REFLECTION
FLOWERS FOR THE MANY THOUSANDS LOST

RIP Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Desmond Franklin, George Floyd, Tony McDade...

As the world reckons with the challenges of containing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastation left in its wake, America is once again confronted with the disturbing reflection of its own original sin. Our nation is being forced to deal with—awkwardly, painfully, dramatically + belatedly—the shameful current (and historical) reality of Black life in America. Our country is once again on fire—literally, in some communities, and metaphorically, everywhere else. Our country is being posed a soul-searching question in the form of a declaration: prove to us that Black Lives Matter. This statement, reverberating in the chants of peaceful protestors—in LA, Minneapolis, Atlanta, NYC + Cleveland—is an appeal to humanity, an invocation of our nation’s mostly deeply held beliefs/assumptions, and a challenge to DO BETTER. This appeal reemerges now in response to the countless examples of how Black life has been (is being) undervalued, despised, feared, and yet, threatened. In his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1908), W.E.B. Du Bois asserted with prophetic clarity that, "The problem of the 20th Century, is the problem of the color line." Sadly, Dr. Du Bois would not be surprised that this problem remains unresolved two decades into the 21st century.

This is a time for difficult questions. Rather than debating whether protests are right or wrong, effective or ineffective, we urge you to focus on WHY the people taking to the streets believe that protests are necessary. We urge you to consider WHY people of all races, genders, abilities, sexualities, nationalities + other identities, have put themselves in harm’s way to stand in solidarity with Black people reiterating their right to exist. We urge you to consider WHY it is easier for your city to enforce curfew orders, than to explicitly condemn acts of police violence against Black + Brown + Poor People and prosecute the perpetrators of state-sanctioned violence. We urge you to look inward for answers to the most uncomfortable question of all: what are you willing to do to prove that Black Lives really matter to you?

ThirdSpace Action Lab’s (TSAL) Theory of Change is the **Impact Continuum: Constant Awareness Building + More Thoughtful Action.** It is easy to find oneself caught up in the doing of The Work, and forget that to do so honestly requires us to continue refining our analytical tools, critically interrogating the insights that inform our strategy, and unpacking the questions needed to clarify the problems we are working on. In this time of strife + chaos, TSAL is doing the soul work to sharpen our swords for the battle. We are challenging ourselves to return to the foundation of Northeast Ohio’s Racial Equity + Inclusion movement: Awareness Building.
We are revisiting + testing our mastery of the fundamental observations in the Racial Equity Institute’s Groundwater Analysis:

1. Racial inequity looks the same across systems
2. Socio-economic difference does not explain the racial inequity
3. Systems contribute significantly to disparities
4. The systems-level disparities cannot be explained by a few “bad apples” or ill-intentioned gatekeepers
5. Poor outcomes are concentrated in certain geographic communities; usually poor communities and communities of color

TSAL has attended virtual trainings facilitated by Racial Equity Institute, Race Forward, HOLLABACK!, and many others to deepen our understanding of racism in its many dimensions, and to help us interpret this unprecedented moment in history. There is (clearly) much work to do for the lovers of humanity, advocates for justice, activists + allies; anyone who believes Black Lives Matter, and have committed to making this an unquestioned reality, instead of a dubious statement of fact. We invite you to continue this work with us.

We are proud to announce—with much gratitude to our comrades at the Racial Equity Institute—that TSAL will be hosting virtual Groundwater Trainings for the duration of 2020. We will also facilitate debrief + dialogue sessions on select dates, and are currently developing new awareness building offerings to contextualize the Groundwater Analysis by diving deeper into its application to specific systems + sectors. Follow the link for more info and to reserve your “seat” for available dates.

Finally, TSAL is indebted to the resistance + sacrifice of those who came before us. We honor the lives lost to the insatiable death machine called racism. We honor the labor of the people who cried and continue to cry out for justice. We honor the support of those who stand in solidarity with movements for a better world. We end this reflection with a timely reminder borrowed from the title of a book by Angela Davis:

Freedom is a Constant Struggle.

Peace + Love + Soul Power,

TSAL

...RIP Tanisha Alexander, Timothy Russell, Malissa Williams, Tamir Rice...