

## **An Open Letter to the City of Austin**

**Submitted by the White Caucus of Undoing Racism Austin in Solidarity with  
People of Color in Austin, Texas**

**March 20, 2015**

We are the White caucus of Undoing Racism Austin, a group of Austin residents committed to leveraging our time, energy and resources to address the ongoing legacy of racism in our communities. Our purpose is to hold city representatives accountable for ensuring the safety and well-being of all communities in Austin. Part of the ongoing race relations in Austin is one of White people displacing Black and Brown communities in the name of economic development. Long time Austinites are familiar with the 1928 Master Plan that mandated a racially divided city with East Austin being the only place People of Color were allowed to live. This city planning decision created a segregated city - an unjust city - that disproportionately impacts communities of Color today.

One of the most recent cases, the illegal demolition of Jumpolín on February 12, 2015, a family owned piñata store formerly located at 4101 E. Cesar Chavez, serves as a microcosm of the gentrification that sustains the racism of our city.<sup>i</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that the harassment and humiliation experienced by Monica and Sergio Lejarazu is indicative of the entitlement that the new White owners felt they had to remove the tenants by intimidation, threat and in the end, force. As White members of Undoing Racism Austin, we are committed to following the lead of People of Color. **We stand in solidarity with the Black and Latino communities most impacted by violent patterns of gentrification in Austin. We uphold the demands made by the joint statement released by PODER, Raza Roundtable, Resistencia, NAACP and Equilibrio.**<sup>ii</sup>

Predominantly White and wealthy people are moving into the city at unprecedented rates and communities of Color are being forced out. Recent research has found that Austin, one of the top ten fastest growing cities in the United States, is the only one with a declining Black population.<sup>iii</sup> Dr. Tane Ward speaks to how relatively small economic decisions add up to a pattern of oppression in our city: "Gentrification is an example of how capitalism and race work in tandem. When a developer flips a house, the new occupant needs no intention of displacing people to add to a larger pattern of displacement... People of Color are displaced, while white people move in, and as more and more white people move in, the public services increase. No one has to hate anyone, or have any bad feelings. However, the outcome is racist because it recreates structural inequality along racial lines."<sup>iv</sup>

The appearance of "Exclusively for White People" stickers on the windows of businesses in East Austin last week brought outrage from business owners and city officials condemning the stickers as racist, missing the point entirely, "... that the City of Austin is racist as an institution, and businesses cater to specific class groups that follow racially segregated norms."<sup>v</sup> As we grapple with the rapid growth of Austin it is crucial that we address the impact of ongoing racist gentrification. Incentives to businesses and developers must be held in check with the needs of our current residents, specifically low-income families of Color being ousted from their homes, businesses and communities.

It is imperative for all of our public officials to engage directly in these issues by funding and participating in Undoing Racism trainings organized by Undoing Racism Austin and the

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. These trainings are a transformative and necessary step to ensure city planning decisions are not done at the expense of some and for the profit of others. We urge the City of Austin to prioritize the demands of residents who have been most left out of the conversation. We must recognize the ongoing pattern of how segregation and gentrification disproportionately harm communities of Color. It is possible to collaborate for a safer, more successful city in ways that do not displace low-income Black and Brown residents.

As we highlight the impact of gentrification in our city, we honor the resistance and leadership perseverance of Black and Brown communities that struggle to survive in the face of displacement. We call for active investment in the livelihoods of poor and People of Color communities by listening to the demands that have been made for decades - developing and implementing affordable housing policies, increasing access to quality education and healthcare, improving reliable public transportation and respecting the self-determination of existing communities of Color to thrive in Austin.

Signed,  
Undoing Racism Austin White Caucus

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<sup>i</sup> New Information in East Austin Jumpolin Piñata Demolition

<http://www.myfoxaustin.com/story/28107711/new-information-in-east-austin-jumpolin-piata-demolition>;

Demolished East Austin Piñata Shop Is the New Center of Austin's Gentrification Debate

<http://www.texasmonthly.com/daily-post/demolished-east-austin-pi%C3%B1ata-shop-new-center-austins-gentrification-debate>

<sup>ii</sup> Joint Community Statement - PODER, Raza Roundtable, Resistencia, NAACP and Equilibrio

<http://equilibrionorte.org/2015/02/28/joint-community-statement/>

<sup>iii</sup> Outlier: The Case of Austin's Declining African-American Population

<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/insts/iupra/files/pdf/Austin%20AA%20pop%20policy%20brief%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Dale, dale, dale, no pierdas el tino! <http://equilibrionorte.org/2015/02/23/23684/>

<sup>v</sup> Stickers and their Discontents <http://equilibrionorte.org/2015/03/20/stickers-and-their-discontents/>