

ΘΦΑ AND DEIA

BY NIKOLE COLLINS-PURI, 2020 SIENA MEDALIST

“Proclaim the truth and do not be silent through fear”

– St. Catherine of Siena

Our nation is facing unprecedented uncertainty, fear about our health, questions around education for our children, and an explosion of racial injustice that has penetrated our nation to the point that no one can ignore nor accept that we all play a role in creating an equitable world. We are dealing with this all while managing the emotional impact of the loss of family members, our way of living, and individuals like Supreme Court Justice Ginsburg, who paved the way for women’s equality and justice through the eye of law. We are in a moment where everything that we have done to this point needs to be re-evaluated, re-prioritized, and re-committed. Fear must fall victim to what is right and truth must proclaim its rightful place in our society.

For many of us, we can derive this spirit to seek the truth and stand up for what’s right from St. Catherine of Siena, whose legacy continues to bring relevance across centuries and generations. A changemaker and trailblazer in her own right, St. Catherine of Siena used the power of her faith and sisterhood to stand in the midst of fear, uncertainty, and ridicule. She is a strong reminder that this is our moment. As a sisterhood founded on a deep commitment to social service, now is the time to define what that means and to hold the sisterhood accountable. It is important to reflect on where we came from so that we may act today and create a better tomorrow for generations to come.

This type of reflection and assessment is what Theta Phi Alpha must incorporate as it embarks on its Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access (DEIA) strategy, especially as it learns more about how to move forward through the listening sessions. And, understand how history has impacted its women of color sisters. It’s critical today for us to come together as a sisterhood to broaden our circle to ensure that each member is seen, heard, reflected, and represented in all areas of the organization – from Ritual to leadership.

It’s true that we are in an unprecedented moment, but for many women of color, especially Black women, we often find ourselves asking our white colleagues, “Why now?” Why now is equity, anti-racism, justice, “wokeness” important? The reality is that consciousness has been awakened; individuals can no longer hide behind their privileges, public shaming is a real thing, and Black people are tired of navigating a world that was not created for us to thrive in so the filters are coming down. The visual reality of the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the countless list of individuals that were murdered because of the color of their skin is a hard pill to swallow for those who truly want to live in a world where all people are equal and have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; but here we are now, staring in the face of systemic racism and barriers Black women and men have faced for centuries. It’s time for us to build on today’s moment to create a better tomorrow.

Theta Phi Alpha has taken a couple of steps already in the right direction. The sorority has established a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access Task Force to help provide structure, strategy, and accountability around this work. Recently, the task force hosted a series of listening sessions for the membership.

As you continue to embark on this journey, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- **PARTICIPATE AND LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD.**

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- **USE TOOLS AND FRAMEWORKS** like Liberatory Design created by the National Equity Project and Stanford’s d.school K12 Lab to structure conversations and create an inclusive strategy.

- **LEVERAGE YOUR NETWORK AND RESOURCES.**

Members sit on college or university campuses that have departments and experts who have been doing this work for decades, leverage their expertise and guidance. Many of your local chapters have been effective in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Tap on them to find out why.

- **WHITE SISTERS DO YOUR WORK** and don’t put the onus on your Black & Brown sisters to figure this out. Here is a great resource to begin your journey: <https://thewomensfoundation.org/anti-racism-resources/>.

- **HOLD YOUR LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABLE.** What are the milestones and goals you want to achieve? What is the

long-term vision for this strategy? What do you expect to change? Who do we want to be and how do we know when we get there? And, who decides what success looks like?

- **REMEMBER, EVERY CHAPTER HAS A DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE.** Once the strategy is built, remember that it has to be translated to local chapters to see effective results.

- **UNDERSTAND EQUITY AND JUSTICE WORK IS ONGOING.** This doesn’t end when you have x number of Black and Brown members. It took a generation to create these social constructs and systems, and it will take time to undo them.

- **STAY GROUNDED IN YOUR COMMITMENT TO SISTERHOOD.** Sisterhood is not always easy. You will need to address hard places and recognize where you have fallen short, but continue to stay compassionate and be empathetic to one another. This is a journey for everyone and in order to move forward, everyone needs to feel safe and supported.



Sisterhood can no longer be just about the common interests or a social network, but the collective power and action as women united across all walks of life coming together for generational justice. We are in the midst of a historical movement that will no longer accept the unequal treatment of those who are not White, Christian, or males. This means all women have to be on the frontlines and use our collective power to change the status quo.

#ONWARD

Nikole Collins-Puri is the CEO of Techbridge Girls and Theta Phi Alpha’s 2020 Siena Medalist. Please see the feature article on Nikole in this issue.