



***Black Lives Matter Philly Statement Regarding April's Open Meeting
4.5.2017***

During the last 36 hours, Black Lives Matter Philly (BLM Philly) has been attacked online and the subject of several right-wing media articles about our April open meeting invitation that states it is a Black only space. This is not the first time we have received backlash and threats in relation to how we organize. Let us be clear now. We are unapologetically Black and believe having Black only spaces—where Black people can come together to strategize, organize, heal and fellowship without the threat of violence and co-optation—is an important part of Black liberation.

BLM Philly is a Black-centered organization that collaborates with partners to build a politically and economically empowered, healthy, and whole Black community with the ultimate goal of building power and liberation for all Black people. As a chapter, BLM Philly believes in self determination and organizes in that manner. Most associated with the teachings of Marcus Garvey, Kwame Ture, aka Stokely Carmichael, and Malcolm X, self determination says that we, Black people, are in the best position to define and create our own plan and path towards freedom and liberation based upon our own unique experiences as Black people in the United States. Simply put, we don't need or want others to define what it means for a Black person to be free and liberated in the U.S. We know that. We've determined that.

To the extent that we want the contributions of others, it is to help us reach this collectively determined goal. Not being able to attend a BLM Philly meeting does not preclude anyone from supporting BLM Philly or the Movement for Black Lives. As an organization that promotes and collaborates with a variety of different organizations across the city, we invite people from all races and backgrounds to join in the Movement for Black Lives. Currently, we have hundreds of supporters, who help us run online campaigns, raise awareness about issues impacting Philadelphians, and donate goods and services that many take for granted, but help make life easier for the most marginalized among us.

Supporting Black liberation doesn't stop and end at one's ability to gain access to a certain space. It is about taking leadership and direction from Black people that outline tangible ways to support their struggle for liberation. It means standing up against white supremacy and racism in

all areas, not just in a meeting with Black folks in the hopes that you will get a medal for showing up and being required to do nothing more.

Fighting alongside Black people for Black liberation means confronting racist and xenophobic actions in spaces where you have access and privilege. It means showing up for victims of police shootings AND missing Black women and girls AND Black Trans women. It means fighting for thorough legislative policy, supporting boycotts, and more, for better wages, quality housing and health access, which all disproportionately impact Black people. It means creating opportunities, within your own circles where access for Black people is systematically denied, for Black people to grow and lead. When was the last time you demanded access for Black people in your corporate boardroom or on your leadership team?

Supporting the goals of Black liberation does not mean that you get to attend our sacred meeting places because of being self-diagnosed as “good natured.” That good nature, the willingness to fight for ALL Black lives, should be more than just a hashtag in your profile. It should be a lifestyle, a way of being. Demanding access to spaces where Black people have stated that, for the health and safety of their members, they do not want you in that space, but encourage and invite you to join other spaces, isn’t being good natured. It’s upholding the idea that Black people cannot do for themselves, must be constantly monitored, and that everyone should have access to our spaces and bodies. In other words, demanding access to Black spaces means still believing that we are property of the state and exist to serve and uphold the needs of others.

BLM Philly isn’t the first or the only membership organization to restrict access to certain spaces based on a variety of criteria. There are religious ceremonies and events that people cannot attend unless they are a member of that faith. There is a huge difference between a systematic denial of a person’s access to public spaces such as restaurants, hotels, schools and hospitals simply based on their skin color, and saying that a meeting is a Black-centered space. Trying to compare legal segregation and structural racism to lack of access to our meetings is a false dichotomy and the epitome of privilege.

We value the lives of ALL Black bodies/people and will continue to engage in this work, unbothered, unashamed and unapologetic about how we choose to value our lives.

Signed,
Black Lives Matter Philly