



**New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup Relations**

**Oversight Hearing: Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, Structural Racism & the Arts
October 20, 2020, 10:00AM – Virtual Hearing**

**Testimony Presented by New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA)
Commissioner Gonzalo Casals**

Good morning, Chair Van Bramer and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the urgent topic: Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, Structural Racism and the Arts. I am joined today for Q&A by DCLA Deputy Commissioner Sheelah Feinberg.

There's little question that we are facing an overdue reckoning with systemic racism that has shaped our society as a whole, including the cultural sector. While the pandemic and the violence against Black Americans have brought renewed attention to these issues, efforts to understand and address them by BIPOC led arts organizations stretch back generations.

In the 1970s and 80s, through self determination and community organizing, a new wave of cultural organizations were established to address the exclusion of communities of color from Euro-centric, mainstream institutions. These organizations - such as Studio Museum in Harlem, El Museo del Barrio, National Black Theatre, and Museum of the Chinese in America - have contributed to the transformation of New York's cultural ecology into something altogether more inclusive, vibrant, and reflective of the people who live here. They established a new model for arts groups as culturally-specific organizations, where organizing and advocacy were just as central to their mission as the presentation of artwork. We continue to be inspired by their examples today, which can help to guide the work we still have ahead of us.

I owe my career to a generation of Latinx leaders that fought for representation, and created training grounds for those that followed their steps. Today I want to personally acknowledge the work of Dr. Marta Moreno Vega, Rafael Montanez Ortiz and Susana Leval among so many other Latinx leaders that helped establish the notion of Puerto Rican, Latinx, and Caribbean culture in NYC. The Department of Cultural Affairs has

built on the achievements of these community advocates and activists who have pushed diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism to the center of the agenda.

In 2015, my predecessor Tom Finkelppearl announced a new initiative to examine the diversity of the city's cultural workforce. While the topic had been brought up by previous administrations, it was the first time the agency commissioned a comprehensive study of demographics of the sector. After our report found major disparities – the cultural workforce was found to be majority white in a city where a majority of residents are people of color – we set out to address this glaring issue.

The public-private partnership is the foundation of the City's relationship with arts and culture. With private nonprofits, we steward public assets and investments for the benefit of all New Yorkers. So our efforts to foster a cultural sector that reflects the public its serving have placed great emphasis on these public-private partnerships.

To build a better pipeline, we focused on cultivating diversity at all levels of employment. The CreateNYC Leadership Accelerator is a professional development program that helps move diverse candidates up through the ranks of the sector into leadership positions. This is based on the 2016 study that found lower and mid level cultural workers were far more diverse than leadership. The CUNY Cultural Corps, which has to date placed hundreds of students into paid internships at cultural organizations, reduces barriers to entry level employment.

We changed the application for Cultural Development Fund support to include questions about diversity, equity, and inclusion. This means that every single cultural group getting DCLA funding - around 1,000 every year - has to spell out the ways that they engage diverse workers and audiences.

To make sure that the leadership and boards of organizations were bought into these efforts of self-examination and progress, we required diversity, equity, and inclusion plans for the 34 members of the Cultural Institutions Group.

Adopted in spring 2019, these DEI plans are among the first of their kind in the country. The members of the CIG embraced the opportunity to examine and address the barriers within their organizations. In just over a year the plans have produced far reaching changes, which in many cases have been accelerated by the reckoning over racial justice. Anti-racist training is now required for many staff and boards; new committees have been established to hold organizations accountable from within; and many groups reported that the first year of implementing their plans helped to build a shared language and community. This provides a foundation for more additional steps like adjusting

human resources policies, and revamping teaching and interpretation strategies in order to tell more complete stories about an institution's collections.

To be able to authentically engage in this work, DCLA needs to do it, too. We have an internal DEI committee, and are taking a hard look at our policies and how they affect not only our own staff, but the cultural groups we work with and support. We have a Chief Diversity Officer to guide and hold us accountable internally. And the team that administers program funding has been engaged in a deep, years long examination of our funding practices to identify ways we can eliminate barriers to receiving support.

We've also made major strides toward increasing the share of the agency investment in cultural groups that are doing the work in underserved communities. More than \$25 million in additional funding has been allocated to groups based on the work of the Social Impact of the Arts Project, as well across the board increases that favor smaller organizations. We redirected additional funding to these groups through the Met Museum admissions agreement, too. While the financial impacts of COVID-19 continue to reverberate, we are proud of these investments and will continue to support organizations that are working in underserved neighborhoods.

In just the last few years, we've seen a major shift in mainstream organizations. As protests spread following the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black Americans, the leaders of major cultural institutions here and across the world loudly and explicitly condemned systemic racism. It was an inspiring moment, but at the same time, the pandemic has shown us more than ever how much work we need to do to repair centuries worth of oppression. Words must be followed by actions.

Beyond these necessary, longer term policy-based solutions, we're also inspired to see artists and arts groups participate in the fight for racial justice here and now. Art, at its best, can help us make sense of the changes happening around us. One example of this are the Black Lives Matter murals that people painted on streets across our city. In Brooklyn, Indira Etwaroo of the Billie Holiday Theater spearheaded the BLM mural on Fulton Street that represented the names of murdered black Americans in its powerful design. In Manhattan, just a block from City Hall on Centre Street, three artists designed another mural that help to channel the public mood and support for the BLM movement, and connect it to deeper artistic traditions.

One of these artists, Sophia Dawson, is now serving as a Public Artist in Residence with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, where her creative practice will help foster individual healing, community restoration, and systemic transformation. The PAIR

program points to another way that artists and creative expression can be engaged in solving the urgent problems facing us today.

As I've said, these symbolic and creative responses are important. But the symbolic actions must be accompanied by real actions to improve peoples' lives and address the legacy of racial injustice that pervades our communities. There is still so much more work to be done. I look forward to working with Council and the cultural community to continue moving the conversation forward in meaningful ways.

It is important to seize the opportunities for structural change that this crisis has presented us. We need to move forward in authentic, proactive ways. For each of us individually, this is the work of a lifetime. For our cultural organizations it is the work of generations.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions you have.

New York Shakespeare Festival dba The Public Theater

Written testimony submitted for Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Oversight - Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, Structural Racism and the Arts – 10/20/2020

Thank you to Cultural Affairs Committee Chair Van Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo, and the members of the Cultural Affairs Committee for holding this important hearing and making space to hold each other accountable as we work together as a field to commit to Anti-Racist practices.

At The Public diversity, equity and inclusion has always been at the heart of our mission and a part of our origin story but as a predominantly white institution we have a great deal of work to do to live up to our mission to be a theater that is of, by, and for all people and center Anti-Racism in all aspects of our work.

In September, we shared and public update on the status of our Anti-Racism work which is included here. In addition to our own institutional work we have convened the performing arts CIG's in participating in the People's Institute of Survival and Beyond four-day Undoing Racism training, we have programmed Civic Salons and Public Forums that have centered BIPOC voices and provided uncompromising explorations in the ways in which the arts field has failed to live up to its Anti-Racism ideals and can improve, and we have continued to program productions featuring the work of BIPOC playwrights, directors, and performers that seek not only to be in dialogue with these pivotal times but also showcase BIPOC communities thriving.

We recognize that we are standing on the shoulders of the many arts leaders and activists that have been leading the effort for many years and we believe that in this inflection point it is not only important for predominantly white theaters to be held accountable and commit to cultural transformation and Anti-Racism; it is also important to highlight, make space for, and celebrate the work of the members of the Coalition of Theater of Color and to make a plan that they are treated equitably within the performing arts and funder ecosystem moving forward.

Our September public statement said,

“We are living through difficult times. The pandemic and the resulting economic fallout are causing enormous pain, loss and stress for so many of us, and the burden falls with particular severity on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities. In the midst of this, a call for racial justice and reckoning has arisen, in our country and across the world, that challenges us to reflect on and reform all of our practices, from the governmental level to the most individual.

The American theater community has been deeply damaged by the pandemic. Unemployment among our freelancers and staff members is catastrophically high, and the institutions which produce work and hire theater workers are under punishing pressure, as well. In this moment, we must mobilize and fight to ensure the survival of the field, and of the individuals who make up the theater.

But we have a unique opportunity, as well: inspired by a world-wide mass movement, educated by thinkers and activists pushing us to a deeper understanding of systemic racism and our role in it, we have a chance to not just come back, but to come back better-- more just, more anti-racist, more equitable. In the wake of George Floyd's tragic murder, and that of countless other Black men and women, it is time to understand the powerful and destructive role that anti-Blackness plays in American life, and in our field. This is the moment to make the invisible forces of systemic racism visible, and to center anti-racism in our practice. It is vital for all of us in the American Theater to accept this challenge. History is demanding it of us.

At The Public, we are examining our systems, habits, structures, and behavior, and what we have found so far requires change. We have not been courageous or consistent enough in challenging the structures that support inequity and white supremacy, and we have allowed too many problems to fester without taking bold enough action to resolve them. We have to change.

We are involved in an in-depth, organization-wide assessment of our practices and ways of working. This assessment involves our entire staff and Board, and is facilitated by outside experts. We anticipate releasing a comprehensive plan in November. Until then, we would like to share some of the changes we are making in our work.

Before the virus shut us down, we had already planned for the end of 10 out of 12's-- the longstanding practice during a production's technical week that requires 10+ hour work days for cast and crew-- in our mainstage seasons. We have also eliminated unpaid internships, as of last fall, and expanded our family leave policy from four weeks to ten weeks, as of this January.

- We have added two Associate Artistic Directors to our staff, ensuring that of the top four artistic positions at the theater, two leaders are BIPOC. This group of four (Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Associate Artistic Directors Saheem Ali, Mandy Hackett, and Shanta Thake) will be central to the final decision-making process on programs and productions.
- We have begun experimenting with a much more inclusive season planning process, one in which all 42 members of the artistic staff have a chance to weigh in on every project we are considering, and where a selection committee of 10 people (6 of whom are BIPOC) will make the final selections for the season. This is a new program, and still very much an experiment, but our commitment to diversifying dialogue and bringing more voices and decision makers to the table will continue to be firm.

- The Board has created a special committee to spearhead anti-racist action.
- The Code of Conduct, which was heavily weighted against harassment, discrimination, and oppressive behaviors, has been revised by our BIPOC affinity group to fully reflect the anti-racist stance of The Public. We are actively creating policies addressing the use of racial slurs and hate speech in our productions.
- We are creating an externally facing Code of Conduct for our vendors and audience.
- We have set aside a dedicated budget line for anti-racist activity, and funded it generously.
- We have set aside dedicated hours, every day, for the entire staff to engage in anti-racist education and discussion.
- We have weekly speakers, curated by our BIPOC affinity group, to speak to us about anti-racist practices and theory.
- We have created a Cultural Transformation Steering Committee, drawn from a diverse cross section of the staff, who will work with outside consultants to lead us through a process of anti-racism training and cultural change.
- We have had affinity groups for our BIPOC staff, our LGBTQ+ staff, our Parents and Caregivers Staff, as well as a Deconstructing Whiteness affinity group since 2016; these groups are now taking new prominence and importance in our deliberations.

