I should have written this statement 3 days ago when I was angry and crying. I’m a bit stoic at the moment. Still seething with anger but for multiple reasons most of which many of the folks in this meeting cannot fathom.

At 41 I have now lived through:

Rodney King
Trayvon Martin
Sandra Bland
Eric Garner
Jordan Davis
Willie McCoy
Philando Castile
Walter Scott

And so many others that I can’t remember or name. That doesn’t even include acts before I was born like the state sanctioned murder of Black Panther Party Chairman Fred Hampton in his bed by Chicago PD. Go ahead and throw in the horrifying story of The Central Park Five. Add in Kalief Browder who committed suicide because of harmful treatment in a criminal justice system that he never should have been in. I could go on and on and on. Most folks here have never had to sit on the phone for almost an hour with a family member as they drove a deserted Texas highway being followed by Texas State troopers afraid that will be another Sandra Bland. Most have never been slammed against a patrol car or had a gun stuck in their face because they looked like a black man. Yet and still I am the most stoic of us all BECAUSE I have seen this before.

So then why AM I angry? Like many other black folks, I am angry that I am 41 years old and white people have seen ALL the deaths that I have listed above are just NOW getting it. Like many Black people, I’m frankly drained by the triggered responses of white people who are just now getting it. But you know what’s worse? Folks that KNOW that it’s an issue but can’t do the one thing that it takes to break the system. The one thing that it takes to break the stranglehold of white supremacy on society. The one thing that it takes to stop anti-blackness from being taught worldwide. You have read enough books and listened to enough lectures to know exactly what to SAY. You know when to use terms like intersectionality and anti-blackness. You know to say you are doing it for the poor blacks because NOT doing that absolutely makes you look racist. But the one thing you need to do you just can’t.

STOP CENTERING WHITENESS
STOP CENTERING YOURSELVES

There is this terribly pervasive behavior where white “allies” try to make themselves and others feel like they “know what black people need” all the while never actually being in community with black people other than maybe their one black friend. By in community I mean actually GOING INTO BLACK COMMUNITIES. If you are fighting police brutality have you actually gone to places like the Bayview or deep east Oakland or South/North Richmond where black folks are ghettoized and routinely harassed by police? Are you actually talking to poor families? Hell are you actually talking to your black coworker aside from asking how they feel as a black person in this moment because twitter tells you that you should? That’s what’s harmful to black people. Telling people what they need instead of actually listening TO THEM and literally getting mad when Black people say no that’s not what we need.
So here we are in a time and moment, AGAIN, where the world is listening to what black people have to say about the atrocities and violence that is repeatedly visited on Black bodies. In a city where men were so emboldened that they showed up like a Jim Crow era lynch mob at a black mayor’s house. ALL THE WHILE YELLING BLACK LIVES MATTER and it was the most current day San Francisco thing I have ever seen. Because that is EXACTLY the way that black people are treated. We are either held symbolically as the black friend that makes you feel less racist, the black person/people that you use as a smokescreen or platform to step on because you know that this moment dictates you be “doin it for the poor blacks” for it to resonate OR we are evil because we don’t listen to you.

And buried way deep in that is the very real marginalization of black queer people and black queer voices. When we started getting calls about whether we were going to postpone Pride considering the recent protests I wasn’t shocked. The Pride movement has become one where hardly any black faces are ever seen. It occurred to very few to talk about the TRUE origins of Pride. Then I realized how many folks do NOT KNOW the true origins of Pride. We here in the bay area know very well that the Compton’s Cafeteria Riots were black trans woman led. But the story that Pride commutates was that fateful night at the Stonewall Inn in 1969 when Marsha P Johnson threw the first brick. For many years, no one knew who threw the first punch that proceeded the brick. It was a Black Butch woman by the name of Storme Delavari. Storme was violently detained by police and even paraded through the crowd. Before she was violently shoved into the back of a cop car, with blood on her face she asked the crowd “why don’t you guys do something” and the rest is history. Pride was started by a black trans woman in defense of a Black Butch woman. Stonewall was a defense of Black bodies. So, I guess the day I was thrown up against that cop car and threatened to be thrown in jail I was simply following a violent and tragic tradition. That happen in 1969, However, the violence and struggle of black bodies continues to be ignored. Meanwhile a whole movement sprang up around us. In an interview, last year with The Breakfast Club, David Johns of the National Black Justice coalition noted that gay neighborhoods and coming out movements were never from black people. They were for white gay people to gain social and political power. By in large, Black folks never moved into gay districts and they weren’t necessarily welcome. They always tend to stay in black community because it was still safer. They were still black.

