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Amplify remembers the legacy of Michael Brown, Jr.



Dear fellow funders,

Michael Brown, Jr. was murdered ten years ago, on August 9, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri. At Amplify Fund, we often talk about “a decade of change” because we believe ten years is a significant period of time to see differences in political, economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and other external factors. As such, I interviewed [Faybra Jabulani](#) from Forward Through Ferguson, to better understand what has changed in Missouri in the last ten years.

After reading through the interview please check out [resources and links at the bottom of the e-news](#) to learn more about other critical work happening in the St. Louis region.

Sincerely,
Renata Peralta

Faybra Jabulani

Lead Racial Equity Capacity Catalyst
Forward Through Ferguson



Renata Peralta

Director of Learning and Communications
Amplify Fund

"Hi Faybra, thank you for taking the time to talk to me and the Amplify community to reflect on the past decade. To kick us off, what were you doing when Mike Brown was murdered by a white police officer? And how did that moment affect your involvement in racial justice organizing work?"



"I was a Montessori teacher at the time, teaching early childhood. I had just made a shift from academia (studying philosophy and Africana Studies) to education so I was getting my Master's degree, and I was on my way to the University of Missouri St. Louis campus when I heard the news and saw the crowds growing. It was an overwhelming moment, especially having to go back to work and explain to my students, their parents, and fellow teachers what was happening. I felt a swift culture shift at my school. Colleagues that I thought were like-minded, were actually not. The way they talked about the community's response, and the microaggressions I experienced, were infuriating. But, as I was making sense of it, I realized that, while this tragedy was significant, it was actually a microcosm of the multiple ways the systems of government and business fail us. I knew this before, academically, but seeing a picture of someone's son and knowing that it was only a couple miles away from where I live, and that it could have been my cousin or my neighbor, was scary. The work to try to solve these issues became urgent. They were urgent in 2014, and they are still urgent today. So, I decided I wanted to be part of the solution. I became a teacher organizer in a different school, which made a strong commitment to racial justice. I was also an inaugural member of Forward Through Ferguson's Racial Equity Roundtable in 2016, that led to me volunteering for the #STL2039 Action Plan which was

intended to identify what racial equity would look and feel like a generation after the Mike Brown tragedy. That contribution resulted in Forward Through Ferguson developing an implementation plan, and I raised my hand to say that I could carry it forward. So I started as a full time senior staff person with Forward Through Ferguson in 2020."

"Your leadership during that time is clear to me, Faybra. And from an outside perspective, it seemed like the Ferguson Uprising in the fall of 2014 brought new, young Black leaders to the fore of the movement who birthed new organizations, forged new relationships, and deepened existing ones. How would you describe the evolution of Missouri's movement leadership in the last ten years?"



"Yes, I think there are more young leaders now, but young people have always been involved. There were dozens of organizations and community organizing efforts that already existed that never got attention or a news story prior to the uprising. Then, in 2014, the media, and people in traditional seats of power, started paying attention to movement leaders. So, I would argue that there weren't as many overnight activists as the media would have us believe. For example, the Ferguson Commission, which ultimately created Forward Through Ferguson, was not made up of random people who suddenly became interested in racial justice. They were people who had decades of experience with helping the region solve big problems. The issue has never been a lack of leadership. The issue is a lack of sustainable resources for impactful leaders, capacity of staff to support those leaders, leadership pipelines when someone retires, and space for meaningful collaboration outside of coalitions that are forged from crisis moments. Young Leaders, and their organizations, are burning the midnight oil without enough support from philanthropy, and

not enough capacity to build at a large scale. It's also very hard to sustain brilliant, and energetic leadership in this type of work when we constantly see our wins undermined and attacked. The reality is that the stress and toxicity of these hostile environments are claiming the lives of dedicated leaders at a young age. I am tired of saying goodbye to my colleagues, friends, and family because not enough is changing. At the same time though, I know that I have to keep trying to make a meaningful contribution to the long term work. I know that liberation is generational work."

"Earlier you brought up that philanthropy is not providing enough support. I'm curious about funding in Missouri. I know that the Uprising drew the attention of many national foundations and donors, if temporarily. But, I also know that the funding was inadequate to the depth and scale of the problems that surfaced. What is funding like right now?"



