



Wheels of Change #WOCBLM

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GLOBAL 1st inspired by George Floyd Killing

Athletes “Writing” **BLACK LIVES MATTER** from NYC to ME

Letters “Visible” from the Moon

EXTENDED through July 26th

Boston - July 23, 2020

A diverse group of athletes has taken GEO ART to a new level - Spelling **BLACK LIVES MATTER** in giant 100 mile-long letters spanning 1500 miles of coastline from New York City to Portland, ME. The resulting “heat map” can be seen virtually, from the moon. This has never been done before.

Last weekend more than 500 people ran, walked and rode their bicycles approximately 20,000 miles, successfully spelling the message, using new technology. The event is extended through Sunday, July 26, 2020 due to snowballing interest and an intense heat wave in the Northeast. Participants of all stripe and capability still have time to put their personal mark on the map and begin to take positive action against racism.



This is the most expansive conception of STRAVA [art](#) ever, both geographically and in terms of participants. Stava is a popular global social app for athletes which produces a map of one’s route. Other technology platforms are being utilized such as Ride with GPS. But the ability to do this rests with the group’s innovative use of technology never before assembled.

“This unique, gigantic, athlete-powered, crowd-sourced GEO-BILLBOARD, where we are combining potentially

thousands of individual rides into one 'heat' map, globally, to our knowledge, has never been done before. It is not only a novel idea in the world of Geo Art, but required the construction of an entirely new application. This is all possible because a team came together around a powerful idea and were passionate about accomplishing something unreasonably difficult in a timeframe rapid enough to impact current events," said the organizers of Wheels of Change. In less than four weeks time it was conceived, organized, technology designed and executed, website constructed, participants recruited, first miles ridden and map made visible! <http://app.wheelsofchange.us/map>

It offers people a safe, but interactive and communal opportunity to DO SOMETHING during a time when many are suffering from the isolation effects and economic disaster of the COVID crisis and the sadness and horror of watching the George Floyd killing, emblematic of years of injustice about which many people feel powerless to address.

The informal volunteer group calls the Project [Wheels Of Change](#) (WOC). WOC requires all participants to pledge positive action and peacefully come together, virtually and safely in the time of Covid 19. Their belief is that creating the extraordinary visual, together with the conversations started and the actions set in motion, will contribute to substantive change toward an anti-racist, just and equitable America. The WOC team started in their own backyard talking to other cycling clubs and riding friends.

Lauri Boxer-MacComber, writing for BikeLaw.com, was skeptical about impact and wondered if this wasn't just a "stunt" for white liberals. Then she observed change and joined the effort. In her words, "[.the types of exchanges that took place on our club listserv were also happening on other cycling listservs and communities throughout New England, which was precisely what organizers hoped would happen. Even before the ride had begun, important conversations about racism were starting to occur and people were speaking up and listening to one another. This was something I could get behind.](#)"

This is a story, as much as anything, about a tiny volunteer team pulling off a small miracle, with only their own social and intellectual resources, in an unreasonably short window of time to create this impactful, socially distanced experience for all.

Wheels Of Change emerged when Ripper Phillip Stern, a software engineer and randonneur and accomplished endurance athlete, following the tragic murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers in late May, wrote to the group, "*JFK said. "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." The Rippers are good people. What will we do?"*" A number of members responded.

- Financial products systems manager Randolph Williams became a key catalyst when he reluctantly shared his very personal reflection on riding while black. It helped others understand and prompted a core group of members.
- At the same moment, food industry entrepreneur Trish Karter sent back the concept of writing BLM across New England in Strava Art, combined with a call to action and suggestions from her son about what white people can do.
- Darren Garnier, an MIT nuclear fusion physicist and randonneur, stepped forward and offered to create the technology that didn't yet exist.
- Physics teacher David Kurtz offered to do whatever needed to be done to make it happen

organizationally.

- Triathlete Legend Karen Smyers jumped in to use her large network to recruit. She recruited Neil withington and a Social Media professional
- Neil, a web designer and another title-holding triathlete and cyclist, offered to build the website along with anonymous contributor "M" (who only wants to be known for "helping the helpers" who took on the tech support.
- Karen also recruited a cyclist and talented Social Media professional to jump on the publicity - who for professional reasons must remain unnamed.
- Then Melanie Morris, founder of the only Black Cycling Clubs in NY and Boston, and former automotive engineer, joined to add more voices and greater reach.
- And finally architect Don Metz, a revered figure in cycling (including numerous RAAM and Mt. Washington titles) jumped in to help spread the word and lend wisdom.

