# OPEN LETTER TO THE DANCE COMMUNITY ON TAKING ACTION IN SUPPORT OF BLACK LIVES

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

## Open letter To The Dance Community On Taking Action in Support of Black Lives

By Dance/NYC



Dear Dance Community,

As Dance/NYC returns from a much-needed pause in the midst of national unrest due to the ongoing murders of Black people at the hands of a white supremacist system and those who benefit and uphold it, we acknowledge that there is no returning to business as usual Simply stating the ways in which the dance field and arts nonprofits are complicit in the inner trappings of white supremacy is not enough. Our statements of solidarity must be accompanied with action. We offer this message as an invitation to our constituents, communities, colleagues, and the organizations they steward to first, envision what anti-racist systemic reform looks like in ourselves, and second, to take measured action to manifest those visions.

In our work to dismantle white supremacy, Dance/NYC has identified four different ecosystems that reflect our spheres of influence and accountability, each with targeted needs and considerations where we have been investigating, identifying and undoing manifestations of white supremacy:

1) Dance/NYC: The individuals who make up our team including our staff, board, committees, task forces, donors, and partners.

2) The Dance Field: The individuals and organizations we serve and the many folks who work to make dance happen (i.e.: individual dancer workers, dance-related organizations, funders, policymakers).

3) The Arts and Culture Sector: The individuals and partner organizations that make up the broader arts and culture sector, across disciplines and focuses.

4) NYC, NYS, USA: The individuals and organizations, industries, and systems that make up the cities and geographic regions we inhabit.

As members of these collective ecosystems, it is our responsibility to examine our roles and remain accountable within them by engaging in a sincere process of self-reflection and deep consideration. And as we strengthen our capacity to enact significant change, we recognize that institutions and systems founded under white supremacist values are not leading the change; we are merely heeding centuries of Black and Indigenous wisdom and Black and Indigenous leadership, which are the guiding force for how we interrogate racist systems. We acknowledge that true liberation would be a dismantling of many of the very systems in which we participate and a reconfiguring of these ecosystems.

In this light, we invite our colleagues, organizations, and service providers, to in this instance consider the following questions anddevelop actionable responses to channel our collective outrage:

In our organizations...

- How are we serving our staff, affiliates, and artists first before we serve the collective "field" or the larger missions we claim as institutions?
- How can we ensure that we do not offer them, their physical and emotional well being, and their thriving as ransom for our ideas of productivity and capitalistic gain?
- How do we center Black, Indigenous, and POC leadership, power, and abundance in how we hire, work, and create?
- How do our Boards reflect and/or serve the collective desire to subvert and dismantle white supremacist systems?
- How do we hold ourselves accountable to work towards justice, equity, and inclusion understanding that we will stumble and fail in the process? Who are we empowering to call us IN when we fail?

In the dance field and arts and culture...

- How can we commit to a sustainable structure for reparations in our field for Black and Indigenous people?
- How do white-led organizations take the initial steps to position themselves as spaces of true safety and accompliceship for Black, Indigenous, and POC folks? Lend their privilege and support to Black-led, Indigenous-led, and POC-led organizations? And eventually, step aside to champion these organizations in the work they are well-positioned for?
- How do we adequately compensate our workforce providing salaries commensurate with the cost of living undoing the ongoing precarity and debt burden endemic in our industry?
- Our work is the work of the body. How do we honor it and ensure its holistic well-being of mind, spirit, emotions, and physicality?
- How are we investigating the assumptions we have held as truths regarding our definitions of technique, virtuosity, and sophistication and our simultaneous upholding of dance genres centered in whiteness as the standard for these facets of artistic excellence?
- How are we ensuring we do not continue to extract culture and ideas from Black, Indigenous, and POC communities, cultures, and move toward proper compensation and the eradication of misappropriation?
- How are we ensuring our commitment to dismantling white supremacy is intersectional and ensures disabled people, LGBTQ+ people, low income and people living in poverty are also leading, benefitting, and supported in our new structures for the future?
- How are we further causing harm by prioritizing the reopening of our industry in the midst of an ongoing health crisis?

