



January 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, & 28<sup>th</sup> | 2021

**VIRTUAL  
SIGNATURE CONFERENCE SERIES**

**Racism is a Public Health Crisis:  
Attacking the 2 Pandemics**

# Conference Report

## **ABC Signature Conference Report**

### **Jerome H. Underwood**

2020 brought a pivotal time in our shared history with two pandemics which have been responsible for unprecedented deaths. COVID-19 hit like a fierce storm causing varying levels of loss of life and economic viability. Simultaneously, systemic and structural racism was forced to the forefront of our collective consciousness through events in Minnesota, Kentucky and here in Rochester, NY. In response to the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Daniel Prude, and others, many cities and towns across the country declared that Racism is a Public Health Crisis. The systemic failures of policing and mental health care were laid bare once again. They have deadly and disproportionate consequences for people of color.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ABC was unable to host its annual Signature Luncheon, typically held in October. Like many other organizations we were forced to consider having a virtual event. This presented a challenging set of circumstances for the agency, not least of which was the need to generate unrestricted income. The Signature Luncheon has historically been our largest (measured by funds generated) fund raising activity of the year. It was clear that needed an event, but very unclear as to what that event should be.

Given the agency's roots as a social justice organization, coupled with the significant amount of civil unrest precipitated by the deaths of Floyd, Taylor and Prude, plus the unacceptable disproportionate suffering by people of color during COVID-19, we decided to host a conference series aimed directed at these issues. That idea gave birth to the theme – Racism is a Public Health Crisis – Attacking the 2 Pandemics. In October of 2020, we decided to hold the conference over the first 3 Thursdays in January 2021. The conference planning team as convened and we quickly acknowledged that attempting to do this in January was a very aggressive timeline, and that we would need help beyond the staff and volunteers who comprised the planning team. A decision was made to retain Sara Taylor as the event coordinator. This turned out to be one of the best decisions we made. Sara has significant experience in event planning. However the virtual environment was fairly new to all of us. The virtual nature of the conference did allow for wider participation of attendees and presenters at a fraction of the cost.

#### **Conference Goals and Objectives:**

- Address the pandemics of systemic and structural racism and COVID-19, and the intersectionality of Social Determinants of Health and associated disparities
- Present strategies for emerging models of integrated services that result in equity and justice for people of color
- Build skills and develop organizational competencies and capacities to improve services and outcomes for economically marginalized communities
- Present evidenced based and emerging models that center around Human Design, Lived Experience, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma Informed practices
- Build a network of local and regional champions of equity change makers committed to improving individual and community outcomes through shared accountability across practices and systems
- Promote public and private partnerships that prioritize racial equity and justice within workforce and economic development practices and policies
- Further understanding of the intersection between racism, socioeconomic conditions, health and educational disparities
- Explore innovative strategies to advance equity through awareness, grassroots initiatives and social justice movements
- Present high-quality professional development opportunities offering CEUs and content focused on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and staff wellness

### **Conference Target Audience:**

For profit and non-profit leaders, policy makers, health and human service professionals, law enforcement leaders, elected officials, chambers of commerce, medical students, educators, philanthropy, the general public, researchers, advocates, mental health providers, HR professionals, and social workers

Because 2020 had been such a tough year in many respects, we wanted to start the new year providing some hope while being very sober about the challenges that prevailed. We wanted to ensure that we would not allow “going back to normal,” and that ABC needed to be a driver in that regard. Our community needed to heal. Our economy needed to be boosted, but in an inclusive way that enabled equity. These issues were persistent and pervasive and remain top priorities for communities of color. We saw this as an opportunity to be vocal about action to demand change in attitudes, power structures and systems, policy and practices. We aspired to be intentional about lifting voices to ***“Promote Equity and Justice for All”***.

The conference series was a way to feature keynotes and high-quality workshops that showcase speakers with expertise in the areas of service delivery, public policy, racial equity, economic development, evidenced based research, community organizing, social determinants of health, philanthropy, corporate responsibility, healthcare, trauma, lived experience/human centered design, education and more.

### **Sponsors & Participation:**

No event like this can be successful without adequate sponsorship. We were able to attract many previous sponsors but were pleasantly surprised at the number of new sponsors from different business sectors. Most significant among these was Key Bank, who came in as the event’s top sponsor at \$15,000. ABC does not have a banking relationship with Key, but they were attracted to the agency as a result of our social justice work. They approached us with an invitation to apply for funding. We will look to develop this relationship into something that will be more than the transaction of event sponsorship. Manning & Napier and Visions Federal Credit Union were other new ABC sponsors who are also seeking relationships beyond sponsorships. We are delighted as these entities can assist with future financial literacy technical assistance for ABC clients.