This is an interim report, and there remains much more work to do. As we said above, by November we anticipate being able to roll out our comprehensive plan for transformation. The Public must become more anti-racist, more democratic, more equitable. Our mission, our history and our hopes all demand this from us.”

These interim updates are an important aspect of our Cultural Transformation and will create the tools necessary to hold ourselves accountable and for the field to hold us accountable as well. Thank you for holding this hearing today to discuss these important matters, to learn from one another, and to be held accountable.

October 20, 2020

Dear Members of City Council and Colleagues,

My name is Amy Andrieux, and I am the Executive Director of [The Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts \(MoCADA\)](#) in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. Thank you for this opportunity to address the critical juncture that exists for my community, with regards to Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, and Structural Racism in the Arts.

I could use this time to point out facts that illustrate the impact of structural racism at mainstream institutions, like:

- In 2018, at the museum executive leadership level — museum director, CFO, and CEO —12% percent of senior leaders were people of color.
- In 2015, 76% of staff at participating AAMD museums were held by White employees, revealing that at many institutions, POC lack a clear path to advancement to the most influential positions.
- In 2012, The Council of Foundations reported that the proportion of foundation CEOs of color decreased from 9.2% to 8.4%, and as executive vice presidents or assistant directors from 12.9% to 11.9%.
- A study also found that 85.4% of the works in the collections of all major US museums belong to White artists, mostly men, while African American artists have the lowest share with just 1.2% of the works.

I could also use this time to point out the lack of parity and consistent support for museums like MoCADA, who serve the Black community, specifically.

As you may know, MoCADA was born from the graduate thesis of our Founder and NYC Council Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo, on the feasibility of an African arts museum contributing to the revitalization of neighboring Black communities – politically, socially, economically. This origin story is similarly true for many Black arts institutions across the country. Most, if not all, of our institutions were created within a different cultural framework than our peers: Our work is grounded in deconstructing colonial systems through the cultural and artistic lens, and by welcoming those who have been systemically left out through arts education. The legacy and work of the [Cultural Equity Group](#) speaks to this. [The Peoples Cultural Plan](#) also speaks to this.

Simply said, our institutions have a double mandate or double remit that goes beyond being just arts & culture practitioners or making art for art's sake. We are critical resources for our

community, safe spaces that deliver mutual aid in all of its forms. For us, Black lives have always mattered and social justice has always been our work.

And yet nationally,

- African American museums are underfunded due to historical barriers and cultural preferences for charitable giving.
- Only 6% of minority organizations receive comparable funding from individual donors to organizations serving mostly white patrons, according to Grantmakers in the Arts (GIA).
- Virtually none are accredited with the American Association of Museums (AAM), few have endowments beyond a nominal size (if at all), and many of us have had to cut staff, programs, or projects in order to remain open (during non-COVID years).

In recent weeks, we have seen firsthand how fragile our livelihoods are, especially in the face of twin pandemics COVID-19 and racism, especially when placed in the hands of broad legislation with little understanding of the nature of our lives and the systemic limitations placed upon them due to even a slight hint of misinterpretation.

So where do we go from here? I leave you with these questions to consider...

How might the City and the philanthropic community review the work that has already been done by thought leaders in the Black community then and now, instead of seeking voices outside of our community to speak or collect data on our behalf? How might the City and the philanthropic community go beyond the performative to allocate funding for Black arts institutions that is comparable to those received by mainstream organizations? How might the City and the philanthropic community commit to a long term plan -- 50 years, 100 years --- to ensure the survival and sustainability of Black arts institutions and the communities we serve?

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Amy Andrieux

Executive Director & Chief Curator, MoCADA

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October 20, 2020 | New York City

TO: NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, City Hall, NYC, NY

FR: Museum Workers Happy Hour • BIPOC Workers' Working Group

Testimony for: Oversight hearing on BLM, Anti-Racism, Structural Racism in the Arts,
10/20/20 @10:00 AM

Good morning Chairperson Jimmy Van Bremer, Commissioner Gonzalo Casal and Members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. My name is Antonio Serna, I am the co-organizer of Museum Workers Happy Hour (MWHH), a Happy Hour created by and for Museum Workers in New York City. Our goal has been to bring together museum and cultural workers from across the city to share experiences, workplace improvement strategies, and as a platform to empower rank and file workers—In all, help shape museums and cultural institutions from the ground up.

I'm testifying today specifically from within MWHH's BIPOC Workers' Working Group, which focuses on the intersectional conditions of BIPOC museum and cultural workers as well as the needs of BIPOC communities.

THE SITUATION

It has become apparent that the internal mistreatment and descrimination of workers of color working inside predominantly white institutions has gone from bad to worse in these difficult times. This has been noted in the press and on social media by activist groups like *For The Culture*, *Change the Museum*, *Artists for Workers*, and *Decolonize This Place*—to name a few.

Let me read to you a few items from a list we've been compiling. This is a list of what we've been hearing, seeing, and experiencing...

[Attachment A, List 2]

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

This new level of intensity calls for urgent attention and immediate action from your committee (DCLA), city council, and the mayor. The museums and cultural institutions of this city, both Cultural Institution Group (CIGs) and private museums receive much support from the citizens of New York City and vice-versa. With the persistence of racial descrimination this reciprocal relationship once tenuous has now been shattered and broken and requires impactful strategies rather than slow moving superficial and performative changes in order to build it anew.

For one, we feel that a city-wide review of institutions and their DEI plans should be evaluated by an external council. We would suggest the council be composed of 1) an organization historically rooted in fighting racism, 2) community members that reflect the ethnic make-up of New York City and 3) rank-and-file museum workers, all with the support and overview of the 4) NYC Commission on Human Rights. Such historically rooted organizations might include the

National Urban League (NUL), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE).

While we believe the responsibility falls on your Committee (DCLA) to make right the situation and to enact this overview/evaluation council as mentioned above, we as rank and file workers of color have taken the first step in compiling a list of suggestions. Let me read some of them.

[Attachment A. List 2]

COVID SITUATION

A thorough investigation into the items on this list is one thing, the next is the need to fight against racism under the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. Reports have shown that more front-facing, education, and new media workers have been laid-off as a result. This amounts to nothing more than a crude and callous elimination of the base of workers of color and working class individuals. As the Museum Workers Happy Hour re-converged this summer, it was obvious that the monthly lay-offs were an added emotional and mental shock to many. For one, just a few years back some of these institutions had millions in their endowments and were raising millions more to expand and rebuild their museums, but for some reason couldn't do the same for their workers in such desperate times of need? In any ethical work environment—and we should hope these arts are maintaining nothing less—solutions such as cuts to six-figure salaries and a reduction of work week for everyone might have proved better long term sustainable solutions for the institution and the cities economy. These workers have unfairly been terminated even after decades of service to the industry, and so this should be re-evaluated too—as we feel that outspoken BIPOC workers and union workers may have been targeted unfairly under the current situation. We've yet to even discuss how many were forced to sign non-disclosure agreements under desperate economic, physical, and mental pressure imposed by the COVID-19 Situation.

CONCLUSION

The diversity and culture that New York City embodies is currently and to that point hasn't ever been truly represented or supported by the CIGs and private museums that are receiving public funding. For cultural institutions to have value in the community they supposedly serve, they should do more to care and support the communities that they inhabit which also include the rank and file workers in their institutions, in addition to reconciling with this past. These are the people in the community directly and historically affected by their actions. To claim diversity and inclusion initiatives for the sake of publicity, or to pause them under the pandemic, is not only disingenuous but also propagates further exploitation of the communities that these institutions occupy.

Respectfully,
Museum Workers' Happy Hour, BIPOC Workers Working Group

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ATTACHMENTS A

LIST 1 *(not in specific order)*

What we've (BIPOC Museum Workers) have been hearing, seeing, experiencing...

- Layoffs have resulted in many front facing staff, education and front of house, so that Museums are now even less diverse than they were before.
- At some PWIs (predominately white institutions) non-poc teams are leading diversity initiatives.
 - There is no way to know if PWIs are properly equipped to create diversity plans.
- In some institutions POC employees are not consulted on the diversity plank.
- Some of the employees now leading the diversity plans, hold their job interest and security over bringing in POC workers, they cannot be true allies.
- The current crisis situation made it easy for museums to cut newly unionized employees.
- The current crisis situation made it easy for museums to cut outspoken POC employees.
- Museums' use of education is both misleading and is forced to follow a predominantly euro-centric or white american curatorial script that has yet to be decolonized.
- Even in smaller community arts orgs/non-profits, leadership is still white.
- Some institutions are presenting their community organization relationships and DEI implementations initiated by BIPOC workers who have been laid off, and now few or no BIPOC workers to steer that work forward

LIST 2 *(not in specific order)*

What We would like to see happen...

- Standardize review and transparency of DEI plans:
 - How were the DEI councils formed?
 - Who was in the group? Roles and company titles/status, race/gender
 - Who controlled it, final reviews and edits
 - Where are the councils now?
- Adding a city-controlled independent review board that can assess the effectiveness of DEI plans, which also takes into account BIPOC staff testimonies
- Enacting and/or continuing Hazard Pay to all frontline and essential museum workers regularly until a COVID-19 vaccine is distributed
- Shifting funding to institutions with good track records in dealing with racism and a balanced workforce.

- Organizational Change in both small and large institutions that empower workers at all levels.
- Creation of permanent BIPOC positions in staffing - Diversity is a necessity not an option
- Rethinking Education, especially community education inclusive of content
- Acquisition freeze, asset release, and re-organizational strategies for staff retention and prevention of furloughs (including endowments and object collections)
- Priority allocation of city funding to cultural organizations most in need (ie. who have minimal endowments and rely heavily on visitorship for budget resources)
- Enforceable timelines for union contract negotiations
- Managerial investigations and disciplinary actions regarding BIPOC staffing complaints
- A required open annual forum meeting with Board Members, Trustees, and Staff regarding the current museum climate and a follow-up response addressing issues raised
- Adequate compensation regarding extension of positional role and responsibilities
- Multilingual labeling of art objects and/or access to a translatable QR code.
- Mutli-lingual front of house w/pay increase per languages:
 - Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin & Cantonese), French Creole, Korean
- Job posting, announcement to be made consistently in Community board meetings specifically communities not hired by museums.
- During Pandemic, hazard pay (1.5 pay), budget for extra medical needs equipment alcohol, PPE, transportation increase.
- Special Pandemic services and budgets for workers to focus on: Housing, Immigration, safety, mental/stress to be covered by museums. (those not covered by unions)
- Hiring: acknowledgement that systemic racism precludes many qualified people from knowing about or being considered for jobs at museums and cultural institutions. We ask for institutions to expand their considerations of job qualifications beyond education and job history to include lived experience and community work.
- Existing POC workers re-evaluate wages, for unpaid work. (back pay)
- Re-Evaluate non-disclosure agreements and contract, etc. used by museums that may restrict freedom of speech, or public statements/complaints of racism (to protect workers from retaliation)
- Make it easy to file complaints, campaign to let workers know of their rights, and a public tracking system for the process.



Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

Testimony: Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, Structural Racism and the Arts

My name is Nicole Touzien and I am the newly appointed Executive Director of Dancewave. Dancewave is a nonprofit organization that provides access to a community dance experience that encourages individuality and whole-person development throughout New York City and beyond. Our approach promotes an inclusive environment for all ages, abilities, sexual orientations, racial and socio-economic backgrounds. We are proudly entering our 26th year of service, serving over 6,000 New Yorkers each year and nearly 4,000 more through our virtual classes and events. I am testifying today to share some updates about Dancewave's commitment to and work towards racial equity under new leadership.

Like many other organizations, we believe in and issued a public statement in support of Black Lives Matter and named ourselves as allies to black communities who have been harmed by institutional racism and violence. We outlined our next step to engage with the young people in our organization and to give them the space to share their thoughts and emotions, and equally support their voices in advocating for change. While we know there is so much more to do, we are living out our promise daily.

Programmatically, Dancewave is prioritizing racial equity as a central tenet. Our curriculum, Race and Dance, uses dance as a medium to support critical conversations with youth, helping students to process and embody difficult topics like racial bias, systemic racism and privilege in a way that is both empathetic to others, and relevant to their own life experience. Our Dancewave Company Program goes well beyond pre-professional dance training, prioritizing restorative practices as a mainstay and focusing on equity, advocacy and wellness. Our Youth Leadership Council, in partnership with the Mayor's Office, empowers youth to become civically engaged leaders tackling issues like racism that directly impact their communities.

Organizationally, anti-racist pedagogy is a core part of our educator training, which is a yearly requirement for our teaching staff and an open program for professionals in any field and any stage of their career.

Administratively, Dancewave engages its staff in regular equity meetings to discuss, unpack and investigate our actions - whether it be curriculum design, hiring practices, or professional development - there is no topic off-limits.



We recognize that these efforts are important and are a small contribution to the dismantling of systemic racism. Being an anti-racist organization is an ongoing process, and one that I am committed to advancing as Dancewave's Executive Director. Thank you.

DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN ARTS ALLIANCE

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Mark Morris Dance Group
MoCADA
New York Transit Museum
NY Writers Coalition
Open Source Gallery, Inc.
Recess
RestorationART
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Theater 2020
Theater Mitu
Theatre for a New Audience
Triangle Arts Association
Trilok Fusion Arts
Urban Bush Women
UrbanGlass
ViBe Theater Experience
White Bird Productions

October 23, 2020

To: Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

From: Beth Allen, Executive Director, Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance

Re: Testimony on Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, Structural Racism and the Arts

Thank you Chairman Van Bremer, Majority Leader Cumbo, and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations for your attention to the issues of Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, and Structural Racism in the arts and for the opportunity to submit testimony. I write to you as Executive Director of the Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance (DBAA). DBAA is a small arts service organization that brings together a network of over 50 member arts and cultural non-profits in the greater Downtown Brooklyn community to provide peer support, networking opportunities, and a voice in local community issues. Our group spans the visual, performing, literary and media arts, and includes every presenting venue in the Brooklyn Cultural District in Fort Greene, as well as smaller community-based groups, internationally known dance and theater companies, exhibition venues dedicated to visual art, craft, and history. In addition to organizations that present, create, and commission new works, our group includes organizations that offer subsidized studio and rehearsal space, residencies and other services to artists, and a great deal of arts education. Their programs serve over 3 million constituents

(approximately 50% of programming is offered free of charge) including over 150,000 children served by school and afterschool programs.

While the demographics of audiences served and represented by our total membership varies widely, our cohort notably includes prominent organizations devoted to presenting and supporting work by Black artists, including MoCADA, 651 Arts, ActNow Foundation, BRIC, Girl Be Heard, Jamelle Gaines Creative Outlet, RestorationART, The Laundromat Project, Urban Bush Women, viBe Theater Experience and others, and many that serve Black and Brown communities, including those who are low-income but also the international diaspora of artists and art lovers who look to Brooklyn as a supportive home for Black creators. These organizations are not only central to those in the local community they serve, but especially influential to the identity and international reputation of Brooklyn as home to a diverse and vibrant artistic community.

DBAA has long been aware that there has been underinvestment in the Black organizations in the geographic area we serve; not only are there fewer organizations led by and serving people of color in neighborhoods that are historically Black, but these organizations tend to be smaller and undercapitalized. Our membership follows larger-scale patterns of under recognition of the artistic excellence of artists of color and of programming that primarily serves Black and Brown audiences. We all hope that the attention being brought to this issue through the Black Lives Matter movement will result in real change in the way these cultural institutions and communities are valued and funded.

As you know, the issue of underinvestment in organizations led by and serving BIPOC c

communities is complex, because the business models for founding, sustaining and scaling an arts organization vary widely and funding comes through a mix of philanthropic investment, earned income, and a range of government sources. The reasons for this underinvestment are also complex, but boil down to systemic biases throughout the various opportunities to secure funding, including the availability of foundation funding to small organizations with limited access to networks of wealth, patterns of corporate sponsorship dictated by marketing priorities, and various forms of implicit or explicit racism in funding decisions, press coverage (or lack thereof), and larger patterns of community underinvestment in Black and Brown neighborhoods.

One of the things we do not have currently, and that would help significantly, is having data on patterns of cultural investment New York City, and I ask for the City's help on this issue. To my knowledge, there is no comprehensive reporting on the patterns of funding for the city's cultural organizations by race or by neighborhood. Various national studies by Grantmakers in the Arts and others have been done to identify inequities in funding and their impact on BIPOC led and serving organizations, but there is little information available on NYC specifically¹.

Every year, organizations that apply for funding from DCLA and other agencies provide data

¹ Some statistics were provided in the testimony of Amy Andrieux at MoCADA for this hearing: "Nationally, only 6 percent of minority organizations receive comparable funding from individual donors to organizations serving mostly white patrons, according to Grantmakers in the Arts (GIA), which evaluates how equally grants are distributed. <https://culturaldata.org/learn/data-at-work/2016/for-minority-artists-race-plays-a-factor-in-the-hunt-for-funding/>

In one of the few academic papers in circulation examining the finances of black museums, Randall A. Williams and Michael Worth of the George Washington University put described the problem straightforwardly: "African American museums face a unique set of challenges that impede their efforts to achieve financial sustainability.

"Virtually none are accredited with the American Association of Museums (AAM), few have endowments beyond a nominal size, and many have had to cut staff, programs, or projects in order to remain open," Williams and Worth wrote. "African American museums need an internal reorientation of missions and staff, as well as an external infusion of funds and experience to address these challenges." <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.491.3133&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

not only on their missions and plans for the year, but information on budgets, number of constituents served, staff size, and other metrics. Would it be possible to do an analysis/report using data collected by DCLA/SMU Data Arts to produce a report on cultural investment?

Some statistics that might help includes (preliminary list):

- The number of organizations who apply/receive DCLA funding by neighborhood;
- Budget and staff size of applicants for White-led vs. BIPOC led organizations, and by neighborhood;
- Number of constituents served by white-led vs. BIPOC led organizations;
- Mix of income sources for organizations by neighborhood and by race;
- Capital investments (public and private) in organizations by neighborhood and race.

Having hard data on the “big picture” of NYC cultural investment would be extremely useful to have for advocacy with philanthropic funders, as well as with non-arts community and civic leaders. DBAA has collected some of this information in the past – specifically to use for advocacy with local stakeholders including elected officials and community board representatives, as well as with the Business Improvement Districts in our area – but there is a recognition that it is onerous for organizations to be asked to provide data that we know has been collected elsewhere, and also that the organizations we serve are an important, but only a small part, of the much larger NYC story.

Knowing the challenges of parsing and reporting on the small amount of data DBAA collects, I recognize that producing a report that does justice to the larger picture cultural investment is a complex task and will require some allocation of resources. However, I believe strongly that

having this data would pay off exponentially in the fight for more equitable cultural investment because it can be leveraged with private funders, State and Federal elected officials, and other civic leaders. Just as Comptroller Stringer's report on the Cultural Economy has proved to be an especially potent advocacy tool for the cultural community during our current crisis, having specific statistics on cultural investment for the city would give us another tool for addressing structural racism in the arts.

I would be happy to talk further and collaborate with DCLA or other agencies to advance this idea.

Many thanks again for the opportunity to provide this testimony, for your commitment to the arts in New York City, and for your leadership in addressing Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, and Structural Racism in our sector.



Good afternoon,

My name is Dr. Raymond Codrington, and I am the Executive Director of Hi-ARTS located at El Barrio's Artspace PS109 in East Harlem. We are a leading cultural hub within the urban arts movement. For over twenty years, we have provided unique development opportunities to artists of color, always placing issues of equity and social justice at the forefront. To date, we have supported works by over 1,500 lead artists, and we serve an audience of over 10,000 annually at our home and nationally, with a local audience that is 75% Black and/or Latinx.

We are in the midst of a once-in-a-lifetime crisis with two global pandemics converging: that of structural racism and COVID-19. With that said, what will the Council's response be, and what side of history will it be on when we look back at this time? As we consider defunding the police and redistributing revenue to the arts, can New York City serve as a national

model that speaks to the cultural worth and economic viability of the arts sector?

These are challenging times, and it is obvious that structural racism does not pause during a pandemic, but we remain optimistic about the resilience of the arts to create change and help us recover and reimagine notions of community. We, as arts organizations are uniquely positioned to frame discussions, programming, and partnerships that address structural racism. What is clear is that we can't go back to business as usual. The public won't allow it frankly. The stakes are too high and the time is now.

A recent study by the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equality shows that only 8.9 percent of grantmaking from foundations goes into communities of color in the U.S. Another recent report cited in The Chronicle of Philanthropy states that even when awarded funds, the unrestricted assets granted to nonprofits with leaders of color were 76 percent smaller than those of organizations with white leadership. While we are hopeful that the philanthropic community will take note of these stark disparities and prioritize funding for organizations dedicated to and led by people of color,

we need public support from our local government, not **just** private foundations. Maintaining initiative funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in FY21 was a win for our community and a great first step. Thank you.

It is time for civic leaders to adopt an anti-racist lens, continue to affirm that Black Lives Matter, and support the organizations who have been here doing the work long before “diversity, equity, and inclusion” were popular terms.

We thank Chair Van Bramer, the members of the Committee, DCLA, and the City at large for its partnership.

Thank You

Raymond Codrington

Executive Director, Hi-ARTS

raymond@hi-artsnyc.org

New Yorkers for Culture & Arts

NY4CA.org

Executive Director, Lucy Sexton

Testimony for Committee on Cultural Affairs Oversight hearing
on Black Lives Matter, Anti-Racism, and Structural Racism in
the Arts

October 20, 2020 at 10am

Thank you Chair Van Bramer and members of the City Council
for this important and urgent hearing. My name is Lucy Sexton
and I am with the cultural advocacy coalition New Yorkers for
Cutlure & Arts.

Last year, I heard Catherine MBali Green-Johnson talk about
what motivated her to found ARTs East NY. When her daughter
was little, she wondered why she had to travel to Fort Greene to
take her to dance class; why she had to go to Park Slope to find
her a painting and creative play class. Why weren't there options
in her own neighborhood. So she founded ARTs East NY, a

center for visual artists, dance companies, theater groups, and also set up shows and exhibitions to get folks to the local farmers market. It was deeply embedded in and an anchor for the community it served. In February she told me she would not be open past April. All of that was the reality before COVID.