In our City...

- How are we using our institutional power and resources to support the Black Lives Matter movement and the recentering of community-centric practices and policies?
- Furthermore, how do we use our institutional and field-wide power to organize for a just city with equitable policies and hold our government officials accountable?
- How are we acting as sanctuary spaces to the community in our relationship with law enforcement, including ICE?
- How can we envision a city where law enforcement in its current paradigm is not needed and redistribute those funds to invest in communities?

Utilizing this framework of deep inquiry as the foundation for our values and missions as organizations demand an anti-racist lens and

therefore informs actions that actively negate white supremacist interests. On an individual level, the following are actions informed by these considerations that can be taken right now:

Take action:

- Support Black Lives Matter New York
- Sign on to the Open Letter from Arts and Cultural Workers of NYC, Demanding the Defunding of the Police and Investment in BIPOC Communities
- Join the #OpenYourLobby movement in support of the BLM movement and the many protesters nationwide fighting racism and injustice so they can rest, recharge, and find safe spaces.
- Declare your venues as sanctuary spaces.
- Advocate for HR50: to provide for additional safeguards with respect to imposing Federal mandates, and for other purposes.
- Testify at City Council hearings.
- Sign the petition for We See You White American Theater.
- Join a protest
  - Juneteenth Million March - Tiffany Rea-Fisher of Elisa Monte Dance is a host
  - @JusticeforGeorgeNYC is a centralized place for NYC protests

Learn more:

- Read the Movement for Black Lives policy platforms to INVEST IN BLACK COMMUNITIES
- If you're white, connect with your local Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) chapter; SURJ provides a space to build relationships, skills and political analysis to act for change
- Review the Dance/NYC Racial Justice Agenda
- Review Dance/NYC's JEI glossary and resource directory that includes:
  - Racial Equity Tools for Organizational Impact Assessments
  - Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization
- Consider these readings:
  - *Enough Already with the Statements of "Solidarity," Arts World* by Kaisha Johnson of WOCA
  - white supremacy culture by Tema Okun
- Consider these book lists:
  - Booklist on race, gender, and sexuality compiled by Lee Edward Colston
  - Booklist from Racial Equity Resource Guide
  - You can order from these Black-Owned book stores
- Racial Justice Trainings to consider:
  - PISAB - People's Institute for Undoing Racism
  - Alia Lahlou, Affiliate Consultant/Trainer, Interaction Institute for Social Change
    Sonny Singh, Social Justice Educator and board member of TakeRoot Justice
  - Hollaback Bystander Intervention trainings

Donate:

- Give to state bail funds for arrested protestors
- Donate to Black Visions Collective
- Donate to Black Lives Matter
- Donate to Movement for Black Lives
- Donate to Black-led Arts organizations: here is a running list of additional Black and POC-led Dance/Arts Orgs you can support (please note this is a starting list and will grow with time)

We position this letter as a place to start understanding that it requires a consistent and ongoing commitment to dismantle white supremacy. We thank and recognize the labor of the many organizations, community organizers, artists and arts workers engaged in this work who have laid its foundation before us and continue to lead it into the future with our support.

In Solidarity,

Alejandra Duque Cifuentes, Executive Director
Alexeya Eyma-Manderson, Administrative Assistant
Brinda Guha, Programs Assistant
Candace Thompson-Zachery, Manager of Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives
Heather Gault, Administrative Assistant
Heather Robles, Grantmaking Assistant
Jessica Gaines, Administrative Assistant
Jovanka Ciares, Executive Consultant
Kirsten Reynolds, Development and Grantmaking Coordinator
Kyle Rudnick, Operations Manager
Maleni Palacios-Delgado, Research and Advocacy Coordinator
Milena Luna, Human Resources and Operations Contractor
Noa Weiss, Research and Advocacy Intern
Peter Elizalde, Communications Assistant
And the members of Dance/NYC's Board

Visit Dance/NYC's Racial Justice Resource Page