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Local activist Fahren James shares her story with Valley College

James shared how police violence and brutality was what motivated her to protest in her community.

By Cassandra Nava, Online Editor

Longtime activist Fahren James spoke to Valley College students in a virtual lecture to share why she decided to protest in her community of South Pasadena after a traumatic police incident she faced this past summer.

The virtual event was hosted by the college's Anti-Racism committee and UMOJA Black Scholars on Feb.18. Host Phung Hyunh, associate professor of art and one of about 60 of the committee's members, introduced James to tell her story. A co-founder of BLM South Pasadena, James shared how she came to start the movement.

"Everyone here has an awesome opportunity to change the shape of your communities," said James. "Having knowledge about the systems and who is representing you locally will allow you to understand who is meeting the needs of your community. You can't change what you don't know or what you don't understand."

After demanding justice for countless Black people killed at the hands of the police, James took to protesting along with her brother, London Lang, this past summer. She shared how at a protest on May 30, 2020, a police officer shot her at close range in the stomach and armpit. She was hospitalized for three days. The day after her brother found out, he continued to protest — this time in South Pasadena.



“While London was dealing with the traumatizing moment of hearing about me being shot, still feeling angry, confused and helpless, he took to the streets and decided to protest in our community where he thought he could avoid the police induced violence that came along with protests in the city,” said James. “We never knew it would turn into 140 days.”

James described how she wanted to maintain an amicable relationship with law enforcement, in order to make the protests flow smoothly. When describing the 140-day long protest, James stated that her and Lang purposely set it up about a block away from a police department. The only rule for those interested in participating was no anti-police signs.

The activist explained that this amicable relationship with the police was a short lived affair. After being spit on by a passerby who disagreed with the Black Lives Matter movement, the police department shrugged off the [incident](#).

Despite the hatred and racism James endured, she said that she will continue to fight for Black people and all people in need. During the question and answer portion, the activist shared her long-term goals.

“This is life for me, I gave up my job and I am currently looking into creating my own nonprofit. There is so much work to be done, and just trying to focus on one element has been extremely difficult.”

Hyunh addressed the students at the end of the lecture and invited them to participate in an optional art project. She wanted those who heard James speak on her achievements to create an art piece — in any medium — about how they feel about either the lecture or the Black Lives Matter movement.

All submitted artwork will be printed as postcards which she will then send back to the artists, in hopes that they will mail their art to friends and family. Hyunh explained that since the COVID-19 pandemic has halted art shows, she had to get creative with how people can share art. The postcards will also be in the college’s [online art gallery](#).

“This [anti-racism] committee is made up of faculty and staff, and within the committee are workgroups because we want to be strategic and institutionalize this,” Hyunh said. “We don't want to be performative, and that's why the committee was formed, so we can do the work.”

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