A few days after the murder of George Floyd, John Wright of The Wright Group spoke to hundreds of cultural groups on our Culture@3 call. Among other powerful and devastating remarks, he asked us whose jobs would be the first to go, which groups would be the first to close? It would be the lower paid workers and lower budget organizations, both of which are disproportionately BIPOC identified.

I know that many today will speak to the enormous amount of work being done by folks in the arts and culture sector to examine and excise the scourge of racism in ourselves and our organizations. And they should. There is much hard deep work to be done. But I wanted to address the need for a radical reimagining of NYC's cultural landscape—we cannot come out of this terrible time with a decimated arts and culture landscape

that is more white and more centralized than it was before. And we need the Council and all our elected to help us—even if money is tight.

In the 1970s, the city was broke and artists moved into the empty industrial spaces in Soho and beyond. Because the scene was almost entirely unfunded, it was largely white artists from middle class backgrounds that took over and bought those lofts. When commercial interests wanted that neighborhood, the City Council passed a system of artist certification. One had to certify as an artist in order to reside in the artist-founded AIR buildings. But the city limited artist certification to those living in that small section of Soho.

What if the Council now opened up the artist certification process---which still exists and functions---to include artist living throughout the five boroughs. What if we certify artists performing in Rooted Theater in Brownsville, dancing with Full Circle Souljahs in the Bronx, or playing world class salsa at Terraza 7 in Queens. What if being certified meant you had access to artist housing, freelance artist health insurance,

discounts at cultural institutions. Then kids in every neighborhood would see that being an artist, in their neighborhood---not just in Soho---was valued and was a viable option for making a living.

There are many other policies to look at which might fundamentally change not just the demographics of the cultural field, but the shape of the sector and who gets included. A theater maker I talked to yesterday was asked by the administration to produce an outdoor theater happening---and told the city would reimburse her costs but she'd have to put up \$30K and do the event before getting the funds. So organizations that have money, are the ones eligible for more money. The system is entrenched in economic practices which tend to keep the field white and middle class.

As we dismantle and rethink it, let's start by going to where culture is happening in every community and every demographic, and seeing what we can do to support it. We were all so grateful and pleased that the Council made Weeksville Heritage Center a member of the city's Cultural Institutions

Group last year----giving them much needed financial stability and recognition. But they were the first new CIG in 20 years, and there is still no transparency to the CIG process. Let's make it intentional and clear that we'll build a CIG that recognizes and invests in organizations run by and serving BIPOC people.

I will end by remembering a woman's testimony in the first COVID hearing at the Council in April, at the height of the horror. She said why is it the same communities, dating back to redlining, that are hit hardest by these crises. And when at long last are the people in those communities going to be given a seat at the table when the time comes to figure out how to recover. Let's build a new city with those voices at the center of the conversation on how to build it.



October 20, 2020

New York City Council Hearing
The Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Submitted by National Dance Institute

National Dance Institute (also known as NDI) is headquartered in Harlem and was founded in 1976 by ballet star Jacques d'Amboise. He founded NDI in the belief that the arts have a unique power to engage and motivate individuals towards excellence. Ever since, NDI has transformed the lives of more than 2 million children.

We at NDI are in pain, enraged, and deeply saddened by the recent events of our country. We grieve the loss of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and too many others who have been victims of our justice system. We grieve the loss of Black lives due to systemic racism, join our communities in demanding justice, and stand against the innumerable inequities experienced by communities of color.

NDI committed to creating an environment that honors the humanity of all people. We believe that diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) are fundamental principles that must guide our work in the arts, and that we can only fulfill our responsibility as educators when these values are our foundation. Placing DEIA at the center of our engagement with children, families, schools, artists, and other communities is essential to the vitality and integrity of our work and to the achievement of our core mission.

NDI is actively working toward creating an ever more just organization so that we may both uphold a healthy work environment and provide engaging, immersive, joyful arts experiences for the children and communities we serve. The ways we have begun working toward equity within our organization include, but are not limited to: ongoing regular affinity/accountability group meetings for our staff to examine racism and white supremacy within our lives and within NDI, establishing a Board DEIA Committee, and ongoing equity trainings for the staff—particularly on racial equity and disability justice. We have also created a full-time Equity Advocate staff position, a yearlong Artist-in-Residence position for an Artist of Color, and a full-time Teaching Artist Fellowship for a Teaching Artist of Color.

In order for us and other arts organizations to continue doing this work, it is critical to receive the funding that will support it. While most of our programs are free, we've lost tremendous revenue during this time and can't sustain future revenue cuts. NDI believes #BlackLivesMatter and arts organizations are an essential part of teaching our communities about social justice, and serve as a place of healing during these challenging times. Please fund the arts programs that our communities need to continue to learn, heal, and thrive during this time and beyond.

Thank you.

Submitted by:

National Dance Institute
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Good Morning, Chair Van Bramer and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relation. My name is Nikiesha Hamilton, and I am the Founder and CEO of Afeni Creative Studios. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I created Afeni Creative Studios to engage Black creatives and cultural organizations to expand access to a healthy global creative economy for the African Diaspora. I was moved to focus on Black community cultural development because I experienced and witnessed racism within the cultural sector. I observed there is a lack of structural support to sustain Black arts and culture. COVID-19 only heightened my concerns. As we all know, the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated long existing inequities experienced by the Black community. As Black people continue to fight to stay alive in America, it begets the question, how do we protect the Black cultural legacy? Black people are unable to have the agency and access to resources necessary to develop their own cultural discourse.

Racism is at the root of all systems that continue to fail us. Racism is a culture, and from my personal experience, cultural institutions do play a role in preserving it. If we do not culturally confront the culture of racism, then it will continue to dominate these institutions and our communities. The structural violence that occurs within these institutions impacts our communities. How can we safely enter these organizations, if we are bound to experience: pay inequity; lack of anti-racist leaders of color; silencing of our voices; racist experiences swept under the rug; cultural extraction from the

communities that they view as inferior; and propagation of paternalistic racist discourses about Black communities.

Anywhere I go in the world, I can proudly say I was born and raised in Brooklyn, and people know exactly where I am from. New York City's most powerful export has always been culture, and Black people have been ghostwriting NYC culture for years. From music, dance, fashion, and more, Black people have served the backbone for NYC culture.

It is on all of us to build proper systems of accountability. City Council, I challenge you to create policies and procedures that can effectively combat the cultural imperialism that is happening within your communities. We need more resources and structure for accountability. I propose that:

- Large organizations submit to City government community impact assessments, if they are seeking government funding for their needs. This is to examine whether they are providing equitable access to their institutions for surrounding communities;**
- Large organizations create structures that ensure community voices are heard. Large institutions should institute community advisory Boards, and/or have at least two seats on their Board that community members can serve on. As I saw at the Brooklyn Museum, there is a lack of community representation in leadership spaces. That needs to change;**
- Diversify streams of funding for smaller organizations to develop their programs and operations;**

- **Create eco-friendly community centers that can host organizations that are currently losing spaces due to COVID-19. If we have spaces like these throughout the 5 boroughs, they can serve as STEAM recreation centers for the community;**
- **Invest in DCLA more so that they can allocate more funding to training programs on operations, funding, DEIA, and more to ensure that organizations' needs are met.**

Now conclusively, I hope you strongly consider my thoughts I share with you today. The Black imagination and creativity has been key to the Black survival in America, and how we conceived freedom from this oppressive system. In the words of Claudia Jones, “a people’s art is the genesis of their freedom.” That being said, if we do not contribute to sustainable growth of Black culture and art in our community... then we are serving in the extinction of the Black imagination and culture.

Thank you for your time.



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Dear Council Member Van Bramer, Committee Chair, and Members of the New York City Council's Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations,

On behalf of our Artistic Director/CEO, Todd Haimes, our Board of Directors, and all of us at Roundabout Theatre Company, we are pleased to submit the following written testimony for today's (10/20/2020) important *Oversight Hearing on Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, Structural Racism and the Arts*:

As a theatre company that is a long-standing member of many communities, we believe in the importance of words, the impact of voices, and the healing capacity of shared stories. That means we must also take our share of responsibility for what is good and bad in the world, and our ability to shape it. As we share the heartbreak and outrage over the unjust killings of Black citizens and the racism and intolerance behind them, we are using this current pause in business-as-usual to deeply explore and engage in the critical work necessary to ensure equity for all.

Since FY19, Roundabout has been proud to partner with the New York City Council for three consecutive fiscal years (including FY21) to provide our Theatrical Workforce Development Program (TWDP), which is generously supported through the Speaker's Initiative. TWDP was launched in 2016 in partnership with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) union as well as industry, workforce development, and youth development organizations and consultants. Our Fellows have been at the forefront of our company wide effort to reignite our pledge to be an actively anti-racist institution.

TWDP empowers a new generation of diverse, passionate theatre professionals while building a model for similar programs throughout the industry. This program addresses two major challenges in the industry: the exclusion of marginalized communities within the technical theatre workforce and the need for qualified theatre technicians. Roundabout is committed to identifying inequities in our organization and the greater performing arts industry, and TWDP is one of several initiatives launched in the past few years specifically designed to break down barriers to entry.

The TWDP Fellows are an integral part of our organization and therefore are at the center of our work towards equity. In response to the recent surge in the Black Lives Matter Movement, the Education staff facilitated listening sessions with the Fellows to ensure their voices continue to be heard and their concerns addressed. Fellows then met with Executive Leadership to share their thoughts and suggest changes to the program that will better support them. Action items from that meeting include forming a Fellow Advisory Committee and organizing a Roundabout Town Hall that connects ideas to action. This work will continue at an accelerated pace, guided by our equity, diversity and inclusion consultants Tammy Bormann and Elizabeth Williams-Riley.

Since 2016, TWDP has trained 74 young adults in four cohorts, providing access to jobs that pay well above minimum wage and sustaining careers in a growing industry. 99% of Fellows have completed the six-week Made in New York Stagecraft Boot Camp while 87% have completed the first year of training, with an overall retention rate of 84%.

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Our Fellows live in all five boroughs of New York City, with 76% identifying as people of color. This is a stark difference from the current racial makeup of the New York City technical production theatre sector, where people of color make up only 19% of the workforce. The program has been successful in connecting young adults from NYC's out-of-school, out-of-work population with valuable skills and work experience. Seven Fellows are NYCHA residents, and most are graduates of Title 1 schools.

Since issuing our "Commitment to the Future" EDI Statement in 2018, we have actively been working toward making Roundabout a more equitable and inclusive organization both on and off stage. In 2019, we were invited to participate in the second round of the Racial Equity in the Arts Innovation Lab, sponsored by the NYC Cultural Agenda Fund and administered by the racial equity organization Race Forward. The plan of action we developed in the Lab focused on forming a solid foundation for comprehensive equity work across our organization, specifically the creation of an environment where equity, diversity and inclusion are expressly articulated as a value and priority of our organization, demonstrated both internally and externally. The intention was that this framework would then serve as a foundation for ongoing equity work with the ultimate goal of equity, diversity and inclusion considerations being an inherent part of all of our work.

