

Group for Young People with Wealth Raises Over \$1 Million to Honor Michael Brown

The campaign, led by Resource Generation, began a few weeks after his death, and ends today, on what would have been Brown's 19th birthday.

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A demonstrator holds a sign reading, 'Dont Shoot', with a picture of Michael Brown on August 17, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri.

Photo: Joe Raedle/Getty Images

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Today Michael Brown Jr, would have turned 19 had he not been killed by Darren Wilson, a white police officer who claimed that the teen looked like a demon (<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/11/25/366519644/ferguson-docs-officer-darren-wilsons-testimony>) while being shot at.

Brown's killing sparked more national attention and grassroots outcry than one could ever have imagined, and the reverberations of the August 9, 2014 incident continue one year later. Thousands of people have been motivated by Brown's death to protest, join solidarity groups and proclaim loudly that #BlackLivesMatter.

Resource Generation (RG), a nonprofit group of mostly white young people who self-identify as wealthy and class privileged, decided to raise money—\$1 million for what they call black-led organizing for black liberation. “Seeing day after day the headlines and the popular outrage in Ferguson led a small number of us in RG to ask, 'What can we do?'” recalls Chad Jones, a middle class “advocate member (<http://resourcegeneration.org/advocate/>)” of black and white parentage.* “The possibility of moving a million dollars in nine months to black organizing for black liberation was something that would be a material contribution and an act of solidarity with black communities most under attack.”

Founded in 1998, Resource Generation

(<http://www.resourcegeneration.org>) isn't a grantmaking group; it serves as a convener and organizer of donors ages 18 to 35. "Those young donors really craved a space to effectively leverage their privilege," says executive director Jessie Spector, a 28-year-old queer white woman. "Not just writing a check," she continues, "But fundraising from wealthy networks [and] affecting systemic and institutional change." They frame their donor organizing as being in the service of "the equitable distribution of land, wealth and power," a tagline that is at the top of every page on their website.

I spoke with Jones, Spector and Willa Conway, a white member living in New Orleans, by phone three weeks ago when the group was still a few hundred thousand dollars away from their goal. As of last week, the group had surpassed it by \$70,000 with more than 100 donors participating.

To structure the campaign, Resource Generation asked more than 80 people with connections to organizing, philanthropy and social justice to submit potential recipients. To qualify for donations, a group had to meet several criteria (<http://resourcegeneration.org/what-we-do/supporting-black-led-black-liberation/guidance-for-giving-to-black-led-organizing-for-black-liberation-2/>)-they had to have black people in leadership, understand anti-black racism as systemic and "build power" in black communities. Having the tax status for a non-profit was not a requirement.

Resource Generation ended up with a list of 200 groups, which they added to an interactive map

added to an interactive map (http://mendozao.github.io/interactive_maps/app/index.html) that describes each group and links to their website. The map went live on April 13th. "With this list we wanted to give our members the opportunity to discover black-led organizations in their local areas and institutions, to give them the opportunity to engage not just as someone who writes a check, but [to form a] relationship, to [show] up to a rally or protest," says Spector.

While the campaign officially ends today, Brown's would-be birthday, Spector says they will continue to add groups to the map through the end of 2015.

Although you didn't have to belong to RG to participate in the campaign, Spector says the majority of donors were members and their families. Resource Generation has about 350** members. Eighty five percent are white. Their membership criteria (<http://resourcegeneration.org/get-involved/become-a-member/>) encourages people to self-identify as having wealth, but the income categories listed range from a \$250,000 net worth and/or an income of \$50,000 a year to a net worth of more than \$50 million.

Jones says they've heard from a handful of the groups on the recipient list "expressing their thanks for being seen and being acknowledged for what they are doing." In response to the news that they'd been included in the campaign, Jess Heaney of Critical Resistance (<http://criticalresistance.org/>), an organization working against the prison industrial complex, told RG: "We appreciate you galvanizing your base to strengthen the movement for liberation and fight back against our greatest threats. Your vote of confidence—by making us visible and accessible to your base, means a great deal to us."

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This kind of rapid response campaign is a first for Resource Generation and they haven't yet decided whether they'll pursue something similar in the future.

RG has not been in contact with Michael Brown's family. “I imagine a lot of people are trying to be in touch with them,” says Spector. “And they are trying to mourn the loss of their child.”

**Post has been updated since publication to reflect that Chad Jones identifies as "black/white" rather than "black."*

***Post has been updated since publication to reflect that the original 250 members cited did not include advocate and alumni members, which brings the member total to 350.*

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