

REPORT 4:
ENVISIONING BLACK FUTURES

TIME OF
RECKONING

TOR

A community-led series of engagement and healing justice sessions focused on the criminal justice system and its collateral consequences on Black people in Minnesota.

ABOUT THE TIME OF RECKONING

Time of Reckoning, Healing, Listening, and Action is a series of community engagement and healing justice sessions that culminate in a Black-led town hall and policy action roundtable focusing on the criminal justice system and its collateral consequences on Black people in Minnesota. The series strategically includes policy-makers with power and influence to implement the recommendations brought forth by the community through this process.

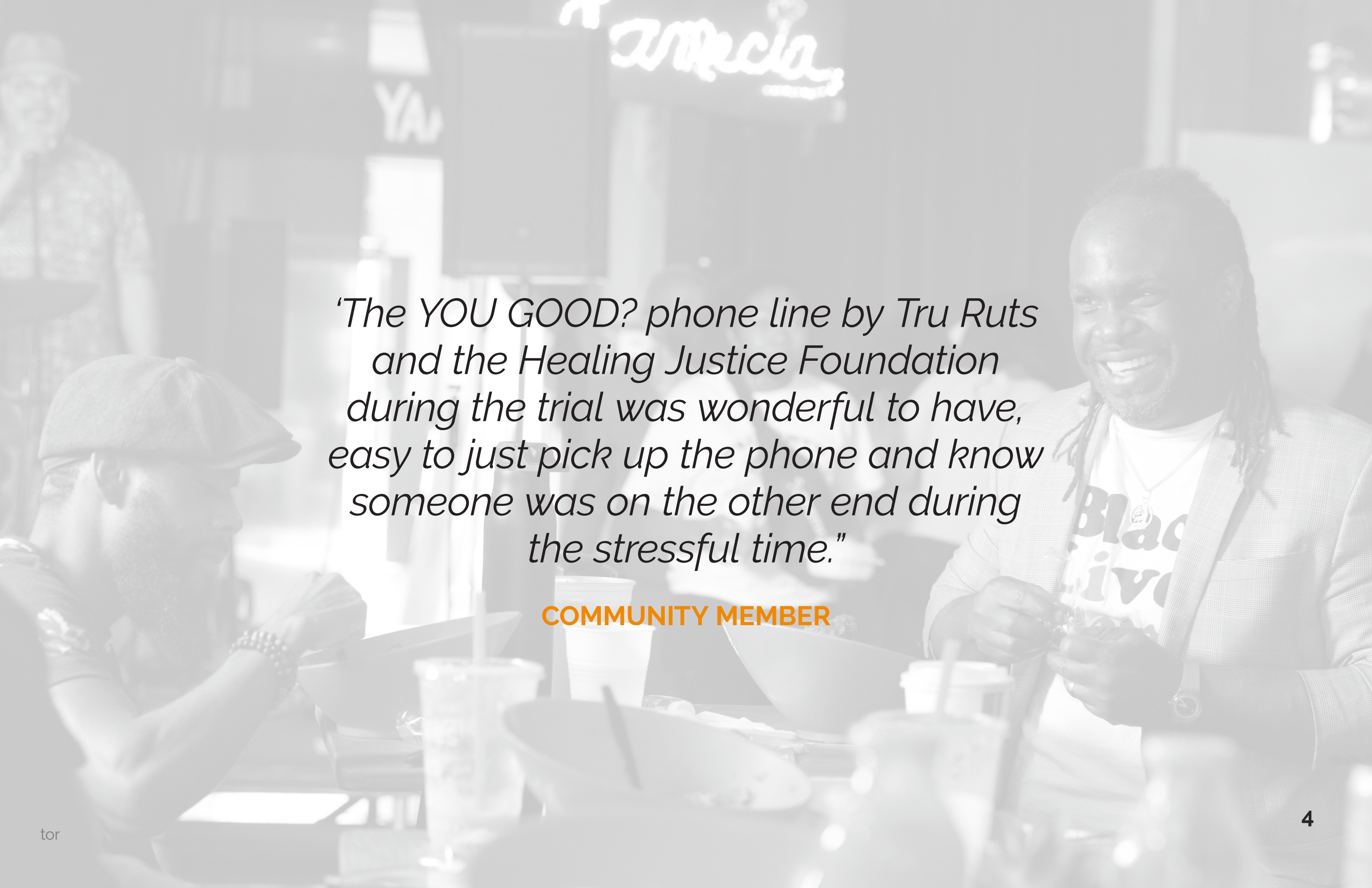
Convened by the community and co-chaired by Dr. Brittany Lewis of Research in Action (RIA) and Dr. Joi Lewis of Joi Unlimited, this work was spurred by the murder of Mr. George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD). This process is an opportunity for true radical re-imagining of what is possible within our collective efforts to advance racial justice.

