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The Year in Review, 2019-2020

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Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Journal

Vol. 5, Issue 1 (Fall 2020)

THE YEAR IN REVIEW, 2019-2020

Reg Flowers and Rachel DeSoto-Jackson¹

The work of the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed organization and its members remains vital. As we reflect on the 2019-2020 organization cycle, we share with you the ways in which the PTO organization has continued to grow amidst these global shifts. We continue to embrace the challenges and opportunities of this moment and continue to support people whose work challenges oppressive systems by promoting critical thinking and social justice through liberatory theatre and popular education.

The report includes the Organization's Statement of Abolition Solidarity, information about Board activities, committee structure, and the 2021 conference, and the announcement of Raising Revolutionary Voices, the new monthly PTO newsletter.

¹ Co-presidents of the PTO Board. For additional information about them and a full list of Board members, go to <https://ptoweb.org/aboutpto/board/>.



THE YEAR IN REVIEW, 2019-2020 LETTER FROM THE CO-PRESIDENTS

Introduction

We are living in extraordinary and unprecedented times: a global uprising against police violence; a struggle to insist on the recognition of the humanity of Black folx; a fight to end the oppression of BIPOC peoples; a global pandemic that every day exposes inequities and systemic racism in health care; and the subjugation of people deemed essential workers yet trapped in low wages and dangerous work site practices that prioritize money over human life. The work of the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed organization and its members remains vital.

As we reflect on the 2019-2020 organization cycle, we share with you the ways in which the PTO organization has continued to grow amidst these global shifts. We continue to embrace the challenges and opportunities of this moment and continue to support people whose work challenges oppressive systems by promoting critical thinking and social justice through liberatory theatre and popular education. This must begin with sharing our collective abolition statement.

STATEMENT OF ABOLITION SOLIDARITY

Estamos compartiendo nuestra Declaración de Solidaridad con la Abolición a continuación como una forma de continuar el diálogo sobre el fortalecimiento de los marcos de abolición dentro de nuestro trabajo como practicantes de la Pedagogía y el Teatro de lxs Oprimidxs. PTO se solidariza con la abolición como una práctica, y con las comunidades en Minneapolis/Saint Paul, Louisville, Tallahassee y más allá que luchan por la justicia para George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade y Ahmaud Arbery. Nos solidarizamos con todxs lxs que luchan en todo el mundo por la seguridad de la vida negra y la vida trans. La violencia sancionada por el estado contra las vidas negras es una herramienta de supremacía blanca y debe ser abolida de inmediato. #LasVidasNegrasImportan #ElPuebloAntesDePropiedad

Declaración de Solidaridad con la Abolición

PTO se solidariza con la abolición como una práctica. Según lo definido por el Abolition Journal, "Abolition" se refiere en parte a los movimientos históricos y contemporáneos que se han identificado como 'abolicionistas': aquellos contra la esclavitud, las cárceles, el sistema salarial, la explotación animal y terrestre, la violencia racializada, de género y sexualizada, y la pena de muerte, entre otros." Reconocemos que involucrar a la policía en cualquier conflicto es un acto de apoyo a la violencia del estado contra todxs. Reconocemos que la policía, el complejo industrial de prisiones, el encarcelamiento masivo, la institucionalización

y otros sistemas similares son todos esfuerzos del estado para reducir los derechos de las personas a sus propios cuerpos, especialmente las personas negras, las personas indígenas, las personas de color en general, las personas pobres, las personas indocumentadas, las personas queer y trans, las personas discapacitadas y muchas otras personas marginadas. También reconocemos la relación continua entre la policía, la propiedad privada y la explotación capitalista, así como el papel histórico y contemporáneo de la policía en los esfuerzos para desorganizar y criminalizar la movilización colectiva. Pedir ayuda a la policía está en conflicto directo con las prácticas de justicia transformadora, creadas principalmente a través de los esfuerzos en las comunidades indígenas, negras y anarquistas, que el PTO apoya.

We are re-publishing our Statement of Abolition Solidarity below as a way to continue dialogue about strengthening abolition frameworks within our work as Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners. PTO stands in solidarity with abolition as a praxis, and with the communities in Minneapolis/Saint Paul, Louisville, Tallahassee, and beyond who are fighting for justice for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery. We stand in solidarity with all those fighting around the world for the safety of Black and Trans life. State-sanctioned violence against Black people is a tool of white supremacy and must be abolished immediately. #BlackLivesMatter #PeopleOverProperty

Statement of Abolition Solidarity

PTO stands in solidarity with abolition as a praxis. As defined by the Abolition Journal, “Abolition’ refers partly to the historical and contemporary movements that have identified themselves as ‘abolitionist’: those against slavery, prisons, the wage system, animal and earth exploitation, racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence, and the death penalty, among others.” We recognize that to involve police in any conflict is an act of supporting state violence against all peoples. We recognize that the police, the prison industrial complex, mass incarceration, institutionalization, and other such systems are all state efforts to reduce peoples’ rights to their own bodies—especially Black folks, Indigenous folks, people of color broadly, poor people, undocumented people, queer and trans folks, disabled people, and many other marginalized folks. We also recognize the ongoing relationship between police, private property, and capitalist exploitation, as well as both the historical and contemporary role of the police in efforts to dis-organize and criminalize collective mobilization. Calling police for “assistance” is in direct conflict with transformative justice practices, created primarily through efforts in Indigenous, Black, and anarchist communities, which PTO supports.

