



# Finding Her Voice

Black Freedom Factory President Kimiya Factory finds place as a leader for racial justice

INTERVIEW BY KATHLEEN PETTY

**K**imiya Factory learned at a young age the importance of finding your voice. Growing up in Austin as the daughter of a single mother, Factory says she was taught that her values mattered above all else and that they should carry over into every facet of her life. With that in mind, she enrolled at the University of Texas at San Antonio to study political science with a minor in legal studies, hoping to find a path where she could influence policy and law in the years to come. At UTSA, she became involved with the debate team, allowing her to travel and compete while learning about policy and how to make structural changes. The 20-something put those ideals to work while still in school, helping to lead the #changerapeculture movement at UTSA and meeting other community members in the process who would eventually empower her to become a leader in the current movement for equality and racial justice. Alongside public relations pro and activist Christian Reed-Ogba, Factory launched

**FACT FILE**

**Hometown:**  
Austin

**Roadrunner:**  
Factory moved to San Antonio to attend UTSA and graduated in 2019

**Get involved:**  
blackfreedomfactory.org

Black Freedom Factory this summer with the goal of helping corporations and organizations in San Antonio create environments that are safe and welcoming for Black people and people of color. “Finding your voice is really the most important thing,” she says. “What has kept me going is just the spark of change that I’ve already seen.”

**What led you to get involved with Black Lives Matter protests this year?**

As a Black woman, I mourned the death of George Floyd, but then at some point I got mad and decided we needed to be active.

San Antonio is a predominately Hispanic community so conversations around race in that sector and around immigration are prevalent, but this was the first time since I moved here for college that I’ve seen Black Lives Matter activism and seen that people believe Black lives matter in San Antonio. There has been some activism before, but this is the first time Black organizers have really called the city to action and have kept in contact with council members and the city manager to push for change.

For a while, Black organizers in San Antonio didn’t necessarily have strong coalitions, but that has changed. Along with Black Lives Matter, there is the Black People’s Collective, Defund SAPD, Black Freedom Factory, Radical Registrars, which have registered around 700 people to vote, and others. We’ve just seen a plethora of activists.

**What is Black Freedom Factory?**

Essentially, Black Freedom Factory is data-driven activism. It’s not just that, though, it’s making sure grassroots organizations are connected to businesses and corporations and systems that want to have honest conversations about equality. The death of George Floyd brought much of the world to a consensus that we need to have honest conversations about race and biases—not just hourlong mandatory diversity trainings. We need to challenge ourselves as business owners and corporate citizens to have the hard conversations and make ourselves better.

**If a business wants to take those steps, how does Black Freedom Factory get involved?**

Essentially, we offer programs, initiatives and consulting. So, we could come in and conduct surveys or polls of staff to really get a good feel for how minorities and POCs feel within the company. From there, we would present feedback to the company based on the data. We want to be able to hand them a report card so they can analyze their progress moving forward. That’s the culture that Black Freedom Factory hopes to create—one of transparency and humility. It’s for diversity by diversity.

That’s just one facet. We also have other

programs. Along with data, we have a commitment to major community issues—sustainability, gentrification, health and safety, education. We're looking at those as pillars of influence and something we're going to hold close and work with other organizations to talk to the City Council and work for change on.

**When it comes to workplaces, what types of things do you hear from people?**

The average middle-class American works from 9 to 5 and those interactions are important and often include microaggressions or those cultural innuendos and conversations that make Black people and POCs uncomfortable. If an employee feels like they have to endure a racial or uncomfortable conversation, they're not going to perform their best. And that's something Black Freedom Factory wants to address. We really want to let other professionals know they're not alone and that this is something we've collectively endured and there's no reason not to be vocal about it. It can even be things like microaggressions about our hair or instances where our knowledge or expertise are questioned in a way that someone else's would not be. Those kinds of undertones are common and very consistent.

**How would you describe San Antonio when it comes to racial justice and equity?**

I think we have a ways to go. The city of Austin just reallocated funding from its police department. Now, do I think the conversation is active here? Absolutely, I do think that. But in the world of change and social justice, we can always do better even when progress is made.

Historically, the city of San Antonio is very segregated socioeconomically and that's something Black Freedom Factory recognizes. So, housing, gentrification, education, sustainability—those pillars we're paying attention to—those all play into that and the long-term access to resources. Data can also be used to point to that and to show how people have been impacted by gentrification and to help create resources for them as a result of what has happened.

**Was there something different about the George Floyd incident? Or what do you think has made the protests this time result in more prolonged activism locally?**

I don't necessarily feel like George Floyd was different. I feel like it was a boiling point. Brutality against Black bodies was something Black folk have always dealt with. The difference is now you can record that, and it can go viral in a second. Black people being forced to see the violence being done through videos on social media makes it impossible to turn away from. It's sickening.

**What sort of change would you hope to see in a year or two? Do you ever worry about there being fatigue among activists?**

We hope to create a more equitable and diverse and transparent culture within workplaces. We also really just want to make sure that police violence and all these issues that haven't consistently been at the table remain there. We hope to serve as a conduit for structural change.

We're in for the long haul. Our people are dying so that alone is enough incentive. The best Civil Rights figures in history didn't succeed right away. I couldn't have marched this summer without the people who marched before me. And we've been supported by other organizations throughout San Antonio, which has been amazing—places like the Esperanza Center for Peace and Justice, Southwest Workers Union and others. ★

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

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