ON THE MARCH

Black Lives Matter Vermont rallies for change

BY DAN BOLLES, PAGE 30
Ebony Nyoni had a tough message for the large, mostly white crowd gathered at a Winooski bar six days after the presidential election: Distraught people looking for comfort as they contemplated a Donald Trump presidency would not find it from her.

“Trump doesn’t scare me,” the founder of Black Lives Matter Vermont began, to thunderous applause. “We’ve been dealing with racists like him for hundreds of years. He’s nothing new.”

But, she warned, “If you’re only here to feel better about yourselves now that he’s won, we don’t need you. We need people who will work to save black lives.”

With that, Nyoni led more than 100 supporters on a boisterous, traffic-obstructing march through the Onion City, drawing still more people from homes along Main Street in spontaneous solidarity. It was a signature evening for the emerging civil rights organization. But was it a sign of sustainable momentum for Black Lives Matter Vermont? Or was it a rogue wave of support in the immediate, uneasy aftermath of an election that left many Vermonters unsettled?

“I’ve seen a lot of organizations come and go,” said Robert Appel, a 65-year-old lawyer and civil rights activist. “The challenge has been to sustain a coordinated effort.”

BLMVT is the new kid on the block in Vermont’s robust activism community. But in recent months, buoyed by a surge of attention to the now-international Black Lives Matter movement, the local organization has become one of the most visible advocacy groups in Vermont.

Its evocative black-and-yellow raised-fist logo has become a fixture at marches and protests around the state, not to mention on bumper stickers and T-shirts. The group’s own events consistently garner significant media coverage.

The organization has benefited from a Trump-inspired burst of local activism and has used its newfound visibility to push an ambitious platform. But BLMVT faces many of the same challenges as its predecessors in Vermont’s civil rights movement—most glaringly, the state’s pervasive whiteness. African Americans are just 1.3 percent of the state’s population.

“We don’t have a model to follow,” said Vermont Law School student and BLMVT leader Brittny Martinez, noting that most Black Lives Matter chapters benefit from a more diverse population than Vermont’s. “We have to build it from the ground up.”

And the state’s liberal politics can be a hindrance, not a help, according to BLMVT youth coordinator Isaiah Hines. “The single biggest barrier to racial justice work in Vermont is the fact that we are such a politically progressive state,” said Hines, a South Burlington High School senior. “That’s a problem, because it leads to people dismissing the experiences of people of color. People thinking that they’re more ‘woke’ or aware than they are is a huge issue.”

“The conversation has shifted, and the tone has improved,” said Appel. “But we’re not out of the woods. There is a lot of growth yet to happen.”
I had no idea what race I moved to...

EBONY NCTO

Brooks, the university’s chef of Caribbean food, has been Champion of the Black student's co-op in the cafeteria for a year. He serves up West Indian cuisine to students, including students of color, who may not have had access to this type of food before. He provides an environment where students can feel comfortable and welcome.

The restaurant is open Monday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. and on Friday from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m.

The restaurant has become a popular spot for students to gather and socialize, and Brooks has noticed a change in the way students interact with each other.

“Before, students would walk in and out of the restaurant without looking at each other,” Brooks said. “Now, they are more likely to make eye contact and engage in conversation.”

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militarized force, a lack of departmental transparency, and failures to involve the black community in a fair and impartial Police Policy. He recently helped draft legislation that would make it easier for black officers to hold supervisors accountable. "It's been a long time coming. We've seen a lot of progress," said Nyoni. "But it's not enough. It's time to start bringing people to the table, to get stuff done."

On the March: 2/28
Del Pozo said he's extended invitations via email to meet with Nyoni and BLMVT reps at "any time or place of their choosing."

SEVEN DAYS
03.01.17-03.08.17
see that there is a lot of work for a group
have told me, they feel more exposed in
York City when you need to feel more part
language and, in many cases, religion that you
acutely feeling how few in number they
mission.
up the department's internal disciplinary
parency. He said the next step is to open
with a full report forthcoming.

del Pozo has become a favored target of
who is critical him publicly on numerous
occasions. He denounces many of her
accusations.
"We're one of the most transparent
police departments in the country," the
chief, named his North Avenue office.
"I think the amount of data we put we put out is unprecedented in
Vermont."

He pointed out that the BPD reports
car-stop data quarterly, which is more fre-
quently than state law requires. The depart-
ment was one of a handful of local police
agencies to voluntarily report data before
the law went into effect in 2014. The BPD also makes its data available to the public online through the Burlington Police Transparency Portal, which includes a database of police incidents searchable by
race and gender.

That climate of solidarity will go a long
way toward determining whether BLM,
the shoulder of the line for every more
trapped in Vermont, with a high density of
Vermont, with a high density of
refugees and immigrants. Yet the demographics
and, in many cases, religion that you
academics say for action under a Trump regime.

Another senior adviser, Bread and Puppet
Thompson, called it a classic protest song often referred to as
the tunes was "Lift Every Voice and Sing,"
a gospel revival of a social justice rally, a PTA meeting, a
meeting staple — as is the passing of vari-
ables, he cited the late UVM professor
Mize-Fox asked the crowd for free picture
of the victims of that shooting aloud.
asking the crowd to speak the names of the
church in Charleston, S.C. She closed by
speaking to the loss of the nine victims that shotting
Alam
"I think the election is kind of a cop-
ny's Fatal Force project,
beauty of action and then just keep on yelling at
about change are ready to sit down with
who are in a position to start bringing
change. You're already highlighted an
hv it to work issues and seldom
commitment, the key to bringing about change is to
ready to sit down with you,
then you can't just keep on yelling at
them," he said.

That's an odd with former
colonialist into action. Speaking to a group
of young people in London last year, he
argued that while Black Lives Matter is
effectively in bringing attention to police
problems, it also needs to be willing to
work within the political system to affect
cannot be focused on with the population by
itself and black officers in the
population. And it's one that actually differs from
the rest of the crowd, which tracks police-involved shootings
in the
Washington Post

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that might compromise the purity of your
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