by police and keeping track of your activity
- Daily things from phone cameras to traffic lights
- I think it occurs by every way possible; infiltrations, tagging emails, sliding into group chats, taking pictures and video
- The only thing I know now is that they look at social media
- When UNC PD is given money to create a geo-fence that triggers when certain words are mentioned, which can be overridden to include names of activists if they so choose.