

Black Resistance
Executive Summary (2023)
(DRAFT 2: 4/4/2022)

Black Resistance to oppression is ubiquitous and perennial. African Americans have resisted historic and ongoing oppression, in all forms, especially the racial terrorism of lynching, racial pogroms, and police killings since our arrival upon these shores. These efforts were to advocate for a dignified self-determined life in a just democratic society, here or beyond the United States political jurisdiction. Black people have had to consistently push the United States to live up to its ideals of freedom, liberty, and justice for all. Systematic oppression has sought to negate much of the dreams our griots, like Langston Hughes, and our freedom fighters, like the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. fought to realize.

Our struggles have entailed efforts to build viable communities and to create strong families. These actions have led Black people to construct autonomous institutions, such as churches (i.e. African Methodist Episcopal), media/newspapers (i.e. *Chicago Defender*, *Chicago Bee*, *the Afro*, *The California Eagle*, *Omaha Star*, etc.), businesses (i.e. Binga Bank, Johnson Publishing Company, Parker House Sausage Company, Soft and Sheen, etc.), colleges/universities/schools (i.e. Howard University, Lincoln University, Spelman, Morehouse, etc.), libraries (i.e. George Cleveland Hall Library (Chicago, IL), Dart Hall (Charleston, SC), etc.) cultural heritage sites, clubs (i.e. Jack and Jill, Phillis Wheatley Literary Societies, etc.), labor unions (i.e. Colored National Labor Union, Colored Musicians Club, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Negro American Labor Council, etc.), hospitals, associations (i.e. Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, National Council of Colored Women's Clubs, etc.), fraternal and sororal orders (i.e. the Divine Nine) that lead social movements that lobby, litigate, legislate, and protest.

Black people have advocated for ways to nurture and protect Black lives, and for autonomy of their physical and intellectual bodies through armed resistance, nonviolence, education, literature, media, and legislation/politics.

We fought back with arms in Memphis, TN and New Orleans, LA. Henry Adams and Benjamin "Pap" Singleton led a mass exodus westward in 1879 and Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church organized emigration to Liberia. Ida B. Wells contested the scourge of lynching. Robert Charles defended himself in 1900 New Orleans and the people of Rosewood, Florida (1923) used arms to defend their lives and the prosperous community they had built from the ravages of murderous white mobs. The 1960s and 1970s in the United States was defined by actions such as sit-ins, boycotts, walk outs, strikes by Black people and white allies in the fight for justice against discrimination in all sectors of society from employment to education to housing. Those who were fluent with the writing and

photography took to poetry, fiction, short stories, plays, films, and television to counter stereotypes and to imagine a present and future with Black people in it.

Historically and today in the 21st century, Black people have worked the political angle to seek their rightful space in the country. **Where race is concerned, legislative or judicial action to deal with controversial issues has often come late.** The historic Executive Orders 8802 and 9346 were responses to A. Phillip Randolph and the all-Black March on Washington Movement's threat to lead a 50,000-strong Black worker's march into Washington, D.C. And all three of the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act and the Fair Housing Act were concessions to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Every advance, improvement in our quality of life and access to the levers of power to determine our destiny has been achieved through struggle. **John Lewis advised us "Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."**

From the narratives of the enslaved, such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Wilson, **to testimonials about lynchings and ongoing police** violence against African Americans has shaped the recent history of African Americans in the 21st century. With the murders of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Breonna Taylor, and thousands of other Black women, men, and transpeople we see new movements (i.e. #Sayhername) and organizations (i.e. Black Lives Matter) that are pushing for the justice system to investigate police involved shootings and white supremacist vigilantes. Nearly 179 years ago, the Rev. Henry Highland Garnett proposed that the only path to freedom, justice, and equality; self-determination; and/or social transformation is resistance. In thunder tones, Garnett shouted, "Let your motto be resistance! resistance! RESISTANCE!"

As forces escalate to limit access to and exercise of the ballot, target for elimination the teaching of Black history, and work to push us back into 1890s, we can only rely on our capacity to resist. The enactment of HR 40, the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, the Breathe Act, and the closure of the racial wealth gap is not the end. They too will require us to mobilize our resources, human and material, and fight for "freedom, justice, and equality"; "self-determination", and/or "social transformation".

This is a call to everyone, inside and outside the academy, to study the history of Black Americans' responses to establish safe spaces, where Black life can be sustained, fortified, and respected.