In fall of 2019, we then engaged EDI Consultants, Tammy Bormann and Elizabeth Williams-Riley, to work with us on a comprehensive organizational-change process. Their 14-month engagement began with a broad-based assessment, in which several Board members participated. From November 2019 through January 2020, they reviewed our practices, policies, and demographics data; they also executed 14 focus groups in our theatres and administrative offices, 28 one-on-one interviews, and a round of surveys to gather confidential input regarding Roundabout's equitable practices from over 200 staff members, Board members, and artists. Tammy and Elizabeth's findings will enable us to think meaningfully about our work until now, contemplate our missed opportunities, and renew our commitment to change.

The COVID-19 shutdown temporarily interrupted this work, but once we recalibrated around the needs of working from home and in response to heartbreaking national events and the broad call to action, we reactivated and accelerated the process, working with Tammy and Elizabeth to modify what was going to be more of a sequence of steps into a parallel-path approach to concurrently: (1) reactivate the work of a "Transformation Team" to turn the assessment findings into actionable steps, (2) resume ongoing capacity-building dialogue and learning with senior leadership; (3) establish ongoing dialogue and learning with our Board; and (4) engage in mandatory organization-wide dialogue and learning around national racial-justice issues in order to build greater capacity for engaging in necessary organizational change and ensuring our culture is one in which these changes will flourish.

Our Transformation Team is a working group comprised of 29 staff members with

every area and of the company represented. This team has begun working actively with Tammy and Elizabeth to dig deeper into their assessment, analyze the inequities and shortcomings revealed, and strategize and develop short-term and long-term action plans to address these inequities, and this work will continue into FY21.



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We acknowledge we have a lot of work to do, but we are excited to be able to use the time while our stages are empty to deeply engage in this organizational change work. Our commitment to be an actively anti-racist institution must encompass every aspect of the organization. Our approach is to balance urgency and thoughtfulness to successfully transform Roundabout in fundamental and systemic ways that will last.

Thank you for taking the time to read our testimony, and thank you especially for your leadership, support, and advocacy on behalf of our field in the public sphere. If you have any questions about the information above, please reach out to Sarah Mercanti at smercanti@roundabouttheatre.org.

Sincerely,

Sarah Mercanti
Manager of Board & Government Relations

Testimony for Cultural Affairs Town Hall, Oct 20, 2020

I am an independent artist and I was an arts educator in NYC for 11 years, before Covid. I was a teaching artist, hired by various nonprofits around the city, to deliver original quality art education programs to youth in public schools all over NYC. I found this work stimulating and creative, though it was at times also exhausting. It is how I made the majority of my living, along with small artist grants, commissions, and speaking gigs.

Once the city went on shutdown, March 15, 2020, teaching artists were the first education arts workers to be cut. For some reason, the contracts that nonprofit organizations had with the city's schools were null, overnight. The time and resources spent planning the curricula and funding across the city's schools meant nothing. Partnerships among schools, nonprofits, and teaching artists were suddenly nonexistent and no one was held accountable for laying off their employees, while CEOs and other administrators' pockets remained lined.

Teaching artists are the most vulnerable in the arts and education hierarchy. It's a field that many of us choose and love, but we are largely women of color, working on contracts or as part time employees with no benefits. The pandemic also allowed one of the nonprofits I had worked in, for a decade, to use Covid as an excuse to switch our PT employee status to freelance/contract. This pandemic was used by arts nonprofits to downsize and threaten its workers. I tried to confront management on this, but my contract was quickly revoked and I was shut out entirely from my work email without warning. There was absolutely no one to turn to for help.

I am currently without unemployment benefits as well. My application has been delayed since late August, now, "pending"- although I sent in all the proper paperwork and have tried calling them several times- along with my council member and assembly person. **We deserve better.**

I have worked hard to provide quality arts education to hundreds of kids all over NY. One wrong move, and I always knew I could be fired. I was fired because of a pandemic. Meanwhile, the police are murdering and beating up protestors and are Never held accountable- let alone fired. Why should I pay for them to have jobs, through my taxes?

It's time to:

- enstate laws that give arts workers better rights, equitable pay, and hold employers accountable
- amend the "work at will" clause which is used against workers
- hold nonprofits accountable for mistreating their workers while hypocritically putting out mission statements in line with "black lives matter" and helping the underserved (they can't even take care of their workers of color)
- ensure freelance and pt workers access to affordable quality health benefits and unemployment benefits that we pay for, through our high NYC taxes
- create jobs for artists, hire us for public projects. We don't want charity. We want jobs.
- enable an art worker's union that creates collective bargaining power and accountability when employers/clients are taking advantage of a precarious labor force
- defund the police force sucking up the city's money. This is a time of great need. They don't deserve the funds they are getting.

Katherine Toukhy



Testimony to Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations Submitted to Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations on October 20, 2020
Prepared by Dance/NYC

On behalf of Dance/NYC, a service organization which serves over 5,000 individual dance artists, 1,200 dance-making entities, and 500 nonprofit dance companies based in the metropolitan New York City area, including BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color) dance workers, immigrants, and disabled dance workers. Dance/NYC joins colleague advocates working across creative disciplines in thanking the Committee for your leadership during this time.

In the midst of a racial and health pandemic, the necessary resurgence of the Movement for Black Lives, one of the most significant civil rights movements of our generation, and the signing of the most recent Executive Order 13950: Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping by the President, Dance/NYC has been working tirelessly to ensure that dance workers and organizations, particularly those led by and serving BIPOC, immigrant, and disabled communities are supported and resourced.

On June 22, 2020 and on September 15, 2020 we testified before this committee and called for:

- The Committee acknowledge the ongoing lasting impacts of slavery, establish and execute a plan to address those impacts, and repair the harm done by immediately establishing a Commission for Reparations for past and continuing harms inflicted upon Black and Indigenous people -- from colonialism to slavery, through food and housing redlining, mass incarceration, and surveillance;
- Prioritize funding to BIPOC Arts and Culture organizations to decenter Eurocentricism and white supremacy in mainstream New York City cultural representation in order to begin to undo pejorative and hurtful narratives, depictions and associations of/with Black and Immigrant and POC cultures. Substantial investment is needed in the organizations that authentically represent these communities.
- Committee reduces the proposed cuts to the Arts and Culture sector, particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color-led and serving organizations, redirecting funds otherwise used to fund the NYPD to ensure that organizations and their arts workers remain necessary workers and community members in New York City.



- The City to include the Arts and Culture communities in rent relief legislation (e.g, subsidized housing, cancel rent, rent relief subsidies) to protect our organizations and workers.
- The City provides financial relief for organizations and artists being affected by the affordability crisis and without business interruption insurance.
- The City pays living wages and funds programs that allow for the payment of living wages for dance and cultural workers.

Each of these requests are anchored in our long-standing values of justice, equity and inclusion (www.dance.nyc/equity/values) and the necessary recognition that as a community and City we must do more to ensure that our stated values drive us to take concrete actions that result in the material and tangible benefit to communities impacted by white supremacy and systemic racism.

To act on these commitments, this year alone, Dance/NYC has:

1. **Examined the racial impacts of our organizational practices and decisions, by removing and preventing racial inequities, and advancing racial justice both internally and publicly.** This includes the establishment of salary floors that better reflect the increasing costs of living in NYC for our dance workers, offering adequate paid leave, providing employees with healthcare, and prioritizing much-needed times of rest to account for the rigorous emotional labor required to remain authentic and present in its services, particularly during moments of national unrest;
2. **Disseminated over \$1 million in relief support to dance workers and dance making organizations,** primarily focused on BIPOC, immigrant and disabled communities, in addition to our ongoing grantmaking;
3. **Launched the #ArtistsAreNecessaryWorkers** (www.Dance.NYC/ArtistsAreNecessaryWorkers/Overview) **campaign** and a 12 week series of conversations (www.Dance.NYC/ArtistsAreNecessaryWorkers/Tune-In) to highlight the importance of the arts ecology, point to current challenges and offer considerations on our way forward as a field in the midst of a health and racial pandemic;
4. **Collaborated with colleague arts service organizations** that are mission-focused on increasing racial equity, inclusion and access for disabled people, and/or integration of immigrants into arts and culture;
5. **Created resource lists on our website under the issue areas of racial justice, land acknowledgment practices,** disability and immigration, among others, in order to



provide tools and information for how dance workers and organizations can best address the manifestations of white supremacy in their work; and

6. **Issued calls to action to the sector through two letters in response to the recent and ongoing murders of Black people** by the actions of white people, institutions and systems, including law enforcement, and the many accomplices, witnesses, and beneficiaries of white supremacy who have actively participated in or stood by and observed in silence.

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
- 2) The Dance Field
- 3) Arts and Culture Sector
- 4) NYC, NYS, USA

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. 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. Defunding the police and funding social services, passing housing and healthcare reform, and ensuring Black and POC- led organizations continue to thrive are all important for the survival of artists, arts workers, the cultural life of NYC and are steps towards the envisioning of what anti-racist systemic reform could look like.

As we look to the future, Dance/NYC envisions a City wherein power, funding, opportunities, conduct, and impacts are just for all artists, cultural workers, and audiences— a place where dance can thrive. We recognize that racial justice does not exist individually or siloed from additional equity areas and interrelated forces of oppression (e.g., disability, anti-immigrant discrimination, economic justice) in its work nor in the lives of its constituents. Instead, racial justice requires an intersectional approach that builds upon multiple areas that together create a



more just, equitable, and inclusive dance ecology meaningfully contributing to social progress. In our work, we seek to dismantle white supremacy and amplify the voices and autonomy of the BIPOC, disabled, and immigrant communities along the continuum of lives in dance, from the public school classroom to the stage and recognize generations of people and organizations engaged in this work and seek to contribute to their efforts.

Dance/NYC's approach cuts across our public programs—advocacy and research; leadership training, networking and convening; technology and visibility; and regranting—and all aspects of our operations. We recognize that the planning and execution of racial justice work requires the investment of emotional labor, financial resources, and time. To ensure the sustainability and well-being of the organization, its staff, and its constituents, Dance/NYC only undertakes activities for which there are sufficient resources available. To that end, Dance/NYC is currently focused on three main issue areas:

- 1) **Racial Justice**
(<https://www.dance.nyc/uploads/DanceNYC-OneSheet-RacialJusticeAgenda-V5.pdf>)
- 2) **Disability. Dance. Artistry.**
(<https://www.dance.nyc/uploads/DanceNYC-OneSheet-DisabilityAgenda-V2.pdf>)
- 3) **Immigrants. Dance. Arts.**
(<https://www.dance.nyc/equity/immigrant-artists/immigrant-initiative>)

For Dance/NYC and its constituents, the most urgent priorities continue to be:

- 1) **The City acknowledge the ongoing lasting impacts of slavery, establish and execute a plan to address those impacts, and repair the harm done by immediately establishing a Commission for Reparations for past and continuing harms inflicted upon Black and Indigenous people** -- from colonialism to slavery, through food and housing redlining, mass incarceration, and surveillance;
- 2) **The City to voice opposition to the President's Executive Order 13950** and establish anti-racism training for all City employees including NYPD;
- 3) **The City provides immediate relief for our communities.** We demand rent cancellation and relief, mortgage cancellation, a moratorium on utility and water shutoffs, and a cancellation of debt. We demand long-term economic solutions like a Universal Basic Income and Universal Healthcare in order to address the ongoing crises.
- 4) **Prioritize funding to BIPOC Arts and Culture organizations.** Substantial investment is needed in the organizations that authentically represent and are integral to these communities.