Ten people pulled off a project that reasonably would have taken an experienced and resourced, full-time team six months or more to execute. Participants levels already exceed the revered pinnacle of uphill cycling, the Mt. Washington Bicycle Hill Climb where many of the Rippers show their grit annually. In many ways this was a steeper climb than any other we have undertaken.

The organizers emphasized INCLUSION and for all participants to engage at their own comfort level (and observe COVID 19 precautions) as long as they were committing to take positive personal action to end racism. All comers are encouraged from children on tricycles to walkers and wheelchairs. Anyone can walk a block or ride hundreds of miles. Some are committing to traverse the whole 1500 mile message (which WOC will track throughout 2020). Cyclists with a smart trainer can ride it virtually from anywhere on the planet. All participants make themselves publicly visible by joining the Wheels of Change Strava Group.

After the second day of the ride, one organizer [articulated in a Strava Post](#) what she, and many others, found so moving about the experience. It was that so many people, who never before considered themselves activists, had the courage to take a public stand on this very fraught and complex issue, and to face hostility in order to engage others in the uncomfortable conversations which are required for our society to heal from and to relegate to history, the 400 years of black lives not mattering as much as white lives:

WOC offers a list of constructive suggestions for club and individual action to help normalize anti-racism. Through July 26th, participants can run, walk, ride, "however you roll" any or all of the [16 letter-shaped routes](#), which cover more than 1,500 miles. Registration is free and available to anyone with a cell phone anywhere in the world. Ways for distant supporters to participate are offered at www.wheelsofchange.us. All activities count - whether ridden on route or walked in a far distant desert.



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Wheels Of Change is a volunteer group of friends spreading from New York to Boston. There is no formal organization or corporate entity. Find out more about them at <https://www.facebook.com/wheelsofchangeus/> or via #WOCBLM.

About the Organizers:

About Darren He visualized and then built the technology to create this crowd-sourced heat map that has never been done before. He is an MIT scientist working on nuclear fusion, accustomed to visualizing large data sets and working with complex systems. He is also, and perhaps more necessary in this case, indefatigable. He accomplished this wizardry in literally three weeks' time and held down his day job (not doing much – just trying to help crack the equation to produce clean energy for the planet). We don't know if he slept. No surprise that he is an accomplished randonneur. He also does the extreme Fleche ride described below in the "about Phillip" section.

WHY In Darren's words - As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." It affects me. It affects you too, but what, you ask are we going to do about it? My friend and riding companion, Phillip, spurred me with the question, but the passion was already simmering there. My only answer is "everything". But, cycling has been a great boon in my life, and so let's start there, write the message BLACK LIVES MATTER as large as we can, and let's pledge to not wait for MLK's dream to come true, but make it come true in our actions large and small.

About Phillip He asked the provocative question to the Winchester Rippers which set all this in motion. He is also indefatigable and brilliant. He is a software engineer for Teradyne. "The same job I took out of college 37 years ago after Bill Gates decided not to hire me!" He is an accomplished randonneur, endurance athlete, and thoughtful human. His note to us ended with, 'JFK said. "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." The Rippers are good people. What will we do?'" Phillip hiked all 48 four-thousand footers in New Hampshire in one summer, then did it again the next winter. For the last 5 years, he has been a member of a Fleche team with Darren. Each team of 5 cyclists designs its unique 360km course then completes it in exactly 24 hours. He also organizes an Overland Beer Safari each year for a small group of friends. They spend a weekend riding over dirt roads and forest trails to craft breweries in New England.

WHY In Phillip's words - Usually, I spend my time thinking about biking, baking, and beer. These days I'm thinking a lot about racism and butterflies. You know, that butterfly that flaps its wings in the Amazon and the tiny perturbation grows until it is a tsunami across the ocean. On May 31, my nephew asked me if the Rippers (my cycling group) talk about racism. I said no. He believes one reason racism persists is that some good people are uncomfortable discussing racism. The next day I called Randolph and asked how he was doing. I learned some harrowing things about "biking while black" that I never even considered. One day later I wrote a letter to the Rippers and asked what we are going to do to fight racism. Later the same week, Randolph wrote a moving letter about his experiences, with links to learn more about cycling diversity, and closed with a call to action. Within hours, Trish answered that call and proposed creating Strava Art to spell BLACK LIVES MATTER across Massachusetts. In the following weeks, Trish pulled

together the Wheels of Change team. The plan kept growing and now BLACK LIVES MATTER will extend from New York to Maine in the largest Strava Art project ever. Hundreds of participants have registered to traverse the letters. Each has also pledged to specific actions they are taking to fight racism. The breeze from the butterfly wings caused a ripple and now it's a wave. As more people in the world join this effort it will become a tsunami wiping away racism.

