

Final Reports for Reading to Transgress

Reading to Transgress addresses the lack of presence of middle school through college age students in Black literary dwelling spaces, specifically the only Black bookstore in Boston, Frugal Bookstore. This need was identified through our ethnographic research and conversations with our community partner; however, this need fails to be fulfilled as Black Boston cultural workers are over-labored and understaffed in their efforts to build and sustain community and education in Roxbury. The city has failed to provide residents with sustainable literary, career, and college resources. Moreover, it is already difficult for low-income, working-class Black folks to acquire the privilege of leisure reading. Felicia, a community native and librarian who specializes in the Children's Selection at the new Boston Public Library, reveals the issue of gentrification of Nubian Square has affected the Black residents of Roxbury. She shared that many people are homeless, because they were pushed from their homes in Roxbury. There are currently 84,000 books that need to be filled in the Roxbury Library, but the city and Mayor Walsh have failed to supply the library with books as they only have 33,000. Our community partner, Frugal Bookstore's space exists beyond the capitalist parameters of buying and selling books; they serve as a safe space where Black folks are able to feel safe and access resources. We have raised over 200 books and will be implementing a free library in the fall. We have built relationships with More than Words, Black Market Nubian, Boston Ujima Project, Frugal Bookstore, and City Council Members (Tania Anderson). We were also able to secure additional funding with the research and connections gained to hold space for a panel discussion between Black Boston and Atlanta bookstore owners and cultural workers. We also were able to

implement a virtual library for community members to access as a means to increase the accessibility and reach of Reading to Transgress.

As a project, Reading to Transgress was received well by community members; however, it took a while and we were given the run around for several months that slowed up the implementation of the free library. Nonetheless, we are happy to be able to implement the community library on the terms of the community that the free library plans to serve, the Black and Brown Roxbury community affected by white gentrification. If we had to do this project again, we would use surveys to track the impact our project and provide more more for feedback as we're doing the work. Still, the verbal responses we received from various city council members and grassroots leaders in the community let us know that we were on the right track and doing work that needed to be done. A huge realization wwe had doing this work was also the lack of research developed about the needs we were aiming to address. I think it would have benefitted us significantly if we could have made awareness apart of our project, since some people were not even aware of how huge the scarcity for Black authored text are in public schools and other systems like the library.

Our main takeaway from this project is that there are people willing to collaborate for positive change-making in these areas and that the work is never finished. I feel like we've been learning more about what more we need to learn; and that can be discouraging when you're not already in tune with the fact that thee sorts of movements must always be sustained, even after resources have been materially secured.

Finally, the funding of the Rich Collins Fellowship enabled us to purchase books, a bookcart, a bookcase, create promotional materials, receive transportation to and from events, and provide refreshments for in-person events.