5) The City ends the war against Black and Indigenous people by:

- a. Reallocating funding used to mobilize the police towards implementing community programs and services that will help our constituents to weather the ongoing racial and health pandemics.
- b. Withdrawing participation in police militarization programs.
- c. Enacting community control and holding the NYPD immediately accountable by external community reviews.
- d. Respecting the rights of protestors. We demand no harm come to protestors.

Community and culture are inextricably linked; and the planning and execution of racial justice work requires a united effort. We thank the Committee for the opportunity to share the anti-racism work Dance/NYC is engaged in and exhort the Committee to follow their commitment to dismantling racism with concrete actions, legislation, and investments into BIPOC communities.

##



MISSION

“Developing the community in the area of arts and social services with the focus on educating community on Caribbean culture”

SLOGAN

Using Culture as a tool for Social Transformation

PROGRAMS

- After School Programs*
- Artist Resource Center*
- Authors Connecting*
- Award of Excellence*
- Body of Vibration Dance & Theater*
- Choral Singing*
- Concert Series*
- Musicians Mentoring Musicians*
- Spirit of the Arts Award*
- Stilt Walkers /Moko Jumbies*
- The Art of Masquerade*
- The Art of Photography-Videography*

TAG

Official Home for Caribbean Culture

Re: Hearing Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, Structural Racism and the Arts
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Tuesday, October 20, 2020 at 10:00 a.m

This time in history is critical for the voices of black cultural institutions and artists to be heard. One way to root out systematic racism from society is to use art and culture as a catalyst for that change. The disparity in today’s society on economic justice, equality and fairness can be traced back to the support that black cultural institutions and artists have received from government, foundations, media, etc. Today, artists are raising their voices with the aim of triggering private and public discussions on social injustice.

Black art representation becomes limited when artists let themselves be crunched into other people’s imagination. When black artists author their own images, they are able to achieve some sovereignty that goes beyond colonial based ideas and racist methodologies. Today we are witnessing the flourish of black creativity and art. For instance, today, it is possible to experience through art the thoughts, reactions, and experiences of Black people based on our own perspectives and unmediated. It is important that the leadership positions in main stream arts organizations are diverse.

Black cultural institutions safeguard against the loss of black history as it documents daily diaries based on experiences. The cultural institutions can either die or flourish depending on the level of nourishment they are offered. Leaving such institutions without funding will make them feel the pinch. All efforts should be geared toward proper funding to give them shape and form. There has been a gap in government funding black cultural institutions and artists hence the dire need for addressing this issue.

The ability of an individual or community to obtain fair and equal justice can be improved through fair media coverage. Each and every person deserves an opportunity to achieve full potential in his or her aspirations. The influence on media is so huge that it aims at educating even persons with no credible knowledge. Media should play a role in legitimization of the courses of action of the black cultural institutions and artists. Avoid racial stereotypes in all mediums. Diversity needs to be embraced for our sociality to blossom.

Our December production “Tropicalfete’s Finale 2020” will most likely be virtual. The theme will be about the injustice in society such as the school system, the medical system, housing, criminal justice system, etc. In one of our meetings, a parent recommended we explore how we treat each other as fellow human beings. Tropicalfete will be exploring those things in song, dance, music, costume and spoken word.



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TAG

Official Home for Caribbean Culture

About us: Tropicalfete Inc. Established in 1999 as an online publication and cultural resource center, in 2011. Tropicalfete became a charitable not-for-profit corporation. Its mission is to develop the community in the areas of arts and social services with a focus on educating the community on Caribbean culture. We have established a reading program with Barnes and Noble for Caribbean Heritage Month in June. Tropicalfete was one of the many organizations that went down into the congressional record held at the Library of Congress for endorsing Caribbean Heritage Month put forth by California Representative Barbara Lee (D-9) signed by President George W. Bush. For the past 9 years, we have participated in various parades; creating marvelous masquerade presentations. We have held free music workshops covering topics such as copyright and royalties, marketing, mixing and playing an instrument. Tropicalfete has had the honor to work with VH1 Save the Music Foundation. We have also worked with such prominent cultural institutions as The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Currently we teach dance and theater, stilt walking, wood work, welding, masquerade, singing, sewing, steel pan and other instruments. We have put on various musical showcases. We have taken our work directly to the community in places such as parks, colleges, community centers, etc. Our work has been validated by a number of persons engaging with our programs, as well as a proclamation from New York City Government, Brooklyn District Attorney and other awards. We are in two public schools (PS 135 and IS392) engaging the students in cultural activities as part of cultural after school adventures an initiative by the City Council. (CASA). We have programs for youth independent from the schools. Tropicalfete has cultural enrichment programming at the Prospect Hill Senior Center, St. Augustine Senior Center and William Hudson Senior Center. Tropicalfete is always looking to expand its cultural programming and on the horizon to be introduce are limbo/fire eating, pottery and culinary arts. Tropicalfete's work have been featured on numerous media outlets including New York Daily News, Billboard Magazine, New York Times, Brooklyn Reader, News 12, NY1, Caribbean One TV Caribbean Life, and much more.

Purpose: Tropicalfete publish information with a concentration on arts and culture as well as highlight the importance of the arts on education and its positive impact on the economy. Tropicalfete is and continues to be committed to the cultivation of emerging artists working in all genres. Among these are: Visual arts, fashion, music, dance, theater, film and new media. Tropicalfete serves as a vehicle to elevate talented persons, while recognizing their contribution to society and the arts. In-addition; Tropicalfete offers opportunities for gifted artist to be mentored through a variety of diverse events. We look at the development of artists from a holistic view; therefore our mandated obligation includes assisting persons with their social needs. Tropicalfete seeks to utilize the power



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of the artist and arts, as it strives to bring about social changes to whomever/ where ever it is needed.

Thank you!

Alton Aimable

Alton Aimable

President and Founder

ADVANCE | MORE OPERA

The Association for the Development of Vocal Artistry and Neighborhood Cultural Enrichment
Manhattan Opera Repertory Ensemble
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Testimony to the New York City Council
City Council Hearing:
BLM, Anti-Racism, Structural Racism, and the Arts

Tuesday October 20, 2020

Submitted by
Cheryl Warfield
Performing and Teaching Artist, Producer and Founder of ADVANCE/MORE Opera

Greetings. Thank you, Chair Van Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo and Members of City Council for reading my testimony and for this hearing on Black Lives Matter and the arts. I am writing to you as an interested party by virtue of being born female and of color.

I am Cheryl Warfield, a professional opera singer and a long-standing member of SAG-AFTRA, Actor's Equity and my parent union, the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA). I am also the founder of the Association for the Development of Vocal Artistry and Neighborhood Cultural Enrichment (ADVANCE), a 501(c) 3 grass-roots non-profit and the artistic director of MORE Opera.

ADVANCE/MORE Opera showcases outstanding and diverse talent while providing outreach and educational programming to youth and seniors in underserved communities. As an African American performer and arts administrator, I am determined to contribute to the musical education of young people, showcase black themes, and highlight the diversity of what is often inaccurately considered as an "elitist" or European art form. As a producer of color, I strive to spotlight outstanding professional talent from all backgrounds who otherwise may be overlooked or ostracized. For 20 years in New York City, ADVANCE/MORE Opera has mounted dozens of public performances and conducted educational workshops and no-cost community choral training to hundreds of young people, adults, and seniors.

I have also been a teaching artist for 20 years, working with children of color in schools in all five boroughs. When Majority Leader Campo challenged arts and culture leaders at the June 22, 2020 hearing on arts funding to seize the moment during the Black Lives Matter movement to find positive solutions through arts and culture, I heeded that call, and designed and taught a free summer music program, "BLM: Songs for George – the Music of Protest" for NYC school students under the auspices of Culture at 3's "Summer in the City" arts program.

Back in the 1990's when I moved to New York from Ohio to sing at the Metropolitan Opera, I was fortunate to find modest housing within walking distance of Lincoln Center. It never occurred to me at that time that I could later be penalized for living in zip code 10023. Yet time and again since I began producing arts and educational programs in New York and applying for funding, I was told by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council that I lived in an "arts saturated" zip code making it less likely to receive funding in spite of the fact that my proposals targeted minorities and underserved audiences within walking distance of my home like the Amsterdam Houses in Lincoln Center's backyard and the Manhattan Valley community.

Cheryl Warfield
October 20, 2020
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More recently, I learned of a COVID-19 related foundation grant for New York non-profits that would have been beneficial to my organization, but when I entered the zip code, my organization was ineligible. Zip codes have been used by many grantors to identify underserved communities, but inadvertently discriminate against subsets within communities of underserved people living within more affluent zip codes. Let's face it: whether you agree that the U.S. is the richest or one of the richest countries in the world, that does not preclude our nation from having families below the poverty level. And just because the Upper West Side is currently being depicted as a NIMBY, elitist and racist community does not mean that ordinary people and artists of color and poor families do not live there.

I ask that the Department of Cultural Affairs find a better methodology to allocate arts grants in the future because using zip codes as a determination to allocate City funding discriminates against so many residents in need of services in zip codes such as 10023, 10024 and 10025 and certainly has disadvantaged my fledgling BIPOC arts organization. I suggest that a methodology like the State's new COVID-19 hotspot zones within a zip code be utilized to identify BIPOC communities in need throughout the City.

I look forward to continued conversation about race and the arts and thank you for reading my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

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Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts
New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs
Oversight Hearing on Black Lives Matter, Anti-Racism, and Structural Racism in the Arts
October 20, 2020

Chair Van Bramer and members of the committee,

My name is Siri Horvitz, and I am the Director of Government and Community Relations at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. On behalf of Lincoln Center, I thank you and your staffs for all you do to ensure that New York City works for all New Yorkers.

I respectfully submit this testimony to speak to Lincoln Center's commitment to equity and representation in the arts and to describe some of the ways we're delivering upon that commitment.

First and foremost, Lincoln Center affirms today and every day that Black lives matter.

Lincoln Center was built on a vision, articulated by founder David Rockefeller, that "the arts are not for the privileged few, but for the many." In our 62-year history, we have not done nearly enough to fully realize that vision: as a workplace, we've not been representative of New York City's robust demographic composition, and as a programmer we have not consistently presented artists and points of view reflecting the city that we serve.

It is part of our job now to help change the status quo. The work to ensure that our day-to-day operations are inclusive and drive real and lasting change will be ongoing.

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts is committed to:

- Telling the story of Lincoln Center from our beginning, in its truth, including the destructive displacement of Indigenous, Black, and Latinx families that took place prior to the construction of our campus. We may never know the full impact on those dispossessed of the land on which Lincoln Center sits. But only by acknowledging this history can we begin to confront the racism from which our institution has benefited. We are currently exploring a myriad of ways for this story to be told, and once we have more firm plans, we will be sure to share them with you.
- Presenting artists and points of view that better reflect the City of New York. We will do this, in part, by establishing commissioning funds specifically to center the voices of artists that have been underrepresented on our campus.
- Dismantling structures across Lincoln Center that foster inequity and replacing them with practices that promote true inclusivity. This includes empowering staff to understand how to identify and constructively address racism within their job functions and departments.

