

# AN OPEN LETTER ON THE REMOVAL OF THE STATUE OF THE BLM PROTESTER IN BRISTOL



*\*Sankofa is a word from the Ghanaian Twi language meaning “Go back and get it”. The Sankofa is linked to the African proverb “Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi,” which translates as: “It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten.”*

Thursday, 16 July 2020

In the news today is a story regarding the removal of a sculpture of a Black Lives Matter protester, made by artist Marc Quinn. The sculpture was erected on the plinth where a statue of slave trader Edward Colston once stood before it was torn down. We are also aware of a suggestion for a slavery memorial by the artist Banksy, we appreciate both Marc Quinn and Banksy for using their platforms to raise the profile of this issue and keep the story alive. However, there is a danger of repeating the mistakes that have led us to this position in the first place by having things once again done for the Black community rather than with the Black community. So we wish to offer some advice to our friends/allies and those who have recently become active in this fight.

## DO YOUR RESEARCH

There are many Black-led organisations that have been fighting this battle consistently and relentlessly and often alone for years, before the world ‘woke’ up. Because of systemic and structural racism you will not have heard of most of us, as all the large media outlets refuse to report on our work, the government and local councils refuse to work with us or appropriate our ideas/work and the funding institutions consistently refuse to fund or simply underfund Black-led organisations.

But nonetheless we are there, and a little research will bring us up on your radar. For instance if you put the words ‘slavery remembrance’ into Google, our website comes up first and if you visit that site you will see that we are a Black-led organisation, which made history in 2016 by hosting **Sankofa Day**, the first ever memorial in London's Trafalgar Square to remember and honour our ancestors and mark UNESCO's International Day for the Remembrance

of the Slave Trade and its Abolition. We have consistently held **Sankofa Day** every year since, without funding and largely ignored by the British media. **Sankofa Day** welcomes all regardless of race, ethnicity or skin colour and is the first steps of the truth and healing process for this painful piece of shared history.

You will also see on the website that back in June we launched a petition to bring our **Sankofa Legacy Trail**, which we have been trying to get support for for several years, into reality. The **Sankofa Legacy Trail** would see all statues and monuments linked to slavery replaced with the **Remembrance Sankofa**, a symbol remembering and honouring the victims, whose literal blood, sweat and tears helped to build this country, and to have the **Remembrance Sankofa** as the next installation on Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth.

At the time of launching our petition we sent out a press release to several large (and small) media outlets but, unsurprisingly, it went ignored, we also tried to promote the petition on Facebook and Instagram, but Facebook (who also owns Instagram) blocked it, just as they are blocking our page name change, these are some of the examples of the systemic/institutional and structural racism we referred to earlier, this means that the petition has received low visibility.

Our organisation sits on the advisory board for the London City Hall Slavery Remembrance event. We have also recently announced the **Slavery Remembrance International REPAIRations Summit on Truth, Justice & Healing**, which is being delivered in partnership with the **Black Cultural Archives** and **Ligali** two other amazing longstanding Black-led organisations. We launched a Gofundme to help in delivering this, but again this too has seen little traction.

## **SUPPORT THE BLACK-LED ORGANISATIONS**

This letter is not in chastisement of what allies such as Marc Quinn and Banksy have done or said or to those who have recently become active, it is offered as advice to them and the millions of others out there demanding to see change. To ensure this change takes place we must ensure we do not repeat the same mistakes, please look for and work with the Black-led organisations who have been fighting this battle tirelessly and often alone, before the world 'woke' up as we will still be here fighting when the world goes back to sleep. Look for the underfunded ones as they are usually the real change makers.

Sincerely

**Shezal Laing**

Founder, Slavery Remembrance