Community stewards include Lulete Mola, Marcus Owens, D.A. Bullock, Hani Ali, T. Mychael Rambo, Tish Jones, Hassan As-Sidiq, Pastor Brian Heron, Leslie Redmond, Sha Cage, Nyemadi Dunbar, and Alex Steinman.

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

Time of Reckoning consists of five critical community healing and policy action engagements that aim to illustrate to the nation what community-centered policy change can look like. The first three sessions were structured like congressional hearings with the goal of developing tangible actions and bold visions for community wellbeing. The first forum, held in December 2020, focused on the experiences of Black women and girls. The second forum, held in February 2021, focused on the experiences of Black men and boys. The third forum, held in April 2021, focused on the experiences of the Black extended and chosen family.

We use healing justice as a framework for this project. In this context, healing is the process of making ourselves or becoming sound or whole again. In this work, we are healing from trauma through radical self-care. Healing justice is an evolving political framework shaped by economic and racial justice that re-centers the role of healing inside of liberation. It seeks to transform, intervene, and respond to generational trauma and violence in our movements, communities, and lives and to regenerate our traditions of liberatory and resiliency practices that have been lost (Page and Raffo, US Social Forum Detroit). Tru Ruts and The Healing Justice Foundation partnered to curate a calendar of virtual and in-person healing sessions March through June 2021, including during the Derek Chauvin trial. Events included TruArtSpeaks' Sunday dinner and a "YOU GOOD?" call-in line.




'The YOU GOOD? phone line by Tru Ruts and the Healing Justice Foundation during the trial was wonderful to have, easy to just pick up the phone and know someone was on the other end during the stressful time.'

COMMUNITY MEMBER

MAY 2021 BLACK FAMILY REUNION

The fourth Time of Reckoning event was a Black family reunion, held in May 2021 at Pimento Jamaican Kitchen. Roughly 30 participants reviewed recommendations from the first three forums and shared cross-generational dialogue about leadership and Black political power to come to the calls to action in this report. People could also tune in via livestream. The Facebook livestream received more than 200 views, with viewers sharing more than 150 comments.

The event harnessed the Black family reunion structure to generate collective, intergenerational wisdom for policy recommendations. As co-chair Dr. Brittany Lewis stated at the event, the Black family is the foundation and infrastructure of the wellbeing of all Black people. The building or destruction of the Black family determines whether the community is well or unwell. The Black family is the keeper of the flame and the curator of the past, present, and future—not only of Black people but all people. The Black family includes biological family, chosen family, and the many non-conforming shapes family can take beyond the confines of the gender binary. The Black family reunion is a cultural practice that has been used—especially in the U.S. by the descendants of enslaved people—to preserve family, community, and culture through reuniting and joy.

A woman with glasses and a white top is singing into a microphone on a stage. Her right hand is on the microphone, and her left hand is raised. The background is dimly lit with stage equipment and a large speaker on the right. The text is overlaid on the image.

“Black people have power. They are brave and have to rest.”

YOUTH

COMMUNITY ACTION AGENDA

Participants at this event completed a survey prioritizing calls for action. They chose their top three priorities within each of five areas. The most prioritized calls to action in each area are below.

