



The Black Legacy Project

When the media is flooded by stories about racism, racial inequity, and the United States' complicated history of challenges surrounding social justice, it would be easy to wonder: How can anyone make a difference today? It's the very question that The Black Legacy Project asks – and is answering – in communities nationwide. And every day, this initiative proves that we can accomplish much – and the time to do it is now.

[The Black Legacy Project](#) is a musical celebration of Black history to advance racial solidarity, equity, and belonging. It's the flagship program of [Music in Common](#), a nonprofit that strengthens, empowers, and connects communities through the universal language of music.

Reimagining Possibilities for Racial Solidarity, Equity and Belonging

Partnering with community stakeholders at the local level in communities nationwide, the Black LP convenes roundtable discussions about experiences and opinions. Informed by those discussions, the Project brings Black and White artists together to record present-day interpretations of songs central to the Black American experience and compose original songs relevant to the pressing calls for change in our time.

"I am convinced that [people] hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don't know each other, and they don't know each other because they don't communicate with each other, and they don't communicate with each other because they are separated from each other."

–Martin Luther King, Jr., iconic American civil rights leader

Work in the first seven communities will culminate in the production of an album containing the reinterpreted and newly composed songs released for audiences everywhere. The aim, however, is to create a series of Black LP albums, making the critical difference needed in so many communities today.

Born as a Creative Response to Overwhelming Tragedies

The idea for the Black Legacy Project had been simmering in the minds of the leaders of Music in Common for many years. But in the wake of the 2020 killings of Black people in the U.S. – with the most publicized including those of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery – the simmer came to a boil.

"Listening to the groundbreaking work of Black artists like Billie Holiday and Sam Cooke, and hearing the solidarity in songs by White artists like Bob Dylan, we were struck by how it all resonated with relevance to our present times. And we recognized how these songs could be powerful tools for bridge building in these divisive times. Likewise, we knew they could inspire new creative works about how to move forward."

Trey Carlisle, Co-Director, The Black Legacy Project

The Project launched in September 2021 in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts and has been traveling to six additional communities between 2022 and 2023:

- Atlanta, GA
- Los Angeles, CA
- The Mississippi Delta
- Denver, CO
- the Arkansas Ozarks
- Boise, ID

Recordings created in these communities will culminate in the August 18th release of the first of two albums created from the Project as well as a nationwide Black Legacy Project Experience concert tour.

Why These Communities?

The first seven communities of the Black Legacy Project were curated to be a snapshot of the country, demonstrating that American history is Black history and vice versa. So, the Project's leadership identified communities with well-known black history, like Atlanta and the Mississippi Delta, as well as communities whose Black history is unexpected and often unknown, like Boise and the Berkshires. Likewise, they aimed to cover every region of the country, working with communities ranging from rural to big cities and everything in between.

"In every community where we've engaged, everyone who has participated in the Black Legacy Project – and anyone who has heard the pre-release tracks – is moved, compelled and inspired. As if the music creates a shortcut connecting the brain, heart and soul."

Todd Mack, Founder and Executive Director, Music in Common

Making a Difference Now, Sustaining it for the Future

In today's divisive times, the Black Legacy Project is a unifying catalyst for dialogue. The initial roundtable discussions are inspirational and eye-opening. But even after the recordings are complete, community conversations and relationships are just getting started.

"I think The Black Legacy Project is the best thing that ever happened to me in many, many years. ...So just a project this morning that hits me from the heart and it uplifts me.. And I'm promising that whatever I can do for you all or with you all, I want to do all I can now while I can."

[Bobby Rush](#), renowned American musician, composer, and singer; participant in the Black Legacy Project in the Ozarks[

Following the roundtables, songwriting, and recordings in the Berkshires, [The Guthrie Center](#) started an initiative to bring community members together for conversations and engagement. Likewise, in Denver, the Project led to commissioned work with the city and county of Broomfield and the Museum of Boulder to launch a [celebration of Colorado's Black history through song](#). Indeed, in every place touched by the Project, people are crossing racial and political divides together, having transformative human-to-human conversations and collaborations that continue to grow and advance greater solidarity, equity and belonging in their local communities.

The Forefront of a Sea Change in American Race Relations

The Black Legacy Project is truly revolutionary. The seemingly simple act of having transformative human-to-human conversations and music-making collaborations makes a tangible difference, enabling the essential steps necessary for us to heal and move forward as a nation.