The number of people registered for the conference exceeded 500. Although the number of registrations exceeded 500, as far as attendance on the 3 days was concerned, we only hit that number on the first day. The following 2 days topped out in the high 300’s. On each day, the participants were very engaged and asked very pertinent questions during the plenary sessions (keynotes and panel discussions). The technical team (managing the zoom) did an outstanding job of keeping things flowing smoothly. There were some minor hiccups that were invisible to the participants, including a few attempts to zoom bomb the event. We were prepared for that and managed it with 2-factor authentication.

Combined with the increased level of sponsorships, we were able to gross just over \$100,000 for the event. Our net profit was just over \$56,000 making it the most financially successful Signature Event. A list of the sponsors is included as an attachment to this report.

## Conference Feedback & Impact:

Judging from the comments made on Day #1 of the series we knew that we hit the mark. The event was designed to get progressively action oriented. Day #1 was theme “Establishing the Why”; Day #2 was focused on “Health” and featured a panel discussion about vaccines; Day #3 was themed “Be the Healing” and was supposed to be the call to action moment. Based on the feedback throughout, participants were moved to take action on various social justice initiatives to include diversity, equity and inclusion. We lost the opportunity to do surveys at the end of each day, but did send out a survey at the end of the conference. An analysis of the survey results are also attached to this report. Here are the results to 3 of the survey questions:

- **What did you like most about this conference?**

Aspects about this conference liked the most included the **speakers, topics and breakout sessions**. The diversity, knowledgebase and ability to engage the audience by speakers were appreciated the most. The positive energy was noted by a few respondents. Providing attendees with an opportunity to interact was also mentioned as a highlight of this conference. Lastly, the staging of conference over three weeks was lauded, enabling more participation and providing time to reflect.

- **On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your overall experience with the conference?**

Respondents were asked to give a rating on a 10-star rating scale, with 1 star=very poor and 10 stars=very good. Overall conference experience was **rated closer to “very good” by respondents, with an average rating of 8.9**. A quarter of the respondents rating the overall conference experience with 8-stars, 21.0% gave a 9-star rating and 44.8% gave a rating of 10-stars. Less than 10% of the respondents rated the overall conference experience lower than 8-stars.

- **Based on the information presented, what will you do to help promote equity and justice for all?**

The following is a list of ways respondents shared that they will help promote equity and justice for all:

- Share information with co-workers, “those in my circles”, others
- Speak up more
- Become more aware of actions of self and others who perpetuate the matter
- Continue to actively pursue opportunities to learn
- Continue to develop educational programs and dialogue opportunities/address matter at work (e.g. include in strategic plan, encourage leadership/board/decision makers/community to address matter, reviewing policies and practices that create or contribute to the matter)
- Seek opportunities to have the matter led by frontline staff
- Vote for candidates who embrace the matter

### **Conference Recommendations:**

There were a number of recommendations raised during the conference. These (summarized below) were discussed as opportunities to make the type of systemic and policy changes that would represent attacking the 2 pandemics.

- City of ROC Non-resident Income Tax
- For any entity receiving public funding – staffing at all levels MUST reflect the community
- Living Wage Audits for every entity
- Black Birthing Center
- Inclusive Recovery – guaranteed mortgages with zero interest for BIPOC
- Education – BIPOC educator exemptions from LIFO (last in, first out layoff rules)
- DEI at every organization – CEO evaluations; board leadership; bylaws & policies
- VET everyone for white supremacists tendencies/backgrounds
- Funding for BIPOC education (medical fields, therapists, educators, etc.)

The conference series has also created the possibility that ABC could provide consulting services to organizations who may want to explore DEI initiatives and/or address systemic and structural racism within their operations. We would most likely partner with other entities or consultants to do this. No firm decisions were made in that regard. However, it is clear that ABC is seen as a credible equity and social justice subject matter expert.