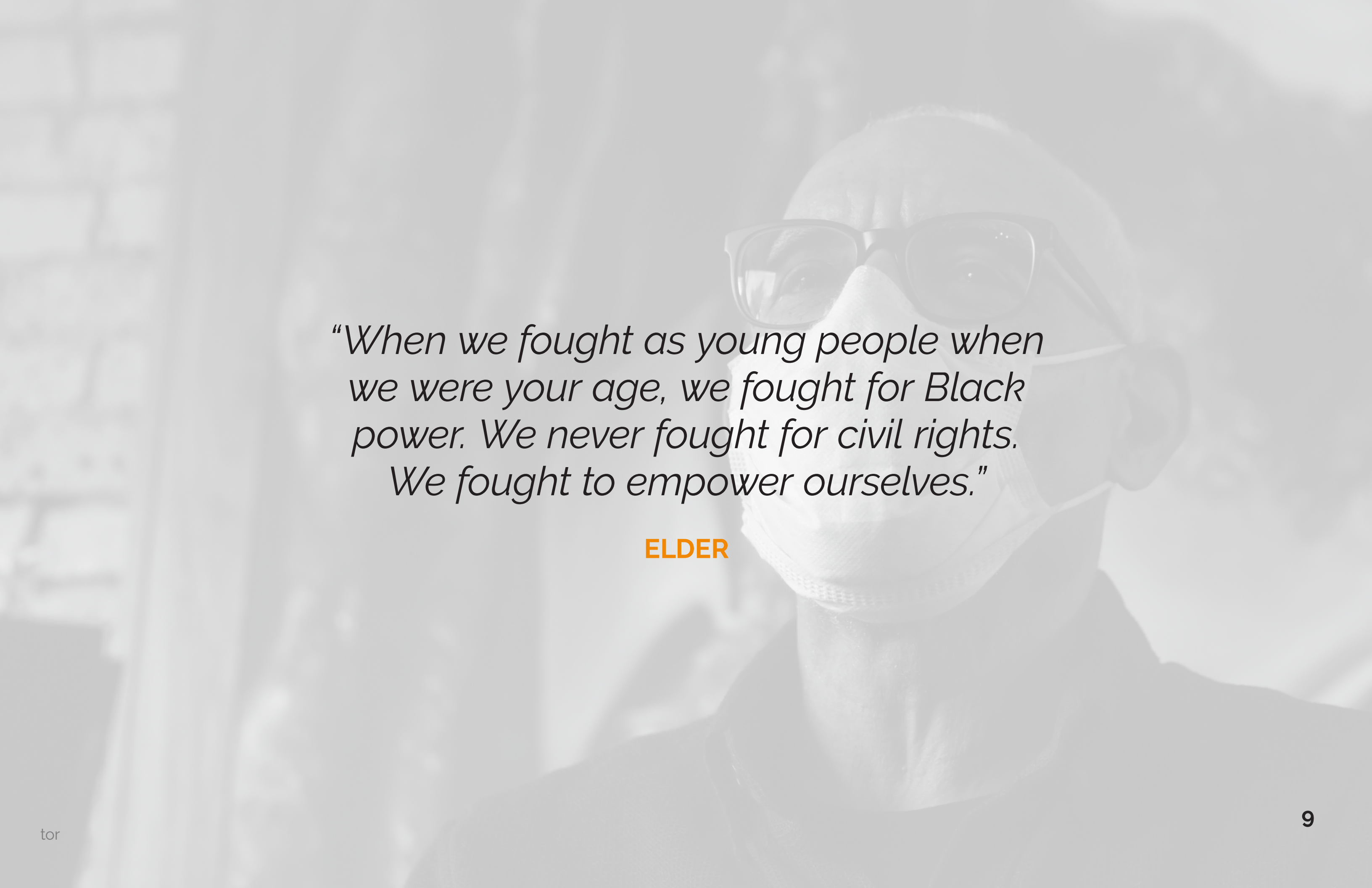
GIVE COMMUNITY CONTROL

Community control recommendations focus on having more individuals from the community in positions of political power, as well as ensuring community control of interventions and resources intended to benefit the community. Community members at the Black family reunion most frequently prioritized these community control recommendations:

1. Bring Black mentors into schools until there are more Black educators in the school system.
2. Reparations: Use reparations as a legal framework; this may include direct payments (lump sum and/or installments) or tax credits.
3. Education: Create private school systems we have full agency to lead and control; build school communities that are inclusive of, and benefit, Black people.

Additional recommendations, in order of frequency, were:

- Restore felon voting rights and support formerly incarcerated individuals to transition back to society.
- Create sovereign systems that are for us, by us and respect the humanity of Black people, such as housing.
- Require police to live in the community.
- Develop community models of public safety instead of the current policing.
- Organize advocacy coalitions for individuals to engage when needed.
- Safety: Pay people who are trained in anti-policing interventions/training as much as police are getting paid with benefits (beyond \$80,000/year).



