



GUILFORD EDUCATION ALLIANCE

We have been writing to you in this space with what we call our "organizational" voice. It is one crafted in tone and content by me – Winston McGregor, GEA's Executive Director -- and our Communications Director, Karen Hornfeck. It is informed by the vision, strategy and tone charted by our Board of Directors and the many voices engaged in our alliance. We have viewed this as a platform not to speak FOR our alliance, but rather to speak TO you.

This profound cultural moment of protests led by the Black Lives Matter movement demands that we wrestle with entrenched inequities and structural racism and calls us to reflect on the voice we use to speak to you.

It compels us to lift up more individual voices in our alliance - voices that can and will guide and contribute to our learning and strategies to take action.

We begin this with Tahjma VanBuren, GEA Program and Volunteer Manager. Tahjma started at GEA as an intern during her senior year at UNCG. She quickly became a contributor to our team and when her internship ended she began part-time work with us in her final semester. When Tahjma graduated, she joined our staff full-time in a junior position. 18 months ago, Tahjma moved up into her current role. She also owns her own small business, *Emerging Black Professionals*. Tahjma will be working with Karen and our volunteer Program Leadership Team to amplify other voices from our alliance as we move forward.

We will also continue to speak to you with our GEA voice, to share data, stories and resources to equip you to engage and act. We are grateful for your work and support. We need you now and will continue to need you. As Tahjma writes, "There is work to be done."



Voices of the Alliance: Tahjma VanBuren

The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Rayshard Brooks and so many others are horrifying. Yet, they have come as no surprise in any shape or form.

Black people have been being murdered for centuries with no firm answer to our cries for humanity and justice. The Black Lives Matter movement started in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin. He was killed by George Zimmerman, a man on neighborhood watch. This year's resurgence of the movement was in direct response to the murder of George Floyd. Before George, there was Ahmaud Arbery's murder. He was killed not by a police officer, but rather by two white men that felt entitled to his life. I bring Trayvon Martin and Ahmaud Arbery up because while all of the information we are reading about focuses on police brutality, it is critical to note that this is bigger than law enforcement. While the current protests are about literal bodies in the street, this is bigger than a skewed justice system.

This is about the Black lives that matter - in toxic work spaces, underfunded schools, segregated neighborhoods, inequitable food distribution, obstacles to business ownership, financial security, inadequate health care services, and a history that is told from "the winners" perspective.

We couldn't breathe well before our interactions with law enforcement. There are teachers killing the spirit of Black children by telling them what they can't do. There are business owners having to explain why they are in their own storefront after hours. Grown Black women are terrified to go to the doctor alone because we are being given treatments that we don't need or not given the ones that we do need. Black life is being compromised from all sides.

We are raised to do well and aspire to excellence. We are also raised to be aware of how our Black life can be seen as a threat no matter what we are doing. We have been fighting for the same thing for almost 400 years now. From revolts during slavery, the civil war, the reconstruction era, the civil rights movement, and now Black Lives Matter.

The "ask" is always the same - for the life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

This is nothing new. Similarly, White people's thoughts and prayers are nothing new. The shares and retweets of Black grief, calls to check in on your Black friend's emotional well-being, online scripture references of hope, book clubs and reading lists to learn about Blackness - it's all been done before. It's a great way to start, but it's not new nor enough.

What is needed right now are tangible actions in the right direction.

1. Vote for the people that not only benefit the well being of your direct community, but for those that extend further than your district.
2. Examine your work teams to see if you've tokenized the one Black person on staff.
3. Make monetary shifts to aid in the Black businesses that work to serve their own communities.
4. Hold elected officials accountable.
5. Lean into raw conversations about racism that lead to action.
6. Most of all, the real work begins when you dig deep within yourself to understand why you have allowed covert and overt racism to persist in your presence.

I love my people abundantly. We have come so far. Now, we take time to grieve and then get right back up and keep fighting with more strategy and hope.

There is work to be done.