### **Signature Conference Series Planning Team**

Lee Alice Lawson, ABC Board
Freddie Hines, ABC Board
Christopher Bell, ABC Staff
Patricia Lloyd, ABC Staff, COO
Sonjia Edwards-Miller, ABC Staff
Brad Rye, ABC Board Chair
Tessie Demps, City of Rochester
Jerome H. Underwood, ABC Staff, CEO
Norman Holland, URMC
Joseph Searles, Excellus
Tracy Boff, Technical Team
Dr. Ebony Caldwell, RRH
Jackie Dozier, Common Ground Health
Sara Taylor, Consultant

## CONFERENCE SPONSORS



**Racism is a Public Health Crisis -  
Attacking the 2 Pandemics**



## **ABC Signature Conference Series Survey Feedback Compiled by ABC's Planning & Evaluation Department**

Action for a Better Community, Inc. (ABC) held a virtual conference, *ABC Signature Conference*, on January 14, 2021, January 21, 2021 and January 28, 2021. The conference's theme was "Racism is a Public Health Crisis – Fighting the 2 Pandemics". The conference examined solution-based actions to counteract the impact of systemic and structural racism on communities of color. The simultaneous goals of the conference were to raise non-restricted income to support ABC's programs, and to educate participants and the community as a whole on collective and collaborative actions we can undertake to eliminate or reduce poverty. Five hundred-ninety two individuals registered for the event. Attendees were able to earn continuing education credits, which will assist them along their path to removing the disparities that result in inequitable outcomes for people of color.

A survey to ascertain feedback on the conference, including identifying action to be taken by ABC and the community to address racial inequities. [See attached survey] A total of 106 surveys were completed, which is nearly 20% of registrants. This document summarizes findings from the surveys.

### **Question 1: How did you learn about ABC's Virtual Signature Conference Series?**

The majority of respondents learned of the conference series through a **co-worker** (68.5%) and/or **social media** (24.7%). Other ways of learning about the event included ABC's website (13.7%) and family/friends (11.0%).

### **Questions 2: Why did you decide to attend this conference?**

The most likely reason respondents shared as to why they decided to attend this conference was that (1) they wanted to **increase their knowledge and/or had an interest in the topic**, and/or (2) they wanted to **help address the matter**. Another commonly mentioned reason was that the topic aligned with their work.

### **Question 3: Was the conference too long, too short or about right?**

Over four-fifths (84.9%) of the respondents felt that the length of the conference was "**about right**". About 10% viewed the conference as being "too long", 3.8% thought it was "too short" and less than 1% felt that it was "much too long".

### **Question 4: What did you like most about this conference?**

Aspects about this conference liked the most included the **speakers, topics and breakout sessions**. The diversity, knowledgebase and ability to engage the audience by speakers were appreciated the most. The positive energy was noted by a few respondents. Providing attendees with an opportunity to interact was also mentioned as a highlight of this conference. Lastly, the staging of conference over three weeks was lauded, enabling more participation and providing time to reflect.

### **Question 5: What would you recommend to make this conference better?**

The following is a list of recommendations:

- Shorter sessions and/or more breaks; longer workshops; have organized downtime such as small activities to keep participants engaged
  - Sitting on Zoom for 5 hours is not good. The portions should be 45 minutes with breaks in between and not go longer than 3 hours

- More time in workshops for attendees to share
  - Some breakout sessions were not interactive and presenters were not attentive to chat and audience comments/concerns
  - Some breakout sessions did not cover the bigger picture, giving some examples of the concepts discussed through their everyday experience
- Registration recommendations:
  - Email link sooner than the night before
  - Clearer instructions for registration deadline
  - Allow attendees to select workshops when they register
  - Clearer instructions about the number of workshops attendees could attend
  - Better description of workshops and presentations in order to help attendees choose sessions of interest
- Have different videos each day
- Send out reading list ahead of time
- Provide an opportunity to send questions ahead of presentations so that the presenters can cover them during their session
- Have Spanish Interpretation/ SAP Abilities
- Include list of ABC staff and program description
- Record each session so that those who could not attend a session can listen to them
- Provide an opportunity to network/engage with other attendees or dialogue with attendees
- More topics (e.g. social issues; broader diversity, equity and inclusion issues; state and national focus instead of Rochester focus; vary topics in the clinical seminars; present on direct application of services, ideas and concepts)
- Future Presenters:
  - Include Black Farmers Association to give history on discrimination in their world and educate about what goes on in our rural communities as well
- Better clarification about continuing education credits
- Allow conversations to move towards “what’s next” and “what now” earlier on by assuming that attendees have a higher level of awareness of what systemic racism is and of the dynamics at play
- Make the conference a primer before the community starts a 21-day racial equity challenge
- More publicity and earlier publicity; promote to chief diversity officers at every business, institution and organization in the Rochester five-county area
- Raise more money
- Less bashing “...you can not fight racism with racism and negativity”

**Question 6: What are your thoughts about the registration process for this conference?**

The majority of respondents felt positively about the registration process, words such as “easy”, “simple”, “seamless” and “user friendly” were used to describe the process. Areas of improvement noted:

- Deadline to register was unclear – a few respondents lauded help they received from tech support
- Some had trouble registering in advance
- Need to have the ability to select workshops at the time of registration and receiving Zoom link immediately rather than having to check email multiple times for the link the night before [one respondent mentioned that this might help increase participation]
- More clarity needed around the number of workshops participants could attend and that workshops were to be selected before the conference
- Better communication around the scheduled and Zoom information
- Need to provide other forms of conference payment besides PayPal

**Question 7: On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your overall experience with the conference?**



Respondents were asked to give a rating on a 10-star rating scale, with 1 star=very poor and 10 stars=very good. Overall conference experience was **rated closer to “very good” by respondents, with an average rating of 8.9**. A quarter of the respondents rating the overall conference experience with 8-stars, 21.0% gave a 9-star rating and 44.8% gave a rating of 10-stars. Less than 10% of the respondents rated the overall conference experience lower than 8-stars.

**Question 8: In the future, would you prefer to attend a conference in-person or virtually?**

**Responses were nearly evenly split, 30 (in-person) and 39 (virtual), respectively.** Nineteen of all of the respondents noted that either format would be ideal. Thirteen respondents mentioned both formats, with 5 respondents stating that a hybrid format or a mixture of both formats would work.

- Benefits of in-person format: provides less distractions and more of an opportunity to network.
- Benefits of virtual format: convenient and makes the event more accessible (e.g. allows those who live far away to attend), saves on travel time/parking cost, less distractions, provides opportunity to attend the event while also attending necessary work meetings, and provides an opportunity to regroup after sessions.

**Question 9: If ABC hosted another conference like this, how likely are you to attend?**

**Nearly all of the respondents (88.7%)** shared that if ABC hosted another conference like the one they attended, they **would be likely (20.8%) and very likely (67.9%) to attend**. Should ABC host another conference, about 10% of respondents would be somewhat likely to attend. Only 2 respondents indicated that they were unlikely to attend.

**Question 10: Based on the information presented, what will you do to help promote equity and justice for all?**

The following is a list of ways respondents shared that they will help promote equity and justice for all:

- Share information with co-workers, “those in my circles”, others
- Speak up more
- Become more aware of actions of self and others who perpetuate the matter
- Continue to actively pursue opportunities to learn
- Continue to develop educational programs and dialogue opportunities/address matter at work (e.g. include in strategic plan, encourage leadership/board/decisionmakers/community to address matter, reviewing policies and practices that create or contribute to the matter)
- Seek opportunities to have the matter led by frontline staff
- Vote for candidates who embrace the matter

One respondent recommended forming a committee to address the matter.

**Question 11: Which speakers would you be interested in hearing from again?**

**About thirty percent (26 out of 93)** of the respondents noted that they **would like to hear (again) from all of the presenters**. Presenters most commonly mentioned included: Dr. Joy DeGruy and Wade Norwood. Some other presenters that were often mentioned were: Dr. Latise Hairston, Sara Taylor, Simeon Banister, Bahia Overton, John Graham and Keisha Carter. *Note: To help respondents to be able to answer this question, presenters and topics should have been listed. Many respondents could not recall the names of presenters.* Other comments shared: (1) have more Latinx presenters and (2) include local employers.

## CHAT ITEMS

### Resources shared in the chat box:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/01/denial-heartbeat-america/617631>

<https://healourcommunities.org>

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/racism-and-ecd>

[www.communityactionpartnership.com/racial-equity](http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/racial-equity)

Urban League of Rochester has compiled a resource library called the Interrupter Toolkit focusing on systemic racism, white supremacy, privilege, trauma, allyship, etc.

<https://www.urbanleaguero.org/irtoolkit>

Racial Equity & Justice Initiative (REJI) – local work can be accessed at Urban League’s website Interrupt Racism at [www.urbanleaguero.org/irfolder](http://www.urbanleaguero.org/irfolder)

Three resources on Whiteness and the Signature Conference Topic:

My Work to Do is a zoom-based program for Caucasians (and BIPOC allies comfortable in white spaces) to explore whiteness. Next round of sessions to be made available soon.

