

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

The Red Summer Project

Lindsey Pointer*

1 Introduction

In 2019, four artists – Mashaun Ali Hendricks, Heavy Crownz, The Honourable Hakim Dough and Paris Williams – set out on a tour across North America, travelling to 27 cities in 33 days. Their tour was intended to mark the 100th anniversary of the Red Summer race riots in the United States. Red Summer was a pattern of white-on-black violence that occurred throughout the United States in 1919. Chicago, in particular, was a site of significant violence during the Red Summer. Through the tour, the four artists hoped to spread awareness about the horrors that unfolded during the Red Summer and to work towards restoration of racial violence by encouraging truth-telling and greater inclusion and peace. The group held events in each city they visited featuring colouring sessions, hip hop music and restorative justice peace circles. The integration of opportunities for attendees to be creative and to share in a musical performance helped to draw people into the dialogue, generating a space to build meaningful relationships and repair harm on a societal level. This creative effort may be seen as part of a movement within the United States to draw on restorative principles and practices to address larger structural and historical injustices in the United States. As Fania Davis asserts in *The little book of restorative justice and race*, in order for restorative justice to be successful, we must endeavour to repair not just interpersonal harm but also the sociohistorical conditions and institutions that perpetuate harm (2019).

This piece was written based on an interview with Mashaun Ali Hendricks, Heavy Crownz, The Honorable Hakim Dough, Paris Williams and Jayme Joyce. The interview was conducted as a circle process with a series of question rounds. The resulting article was then shared back with the five interviewees for feedback, adjustments and approval. The following are the main themes that emerged from the interview.

2 Using our gifts to create space and share love

In our interview, Mashaun Ali Hendricks, Heavy Crownz, The Honourable Hakim Dough, and Paris Williams all spoke about how the tour was an opportunity to

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share their creative gifts. Through the tour, they used their gifts to open up a space to talk about the history and current reality of racial violence in the United States and to collectively work towards creating a more peaceful, inclusive and just future.

Each of the four artists brought a specific talent or gift to the tour. Paris led colouring sessions through his company, *Mobi Color*,¹ which invited participants to sit down and pick out a colouring book sheet to colour, tapping into something they may not have done since they were kids. Paris described, ‘We transitioned with it, we opened up with it, it was something that made people feel disarmed enough to say “Ok, I can express myself.”’ Colour sessions broke the ice and allowed participants to connect in a new way. Mashaun is a long-time restorative practitioner who has a restorative justice-based streetwear brand and boutique called *TRAP House Chicago*.² Mashaun brought circle practice to the tour, opening up a space for authentic, vulnerable dialogue and enacting the values that were at the root of the tour. He identified four values they all shared, which were at the heart of the tour: trust, love, respect and authentic expression. Hakim³ and Heavy⁴ are both hip hop artists, who create an experience of connection through their performances and have written songs relevant to the Red Summer and racism in the United States.

Each of the four artists’ talents contributed to the greater mission of the tour. Mashaun described how the gifts that each of them brought to the tour worked in harmony to create a space of greater connection and understanding.

Paris, you curate culture. You bring the child out of people; you keep the child alive. Cool. Bam. Heavy, Hakim, divine energy flows out of you all every time you open your mouths. It break barriers because you can’t close your ears. You can try your best to ignore it, but you’re going to feel the love. And then the circle process, that’s for humans. At the time, Trump was building the wall, everybody was worried about borders, and we were about, you know, boundaries are imaginary. We were hopping over these borders to build love. And the more you know about someone, the harder it becomes to harm them.

The group also spoke about how it was not just the specific individual gifts they brought to the tour, but also the order of events and the structure of the experience that allowed them to open up a transformative space of vulnerability. As Heavy explained,

It was a combination of all of our skills and also in the order they were conveyed that allowed the space to be set. We would make everyone comfortable, welcome, have nice music playing, maybe some libations, and then the Color Sessions. And everyone would be invited to come in and sit with us and begin coloring and get to know somebody. From there, Mashaun would take over and

1 www.mobicolor.club/ (last accessed 21 October 2022).

2 www.traphousechicago.us/ (last accessed 21 October 2022).

3 <https://hakimdough.com/> (last accessed 21 October 2022).

4 https://soundcloud.com/heavy_crownz (last accessed 21 October 2022).

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begin to hold space with circle. Each person would explain why they chose the image they chose to color and what it meant to them. And then after that, when everyone had expressed and shared things that would show you more about them as humans, then me and Hakim would end off the night with a performance with music that spoke to the Red Summer feels, even a song we created called ‘Truth to Noose’ where we kind of put ourselves in the space of people that may have been alive during those riots... Those were the ways that we would create space.