"There's definitely been a huge walking back on commitments and white supremacy backlash. Because we were winning, because we could point to specific wins in racial justice, like more oversight and accountability of police, more non-partisan organizing, more institutions expressing diversity, equity, and inclusion as a value and having to demonstrate it...because of all that, the people and structures that were resistant to begin with devised a plan to undermine racial justice efforts. They created false narratives about 'favoritism' and 'wokeness.' These narratives have taken hold in the business community, and the influence that the business community has over philanthropy has resulted in philanthropy taking a panicked and cowardly response to supporting racial justice work. So, I see a return to philanthropic paternalism, and a return to the promotion of capitalism at the expense of urgent community needs remaining unmet."

"Philanthropy has a terrible way of shifting their strategies once a crisis disappears from the news. Turning to another institution, has policing gotten better? The Mike Brown murder, and murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012, shined a spotlight on police brutality in this country. Have you seen any changes in this area in the last ten years?"



"I think there's more of a willingness to have accountability conversations than before, and that's a testament to organizing focused on electing people who are interested in community discussions of public safety. Organizers are doing their best to ensure that those local, elected officials maintain oversight of our local police department. There was an effort to move police oversight to the state, but it was struck down. People who don't live here are continuing to fight for state preemption, but for now, our local officials still have control over the police. Those elected leaders, at least the ones I have spoken to, have shown a willingness to understand what community organizations are working towards when it comes to public safety and police accountability. That did not exist before. And, it's not enough, but it's a good start. And, as we continue to be clear about what we want to see, and not just what we don't want to see, that helps elected officials a lot. For example, there's traction in creating non-police alternatives to first responders. Forward Through Ferguson is working on an initiative for the county, and, from my understanding, Action St. Louis is working on an initiative for the city."

"Those wins are definitely attributed to the sophisticated, smart, strategic organizing of movement leaders in Missouri. Can you talk to me about changes in organizing in Missouri?"





"We have been able to change the narrative to say "the way things have been working, harms everyone. It's unsustainable. So by working on racial justice issues, it benefits society as whole." And that's because we have savvy organizers, doing both community and institutional work, that have the ability to demonstrate that these are systemic issues that are solvable with policy and investment, and cannot be reduced to individual misfortunes. Another major change is more collaboration between new and seasoned leadership. This happened because we de-siloed our issues, and promoted coalition building. You can see that in the [People's Plan](#), and the local Prosecutor Organizing Table. When we collaborate more, we are also able to hold each other accountable and support each other more effectively. This is a lesson we learned from previous movement work, where we asked ourselves tough questions, and realized that leaders didn't want to talk to each other anymore, and they didn't want to argue anymore. So now, we have structures to argue, structures to be friends, and structures for generative feedback."

"And that has resulted in policy wins. You successfully closed the workhouse, an inhumane jail in St. Louis City. You elected a mayor who created the Reparations Commission."



Resources from grantees in the St. Louis Region

- [The People's Plan St. Louis](#)
Written by Action St. Louis, ArchCity Defenders, Forward Through Ferguson, Homes for All St. Louis, Missouri Faith Voices, Missouri Jobs with Justice, WEPOWER, and many more.
- [Prosecutor Watch: Assessing the Practices of the St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney's Office](#)
Written by Action St. Louis, ArchCity Defenders, Forward Through Ferguson, and other partner organizations.
- [The Community Wealth Action Group](#)
A coalition of St. Louis, MO and East St. Louis, IL community members, organized by WEPOWER, with a common goal to build communities where we can all thrive.
- [Under the Arch Podcast](#)
Produced by Action St. Louis and ArchCity Defenders, and co-hosted by leaders of the two organizations (Kayla Reed and Blake Strode).
- [Pay or Stay: The Fight to Abolish Debtors' Prisons](#)
A multi-faceted storytelling project from ArchCity Defenders documenting how many towns in St. Louis have used their police and municipal courts to arrest and jail thousands of poor, predominantly Black people, for their inability to pay.
- [Reenvisioning the Workhouse](#)
A vision for repurposing the former jail and its surrounding land written by community stakeholders, including representatives from ArchCity Defenders, and informed by feedback from nearly 2,500 St. Louis residents.
- [LeadBLACK](#)
A program designed by and for Black leaders to create political alignment and develop leadership. Amplify Fund has supported this program since 2018.