“When we fought as young people when we were your age, we fought for Black power. We never fought for civil rights. We fought to empower ourselves.”

ELDER

INVEST

Invest recommendations call for rethinking how to invest in individuals and Black communities to support wealth development and access to meaningful resources. Underlying this investment is a reframing for asset-based, positive expectations about potential, rather than focusing on blame and criminalization. Community members at the Black family reunion most frequently prioritized these invest recommendations:

1. Youth programming: Provide youth with mentorship and resources so they feel supported and loved, like arts and crafts, sports, and other programming that youth want—so they are in environments where they can thrive.
2. Education: Host events at schools and in the community to encourage and support family involvement with children; commit to supporting the Page Amendment to the state constitution, which would provide all children with a civil right to quality public education; and invest in education practices and settings that work for Black youth, like building a pipeline of Black teachers and providing culturally grounded education focused on children's humanity.
3. Invest resources for brothers and sisters who have been incarcerated.

INVEST

Additional recommendations, in order of frequency, were:

- Housing-first programs and community safe houses for homeless youth.
- Equitable access to bank loans; support wealth development.
- Pass the African American Family Preservation Act, which aims to address the racial disparities that exist at every point of contact for Black families involved with Minnesota's child protection system.
- Police training: Invest in training and education for police.
- Develop a community space that nurtures dignity and pride in identity and culture.
- Legalize recreational cannabis nationwide, expunge records, and seek amnesty for those incarcerated for cannabis-related offenses.

Additionally, community members recommended investing in formalized training and capacity building for healers and healing spaces across the board. Healing justice needs to continue to be centered throughout policy change conversations rather than being an afterthought.

DIVEST

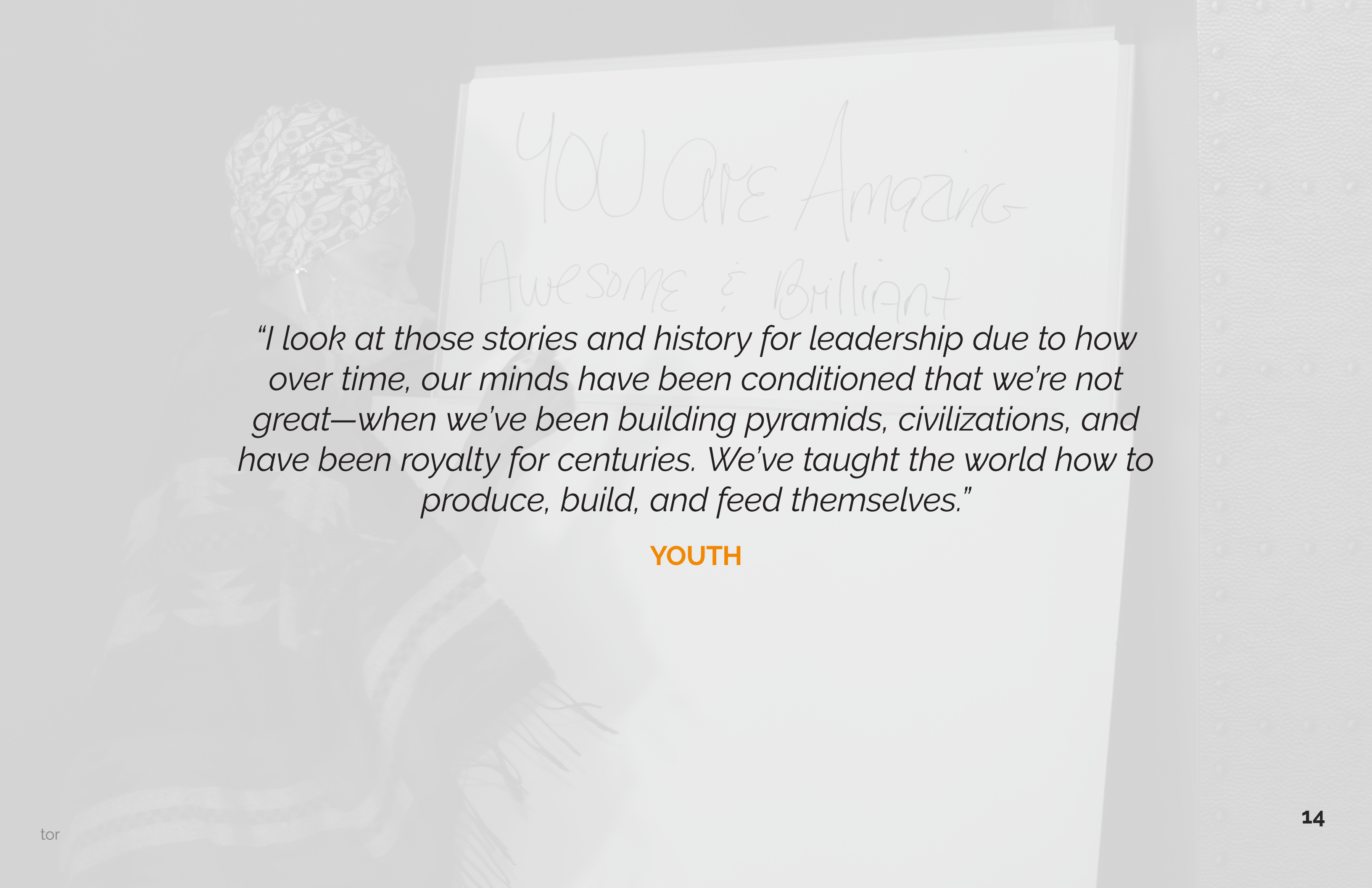
Divest recommendations call for moving resources away from policies that undermine healing and justice in the Black community. Community members at the Black family reunion most frequently prioritized these divest recommendations:

1. End traffic stops for minor equipment violations.
2. Shrink the footprint of policing and bring in the appropriate professionals, elders, and other experts to address issues in the community.
3. Invest money into families instead of foster care parents.

DIVEST

Additional recommendations, in order of frequency, were:

- End mandatory minimum sentencing laws for low-level offenses.
- End systems that break up families—like foster care and child protective services.
- Abolish the police and create different systems of safety; disband and deconstruct failed police departments.
- Change responses to protests to reroute money for policing back into community and to focus on de-escalation.
- Criminalize violence against protesters.
- Remove cops from schools.
- Demilitarize police departments.

A young girl wearing a patterned headscarf is holding a white sign with handwritten text. The background is a soft-focus image of her.

YOU ARE AMAZING
Awesome & Brilliant

"I look at those stories and history for leadership due to how over time, our minds have been conditioned that we're not great—when we've been building pyramids, civilizations, and have been royalty for centuries. We've taught the world how to produce, build, and feed themselves."

YOUTH

ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY


These recommendations relate to holding systems accountable for individual, family, and community outcomes; accountability should be at individual, organization, and system levels. Community members at the Black family reunion most frequently prioritized these recommendations:

1. Increase accountability for police officers and departments (bias assessments, remove federal/local immunity conditions, implement an officer “customer” service rating).
2. Officers should be liable for their actions, through their own insurance.
3. Stop paying salaries or pensions after police officer infractions.
4. Sue lending institutions for continued redlining or predatory lending practices.

ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY

Additional recommendations, in order of frequency, were:

- Launch federal investigations into police departments that use practices like arrest quotas.
- Require police to pay if they damage people's property.
- Ensure the Minnesota Department of Human Rights office is proactive, recognizing people's humanity rather than focused on compliance; protective and not reactive.
- Change engagement protocol for officers to follow with driver and occupants.
- Sue landlords for discrimination.
- Create/strengthen accountability measures for racial microaggressions and discrimination Black consumers experience (e.g., being followed in a store).
- Implement peer monitoring and reporting among police officers.
- Establish an independent agency to investigate police misuse of force.
- Extend the statute of limitation for discrimination and harassment from 7 to 10 years.
- Implement the post-fatality investigation toolkit.
- Ensure accountability of community organizations.
- Clarify how to file grievances with agencies.
- Do not deliver legal papers or court summons to street address after raids, as police raids are often grounds for eviction.



"If you don't feel empowered, you've gotta go to that grandmother or that person who made you feel important."