These commitments are reflected in the internal reforms that Lincoln Center has been making per its DEI plan, which was approved by our Board of Directors and submitted to the Department of Cultural Affairs in Spring 2019.

In the year and a half since the DEI plan was finalized, we've taken our commitment to DEI extremely seriously, making major reforms from the top down. One of the strategic priorities adopted by our board is "to champion inclusion and increase the diversity of programs, audiences, communities, performers

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and administrations,” and our board has formed an ad hoc task force to focus on board diversity led by former New York City Deputy Mayor for Economic Development Robert Steel and Ford Foundation President Darren Walker. New additions to our Executive Leadership Team means that 50% of Lincoln Center executives are people of color, compared to 0% in Spring 2019. One of these executives, our Chief People Officer, has led a near-complete transformation of our human resources function, drawing on her background in DEI and organizational development to create a unit that is better suited to lifting up all employees and ensuring that our hiring practices are more fully inclusive and fair.

While we make changes to our present, we’re also considering the future of our institution by committing to developing a more racially and socioeconomically diverse cultural workforce. Just a few weeks ago, our inaugural class of Lincoln Center interns—14 college students—drawn from leading leadership development organizations like CUNY Cultural Corps, Ladders for Leaders, and Prep for Prep—started their first rotation in what will be a paid, year-long exploration of arts administration. We expect that they and the following cohorts of interns will become major leaders in the cultural field. The commitment to diversity in the workforce extends to our capital projects: we’ve committed to a minimum 30% Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises (MWBE) construction participation in our forthcoming renovation of David Geffen Hall, and are working with Turner Construction to create a comprehensive workforce development program providing a pipeline for New Yorkers in low-income housing and schools to access job opportunities and related student internships. This program is being designed against a 40% work force inclusion goal, inclusive of Black, Latinx, Asian, Veteran, Disabled Veteran, and LGBTQ+ groups.

The conscious changes we have made on the administrative side have been reflected in the art presented on our stages, in our public spaces, and on our digital channels. We’re firmly committed to presenting a diverse range of artists, art forms, and lived experiences. And we’re making sure to create space for artists to respond to our current moment, too. From co-producing the dance piece *Ces Noms Que Nous Portons*, a dance celebrating the intersectional identities of queer artists of color by choreographer Kyle Abraham and dancer Taylor Stanley; to presenting Davóne Tines’ performance piece *VIGIL*, the artist’s tribute to Breonna Taylor; to joining cultural organizations across the country in presenting Carrie Mae Weems’ *Resist COVID / Take 6!*, a public art project highlighting the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, Lincoln Center has been driven by a focus on art that highlights diverse, innovative voices and resonant, impactful messages. We’re also making this art as accessible and resonant as possible, more actively engaging our community in the work we do, presenting contextual information, and using teaching artists in schools to help students interpret complex works of art.

To ensure that we connect with and serve all our potential audiences, Lincoln Center has recommitted itself to becoming a community hub, forging new connections and expanding existing ones with local schools, community-based organizations, and elected officials to better understand community needs and ways that we could serve them.

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Prior to the pandemic, this work with our local partners and elected officials informed the development of our community and education programming. During the pandemic, with those programs disrupted, we've transitioned into more of a direct service role to respond to increased needs. In July and September, in partnership with the Food Bank for NYC, we hosted two food distributions on campus, one of which featured music performed by artists from Lincoln Center's constituent organizations. These events provided much-needed hunger relief to more than 850 households and 2500 New Yorkers. We are supporting local schools including LaGuardia High School for the Performing Arts, which is unable to fully reopen, by making our outdoor spaces available for safe, socially distant arts classrooms. And throughout the past 10 months, as part of our commitment to the arts and support of art-making, we have supported artists who are working to encourage participation in the Census by teaming up with Black Theatre United and Fair Count to film a Census PSA at Lincoln Center, and hosting a Create-a-thon, which brought together communities of color for Census-focused artmaking.

We are working diligently to turn Lincoln Center into a place where everyone feels not only welcome, but that they belong, and we're taking steps toward making sure that Lincoln Center can truly become the home for everyone to enjoy world-class art, arts education, and community that it was envisioned to be.

Respectfully submitted,

Siri Horvitz
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**Testimony to the Committee on
Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, Structural Racism and the Arts
John F. Calvelli, Executive Vice President, Public Affairs
Wildlife Conservation Society
October 20, 2020**

Thank you Chairman Van Bramer and members of the Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is John Calvelli, Executive Vice President of Public Affairs for the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS.)

Based in New York City since 1895, WCS is a global conservation organization that saves wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. To achieve our mission, WCS, headquartered at the Bronx Zoo, harnesses the power of its Global Conservation Program in nearly 60 nations and in all the world's oceans and its five wildlife parks in New York City, visited by 4 million people annually. WCS combines its expertise in the field, at our zoos, and aquarium to achieve its conservation mission with the aim of conserving the world's most ecologically important wild places in 14 priority regions, home to more than 50 percent of the world's biodiversity. WCS envisions a world where wildlife thrives in healthy lands and seas, valued by societies that embrace and benefit from the diversity and integrity of life on earth. We hold ourselves to the highest standards, adhering to our core values of respect, diversity and inclusion, accountability and transparency, innovation, collaboration, and integrity.

The senseless deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and the many other victims of racism and injustice in this country have been felt profoundly by the leadership of WCS and the people we have been proud to serve. As we continue to support the Black Lives Matter movement and witness injustices against BIPOC communities, many of our staff and those we call our neighbors have been struggling to cope with this wave of frustration and anger while managing through the financial and medical hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic. WCS leadership has been examining our past and listening to our staff and to the communities we serve through our New York zoos and aquarium. We recognize that overt and systemic racism persists. In the name of equality, transparency, and accountability, we must confront our organization's history and foster a workplace that allows no room for racism as we advance our mission to save wildlife and wild places.

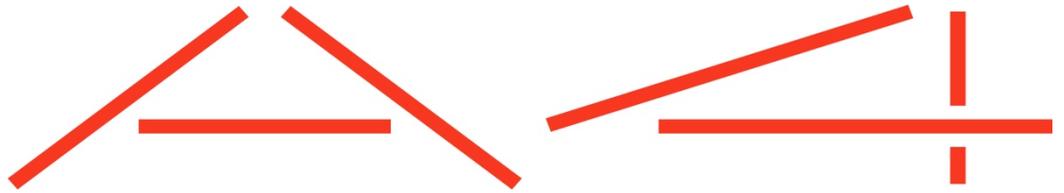
As you may know, our CEO Cristián Samper sent a Juneteenth message to WCS staff and released a public statement in July that reckons with the bigoted actions and attitudes of our early leadership. In September 1906, WCS displayed a young man from Central Africa's Mbuti people named Ota Benga in the Bronx Zoo Monkey House. This atrocity, in combination with the racist philosophies of two of our early founders, eugenicists Madison Grant and Henry Fairfield Osborn, and our first zoo director William Hornaday, are two of the most significant in WCS's history — causing shame, anger, and sadness for people inside and outside the organization.

WCS's mission to save wildlife and wild places is built on advocating for the interconnectedness of all life. Over the past century, WCS has established long-term conservation presence in the most remote, wild, and intact places left on the planet. Today, core to our work protecting these intact forests, grasslands, and coastal reef systems is building strong, respectful and trusting partnerships with local communities and Indigenous Peoples whose livelihoods, well-being and cultural identities are dependent on these important landscapes.

Just as we value the communities in the landscapes in which we support conservation, so too we value the communities in which our parks reside and the City which is home to countless New Yorkers from all around the world. We will utilize the negative aspects of our past as a tool for educating and bringing pressing issues to light. We will continue to tell Ota Benga's story and make all known records of his time with us available online.

Additionally, while we continue to take steps to deepen conversations with staff, we have accelerated portions of our DEI plan, such as hiring a Diversity Officer and reviewing the images and art in our facilities to ensure they represent our core values and our workforce.

There is no right one-size fits all approach on how to enact change, but daily individual actions and self-reflections, including that of our own organization and its leadership, will result in a better future. As part of our ongoing commitment to accountability and transparency, we recognize that there is more we can do to educate current and future generations about our history as we nurture a conservation movement that values diversity and inclusion while continually exploring ways to promote diversity and end systemic racism.



**Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Oversight Hearing – Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, Structural Racism and the
Arts
Tuesday, October 20, 2020**

My name is Lisa Gold and I am the Executive Director of the Asian American Arts Alliance (henceforth referred to as A4). We are a 37-year old, Brooklyn-based service organization dedicated to ensuring greater representation, equity, and opportunities for Asian American artists and arts organizations as well as providing a critical voice for this community. We are a diverse coalition of artists, arts organizations, and arts supporters who believe that working together as a pan-ethnic, multidisciplinary community is essential to nurturing the development of our artists and arts organizations.

I'd like to thank the Council for the work you are doing to advance racial justice and for the opportunity to share my comments with you today.

We all know that the city has been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic. And the effects of the pandemic have disproportionately affected people of color, with Asian Americans reporting an increase in unemployment from 3.4% in February 2020 to 25.6% in May 2020, the largest increase among all racial groups.*

I am calling on the City Council to acknowledge the deep loss effecting the Asian American community and for this committee to discontinue its practice of perpetrating inequitable funding to Asian Americans, further exacerbating the crisis highlighted by the pandemic.

Asian Americans make up nearly 16% of the population of New York City, yet in FY20, AAPI-led and serving organizations **received only 3% of program funding** from the Department of Cultural Affairs. When I testified to this committee in 2019, I cited statistics from 2018 showing the same allocation of only 3% of funding to the AAPI community.

In the DCLA FY20 budget, 985 grantees received over \$45.6MM, yet only 43 of those were Asian American led or serving—representing 4.4% of DCLA grantees (DOWN from 44 organizations and 4.7% in FY18). And the total amount of funding for those

Continued...

organizations? Just over \$1.3MM--approximately 3% of the DCLA programmatic budget. Additionally, in FY20, the average DCLA program grant amount was approximately \$46,000, while the average grant to AAPI-led and serving organizations was only \$31,000. Why do we deserve 32% less than other organizations? Why are we only receiving 4% of grants when we make up almost 16% of the population.

I'd like to note that these statistics only take into account programmatic funding, not capital funding, CIG funding, or other discretionary funds, which would illustrate an even greater disparity and financial disenfranchisement of the Asian American community.

I am here today to ask for equity. I know that hard budget choices have to be made, but continuing to underfund the Asian American artists and arts organizations on top of the devastating losses our community is facing is just unconscionable for a budget that was negotiated with a focus on achieving equity, particularly for low-income communities of color.**

A4 has continued to serve our community which has also been beset by growing anti-Asian racist threats and actual occurrences of violence. Sadly, the most popular program we presented in 2020 was a panel on strategies to deal with anti-Asian racism featuring speakers from the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes at NYC Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, an expert in mental health from New York University, and an attorney with expertise in employment discrimination. To-date, that panel has received over 5,700 views on [Facebook](#).

We hope that by being fully transparent in funding decisions and through the release of funding data, the City Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs can demonstrate its commitment to racial equity. Therefore, we ask that the City Council and DCLA not only allocate funds equitably among the city's population, but that it publish statistics demonstrating that commitment. Additionally, we request that the City continue to invest in the Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund to ensure that the organizations serving people of color continue to survive and thrive.