About Randolph Randolph's willingness to share his experience as a black cyclist helped others understand and decide to take action. Their conversations led Phillip to send the "what do good people do" question to his Ripper friends. Randolph lent his perspective to the Wheels of Change team, in part with the "biking while black" [post](#) he wrote and shared with the Rippers, the Pan-Mass Challenge, and another local cycling club. The post increased understanding, sparked public statements of support, and spawned diversity efforts within these groups. He has been at the center of organizing WOC, using his decades of product management, engineering, and operational experience in the preparation of this complicated event. He has been central to the systems and communications of the team, contributing to the remarkable pulling together of this project in an unreasonably short time frame.

WHY In Randolph's words - My family has had a long history of fighting racism. My father was sent by Martin Luther King Jr. to Miami to help establish CORE in Miami after graduating college in Boston. WOC is a continuation of the family tradition.

Trish Trish proposed the giant BLM message to the Rippers in response to Phillip's question and then threw herself into making it happen. She is an entrepreneur, athlete, artist & lifetime activist for social and environmental progress. A latecomer to competitive cycling in her 50's, she got faster and stronger, particularly in uphill racing and endurance events (AG records on RAAM and Mt. Washington). Trish has used her love for cycling before to make social change with other large projects, and she tries to leave small waves of positive energy as she rides through life.

WHY in Trish's words - My parents set an example of making every day count toward a more just and sustainable society. I've been chipping away that. I also have a deep passion for making art. And I love being outside in nature doing things. Especially love my bicycle. When Corona locked us all down I devoted my newfound free time to paint, think and write from my home on a farm. I was intensely aware of my privilege and safety. I was doing pro-bono work with threatened minority and women-owned small businesses. But it did not feel remotely adequate. There was such great suffering all around. I had recently "written" a political statement with my bicycle, in Strava Art, on the Guilford Town Green. Then the George Floyd killing rocked the world. My kids and I were in an ongoing conversation about why, what it meant and what to do. When Phillip sent out his question I sent back an article of my son's with suggestions and included the idea of the Strava message across New England.. Then Randolph's moving personal statement helped galvanize the team and here we are. [My Corona Journal](#) has been nearly abandoned since we launched this effort. I will get back to it. This is more important.

Dave Dave is a high school physics teacher and an avid cyclist. He was the first Ripper to respond to Trish's

BLM idea and was all-in from the get-go and has been a backbone of the team getting all the pieces put together as well as a steady, strong, principled guiding voice for the mission and inclusion.

WHY In Dave's words - Unintended bias is a part of everyone's life. We make decisions daily without realizing why we actually made them. Sometimes those decisions are made because of unintended biases. The Wheels of Change Project is a break from all that unintended bias. It is a conscious effort, physical and mental, to act in a way to defeat bias. Every stride or pedal stroke is a reminder that we can all do a little more to set aside our biases, and treat one another with kindness and compassion. We can all think about the ways we want to change; this project is an opportunity to act and make those changes in ourselves.

About M - (who prefers to keep a super-low profile) M volunteered without knowing any of us – it was just on the power of the idea that he said, “I’ll try to do whatever needs to be done.” He runs IT operations for a large health care system. A friend turned him into WOC and he immediately raised his hand. He hammered together the back end of our website and info systems.

WHY In M's words - M sent this text to the editor and then reluctantly agreed to it being included: Thank you for wanting to mention me in the posting of the team bio's. I prefer to be left as a silent helper with the groups and organizations I've assisted over the years. I just enjoy seeing a change in the world and follow a basic principle: Help the helpers. I am excited to see what a group this capable will accomplish.

Karen Karen, the Ironman triathlon legend, jumped in as soon as she heard about the effort and took on the job of running recruiting and being sure every inch of the course was covered. No need to tell you what her stamina and focus looks like. But as a colleague, she is also a positive-energy joy in every way. She recruited Neil to do the website and another wonderful person (who has to remain anonymous) to do Social Media.

WHY in Karen's Words - I have been involved in sports since I was a kid. Throughout my involvement with sports, I have marveled at the way it can bring diverse people together in a multitude of ways. When training together, it fosters respect among teammates. When at a participatory event, it sparks camaraderie among people from all backgrounds and cultures. When cheering for a favorite team or star, it serves as a unifying mission.