ELDER

GROUND IN HEALING JUSTICE


Healing justice recommendations recenter the role of healing inside of change to transform, intervene, and respond to generational trauma and violence in movements, communities, and lives (Page and Raffo, US Social Forum Detroit). Healing justice solutions relate to changing norms and providing physical space and programming for people to heal and thrive. Community members at the Black family reunion most frequently prioritized these healing justice recommendations:

1. Look beyond the “Strong Black Woman” trope and recognize the humanity and needs of Black women and girls.
2. Provide support and healing spaces within Black communities.
3. Programs that help Black men and boys increase their emotional and spiritual awareness, maintain mental health, and address historical and intergenerational trauma, like healthy masculinity workshops and mentorship programs for Black men and boys.

GROUND IN HEALING JUSTICE

Additional recommendations, in order of frequency, were:

- Stop the practice of isolating and segregating Black men and boys (in schools and in prisons); focus on healing sources of pain instead.
- Expand state health insurance to include healers like massage therapists, reiki workers, pastors, and ministers.
- Utilize data to help not punish.
- Decriminalize addiction.
- Provide spaces to talk to Black grandmothers and spaces to be heard.
- Reframe from blaming the individual to focusing on assets of the whole person (wraparound services) within programs and systems.
- Focus new systems on rehabilitation, nurturing, and support, as well as prevention rather than punishment.
- Destigmatize asking for help.
- Invite trusted “pillars of the community” to work through challenges.
- Pathways to receive culturally appropriate mental healthcare.
- Invite those not in need of help to go to these spaces to help others (peer healing).



“If we don't hear y'all thinking the way we thought, it's like what we did we did in vain. ... We need to be able to pass the baton, and you're supposed to take it—not wait for us to give it to you.”

ELDER

HIGHLIGHTS FROM SUNDAY DINNER

Community partner TruArtSpeaks hosted a Sunday Dinner preceding the family reunion. Sunday Dinner, a reoccurring program of TruArtSpeaks[1], serves as a cultural convening for Black Minnesotans centered around the practices of breaking bread and sharing a meal and kitchen table talk as expressions of both Black joy and a radical praxis of liberation rooted in Black/African ways of knowing. Held on May 23rd, 2021, just days before the Black Family Reunion, the Sunday Dinner served as a means of including more community voices in the necessary work of Time of Reckoning. Time of Reckoning provided support to TruArtSpeaks, partnering on the execution of that particular Sunday Dinner, which resulted in the following information.

CLERGY MEMBERS DISCUSSED HOW TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA.

They said gangs offer a sense of belonging and purpose and offer resources to families who are struggling. This led them to pose questions about how to protect children who just want to belong; hold violent offenders accountable and accept them even as they cause harm; and heal the trauma youth experience from experiencing and partaking in violence. "Collectively we have power," they said. "Love each other."

YOUNG PEOPLE DISCUSSED THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE AND A HEALING FOCUS.

The group discussed the distance between their bodies and their ancestral practices, particularly around healing and health maintenance. They said cultural rituals are vital for the vibrance and enrichment of the community. The young people also talked about hope, and said they find hope in remembering that healing has been genetically inscribed into the very essence of their beings. They called for creating environments that offer the grace and resources to allow them to be their natural selves. Youth shared additional hopes for Black unity and self-awareness to recognize they are in this together.

ARTISTS DISCUSSED HOPES, HIGHLIGHTS, AND SOLUTIONS.

They called for the art world to move away from Capitalist construction and toward reparations. They called for more Black people in positions of power in the art industry, such as on theater boards and in unions, and for taking care of artists with healthcare, appropriate pay, and strong contractual rights to their art. The artists discussed ways to build collective power—such as through organizing and advocating for themselves to make demands to large institutions or through elders mentoring younger artists on topics like contract negotiation. “We all get together and talk to each other—you can’t pull something over on the Black artists in Minnesota,” one artist said.

A FOURTH GROUP DISCUSSED THE ROLE OF THE CARCERAL SYSTEM.

The group discussed the need to reckon with the roots of the U.S. carceral system. “The carceral system is a racketeer that is kidnapping, extorting, and exploiting its Black citizens,” one person said. “And the state sanctions it.” The group discussed alternative ways to pay retribution that are more productive than being in prison. Regarding reform or abolition, one person stated, “We must work within the current system if we are not yet ready as a collective to send it all the way up.” The group also discussed the importance of supporting people returning to society after incarceration, including to heal from their trauma and recuperate from the growth and development that was lost during the incarcerated time. One person recommended supporting people for 2 years after release to reconnect them with integral relationships. The group also emphasized the importance of engaging the people most directly impacted in any similar discussions.