[www.myworktodo.com](http://www.myworktodo.com)

Book entitled “How to be Antiracists” – in particular, see pages 231-232 for framework information

Book entitled “Blindspot”

Other Antiracist learning websites:

[https://libraryweb.org/whats\\_new/black-lives-matter-an-anti-racism-resource-page](https://libraryweb.org/whats_new/black-lives-matter-an-anti-racism-resource-page)

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d937681299c611147cf291d/t/60084f7d7b917d7fd2f7c095/1611157379857/20+INTERRUPT+RACISM+REPORT\\_Final.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d937681299c611147cf291d/t/60084f7d7b917d7fd2f7c095/1611157379857/20+INTERRUPT+RACISM+REPORT_Final.pdf)

Dr. Joy DeGruy website: <https://www.joydegruy.com/onilne-course>; <https://www.youtube.com/user/DrJoyDeGruy>

Article about a program entitled “Noetry Learning Center” which was launched in the Fall 2020 by a laid off teacher to provide cultural responsiveness tutoring. Teacher trained in VMA model.

Basic information on Indian cultural: <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au>

### **Comments related to Resources**

Identify list of resources that connect to this matter.

Identify or create a community table or organization in Rochester that is comprised of reps from each sector that impacts racism (e.g. housing, health, economic stability, mental health, etc.)

Include Rochester Lifestyle Medicine to join conversation/table because they focus on holistic preventative health to address and reverse chronic diseases through diet and health

**Action Commitments shared in the chat box:**

***Read materials shared at the conference:*** Carly Hamilton, Elizabeth Franz (Read Waking Up White)

***Commitment to listen and/or learn:*** Sasha Mitchell, Cynthia Korpall, Damiene Denner, Garrett Roe, Lisa Hiley, Jeananne Mark-Odell, Tim Hill, Stephen Gaudio, Patti Follansbee, Jennifer Cherelin, Ann Johnson, Jenn Braun, Carol Borsa

***Listen, learn and act:*** Eleanor Seifert, Karen Podsiadly, Beth Bojarski, Jamie-Lynn Selden, Jen Canning (listen/watch for opportunities to use privilege to uplift BIPOC's needs, opinions and experiences), Djanique Rosa, Lisa Butt, Karina Lopez-Ribadeneira (create training at workplace and work with 1 community group in her neighborhood around racism), Lindsay Cray, Nate Baldo, Melanie Jones (encourage shared accountability and awareness of privilege and white supremacy effects), Lisa Goff, Latise Hairston, Sherita Bullock (host and continue to participate in training), Phyllis Jackson

***Check for cultural assumptions I carry:*** CGerman

***First, have deep look at self:*** Isabel Fernandez

***Start and/or continue to act/advocate:*** Jackie Dozier, Sara Johnston (prep for conversation around DEI with REF Board), Tera McIlwain (empower the voiceless), Mike Romaniello, Susan Stanger (go to Black Agenda Group and bring declaration to Temple Sinai), Beverly Murrell-Frasier, Yaritza Pineiro, Ken Porter-Hutton (accepted offer to sit on Working Group for Irondequoit Commission Advancing Racial Equity), Karen S-W (incorporate diversity across curriculum at Brockport and constantly look for racist structures and systems), Mona Isler and Zaula Kennedy (have conversations at organization around addressing DEI), Julie Hartfield (advocacy for my clients), Dr. Kiah Nyame

***Educate others:*** Tharaha Thavakumar, Farrell Keegan (create training for staff), Helen Young, Monique Johnson and Mellanye N (teach their children), Jeananne Mark-Odell, Dr. Gloria Morgan (share knowledge not myths), Kalona Green (educate and empower families she works with), Nikisha Ridgeway (make/take space for DEI conversations), Jessica Stern (continue to push organization to speak out against racism and see how it affects all that we do), Emily Bianchine

***Work with employer to bring I.D.E.A.:*** Gail Berkes

***Initiate a conversation:*** Maria D'Acquisto, Lindsay Tersmette, Carole, Jen Loughran, Dirk Wyatt, Frances Davis, Gwendolyn Green, Melanie Jones, Emily Bianchine, Andre Harper, Margaret Michael-Ralston, Melinda Sutton, Ursula Nicholson, Stephen Gaudio (participate in Blackfriars Theater "uncomfortable conversations"), Curtis Jones, Jr.

***Speak out:*** Trinisha Brown, Christopher Goodwin, Anne Tucker, Virginia Wade, CJefferson, Joellen Stender, Colleen Lewis (and hold one another accountable), Rando Conductor, Mona Isler

***Allies:*** Raskakim (create more allies and speak my truth), Sheila Rogers (demonstrate patience with allies)

***Continue to work on one person at a time:*** Barbara Maryniak

***Continue to speak authentically/unapologetically me:*** Sasha Mitchell, Tamika Ward-Williams, Felicia Stanley, Shantel Giles, Ann Johnson, Jenn Braun, Lavern Sleugh-Sharpe (self-advocacy)

***Review organizational actions:*** Tassie Demps