

“Listening Circles” : A Measured Response to Our Current Crises; Please Note...

about this moment:

We are shaken. Our nation and our people are sad, stressed and searching. Healing is hard but vital.

Rather than *re-act*, we seek to slowly *pro-act*—per the motto “Don’t just *do* some thing, stand there!”

We have an idea: a mobile space where people of all backgrounds and perspectives can gather to listen, to reflect and to learn; together, we might [re-]consider who we are, how we got here and where to go.

about our format:

We believe that in an era of numbing loudness and social strife, quiet and personal calm can move much. We believe in the power of “expectant waiting” as embodied in Quaker tradition; by going inward and taking inventory, all can emerge with something of value to contribute to a larger, shared understanding.

We believe that as much as people wish to speak, they wish to be heard—to be truly listened to, without challenge or judgement. We can give them a forum—but to share solely from their *own* experiences, *not* to speak for others or tell others what they “should” or “not” do: Only so can their words be authentic.

We wish to offer our mobile exhibit as a backdrop for current-day themes, but as seen in historical case studies—a backdrop for quiet personal reflection, lively public discussion and the exchange of personal perspectives. This cannot be achieved through chaos, but rather with disciplined order, such as:

We would start every even hour (for ex., 10am, noon, 2pm, etc.) during our BUS-showing times with a few minutes of focused silence, out of which those in the circle [on physically-distanced chairs] can ask for 3-5 minutes to share what arose in them during the quiet—a time for sharing, *not* discussion.

At the top of every odd hour (9am ... 7pm), experienced docents will speak about themes displayed on the BUS panels—which we’ve remounted, moving them from the interior to the BUS’ exterior. After about a quarter-hour presentation, those docents will facilitate discussion driven by audience input.

about our intentions:

The all-new exhibit featured in our mobile museum [literally, a place “for the muses”] in a bus, the “BUS-eum,” is *Hidden or Forbidden No More: Prequels to the ‘Greatest Generation’*, which has five sub-foci. Ultimately, all five dissect white privilege; three of them, however, are exceptionally relevant to now:

- *America’s White Cancer: The KKK’s ‘2nd Wave’ of the 1920s* examines the three million Klan members of that period, tens of thousands of whom were in the Midwest; 1/6th (500,000) were female members. This sub-exhibit includes accounts of the 1919 race riots in Chicago and Omaha, and the 1920 lynching of 3 circus workers in Duluth. It explores from where racist hate originates and how to counter it—its shadow being long and dark, stretching into the present.

- *The Killer: 1918’s Flu Pandemic* contains many takeaways applicable to 2020’s pandemic... IF we will see their lessons. Some of them can be heard in an interview with Quaker radio-station host, Mark Helpsmeet, in Eau Claire/Wisconsin, per a link at: <https://northernspiritradio.org/episode/not-our-first-pandemic-rodeo-1918-2020>

- *Cow Wars* explores social-justice issues inherent to mass unemployment during the Great Depression: forced deportations under Hoover and FDR of up to a 1/3rd of a million Latinos “back” to Mexico; hunger marches by laid-off Ford Auto Co. workers; some 40,000 WWI veterans who marched on and then occupied Washington/DC to demand Congress-approved bonuses; Upper-Midwest truckers’ and, ultimately, Midwest farmers’ “Farm Holiday” strikes.

Together, they explore social movements or national moments that influenced the much-mythologized generation that “survived a Depression, beat Hitler, built post-war prosperity and landed on the moon.” They re-examine venerable narratives about ourselves that have sanctioned certain beliefs or behaviors.

By dissecting the world that shaped our ancestors, we better know ourselves—their descendants. With greater understanding of our families’ and our roles in creating the status quo, we can better change it. Owning our personal assumptions and privileges allows us to withdraw from unconscious “living” that impinges or endangers those around us—especially non-whites or those disempowered by our power.

about our goals:

We seek to create a space where visitors to the exhibit might see themselves anew. (It is now available at www.TRACES.org and <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMXietD-X0Q-LXgAcZ7eehA/videos>) Those who wish may speak with docents or volunteers, who have been briefed on the exhibit’s contents.

Both on their own and with the help of engagement with attendants or other visitors, those who gather at the BUS will leave with greater understanding of how past events have helped to create “today.” And, they will have takeaways from the featured case studies which they can apply to our present and future.

about safety measures:

We will strive at all times to support Covid-safe practices and behaviors. Towards that end, we note that:

The number of exhibit visitors will be limited to 25 people viewing EXTERIOR panels at any given time; seating during presentations will be physically distant. Volunteers will greet visitors and explain social-distancing measures in place + remind them to wear their masks, as required of all attendees. On a table outside the entry door, we will supply a bottle of hand sanitizer and extra masks. In dry weather, we now have converted the exterior of the BUS to hang all of the interior panels, so that no one “must” enter the BUS who doesn’t wish to; the bookshop inside, however, remains open, as it finances the tour. In all weather, the BUS enjoys fresh air that constantly moves through the two doors and many windows that are always open; except during downpours, two ceiling hatches also facilitate airing. If need be, we can pace the flow of visitors entering the BUS to a safer, distance-assuring level. Spread typically over one or two four-hour showings, the normal density is conducive to “safe” showing even during this pandemic; especially outside, where visitors can maintain social distance. All of our on-BUS films can be viewed via our website or YouTube channel; the exhibit-panel texts also are online: This allows for visitors to engage with the curator/docent about how the five sub-themes fit together, then deepen their experience—if they choose—to speak with attendants or other visitors; they can further “interact” with the exhibits and related programs “socially distant” from home, school, etc. For libraries, museums, etc. now closed or reduced to curb-side service, the BUS offers a way to be safe yet “relevant” in terms of a community’s cultural programming, despite shut downs or limitations. In an otherwise socially fallow era, this project lets cultural life begin again, safely; it stills a growing public hunger for meaningful mental engagement.

This project relies upon committed local hosts and volunteers, who in shifts greet and engage with the public, using the BUS’ five sub-topics as starting points for reflection, discussion, healing and change. The exhibit’s creator sees his on-site role as a primarily a reference person for historical questions; local hosts will be visible and engaged with community members, both during and potentially after a BUS showing.

For more information:

To know more about why and how TRACES-Spuren works biographically for social transformation, see: <http://roots.traces.org/vision-and-mission> or www.TRACES.org

Preview the presentations at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMXietD-X0Q-LXgAcZ7eehA/videos>

To host the BUS, contact KristineZylstraTabke@gmail.com at 515.450.1548. **Thank you, friend.**