Thank you.

*Khan, Shih, 2020. *Impact of COVID-19 on Asian Employment in New York City*: NY, Asian American Federation.

** June 30, 2020. New York City Council Press Release: Speaker Corey Johnson, Finance Committee Chair Daniel Dromm, and Capital Budget Subcommittee Chair Vanessa Gibson Announce Agreement on FY 2021 Budget

October 20, 2020



Good morning Chair Van Bramer and members of the committee.

I was born on the Caribbean island of St. Vincent and grew up in Brownsville, Brooklyn and throughout my entire life culture has always been a huge part of who I am and set out to be. I chose to take on the role of Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Brooklyn Children's Museum as the opportunity to serve the community of Central Brooklyn and NYC at large was a full circle opportunity as I grew up at BCM. Recently I was appointed chair of the CIG's IDEA committee.

The IDEA committee, for context this is the renamed DEI(A) committee, as the focus is on achieving and realizing the IDEA of inclusion in reality. Each CIG member created their own DEI(A) plans that laid out multi-year goals to guide their work and diversity efforts. The IDEA committee supports the work of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) on the advancement of the plans and overall IDEA work of each individual member and in turn, the CIG at large. The goal of this committee is to have IDEA be a common practice of all members so that we are a more equitable community representing culture in New York City.

To achieve this goal, this Committee will provide resources that include turn-key tools and lay the foundation for tools that are adjusted for use by individual members of the CIG. These resources will complement the individual IDEA plans of each CIG member and include resources from the individual plans that can be used by other members. Additionally, the IDEA committee, through its chair, will serve as a liaison with the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs.

Our current focus is on workforce development as changing the makeup of our staff is essential to actually positively shifting the culture at our organizations. Our work isn't just on bringing in diverse talent but also supporting them from entry level to executive positions as the history of our institutions can and is traumatic to many. That's why the support is essential and starting to come to fruition. The CIGs have started laying the groundwork through their DEI plans, changes amongst staff and leadership and board support – this groundwork is essential to the journey but still in process.

This isn't a competition. It will take cultural organizations working with NYC, its agencies, and elected officials, to enact true change. Success has a mutual benefit as the City will be a better world because of honest cooperation that includes constructively challenging and holding each other accountable.

CIG staff has decided to join institutions that have a spotty history as it relates to racism. Many organizations were founded during the late 1800s and early 1900s when racism was an overt experience. In these times, we are still struggling with institutionalized and systemic racism. We have to be systematic in our approach to change structural racism. More often than not, the work will never feel like it is moving quick enough but understand we are trying to change centuries of systemic issues and that change is happening and will continue to happen.

To quote James Baldwin, "the world is before you and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Atiba Edwards".

Atiba Edwards
Executive Vice President & COO
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Good morning. My name is Yazmany Arboleda, and I'm the artist-in-residence with the Civic Engagement Commission in partnership with the city's Department of Cultural Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

The Public Artists in Residence, or PAIR program, is inspired by the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, who was named the artist-in-residence for the city's Department of Sanitation in the 70s. Her goal was to erase the stigma of being a sanitation worker and to make the city look with new eyes at its waste and waste workers - "essential workers", as they were not called yet. I'm honored to be a member of this artistic tradition, and I cherish my role as artist in residence for the city's civic engagement commission. It is a great responsibility to take on this position at such a crucial time, during the Black Lives Matter movement, the global pandemic and an election so consequential to the path on which this country and city will walk.

I believe that art and artists have a unique and essential role to play in bringing all New Yorkers together, helping us both understand and address the systemic racism so powerfully denounced by the Black Lives Matter movement. Disparities in educational opportunities, environmental hazards, economic instability, unequal access to health care - solving these issues will only be possible if we manage to rally our fellow citizens behind a shared understanding of the challenges some of brothers and sisters face, and inspire the civic engagement that is the cornerstone of meaningful and lasting change.

And that is why I am particularly excited by the bold ambition of the Civic Engagement Commission, since I've spent my career engaging communities around the world through the co-creation of art.

In a project called Colour-In-Faith, all over Kenya, people of different faiths united to paint their houses of worship- mosques, temples, synagogues, churches – yellow, together, in the name of love. The sculptures spoke of people from different backgrounds standing together, and pathways between new friends were built. Another project, the "Future Historical Society", in Fort Greene, Brooklyn and in partnership with BRIC, is a multi-generational collective of storytellers joined together to create a neighborhood archive that honors the histories of Fort Greene's changing community, while transforming its vision for the future.

In #RetireSegregation, as Artist-in-Residence for IntegrateNYC - a youth-led organization that stands for integration and equity in New York City schools, we threw a retirement party for segregation on the 65th anniversary of Brown vs Board. We created a newspaper that outlined improvements to NYC's segregated school system and passed it out in all five boroughs before converging on Times Square in the afternoon. Through this art intervention, my young collaborators showed that students can be designers of solutions, advocates for transformative policy, and visionaries for a more just future.

It is one of the major tenets of my practice that art is a universal process through which we bring about real change and progress, expressing our shared experience, envisioning new possibilities, and helping make those ideas a reality. For me, art is a verb. The whole premise of

PAIR is that artists think differently and have the power to model new approaches to civic work. Artists who are working to address systemic racism, disenfranchisement, and other matters of social justice are key to bridging the divide between the cultural sector and civic life- which I think is really where change can happen. New York City has always been a beacon of progress and renewal. At this time of great hardship and profound change, I am proud to join others, artists and citizens alike, in fighting the racism that is the antithesis of the very idea of New York.

Yazmany Arboleda

Public Artist in Residence, CEC

Pronouns: he/him/his

212-356-0021 (m)

Website: [NYC Civic Engagement Commission](#)

October 20, 2020 | New York City

TO: NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, City Hall, NYC, NY

FR: Museum Workers Happy Hour • BIPOC Workers' Working Group

Testimony for: Oversight hearing on BLM, Anti-Racism, Structural Racism in the Arts,
10/20/20 @10:00 AM

Public hearing: Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, & International Intergroup Relations

Testimony presented by: Patrick Jaojoco/p@patrickjaojoco.com/650-888-0019 representing
Art Workers for Black Lives

I. FORMAL INTRO

- Good morning Chairperson Jimmy Van Bremer, Commissioner Gonzalo Casal and Members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. My name is Patrick Jaojoco. I am calling in from occupied land of the Lenape and Canarsie people in Brooklyn, New York.
- I'm testifying today on behalf of Art Workers for Black Lives, an organizing body of NYC artists and art workers dedicated to decolonization, abolition, and reparations in the arts economy and beyond. We are here to demand equitable redistribution of public funds to the most vulnerable arts workers and divestment from NYPD cooperation and enforcement in the cultural sphere.

II. THE SITUATION

- BIPOC arts workers disproportionately hold the most precarious jobs in the arts--as freelance artists, entry-level administrators, curatorial assistants, teaching artists, front of house staff, and more. We are the lifeblood of New York City's cultural economy, and we face the multiple pressures of the present COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent layoffs, along with historic, systemic racism in the cultural sector and in our day to day lives.
- The steps taken by DCLA, including relief and support packages, have been complicit in materially prioritizing institutional bottom lines and the interests of their most senior leadership, while continuing to marginalize and insufficiently resource the lives of the wage workers and lower income employees whose labor undergirds this economy. I implore you all to move away from discussing "the arts" as an abstract idea and instead recenter artists and arts workers, particularly BIPOC and low-income workers.

III. WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

- We ask that you publicly acknowledge the complicity of DCLA in systemic oppression, beginning with the material construction of city-funded cultural institutions on stolen land, with stolen wealth gotten from economies of slavery, indentured servitude, and imperialism.
- We also ask that you defund all coordination of NYPD contracts, in accordance with the demands made by the historic black-led movements and uprisings in our city.
- Finally, we ask that you publicly release data of cultural institutions' investment in local law enforcement.

V. CONCLUSION

- It is imperative that the DCLA and the cultural institutions of our city take heed of these historic uprisings and the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic as a moment to truly reckon with the root causes of structural racism in our sector and beyond: the occupation of indigenous land, and histories and legacies of enslavement and imperialism. In order to move forward as a cultural sector, we need to materially center the voices and needs of BIPOC wage workers, not the bottom lines of large institutions founded in extractive economies.

Sincerely,

Patrick Jaojoco, delivered on behalf of Arts Workers for Black Lives

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Ballet Hispánico Testimony

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations October 20, 2020

Overview: Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, Structural Racism and the Arts

Founded in 1970 by National Medal of Arts recipient, Tina Ramírez, the organization emerged during the post-Civil Rights Movement on NYC's Upper West Side, providing a safe haven for primarily Black and Brown Latinx youth seeking artistic sanctuary during the plight of 1970s New York City. With the need for place both culturally and artistically, families found their way to Ballet Hispánico. With a focus on dance in order to develop artists who work, the training, authenticity of voice and power of representation fueled the organization's roots and trajectory.

Ballet Hispánico was recently honored as one of "America's Cultural Treasures" by a consortium of funders led by the Ford Foundation in a seismic initiative to support Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous arts organizations in response to the ongoing pandemic.

The Latinx arts community has helped shape this great landscape with sweat equity and grit, yet our voices are still in need of championing.

We continue to face loss of community, lack of resources, and the acknowledgment of our struggle and its legacy. Our art has long been impacted by the structural racism embedded in the Western arts model we were born into. While the field has matured in its recognition of representation, practice, protocol, and inclusion, right now, the challenge here is for deeper examination of BIPOC communities needs for support, advocacy and evidence of their legacies and histories.

Leadership in our field is also threatened. Our leaders' tireless work and the strides they have made often go unnoticed by the dance community. Cultural inclusion programs for artists of color, hailed as innovative and timely by large dance companies, seldom mention the decades of work that Dance Theater of Harlem, Alvin Ailey, Philadanco, Ballet Hispánico, and others have done since their inception.

Ballet Hispánico recently addressed some of these challenges by convening a national group of Latinx leaders in order to create a dynamic space for sharing our experiences, gathering our strengths, and activating change. Throughout the nation, all of these Latinx dance companies are serving their communities and celebrating the vibrancy and diversity of Latinx culture. These organizations are taking a leadership role against hateful rhetoric by inspiring our youth and communities with their voices.



And just this month, Ballet Hispánico joined Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, American Ballet Theatre, Dance Theatre of Harlem, and New York City Ballet to create a new online initiative to urge the dance community to do their civic duty and vote: #NYCDANCEUNITES.

The first iteration of #NYCDANCEUNITES will focus on voter turnout, encouraging dancers, dance makers, dance companies, dance advocates and dance supporters to make their voices heard both online and in real life, by encouraging others to vote throughout the month of October and by voting themselves in November.

Ballet Hispánico has been, and will continue to be, a beacon for our community and a champion of diversity. We foster the pursuit of art as a way of providing transformation through the exploration of our shared experiences.

If we are to usher in the next generation of BIPOC organizations, then, the way forward is through collaboration, alliance and leadership development.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Eduardo Vilaro
Artistic Director & CEO

City Council Hearing: "Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism, Structural Racism and the Arts."

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