So here we are today with this HUGE movement where the most controversial thing that a Pride organization can do is elect a black woman president who speaks her mind and doesn’t cater to fragile whiteness. And trust me I get it ALL the time by people who will yell black lives matter from the top of their lungs but whose actions show their immense disdain for Black people and particularly Black women and how the Pride machine ALLOWS this to display this disdain relatively unchecked. Just so we are always clear, I will always be loud as fuck and I will always prioritize black folks ALWAYS. I am so thankful that in a world that didn’t want me to learn a thing about Black queer history I know exactly which ancestors and who sent me here. I thank the power women of Black Lesbians United in Los Angeles, Nia Collective in Oakland, the Ruth Ellis House in Detroit and the Black Lesbian Conference in Harlem for teaching me and always reminding me of Black queer history I know exactly which ancestors and who sent me here. I thank the power women of Black Lesbians United in Los Angeles, Nia Collective in Oakland, the Ruth Ellis House in Detroit and the Black Lesbian Conference in Harlem for teaching me and always reminding me of my place in this world and this movement. For those who don’t know black queer history, I stand on the backs of Bayard Rustin the dynamic community organizer that created the march on Washington but was banished from the civil rights movement because he was gay. I stand on SQUARELY on the back of Barbara Jordan who was amongst the first black woman elected to congress but who stay closeted her entire life she feared being an out black woman could never win a political seat. I stand on the shoulders of a powerful writer we know as Audre Lorde who taught us that the Masters tools will never destroy his house and a dynamic poet Pat Parker. I stand on the back of Margaret Sloan who left the feminist movement when they wouldn’t give space to black women, particularly black lesbians, so she came her to Oakland to help build OUR space and
amplify OUR voices. I stand on living legends back such as Cheryl Dunye who taught us to reclaim our black queer spaces in existing narratives. I stand on the dynamic Jewelle Gomez who taught me that lesbians could reclaim out past space and dream of a future. I am thankful in this lifetime to have shared space and community with the dynamic Jewel Thais-Williams, the found of the Catch One disco which would become the oldest gay club in the nation. 20 plus years ago a group of black queer men in Los Angeles decided that this pride movement wasn’t for Black people and they gave us the gift of the Black Gay party. I am proud to stand should to should with folks from Houston Splash and especially Atlanta Black pride who did the same. I am thankful for my brothers in this current day struggle such as Rhyann Holmes at Brooklyn Boihood who are not only creating events but creating conversations about what it is to be Black and Queer.

And these are just SOME of the dynamic, impactful, nurturing, important leaders that flow through ME. One thing about black folks is that we always value our family tree and if you do the work of asking us we will tell you. We must know our network we must know our worth because there is NO ONE when someone like a Tony McDade dies. Tony McDade was a black trans man that was murdered by police on May 27th in Florida. If you know black queer community you know that Florida is right up there with Atlanta as far as having a huge black gay community. But where is the REST community now? Have you heard Tony’s story? What are WE as a community doing to look for justice for HIM? We are saddened by the murder of George Floyd but we MUST do a better job of yelling out for justice for Black queer people. There have been whole black queer families murdered simply for have a black gender non-conforming or trans family member. There have been babies killed because they had two moms. Where is the outrage then?

That leaves work to be done. Black Queer people are real and here. We are not here to be ghettoized, tokenized or fetishized by you. We don’t need you to speak for us. We have our own voices and politic. As Wendy from the Nia Collective said last year at our press conference, “we created black spaces so that we could nurture people like you Carolyn so that you could go out into a world that where we were and LEAD.” We are here Black and Queer. If you aren’t here to CENTER BLACK QUEER LIVES then this isn’t for you. There IS nothing, nothing, NOTHING more important that you need to do than listen to black people. Center THEIR experiences, thoughts and values. If you need resources on how to unlearn your embedded white supremacy we are posting anti-racism resources on our webpage. If you have already read them I IMPLORE you to read them again and visit Kin Folks and Dana’s RACISM UNDER THE RAINBOW.

There are some that are saying “oh they don’t have to worry about law enforcement until next year.” Not true. Law enforcement has their own work to do. I encourage law enforcement to take this time to come humbly and openly to the table. Time and time again organizations have asked law enforcement to come to the table and you come but you come with a defensive stance that ultimately says I came but we are going to do what WE think is right. Well the community is and has been telling you that what you think ISN’T right. What you think is literally killing black people. Let this be a signal to you that it’s time to earnestly listen. I encourage both black and lgbtq officers that would like for us to allow YOU to celebrate who YOU are to celebrate who WE are by actually listening to the community. In these 12 months, come to the table with open hearts and ideas. Not closed ranks.

So, we as an organization are going to take this time to amplify Black voices and specifically Black LGBTQ voices. This week in lieu of our flag raising we will be hosting a discussion sponsored by the office of transgender initiatives called “Pride in Defense of Black Bodies” it will be moderated by myself and featuring Aria Said from the Transgender Cultural District, Imani Rupert Gordon of NCLR, and Tuquan Harrison from the SF Human Rights Commission. We will be discussing the epidemic of violence in against black queer bodies.
Also, we know that there is so much going on in this crazy world. We wanted to make sure that we were supporting those still affected by covid as well as practicing what we preach by donating to black lgbtq serving organizations. SF Pride will be donating to communities that support those impacted by these issues. We are pleased to contribute $10,000 to the SF LGBT Covid Fund. Thank you to Anjali Rimi and Clair for your work on this. We will be donating another $10,000 to the Transgender Cultural District. I would like to thank Aria Said for not only being a great community partner but as an individual that has been a black queer woman leading in SF longer than I, I want to thank her for always encouraging me and allowing me to do the same.

There was a song that was written in tribute to freedom fighter Ella Baker and the song says, “We Who believe in Freedom Cannot Rest.” If we believe that we truly can’t rest than we must do this. Someone once recalled being asked “Do you wanna do what’s right or do you wanna make history?” We choose to make history. We choose to fight.