

## An Open Letter to Funders on the Fight for Racial Justice: “Get In and Stay In”

by Crystal Hayling, Guest Contributor, July 22, 2020

*“I appeal to all of you to get into this great revolution that is sweeping our nation. Get in and stay in the streets of every city, every village and hamlet of this nation until true freedom comes...”*

— JOHN LEWIS,  
MARCH ON WASHINGTON, 1963

Sometimes it takes a shared loss to remind us of what is right and what we must do right now.



The late Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., listens as President Barack Obama delivers the State of the Union address in 2013. [Official White House Photo](#) by Pete Souza. CC BY 3.0 US

Today, I am feeling our losses heavily. There is no bigger loss than civil rights hero Rep. John Lewis. Even in death, his impact is profound, serving as a clarion call to stay in the long and hard fight for racial justice, a fight that left scars on his body.

When Americans poured into the streets in June in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, many in philanthropy made bold statements of outrage and concern—and some even promised action. I read so many emails from colleagues attesting to their passion for change and a commitment to fight racial injustice. But are they getting in and staying in this great revolution with us? [Some are...](#) and some aren't, at least not yet.

When George Floyd was murdered, I wrote [“On the Precipice”](#) to exhort my colleagues in philanthropy to meet this moment by moving money to Black-led organizers on the front lines working to save our democracy. I was heartened that in addition to writing statements, some of my colleagues called to ask, “Well, what, exactly, should we be doing?”

I can share some advice based on the experiences of the Libra Foundation's staff and board:

- Find guides. Listen to movement leaders and other funders who work closely with them.
- Acknowledge that you do not currently possess the expertise to understand the problem, much less determine the solution. If you were shocked by George Floyd's murder, recognize that a combination of privilege and white supremacist bias blinded you to the state of the world as it is and narrowed your vision of the world as it could be.
- Know that shedding the blinders that racism creates will not happen quickly, nor can you do it alone. Find a community within which you can grapple, honestly, about what we give up and what we gain in fighting for equality and justice.
- Sit with discomfort. Listen.
- Commit to staying in this fight for years, not months.

We've been [walking that walk](#) for some time now at the Libra Foundation. We began years ago to focus our grantmaking on communities of color on the front lines of change. We developed relationships with Black-led organizations, and we listened to their needs. We give them unrestricted dollars because we believe they know their communities best. We [doubled our grantmaking](#) this year to help our grantees meet the multiple challenges of 2020—in public health, the economy, and in our democracy.

But I want to say to those who are continuing to sit on the sidelines: Think long and hard about what you owe our country in this moment. Is your discomfort in funding outside your program areas or taking this issue to your board anything like that of John Lewis' when he faced bullwhips and beatings? Can you please join us in making a bold stand, now, for what you know is right? If you do not act now, your words of concern of a few weeks back will ring hollow.

It's like John Lewis said: Get in, and stay in.

*Crystal Hayling is the Executive Director of The Libra Foundation.*