Brown Hope is Inspiring a Movement of Collective Courage
By: cameron whitten

We are living in dangerous times. Newspaper headlines across the US are constantly filled with stories of economic, social, and political disaster. Many people's faith in democratic institutions or systems of justice have eroded—replaced by a crippling sense of cynicism.

Despite the nightmarish levels of injustice we face, I proudly identify as an activist—**and as an optimist.** *(Yes, this likely makes me a little crazy.)* But I refuse to accept defeat, and I reject the belief that collective liberation isn't possible in our lifetimes. But I also acknowledge that we have **A LOT** of work to do.

I'm the founder of Brown Hope, a Portland-based nonprofit that was created as an alternative to the far too dominant messages of fear and despair. Our beginnings trace back to 2018, a time when we were still in the midst of the first Trump Presidential Administration. As political violence and hateful rhetoric were on the rise, many of my neighbors and loved ones didn't feel safe to even exist in this country.

Despite harsh and hostile conditions, Brown Hope shone in our community as a beacon of inspiration. We countered the ugliness of the world by creating beauty. Instead of responding with fear and hate, **we answered with courage and love.** To this day, one of my favorite interviews ever was when I went on Fox News to talk with Tucker Carlson about Brown Hope's inaugural event, Reparations Happy Hour.

Today, Brown Hope's mission is to plant and nurture seeds for racial justice and healing. We serve and mobilize communities to heal our collective soil from the poisons of our past and present, so our future roots can thrive. Our theory of change centers on racial trauma because all of us —across different racial identities and backgrounds— have to heal from the pain of our collective past and build a future where we all thrive.

Our innovative organizing strategy addresses racial injustice through a restorative approach— uplifting self care and community building as we work towards greater systems change. This work involves creating intentional spaces for Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, but we also mobilize racially privileged allies to advance advocacy efforts that transform our systems as we know it.

We've accomplished a lot in the last eight years. The best part is that we're just getting started.

Remembering the Legacy of George Floyd

When I look back at Brown Hope's history, one of our most important moments was 2020. It was after the murder of George Floyd and the national racial justice uprisings that our impact grew substantially. Within days of George Floyd's death, I created a GoFundMe called **Black Resilience Fund**, which raised over one million dollars in just 29 days, and was distributed to Portland's Black community as an intentional act of reparations.

I continue to give credit and respect to three of our ancestors whose sacrifices galvanized the emotion and willpower needed to ensure Black Resilience Fund's success— **George Floyd**, **Ahmaud Arbery,** and **Breonna Taylor.** In 2020, people across this country (including Portland) took to the streets during a global pandemic and demanded justice for Black Lives. Our combined advocacy resulted in tangible policy and philanthropic investments into Black communities across America.

Last year, Brown Hope honored the five year anniversary of George Floyd's murder by organizing We Are The Bridge: Rise For Racial Justice, a week of action which included a know your rights training, a public grief circle, and a rally and march to the Burnside Bridge in downtown Portland. We continued to leverage the momentum we built and successfully advocated to Portland City Council, which on February 26th unanimously approved a resolution to commemorate the life of George Floyd and reaffirm the City's commitment to racial justice.

In Portland, Oregon, the whitest major city in the United States, I see Brown Hope in a unique position to challenge our City's dismal, racist history and write a new narrative for our collective future. And as we face the threat of White supremacy on a national level, I encourage all of my beautiful Black people to remember our inherent value. **Black lives truly do matter.**

Finding Our Collective Courage

Brown Hope's intention for 2026 is **Finding Our Collective Courage**, which resonates directly with the times we live in. As political extremists spread lies and sow division, it's clear that we must turn to everyday people for a strong moral voice. Our courage will be measured by our defiance towards adversity and oppression. Instead of being overrun by fear, owning fear and overcoming it.

The change the world needs will require courage from all of us, and a willingness to lean into discomfort. I especially ask people of moral consciousness to reflect on the ways in which we have been complicit— watching from the sidelines as our core values and neighbors have been under attack. **The injustices of the world are not something we can look away from or avoid.** We must face them.

For example, just a month ago dozens of community members came together at Augustana Lutheran Church for a solidarity rally co-hosted by Brown Hope and Unite Oregon in support of our African immigrant neighbors. The Day Without An Immigrant rally was an incredible opportunity to display grassroots strength, but also the importance of practicing intersectionality, examining how systemic oppression impacts people with a combination of marginalized identities.

Our country is currently at an inflection point. We are facing many uncertainties in the future, but if we find our collective courage, our destiny will be in our own hands. 2026 will require change from all of us. In these critical times, **showing up isn't optional — it's urgent.**

Brown Hope Needs Your Support

Brown Hope will continue to lead innovative strategies that fight for accountability and freedom, and we ask that you stay with us on this courageous journey. Here are a few ways to support Brown Hope:

- Sign up for our weekly email newsletter
- Learn more about our work and past events by checking out our YouTube channel
- Become a monthly sustaining donor
- Participate in our monthly Mindful Medicine program, it's on Zoom and free to the public

Brown Hope's work is more relevant than ever. We have stayed true to our mission by expanding programs, events, and other offerings to support our neighbors. And there's so much more we can do.

By working together, Brown Hope can expand our reach— serving Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, but most importantly— **inspiring hope.**

Let's bring more good into the world. Together.

Bio:
At the age of eighteen, **cameron whitten** *(all pronouns are extremely welcomed!)* worked themself out of youth homelessness in Portland and has spent more than decade giving back to the same community that was here when they needed it most. cameron has been a leader in several movements for positive social change, and has served as the Executive Director for local nonprofits such as Know Your City and Q Center. cameron is currently the Founder and CEO of healing justice nonprofit Brown Hope and Co-Founder of the Black Resilience Fund. For cameron, hope is not just a word— Hope is Action.