

January 13, 2020

Dear Malinda and Jacqueline,

I think that the best way to begin this update is to re-visit our motivations as a group for applying for this grant last spring.

“Many activists here, including we, the applicants, have experienced hopelessness and a lack of vision for what the future might look like. This can be a paralyzing state in which to exist. The road before us is profoundly dark and difficult; the fall of Silent Sam was neither the beginning nor the end of the struggle against racism at UNC. However, we are constantly reminded of the collective power of collaboration and creativity, in working with people who you love and who love you, and of the need to fight back.”

One voice: Then, anything felt possible—and, for a moment, it was. But, life, or rather living, gets in the way. There was a feeling that our art could make us formidable; that we could use our collective hope to brace ourselves against the storms that were coming. Since then, two things have become clear. One was that the storms we predicted never came. Rather, we woke up one day and student fees were now funding the far-right. The second was that hope was not enough. It couldn't melt the statue and it couldn't keep us in the same cities, or intact. We needed something stronger. I guess what we needed must have been magic.

Another: Our belief in the collective power of collaboration and creativity has not ceased, but its directionality has changed. Annie and Alyssa live hours away from Chapel Hill (both doing vital anti-racist work in their respective fields of art and history), and Hong-An is on sabbatical (working on incredible art projects). Gina is tied up in a variety of civil rights legal work and activist support, and Julia is managing essential activist infrastructure and has only recently had serious charges against her -- charges related to her activist work -- dropped. We are all still doing the anti-racist work that made us apply for this grant in the first place, but we are each pursuing this work in a way that we find leaves us little time to work on this project together. It is easy to feel guilty about this reality. But when we reflect on why we find ourselves here, we find we are here because, and not in spite of, the qualities that brought our project to your attention when we first applied for this grant. We are living the spirit of this grant in our daily lives; our lives are our art. The monuments we have left and will leave on this campus are in the hearts and minds and spirit of this university that we have left an indelible mark on.

Given that we have not been able to direct the necessary energy to our project, we would like to direct our remaining and future funding to our friends and comrades whose art has so moved us. We began this endeavor with the hope to fund and give space to Black and activist voices at UNC, and in pursuit of this, we want to re-direct both our remaining funds (\$3,100) and energy to supporting a three-day film festival Jerry, Cortland, and De'Ivyion plan on hosting in the spring. Gina has met with Jerry to discuss whether Jerry's group would be interested in this, and Jerry indicated that they could absolutely use our remaining funding to support their ambitious, vital programming in the spring. We plan to sell the trailer and direct those funds to them, also. We also plan to offer Jerry, Cortland, and De'Ivyion the time and skills that we would have otherwise brought to our own project. It's what feels right, and feels closest to our motivations for coming to the table in the first place.

We would be glad to meet with you about this update.

Yours in gratitude,
Gina Balamucki
Alyssa Bowen
Hong-An Truong
Julia Pulawski
Annie Simpson

P.S. If you support us giving the remainder of our funds to Jerry, Cortland, and De'Ivyion's group, perhaps you could offer guidance on the best way to handle it administratively. Gina would be glad to receive the last 50% of the grant (\$2,500) and gift it all to Jerry, or you all may wish to give them the funds directly. Either of those options would work for us.

P.P.S. If you haven't read the accompanying zine yet, we recommend that you do. It will offer you some insight into our decision and the road we traveled to get here.