When Trish sent out a query to some of her contacts asking if anyone would like to be involved in organizing a bike ride to bring awareness to the Black Lives Matter movement via a giant Strava art attempt, I knew immediately I wanted to help. Like many other people, I have had a pit in my stomach ever since the video of George Floyd's death surfaced. I subsequently read testimonials, articles and watched documentaries about how ingrained racism and injustices are in our country and I desperately wanted to DO something. The Wheels of Change was a perfect opportunity for me to take action: it combines my belief in sport as a vehicle to bring people together for a common cause, it helps educate and spread awareness about one of our country's biggest impediments to having a fair and just society,

and it promotes individual action which is what it will take to finally eliminate racism.

Neil Neil jumped in to “help out a bit” with the WOC website design VERY late in the game when Karen Smyers pitched it to her and her former teammate, Trish, piled on. It has been a 24/7 effort ever since and she pulled off a small miracle - chasing down every minute detail and making every single impossible deadline. Neil describes herself as a computer geek who worked as a Systems Engineer in high tech until having children and then started her own company to have the flexibility to work from home. The flexibility had an added bonus - creating her own work hours gave her more time during the day to pursue her passion - cycling. Cycling branched out to include triathlon. She holds AG titles in Ironman Triathlon events and in many of the cycling segments. Neil met Trish while participating in a 4-women 60-year-old team in RAAM - the Race Across America. It is a grueling non-stop 3200 mile, 7-day time trial from San Diego to Annapolis. At the time she was 66 years old! She is coached by Karen Smyers.

WHY in Neil's Words - Although mostly retired now, I jumped at the chance to participate in the WOC project. Although I joined late, I respected Trish and knew she would assemble an amazing team. As a child of the 60s, I am appalled at how little our society has advanced. Our generation had great aspirations, and it is devastating to see what we let happen on our watch. Although our aspirations have not been achieved, I believe it is more important than ever to take action NOW.

About Melanie Some of the responses to Phil's initial post connected Melanie to Randolph who connected her to Wheels of Change just as the site was going live. She jumped in to use her resources to help spread the word to media, bike shops and journalists. Melanie is a former automotive engineer working as a freelance journalist in Boston. She is the founder of the Yellow Jackets cycling club in Rochester, New York, and Boston. Both chapters were founded to introduce the sport of biking to people of color, but all are welcome. Melanie is a storyteller at heart. Shooting and editing video is something that comes naturally. And she's always up for a good interview. As a long-distance cyclist, she learned about CRW shortly after moving to Boston. She's also interviewed a few Rippers on her cable access TV show, "The Lady in The Yellow Jacket."

WHY in Melanie's Words - My great-grandmother was a slave. My grandparents fought racism. My parents fought racism. I'm fighting racism. My niece and nephews are fighting racism. Now my great-niece and great-nephew are fighting racism. More than 120 years later, we're still in the same fight. George Floyd's 8 minutes and 46 seconds murder at the hands, well, really at the knee of a police officer, was a game-changer. This horrific act started long-overdue global conversations and actions on racism. Blacks have always needed more than blacks in this fight. Mr. Floyd brought the world together for the purpose. Wheels of Change is a unique opportunity to further the conversation and take action.

About Don Don signed on to help recruit participants late in the game when he heard what we were up to. He is, we think it's fair to say, a role model for all of us in various ways. His joining our team was a huge lift when we were a bit exhausted and it wasn't yet clear if we had critical mass. The editor chose in this case, to insert the modest first-person narrative from Don: “I grew up racing jalopies on our farm in Pennsylvania, ran the 880 pretty fast in high school and college, raced motorcycles pretty fast in the 60s and 70s, cars in

the 80s, fell for MTN bike racing at age 57, then on to skinny tires and a few brushes with racing fast in the hill climb and long distance categories. When I moved to Arlington in 2011, I had the great good fortune to be welcomed by the Rippers, among whom I made many lasting friendships, good people indeed, as this brilliant BLM project exemplifies.” Editor’s commentary: Don is an architect who has done wonderful work in a small footprint and green design, held records in HS and College track, was one of a four-person 70-year-old RAAM team in 2012 that set the 70 and 60-year-old records simultaneously (!), holds many Hillclimb records and Mt. Washington records and titles, is unflappably kind, has written wonderful books, is a gentleman and a scholar and is pretty much adored by all who know him.

WHY in Don’s Words - I hope the good people in whose honor this ride was put together will finally receive the respect and rights they’ve been too long denied. Many thanks to this amazing gang. May the good work continue!