



May 31, 2022

We, the African American Health Equity Task Force, the Buffalo Center for Health Equity and the UB Community Health Equity Research Institute honor the members of our community who died at the hands of racism: Celestine Chaney, Roberta A. Drury, Andre Mackniel, Katherine (Kat) Massey, Margus D. Morrison, Heyward Patterson, Aaron Salter, Geraldine Talley, Ruth Whitfield, Pearl Young; and those who were wounded and are recovering: Christopher Braden, Zaire Goodman and Jennifer Warrington.

We express our love, support and comfort to the family and loved ones of those who were killed and wounded. Our entire community has been traumatized and we pledge to work with the community toward healing.

This disturbing attack by a white supremacist on our beloved community is not an isolated incident but reflects a deep political and moral division in our country. Progressive forces have a vision of America based on racial, social, economic and political justice, while the right-wing seek an America based on authoritarianism, White supremacy, systemic structural racism, and exploitation.

This reality causes violence to threaten Black lives. This shooting is directly related to the anti-critical race theory movement, Black voter suppression, and other efforts to marginalize Black people. The legacy of oppression and economic subjugation started during slavery continues to have an impact on the position of Black people in American society today.

Racism exists in the systems and institutions in our society and is present at the individual level. Racism is a critical driver of racial health inequities. We must commit ourselves to systemic change by developing anti-racist laws, policies and regulations that will transform the East Side and other marginalized and underdeveloped communities.

This tragedy that occurred at the only supermarket that serves the East Side, where about 70,000 people live, shines a spotlight on the food apartheid that exists in Buffalo. The closing of the Tops store, even for a short time, creates a significant hardship and has a health impact on people in the area, exacerbating a longstanding inequity in the availability of healthy food. The reality is that nearly 30% of our city relies on a single supermarket store.

We urge Tops to dialogue with the East side community and reopen this store in a way that honors and respects the lives that were lost and the trauma that community members have experienced. Concurrently, one supermarket on the East Side is not enough. Therefore, we support the development of a cooperative grocery store that East Side residents own and control. Importantly, we must commit ourselves to addressing the underlying inequity that tragically makes food insecurity a daily reality for families in our city.

This racist act on our community must strengthen our resolve to work together toward eliminating the underlying systemic racism that plagues our community and the nation. This tragedy must fuel the fire to continue to fight to abolish health inequities and the social determinants that produce them. The outpouring of support both from within and from outside the neighborhood of the tragedy is encouraging and creates an opportunity to leverage the resources and talents of many sectors of our community.

Repeating the actions that have brought us to this moment won't work. Now is the time for bold initiatives. Therefore, we should work to transform the East Side into a community land trust funded by the public sector. We must intensify the fight to abolish substandard housing and decaying neighborhood conditions. And we must work toward the establishment of social enterprises, cooperatives, and other institutions that give East Siders greater control over their community.

Moreover, we need to forge a strategy for community wealth-building, create activities that provide our children and youth with opportunities that bolster social development while providing them with alternatives to street life. Moreover, we should develop "on the job training programs" that make it possible for East Side Blacks to rebuild their lives as they rebuild their community.