The careful curation of an experience for participants, which allowed for a natural flow and building in vulnerability and intimacy, was at the core of the transformative space provided. This was made possible by the integration of their artistic gifts.

3 Restoring the past and present

A driving force behind the tour was the goal of bringing greater awareness to the Red Summer race riots of 1919. The group recognised that one hundred years prior, the country was going through something very similar and there was a shared motivation to stop history from repeating itself. As Hakim explained, ‘To be a catalyst for preventing further harm was an idea that resonated with all our spirits.’

The four share a vision that the best way to stop race riots from reoccurring and to begin to heal the history and present reality of racism in the United States is to open up spaces for honest, authentic connection, where people can come to know each other and actively forge more peaceful relationships. The tour provided a way to work towards this goal by taking the philosophy and practice of restorative justice around the country.

In addition to this relational goal, there was also an entrepreneurial drive to the project, with all four hoping to financially profit while sharing their gifts in the cities they visited. This entrepreneurial motive also had a reparative element. As Mashaun explained, referencing the thriving black Chicago community that was destroyed during the 2019 riots,

It was about commemorating an economic powerhouse that was destroyed. That’s what was most inspiring, the fact that one hundred years ago, there was a community that was completely self-sustained and that was competing at a high level in a capitalist system and that was robbed. It is proof that we did it once, let’s do it again. So it was very entrepreneurial.

4 A prophetic tour

The tour took place in 2019, and knowing what we now know about the protests that erupted all over the United States (and the world) following the death of George Floyd in 2020, the tour has taken on what the group described as a ‘prophetic’ nature. As Heavy explained,

There was a prophetic nature around what we did, why we did it, and when we did it. I think that a lot of the same measures that we spoke about on tour are what are being talked about today.

While the tour felt in many ways like a foreshadow of what would come in 2020, all four were quick to explain that this reparative work is a lifestyle, not a single event or a passing trend. Mashaun explained,

There's nothing trendy about it for us, not at all. We had no idea that 2020 was going to be what it was, and I believe that when you live an aligned life, you're going to be on time with everything that you do and everywhere that you go.

Hakim further explained,

It is a lifestyle, it is not an isolated event, not an isolated group of people, it is an ever-growing and evolving thing, motion towards healing, abundance and growth. I'm just grateful to be a part of it.

5 A restorative approach to documentary filmmaking

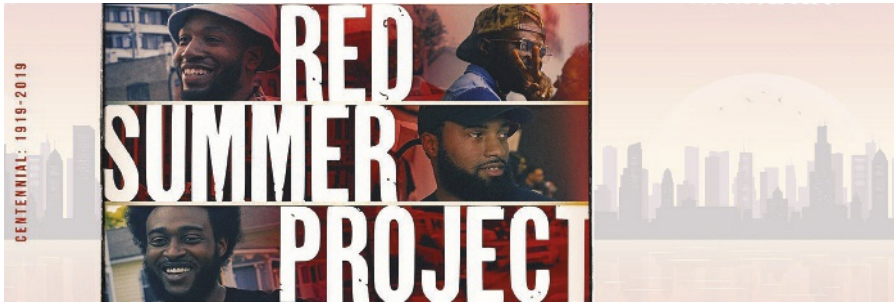
Filmmaker Jayme Joyce and her colleagues at Local Legend Films⁵ made a documentary about the tour titled *The Red Summer Project*. Joyce noted that being along on the tour felt like 'living history', and she was inspired to try to capture it.

Local Legend Films also incorporates restorative justice in its company culture and approach to filmmaking. Employment is central to Local Legend Films' mission, and they are committed to employing young people at risk from gun violence. A commitment to restorative values and the use of restorative circles internally aids their social mission by helping to build a positive company culture where all can thrive.

Jayme explained that her approach to filmmaking is grounded in the restorative justice philosophy as well. She is intentional about taking a relational approach to interacting with the subjects of her film and to telling the story, rather than being the detached observer behind the camera. She described it as a highly collaborative approach to documentary filmmaking, co-constructing the final product with the subjects of the film. Jayme also mentioned her awareness of how the camera impacts the space. She described how the camera communicates that 'your voice is going to be elevated, this space is going to transcend this one moment in time'.

5 www.locallegendfilms.com/ (last accessed 21 October 2022).

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6 Healing larger harms

Through the tour model and the integration of arts to open up a space for connection and dialogue, the team behind the Red Summer Project has devised a way to respond restoratively to larger historical and structural harms. One of the most frequent critiques of restorative justice is that in its focus on interpersonal harm it very often fails to consider and address larger sources of harm as found in social structures and history. The Red Summer project charts a path forward in responding restoratively to those larger harms, endeavouring to heal not just individuals but society as a whole.

References

Davis, F. (2019). *The little book of race and restorative justice: black lives, healing, and US social transformation*. New York: Good Books.