"I was taught leadership because we don't follow, we lead."

ELDER

REIMAGINING BLACK POLITICAL POWER

Black family reunion participants talked at tables about how to create sustainable Black political power. The below themes and areas of synergy emerged.

Participants called for **voting and holding elected officials accountable**. Some participants called for more education about voting and the political process. One person pointed to Kamala Harris' election as Vice President as an example—"She's proof that our votes do count." Participants noted that white leaders are not getting anything done. In addition to voting in more Black leaders, participants called for holding current elected officials accountable. One person said, "Pay attention now—hold their feet to the fire."

Other participants said the current political system is not working and called for **creating Black-centered and Black-led institutions, like a political party**. Participants discussed how the current system, including Democrats they have voted into power, is not leading to systemic changes. As one person said, "The current two-party system is not sustainable for the Black community as more issues and interests are prioritized outside of those that're Black-centered." Participants called for creating their own institutions if they cannot infiltrate current systems. One participant called generally to separate from white people, citing HBCUs as examples of how great Black leaders have come from environments that are separated from white people.



“Liberation is being free to move around, walk around, feel the world, like you’re on top of it.”

YOUTH

In developing this power, people must **acknowledge and leverage different types of power** and capital within the community, some participants said. They named social currency, physical currency, mental currency, individual and community skills, and food co-ops as examples of non-monetary capital. “We all have individual power within us even though we’re not politicians,” one person said. “We have done things on the ground and in our communities that can create and demand change.”

Similarly, participants called for **cultivating lineage and historical knowledge** to fulfill a need for self-knowledge and self-love. A young participant called for Black-centered schools, Black teachers, and Black therapists to free young people mentally so they can free themselves physically. “I don’t really know who I am past my grandparents,” this person said. “I think it’s really hard to build a legacy upon something that you don’t know that you have. It’s easier to be able to say who you can be if you know what you can do and what your past family and relatives could do and did.” Participants called for more culturally specific instruction in schools to learn the history of their people. “There are benefits to integration in schools, but we need space for culturally specific instruction and models of education to teach our history, our math, and our science,” one young person said.

Some participants recommended **securing sovereign land**. Citing the lack of systemic change within the U.S. government, some participants called for separating from it and working toward sovereignty. Participants shared examples of institutions and cities that have done this, such as a sovereign tribe in the State of Georgia. “When you have your own land, you make your own laws,” one person said. This recommendation can include cultivating the resources to support a sovereign nation to thrive, such as money and therapy.

One participant called for a **multifaceted reparations plan** that reflects the many forms of oppression and Black contributions to the country. Points in the plan could include money; acreage; free healthcare; tax exemption; and additional forms of reparations.

BOLD VISIONS FOR BLACK FUTURES

Participants at the reunion also shared ways to venture into bold visions for Black futures through community, policy, or other ways.

They responded:

- Buying Black!
- More Black Educators, healthcare workers, and therapists.
- Economic sharing and knowledge.
- Educate the youth and adults by building our own institutions.
- Defunding the police.
- Owning our own institutions.
- Sovereignty.
- Separate from main society.
- Decriminalize addiction.
- Legalize recreational cannabis, expunge records, and seek amnesty for those incarcerated for cannabis offenses.
- Pay people who are trained in anti-policing intervention.
- Strong ethics.
- Education.
- Deeper involvement.
- Criminal justice reform; all ex-felons be given all their rights after leaving prisons.
- Shrinking the footprint of policing.
- Provide spaces for youth to be heard.
- Reallocating police funds for more training.
- Provide Black youth with programs that educate.
- Look beyond the “The Strong Black woman” trope and recognize the humanity and needs of Black women and girls.
- Advocating for the youth.

Learn more about the work of TruArtSpeaks by visiting <https://www.truartspeaks.org/>

OUR TEAM

(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)

CO-CHAIRS

Dr. Joi Lewis
Dr. Brittany Lewis

CORE TEAM

Lulete Mola
Marcus Owens
Hassan As-Sidiq
Pastor Brian Herron
Leslie E. Redmond
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Tish Jones
Tomme Beevas

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OUR PARTNERS

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