

How to achieve the just treatment of Blacks—and all people of color

Anti-Black racism needs to be specifically called out. Black leaders and communities must be immersed and centered in redesigning the systems that distinctively oppress them. Chicago's civic and philanthropic communities need to act as well.

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This year has been brutal for Blacks in Chicago. COVID-19 has hit the community hard. Forty-four percent of the lives lost to COVID-19 have been Black. The callous murder of George Floyd by a white police officer sparked weeks of uprisings and protests.

It showed the world that anti-Black racism is not insidious, it exists in broad daylight. We are having new conversations about the perpetual oppression of Black people and see a continuous stream of statements declaring solidarity across sectors. Calls for action are louder and more frequent. This is the dawn of a new era for fighting racism.

The last several weeks have made clear that anti-Black

racism needs to be specifically called out. Black leaders and communities must be immersed and centered in redesigning the systems that distinctively oppress them. Eliminating anti-Black racism does not stop the work of ending all forms of racism and discrimination. In fact, we believe centering anti-Black racism in this fight and calling in all people of color will ultimately lead to our collective liberation.

Chicago cannot realize its full potential until it gets past its history of racism. We remain one of the most segregated metropolitan areas in the country. Nearly half of the region's 1.6 million residents live in majority Black neighborhoods and over 25 percent live at below the federal poverty rate.

As a result, Black communities in the region have endured decades of disinvestment and over-policing, perpetuating the false narrative that Blacks are dangerous and unworthy. The George Floyd uprisings in Chicago also revealed anti-Black racism from residents of other communities of color, particularly the Latino community, a community that also shares a history of oppression rooted in colorism and racism.

As women of color leaders in philanthropy, we are engaged in honest conversations about our role in addressing this pivotal moment. Our non-Black philanthropy sisters have

expressed serious concerns about how anti-Blackness has existed “unspoken” in their respective communities—communities that also share histories of oppression rooted in colorism and racism.

This pivotal moment opens a new frontier in eradicating racism. The 21st-century activists who lead peaceful protests in our city and around the world represent the full spectrum of race, class and gender identity. They have boldly shouted in unison that Black. Lives. Matter. Chicago’s civic and philanthropic communities also need to embrace this moment with bold leadership and action.

Our goal is just treatment of Black people and, ultimately, all people of color in the region. Changing this entrenched reality means supporting redesign of narratives and systems that produce persistent anti-Black sentiment and racial disparities. To achieve this, we call on Chicago’s civic and philanthropic communities to act in the following ways:

- Increase long-term investments in Black organizations that connect individuals and families to resources and build power in our communities to lead substantive change.
- Expand funding of policy and system reform that takes the long view necessary to improve conditions in Black communities beyond federal and philanthropic emergency

and response efforts. We must have the patience and will to change conditions that were built over hundreds of years.

- Target philanthropic funds to support transformation of Black communities during the response and recovery phases of these pandemics. Our communities are disproportionately impacted and must be proportionately invested in to meet the need and potential. It is not just the responsibility of Black foundation leaders and other leaders of color to address structural racism. This responsibility must also be as resolute for our white foundation, civic and public-sector leaders.

- Build and increase capital to Black communities. Foundations can increase payout, use endowments to employ additional investment strategies, expand partnerships with community-based financial institutions and support alternative business models such as worker cooperatives, that strengthen community economic development. The recovery and redesign effort will require creativity and a renewed, enduring commitment to Black communities, the path forward to a healthier region.

- Fund and support Latino-, Indigenous- and Asian-led organizations working to address systemic racism and inequities. Members of these communities experience oppression, understand racism and fight to dismantle it.

Supporting their ability to build coalitions within and across communities of color is critical to current and future movements to eradicate anti-Black racism and all forms of racism. Make sure your portfolios are vast and deep in supporting the city and suburbs, across ethnicities.

- Be transparent and accountable to communities.

Foundations, corporations and nonprofits need to examine workplace environments to identify norms rooted in implicit bias and anti-Blackness; and change them to address the harm these practices have caused. This, in part, requires changing membership of board and staff at all levels to reflect oppressed communities. We also need to track, assess and report grantmaking and investments to Black communities and businesses. That includes identifying communities of color on whom we rely for success as our bosses, not our beneficiaries.

- Advocate alongside affected communities for the public policies they seek. Community organizers, residents and advocates have called for solutions such as diverting funding from police departments to other community priorities or investing significant private- and public-sector dollars to create vibrant neighborhoods on the South and West sides. Foundation and civic leaders can use their influence to support community-led change.

- Get smarter about spotting racism at work and at play. Learning how to identify and undo racism does not happen in a book or overnight. Get trained on anti-racism with competent trainers, such as those at Enrich Chicago, who can work with your board and staff to understand how racism manifests and get tools for the journey ahead.
- Rethink metrics. Evaluation of nonprofits has long been based on comparisons to white-led nonprofit models. These models are contingent on access to high-net-worth individuals to serve on boards and provide working capital, allowing organizations to take risks and fail forward with cover.

Black-, Indigenous- and POC-led organizations have not been afforded generational wealth but often have other futurist models based on mutual aid, earned revenue, in-kind support and more. Metrics should be rethought in partnership with these grantees. Use tools such as Chicago Beyond's Why Am I Always Being Researched? to work with your board and staff on how power and privilege manifests in evidence and outcomes, and make changes.

- Promote avenues for racial healing, such as the work of Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) Greater Chicago and the Chicago Community Trust's On the Table, which are initiatives created by philanthropy to facilitate

racial healing circles and dialogue on a full range of issues impacting the quality of life in our city.

Many of the proposed actions are not new and, in fact, have been repeated for decades. This is a pivotal moment for Chicago, and we can no longer delay or ignore these actions. The leadership of Chicago's foundations is changing. There are over 20 people of color leading foundations. Most are women; nearly half are Black women. This new leadership is advancing a new narrative for philanthropy. It is one willing to shine a light on racial inequities and injustice and invites others to join us on the front lines.

Women of Color: Sharon Bush, Cecilia Conrad, Felicia Davis, Shelley Davis, Amina Dickerson, Liz Dozier, Patricia Ford, Helene Gayle, Monique Brunson Jones, Jane Kimondo, Dinaz Mansuri, Michelle Morales, Serena Moy, Na'ilah Suad Nasir, Heather Parish, Maria Pesqueira, Angelique Power, Unmi Song, Sejal Shah-Myers and Elizabeth Thompson.

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