



Black History Month 2021 Acknowledging History and Working Towards Racial Justice

February marks Black History Month in the United States, an annual observance where we take time to remember the important people, events and achievements of Black communities and their critical role in shaping the world as we know it today. For INPUD it is also an opportunity to celebrate the enormous contributions of Black peers and communities who are engaging in critical work to improve the health and wellbeing of people who use drugs everywhere.

We also acknowledge that although progress has been made, we still live in a society where systemic and societal racism perpetuates an immense amount of harm and violence onto Black communities. The prohibition of drugs has always been rooted in anti-Blackness, anti-Otherism and xenophobia. Historically the criminalisation of drugs in the United States has followed the legacy of Jim Crow laws, segregation and other laws perpetuating systemic racism against Black communities. The impacts of this are still felt today. According to the [Drug Policy Alliance](#), nearly 80% of people incarcerated for drug offenses in US federal prisons and almost 60% of people in state prisons are Black or Latin American. Research shows prosecutors in the US are twice as likely to pursue a higher sentence for a drug crime if the person arrested is Black than if the person arrested is white. One in 13 Black people of voting age in the US are denied the right to vote because of felony disenfranchisement laws, and one in nine Black children has an incarcerated parent.

In 2020 the Black Lives Matter movement experienced a meteoric and global rise following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many others at the hands of the police. In the case of Breonna Taylor, police cited enforcing drug prohibition for the reason her home was being monitored in the first place, resulting in the police raid which led to her death. For George Floyd, Walter Wallace, and many other Black men who have been murdered by police, their history of drug use is weaponised against them in the media to devalue their lives, justify law enforcement brutality and attempt to erase accountability.

For INPUD and other drug user advocates, Black History Month is a moment to evaluate the impact of our work in the context of the movement for Black lives. We continue to be dedicated to the daily work necessary to end systemic racism and oppression of Black communities worldwide. This month we are asking all members, supporters and allies to take time and reflect on how your work is contributing to true racial equity; not just in the United States but all over the world. Racial justice starts with holding ourselves and each other accountable for our words and actions. Below are several Black-led community organisations in the United States doing incredible work to confront systemic racism. Please take the time to educate yourself on what they are doing and how these themes can be incorporated into existing advocacy work.





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VOCAL-NY: building power among low-income people in New York City affected by the drug war, HIV, mass incarceration, and homelessness.

The Bail Project: combatting mass incarceration by disrupting and ending the cash bail system in defiance of a system that criminalizes race and poverty.

Black Girls Code: increasing the number of women of color in the digital space by empowering girls of color to become innovators in STEM fields and community leaders.

#BlackLivesMatter: the flagship global movement for fighting to eradicate white supremacy by building community power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state.

Black AIDS Initiative: working to stop the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Black communities by engaging and mobilizing Black institutions and individuals in efforts to confront HIV.

Black Alliance for Just Immigration: educating and engaging Black immigrant communities to organize and advocate for racial, social and economic justice.

Black Feminist Future: carrying the legacy of Black feminist organizers seeking to amplify and support the leadership of Black women across the country.

Color of Change: the largest online racial justice organization in the US working to move decision-makers in corporations and government to create a more humane world for Black people.

Equal Justice Initiative: providing legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced or abused while incarcerated, and advocating for the abolition of the death penalty.

National Black Justice Coalition: dedicated to the empowerment of Black LGBTQ+/SGL people, including people living with HIV/AIDS, through advocacy and combatting stigma.

Reclaim the Block: Organizing around policies that strengthen community-led safety initiatives and reduce reliance on police departments.

Southern Poverty Law Center: working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements and advance the human rights of all people.

Trans Women of Color Collective: uplifting the narratives, leadership and lived experiences of trans people of color while building towards the collective liberation of all oppressed people.