



We who believe in social justice cannot rest

Friends,

We, as a nation, are standing at the crossroads of profound moral decisions. Over the past week we have borne witness to horrific images illuminating the deplorable injustices faced daily by African-Americans in the United States. Equally arresting have been the systemic and systematic injustices in healthcare, mass incarceration, housing, educational access, and socio-economic status illuminated by novel coronavirus, COVID-19, which has disproportionately infected and killed members of the Black community. We have all been witness to these injustices and now the task of seeking remedy belongs to each of us.

None of us is untouched by these tragedies, nor have the treasures of our City escaped unscathed. A symbol of pride recognizing the contributions of Black Americans' service to this country, the Shaw 54th Regiment Memorial located in the Boston Common has been defaced. Instances of vandalism such as this are designed to create rifts in the community and stymie our work. However, our historic buildings, collections, and programs continue to expand cultural understanding and promote dignity and respect for all. One of these, the African Meeting House, has served as a gathering place for those in search of freedom, justice, and equality since 1806.

The Museum of African American History as a whole continues its legacy of living these maxims and its mission to inspire all generations to embrace and interpret the authentic stories of New Englanders of African descent, and those who found common cause with them, in their quest for freedom and justice. We stand with freedom fighters in Boston and beyond and are invested in serving as a voice to promote justice in the tradition of Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, William Lloyd Garrison, and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin - the civil rights leader instrumental in recruiting soldiers for the 54th Regiment.

In the upcoming weeks the Museum will be hosting a Town Hall with City Officials to determine how we can continue to serve as an anchor, incubator, and resource supporting and enriching the vibrancy and creativity of our community, as we have for decades.

We will continue to amplify the voices of the marginalized. We will continue our work of lifting the narratives of those who have been silenced by racism. We will not waver in our dedication to fighting for justice for all through innovation, and ingenuity, joining our many talents and strengths.

During this time I am reminded of the work of the great Ella Baker, architect of the Civil Rights Movement. Though Ms. Baker's work went unheralded and in the shadows during her lifetime, it is on her tireless efforts that The March on Washington, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and the NAACP's Freedom Movement were built. Without Ella Baker there would be no Civil Rights Movement. Without African-Americans there would be no America. Though we, too, have been silenced and disregarded we must press forward in the spirit of Baker's famous words "we who believe in freedom cannot rest." We are in a moment of pivotal opportunity to continue the freedom work of those who have come before us.

Together we unite to decry not only violence, inequity, and systemic injustice against Black people in this country, but for the entirety of mankind, here in Boston, across our nation, and around the world. The gospel group Sweet Honey in the Rock's tribute to Ella Baker, titled simply "Ella's Song" extends her quote to "we who believe in freedom cannot rest - until it comes." Freedom from injustice will indeed come and I invite each of you to join us in this fight and in this song as we work toward our ultimate goal of achieving true liberty and justice for all.

In Unity,

Leon Wilson, President and CEO