



FROM JAIL CELLS TO JOBS: COMMUNITY FINDS SOLUTIONS



Community Members Creating the Change They Wish to See in the World:

Will Dun grew up in a housing project near Nubian Square in Roxbury. It is safe to say that he faced many challenges in his youth as he ended up dropping out of school, joining a gang, and was in and out of the prison system. A particularly heavy blow came when he was tried and convicted (as an adult) for a term of 5 years for his role in a double murder.

While incarcerated Will met Chris Womack. Womack, Dun's longtime mentor, was then a part of the TenPoint Coalition and met him via the group of Black ministers and organizers that called for change regarding current practices to prevent violence in communities. Together they recruited several formerly incarcerated people for a security team that patrol and look out for community welfare in Nubian Square as well as the surrounding community. A nonprofit, Nubian Square Foundation pays them a \$20/hr salary for their work via a grant from David Mayo, the director of the city's Office of Returning Citizens.

Efforts like these are needed due for several reasons. Formerly incarcerated folks often find that it is near impossible to find any kind of accessible employment due to their records, as well as discrepancies in job skills and resumes due to time served. One of the largest factors in recidivism rates is the ability for folks to find employment. When a system punishes people for life by stripping them of everything they need for social cohesion, it is no wonder that folks turn to illegal means of gaining income and deviant behaviors to survive. Employing formerly incarcerated people is a matter of equity and community welfare that is often overlooked.



BLACK JOY DAY: SEPTEMBER 12

City Officially Recognizes Black Joy Day

This month Boston recognized September 12th as Black Joy Day. This comes after a constant barrage of heartbreaking, but important, news bringing awareness to all of the injustices happening all around us. Some folks feel that the news of police brutality and state sanctioned murders by police and racist entities is overwhelming. What these privileged folks constantly miss is that to live under the conditions that cause you anxiety to even hear about, is even more overwhelming. Black and Brown people live their entire lives under these oppressive systems, and cannot simply forget about them by turning off the TV.

Yet, it is also important to showcase our triumphs in the face of adversity. It is important to celebrate our resilience and and persistence to this day. The celebration of Black Joy is one way that some communities are doing this. Boston organizer Thaddeus Miles created the Black Joy Project. While being recognized by Councilor Mejia during the city counsel meeting, he stated "I want to thank you for taking the time to recognize and for voting on having Black Joy Day for the past three years,". He went on to say, "You are my Kings and Queens before you are Council members. I understand, and I am with you every step. I understand the storm, and it is nice to see you are still moving forward as we as a collective move forward. This is about us. This is about all of us.".

Some of the activities and events that are taking place during Black Joy Day 2023 include discussion panels on Black empowerment and Black issues, Tai Chi, poetry readings, spoken word, music, youth voices, Black Men Unity Moment, and much more.

The Institute of Contemporary Art Boston will also be hosting an event in partnership with Thaddeus Miles just preceding Black Joy Day. The FREE weekend of events will take place September 9-10th and will feature performances by local talents, including DJ WhySham, Eph See, and Amandi Music, as well as discussions on restorative justice, and empowering our communities.

We hope to see more events like these soon, especially when founded and organized by grassroots community leaders. Those that live among a community know best what that community needs. This includes organizing an engaging, enjoyable, and memorable event to celebrate Black Joy.



CANNABIS AND EQUITY



As Black Cannabis Week concludes, many ask what is “equitable distribution” of licenses?

This August was Boston’s first ever Black Cannabis Week. The events were designed to highlight glaring inequality in the legal cannabis industry. Often times, we hear from folks that oppression and discrimination are no longer as prevalent as they have been throughout this country’s history. However, nearly every statistic on the measures of equity in the cannabis industry show the opposite.

Black and Brown people were extremely over represented in both marijuana charges as well as convictions across all 50 states. Black and Brown people were given harsher sentences across the board as well. Meanwhile, data showed that marijuana use rates were similar across Black and White people. The discrepancies in incarceration rates are due to higher rates of policing of Black and Brown communities, racial profiling, and a number of other systematic institutional flaws.

When marijuana was legalized in several states, after years of advocacy and work from community organizers, some states and cities created legislation to ensure that those that were most impacted by incarceration for marijuana charges were given access to this industry first. Black and Brown people should be at the forefront of this industry, yet the typical image of cannabis entrepreneur is a white man. How did the face of the “industry” change overnight despite the former image being poor Black and Brown people when Marijuana was illegal?

Despite the legislation around equitable practices, the cannabis industry is anything but equitable. In Brookline alone, none of the several marijuana licenses have been given to Black or Brown people despite several qualified applications. Materials were even distributed to fear monger about the Town being “taken over” by marijuana and the effects this could have on Brookline’s children when locals were calling for the next license to be awarded to a Black or Brown person. No such concerns were raised when another cannabis dispensary opened mere meters from a childcare facility.



DEAD IN THE WATER: A TOWN STAND STILL

As September Concludes, Brookline Residents are Left with More Questions than Answers

Brookline Town Administrator, Chas Casey, announced that the Town would be launching an investigation into the non-profit organization, Black N Brown Club, also known as BNBC, due to allegations of discrimination. At the at the July 25, 2023 Select Board meeting, Chas also announced that the Suffolk University Center for Restorative Justice would be involved in addressing the concerns brought up in Warrant Article 19. These concerns being, a sense from members of the community that they are not being heard, that the mechanisms in the town do not address their needs, that there is no meaningful avenue or venue for black and brown people to be heard and be involved in policy that impacts us, and that these principles are critically important for our community to engage with and grapple with. Chas said that it is important for the town to engage with folks that brought up this warrant article and hopes that Suffolk will take a more holistic approach to address the underlying problems this article brings up as well as identifying and engaging community stakeholders. Finally, he referenced upcoming meetings with CDCIR as well as Town Counsel.

As September comes to an end, the Black and Brown community is left with even more questions than before. If this is an issue that the Town cares about so much, why have we not been given more updates? Why did we hear at recent Select Board Meetings that impacted parties have not heard from the investigator nor Suffolk County Center for Restorative Justice? What can Black and Brown residents expect going forward? How can Town governance expect Black and Brown people to trust that they have our best intentions with all of the evidence to the contrary?