2020 Conference (now PTO Chicago 2021)

We had hoped to gather together in Chicago in May 2020 as a community to share our practices and engage in dialogue and action. The global pandemic drastically shifted those plans. Thanks to the local planning team, we were able to move the conference to 2021 while maintaining our site location of Chicago and our theme of Popular Power/Poder Popular. While it has been challenging to suddenly reorganize events and timing, this move of the Chicago conference back by a year affords us the opportunity to begin planning our 2022 conference early—a gift of time we have often otherwise not had.

If you are interested in hosting a future conference, view our [guide](#) and contact us at Info@PTOweb.org.

Annual Board Retreat

The PTO board found renewal and energy at our annual retreat in January 2020. While we have sought to meet in-person during our retreats, this year we opted to meet virtually to maintain fiscal responsibility and accommodate schedules. Our framework for the retreat focused on:

- *Community-building by embracing the uniqueness of this specific board;*
- *Discovery by learning how this board wants to impact the organization;*
- *Momentum by kicking off actions that will move us forward;*
- *Time and Process by honoring that we will hold space for important dialogues that shape the organization and recognizing that we won't solve everything in this retreat*

Outcomes from the retreat include collaborative writing on a revised mission and vision statement, goals for a new strategic plan, creation of a new structure for subcommittees, and sustained dialogue on ways to support our membership. We have also worked this year on reviewing and improving our processes such as the structure of our monthly board meetings and enhancing communication strategies to support board members in serving on the board.

Subcommittees

The following subcommittees were created: Accountability; Communications; Community Engagement; Future Conferences; Global Solidarity; Journal; Resource Development. Additionally, our local conference committee continues to work each year to organize our annual conference. The formation of subcommittees helps to create equitable labor structures within our organization to accomplish organizational work outside of our monthly board meetings. Each new cycle, subcommittees will be formed comprising of 2-3 board members with one board member serving as *Champion* of the subcommittee.

One of the initiatives we undertook this year was to find a way to include Members in supporting the PTO organization. As an all-volunteer board, there is a high amount of uncompensated labor--to aid the equitable distribution of this labor and to provide scaffolded mentorship opportunities we have treated a new structure for subcommittees that invites Members to join a subcommittee. Subcommittees will be open to general members to join ad hoc. A general call via the member listserv will be sent out at the beginning of the cycle for members to join. Specific project and task requests will also be sent out via the listserv throughout the cycle for members to participate in. Given the expected fluidity of general membership involvement, board members will ensure continuity on subcommittees and work to create an inclusive environment for ad hoc subcommittee general members. Our goal in making this structural change is to increase visibility of the work of PTO, include our Members' skills to support the work, and provide a shared learning space for all of us. We also have a new section on our website where we will post subcommittee reports each month to be transparent in the work that is happening.

Raising Revolutionary Voices Newsletter

PTO is working to better amplify the work of Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners, activists, and organizers. To accomplish this, a new monthly newsletter has been created titled “Raising Revolutionary Voices” which will be launched in August 2020, the last month of our 2019-2020 cycle. Content might include:

- Resources, workshops, exercises, or curriculum, that focuses on liberation and anti-oppression alongside marginalized communities (which have a plan of action to avoid spreading Covid-19)
- Creative dialogue formats that encourage self-reflection and anti-violence
- Research or findings of PO or TO practices in communities
- Any activities focused on education or discussion of racial justice, abolition, gender justice, disability justice, class struggle, sexuality liberation, immigrant and refugee rights, and trauma-informed/healing centered action
- Upcoming events or workshops on PO or TO – local to your community, to the PO/TO community, or to the general public

For the Future

As we transition to the 2020-2021 cycle of the PTO organization, we carry forward our initiatives to find better ways to support members, review our own accountability to our community, and implement stronger mechanisms to amplify the work of our members using our platform and visibility. Please visit our website for continued updates on the work of this organization (PTOweb.org).

In Solidarity,



Rachel DeSoto-Jackson
Co-president



Reg Flowers
Co-president

BOARD MEMBERS:

Skye Kantola (Communications Director)

Sasha Sigel (Secretary)

Charles Adams (Treasurer)

Chicago Workers' Collaborative: Represented by Fredy Amador or Tierra Hawkins (Board Member)

Rebecca Struch (Board Member)

Robin Brandehoff (Board Member)

Kelly Howe (Board Member)

Bonface Njeresia Beti (Board Member)

Maxwel Eliakim Okuto (Board Member)

Miles Boucher (Board Member)

Emily Ruth Evey (Board Member)

Lisa Jo Epstein (Board Member)