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business, just keep the troops looking sharp, alright? That'll be all, Berggren. Oh, what do I owe you for the trim?" he asked. "It's on the house, sir—and thank you, sir," I responded.

Along my irregular path of unlawful barbering, I've noticed that people speak freely about whatever's on their mind: from sports trivia and jokes to impending problems or family stories. The summer I practiced on my dad, he told me of a coworker who played the horses and was always pestering him to place a bet. Finally, my dad gave in and said, "Alright, here—put two dollars on that horse you're so keen on." The man said, "No, Red, I can't. I just like to tease you. You're the only fella here who doesn't gamble." The next Monday the man came to work and said, "Oh, Red, I really shoulda taken your money—that horse won, he paid off big!" My dad ended the story by telling me he was so glad that he hadn't placed the bet and won that money. "I might've become addicted to gambling." That was his lesson to me, my first tip.

Over the years, I've learned a broader lesson: barbers (and hairdressers, too, no doubt) are good listeners. Like psychiatrists beside a couch or priests on the other side of a confessional screen, barbers are unseen—a voice from behind, out of sight, asking open-ended questions, prompting you to think aloud. They're professional listeners, and I'll bet they're chock-full of stories. ▼

Dan Berggren's roots are firmly in the Adirondacks, but his music has taken him throughout the United States and abroad. Dan has worked in the woods with a forest ranger and surveyor, was a radio producer in Europe, professor of audio and radio studies at SUNY Fredonia, and owner of Sleeping Giant Records. An award-winning musician and educator, Dan is also a tradition-based songsmith who writes with honesty, humor, and a strong sense of place. Visit www.berggrenfolk.com to learn more about Dan and his music. Photo by Jessica Riehl.



The Call—Youth Leading Social Justice

Urban Explorers: An Education Initiative with City Lore BY RAQUEL ALMAZAN

I was introduced to the eclectic organization that is City Lore through the position of directing a new youth development program, which I have had the honor to initiate and curate for the past three years. The youth of the program are reframing their identities—in the United States during the current civil rights struggle—through art that fosters critical thinking and solidarity that unites several communities.

Urban Explorers is a summer and after-school program that serves high school students.¹ The program introduces students to a variety of art mediums (documentation skills, dance, music, oral history, drumming, hip hop art practices, and visual art mediums) through the social inquiry of the Lower East Side, while being responsive to the interests of students. The program engages young people in exploring, documenting, interpreting, and advocating for people and places in their communities and city. Students gain skills in using documentary tools, including audio and video recording, photography, and interviewing. Working in small groups, they have created documentaries or interpretive artworks about their chosen subjects.

We created an alternative space that focuses on the specific cultural, gender, and racial identities of the students, who are primarily students of color. The major pillars of the program are based on exploration of self-identifying, community, and advocacy.

As a newly developing program, Urban Explorers is in its third year of programming in 2021. In the two prior semesters during the pandemic, themes of the student's work were based on identity, social justice, and political uncertainty. A need for advocacy arose as major connective tools for young people in the development of the program.

The murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, was a second shock for the students

#ExploreMe – exploring the identity of young people through exercises and art making tools.

#ExploreWe – exploring the identity of a community—its cultures and its societal conditions, including responding to the coronavirus pandemic.

#ExploreAdvocacy – exploring the intersection of arts and activism and how their work, serves as a tool for social awareness and change.

while experiencing the pandemic, as it was for the entire world. It was essential to create an open forum for the students and teaching artists to discuss their feelings, experiences, and possibilities for change. For some students, it was an intensely personal experience; they had lost family members to police violence. One student had witnessed the destruction of her neighborhood during the Black Lives Matter movement. I programmed the Racial Injustice Series to process the Black Lives Matter movement, so that students could address their concerns and reframe the experience as a form of empowerment through art-making.

Visual Arts

According to the artist, Felicia Conduah:

In this image, I wanted to catch the importance of the idea of America. When we look at America, we are made up of immigrants. This isn't said enough. We have Columbus Day, on which we celebrate a false story, and honestly, a tragedy. We need to celebrate our Indigenous lives, the people who are here. What would America be without its immigrants and Indigenous people? In this image, there are three layers of photos: the first being part of my home, the next being the American Flag, and then the America with a Black woman

over it. This represents a hole in the racist flag. The flag stands for things that aren't great but can be better.

Music

The Music Group has just started social distanced recordings. These visual poems, with music tracks created by the group, embody the self-determination of youth leading us all into liberated futures, responding to racial injustice while in the turmoil of the pandemic.

Overtime: youtu.be/C_01IOEhXO4

Gratitude: youtu.be/BrsN8E0C_iU

Freedom: youtu.be/3yL3U__UTO8

Documentary/Writing Group

This poem highlights a call to action that disrupts privilege while centering the youth most affected by systemic racism. Villalba moves us to a future where people of color fully live in agency and cultural vibrancy.

BLM by Michelle (Pastel) Villalba

Black Lives **Matter!**
Black **Lives** Matter!
Black Lives **Matter!**

And no matter how many times we say this, they won't listen.

They say we're being overdramatic when we've been silenced for too long.

No Justice! No Peace!
No Justice! No Peace!
No Justice! No Peace!

Calling **us** uncivilized as they shoot down more of **our** men.
And for what?

Walking down the street where **we** live?
For working at **our** jobs?
For saying good night to our kids?

They don't really **care** about us!
They **don't** really **care** about us!
They don't really **care** about **us!**

Being profiled everywhere we go.
Just because of the color of our skin
Culture
Language
Where we come from

America!
Home of the **free!**
For new opportunities

To get away from the troubles the government has put us through

MIN PURSUIT OF A BETTER AMERICA



Just to go through it again.

We're humans just like **you**
What do **we** have to prove

We live

I feel good to have dark skin
To have dark hair
To have a big nose
Small lips
A strong voice

Wrinkles around my eyes
To come from a place with rich culture
Good tasting food my mother makes

To be me and happy

I don't need to paint my skin white
No blue contacts to change my eye color
Don't need to bleach my hair to be blonde

Just be me
Just be me
Just be me

To be human
One day, we'll look behind us,
And think, why?
Why did we fight in the first place.

We're all human

There will no longer be fights about black and white
So stop carrying tasers

No more calling the police in unnecessary situations
So quit telling us we did wrong when we only took a breath.

We'll be able to hold hands
Together

BLM will be in history

And the chants we once sang
Will be a memory

The streets will no longer be the grounds of protests.
And all we'll say is

Silence

Fresh clean air
The murals will stay, as a sign that we won.
Flowers are finally growing
We won a long war and now we get to sleep.
Thanks to those who stuck by us
We remember those who had died
And now we live in harmony
And sing happy tunes.

This is the call from this forward-moving generation inviting us to answer this call with urgency, purpose, and compassion. ▼

Note:

1. See Urban Explorers page on the City Lore website, <https://citylore.org/education/urban-explorers/>

Raquel Almazan, interdisciplinary artist, educator, and activist, is the Youth Program Director of Urban Explorers at City Lore. She is the Artistic Director of La Lucha Arts, collaborating with organizations, social movements, and the impacted. Photo by Dorothy Shi.



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