Project title: The National Black Action Plan
County: United States  
Sponsoring College: Brandeis University
Designated project leaders: Sonali Anderson & DeBorah Ault
Project execution dates: May 31 - August 6

Brandeis University ~ Final Report Cover Sheet

Name: Sonali Anderson     DeBorah Ault
Email: Anderson: sonalianderson@brandeis.edu Ault: deborahault@brandeis.edu
Mailbox #: Anderson: 2171     Ault: 1656
Phone Number: Anderson: 770-656-0054     Ault: 770-256-6853

Local Address: Anderson & Ault: 415 South Street Waltham MA, 02453

Hometown City, State, & Country: Anderson: 420 Emerald Lake Drive GA, 30215 Ault: 1027 Texel Lane Clarkston GA, 30021

Major(s): Anderson: Business & Environmental Studies     Ault: Business & Education
Minor(s): Anderson: Spanish     Ault: N/A    GPA: Anderson: 3.49     Ault: 3.38
Expected Graduation Month and Year: Anderson & Ault: May 2022

Project Location: Virtual

Working Title of Project and Short Description: The National Black Action Plan

One Brandeis proposal will be funded by the Davis Foundation, with an additional proposal possibly eligible for funding as well.
The intention of The National Black Action Plan was to share strategies that students and business professionals could use to make systemic changes in their organization to dismantle systems of racism. We also hoped to build a community of transformational leaders who could support one another as each leader worked to make changes in the communities to which they belong.

The inspiration for this project took place after the world witnessed the devastating murders of George Floyd, Brionna Taylor, and countless others. The feeling of complete devastation and the sight of worldwide pain inspired us to take action against systemic racism in a community we had influence over because while we could not change all of the acts of racism globally, we were led to the idea that if each person could change the community, they were apart of then we could change the entire world. As a result, we found that our college campus was a perfect place to start making a difference, and this realization marked the beginning of the Black Action Plan. While executing the Black Action Plan we began to understand that the framework that we were utilizing to make a difference on our campus could be shared with other people who wanted to make a change in their community and would benefit from having a framework to reference to make that change. As a result, we decided that we would teach our framework to others who would be able to tailor our approach to their specific community and this was the start of the National Black Action Plan.

The National Black Action Plan is a direct response to institutional racism because we believe that structures of racism enable individuals to take acts of racism without proper recompense being mandatory to both correct the harm caused and prevent such harm or similar harm to occur again. I think systemic racism exist because when the pillars of our county were being formed, they were formed by people who thought they were superior to other people, and they failed to recognize the value that each and ever life has. As a result, their beliefs transcended their thought and became their actions and ultimately became the pillars which our country has stood on since its inception. Due to the denial of this belief the issue of racism continues to exist in every part of our lives, advantaging the powerful and disadvantage the powerless oftentimes along racial color lines. Therefore, these beliefs have become laden in all the structures and communities that we are currently familiar with and only with continuous social critique and accountability will these structures change.

Given the nature of our project we thought it would be most fitting to execute our work in the United States given that this is the racial context that we were most familiar with. Additionally, we felt that many individuals in the United States were beginning to acknowledge the existence of racism in the country and many individuals with power are also willing to begin to take action to dismantle these structures and this was the perfect opportunity for change. We choose to hold our project virtually to maximize our reach and to be cautions of the ever-evolving state of COVID-19.

Working in the United States was familial since we are from the United States but working on our project online was both rewarding and challenging. Being able to meet easily with people from so many different backgrounds was extremely rewarding but at times it was tiring to constantly communicate digitally. Online communication also made it challenging to build close relationships at times.

Due to these hurdles, the course of our project’s implementation changed drastically over the summer. Our initial intention was to host a synchronous internship where we would have participation with students across the country, and while a wonderful idea this plan did not consider that different students lived in different time zones, and we also underestimated the attention needed for recruitment.
To make this model work, we incorporated mobile group chats with our participants to answer questions, check in on project progress, and to facilitate more timely communication. With time, it became more and more challenging to accommodate to all the different circumstances of our willing participants and participation began to dwindle. After re-evaluating our project, we realized that we could make it into a self-paced webinar series and this shift really helped our project along.

By making this change, we lengthened the time frame which our project could make an impact from being a summer long to being yearlong. Additionally, by hosting this program virtually, we had the ability to allocate money towards having a strong domain platform, and renown guest speakers.

Regardless of this shift we still had the opportunity to meet so many students and communities across the nation, our project was one that required high levels of networking and meeting new people more than ever before. In doing so, we talked to so many different people ranging from students and professors from great prestigious universities, and full-time business leaders all doing amazing things. From every conversation it was amazing to see how we all shared commonalities, like where we grew up and important moments in our life, which ultimately helped us change the dynamic of our scheduled meeting to a comfortable conversation. From the series of these experiences, we realized that the world is filled with strangers who share countless commonalities within experiences and upbringing. Ultimately, once these commonalities are made aware of between groups of people the world becomes a place filled with less strangers and more familiar acquaintances.

Reflecting on our project and the people that we have met through our initiative we believe that peace occurs when you do not have to worry and, in a society, where your race can lend to you power or privilege having peace would occur when regardless of how you were born you are treated with love and respect in any circumstance you face.

In the short term our project will contribute to peace by empowering those who may not experience peace right now to imagine what peace, love, and respect could look like and for the long term our project would then encourage those same individuals who imagined what peace could look like in their communities, to work towards making those imaginations their reality.

One of the most inspiring changes that occurred during our project took place as we spoke to an individual who was interested in doing a project and realized that they had the power within themselves to make the changes they wanted to see. They were happy that our model was really interested in their personal experience and was crafted to care about their interest. They found it refreshing to be asked what they wanted to see as part of their experience rather than only being given a set agenda to be followed that has limited flexibility.

As a result of the project, we look forward to seeing more and more institutions and communities becoming more equitable and inclusive. We look forward to tracking these successes through a Facebook group that will have leaders from around the country who are working on their own black action plans and creating the changes they want to see.

Our advice for future Project for Peace grantees is to be open and flexible. The pandemic really made us have to think outside of the box and this only made our project better, so even when you can only see one clear path, try looking at your project from a bird’s eye view to see the possibilities.
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Sonali Anderson: We were already doing life changing work locally before we found and applied to Projects for Peace, but when awarded the grant this allowed us to take our work and impact to unforeseen bounds nationally. As a result, we were able to connect and empower people in ways and scales we may not ever realize.

DeBorah Ault: By participating in the Davis Project for Peace I have truly realized that I can be the change I want to see in the world, and I am so excited that the work I have done this summer will allow so many more young people to make that realization as well.

DeBorah Ault: deborahault0@gmail.com
Sonali Anderson: sonalianderson@brandeis.edu