

## CREATIVE PEACEFUL RESISTANCE

Creative Peaceful Resistance (CPR) is a grassroots organizing initiative through which marginalized youth publicly share visual and performance art reflecting their insights and visions for change. Creative expression is used as a catalyst for civic engagement and neighborhood restoration. Over the last decade, CPR projects—supported by private and public funding, including a Fulbright grant—have produced community-based art, conference exhibits, and stage performances in the U.S., India, and South Africa.

### Key Elements of the CPR Initiative



**Analysis and Visioning:** Project participants engage in a critical examination of racial, economic and related injustices in their communities. Youth from marginalized communities form the “core group,” whose ideas and visions for change inform various forms of creative expression. Seasoned and trusted facilitators create safe spaces for honest discussion, emotional release, visioning, and action planning.

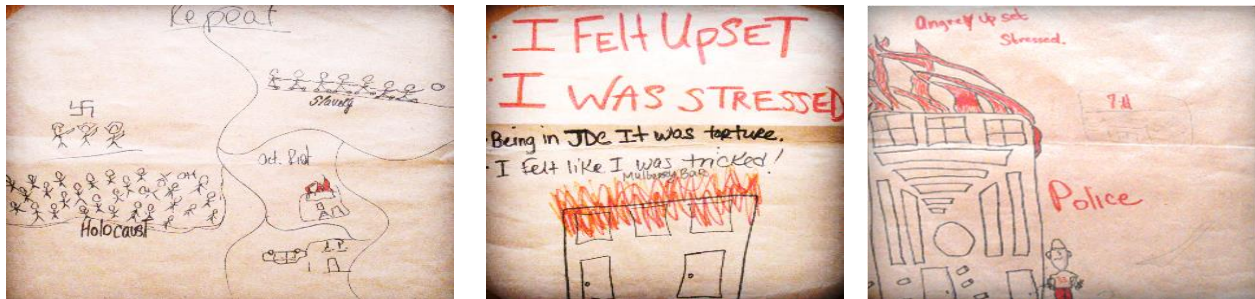
**Creative Expression:** Local artists and/or art students and other volunteers work with the core group to translate insights and visions into various modes of creative expression—murals, posters, photo exhibits, narratives and performance pieces including spoken word, dances, songs, and skits. Neighborhood and institutional green spaces may be converted into galleries and youth-centered recreation/deliberation sites.

**Civic Engagement:** Project participants use public spaces as canvasses and stages for involving the public in collective introspection, dialogue, and action. The hope is that CPR art will help to prompt social and policy changes that address racial and economic injustices at the local level and beyond.

### Fifteen Years of CPR

The idea of Creative Peaceful Resistance (CPR) was conceived in undergraduate Ethnic Studies classrooms at Bowling Green State University and the first collection of students’ creative expressions, *Breaking the Silence*, was displayed at the Toledo Museum of Art Community Gallery in 1999. In 2004, the Young Artists at Work (YAAW) program, sponsored by the Arts Commission of Greater Toledo, adopted this strategy to create *Charting a Journey towards Hope*, a mural painted in the central lobby of the Lucas County Juvenile Detention Center.

In 2005, the CPR approach was used with a group of 30 young people who were arrested following a neo-Nazi march that ended in Wilson Park, a neighborhood park in North Toledo, Ohio. Community leaders worked with local law enforcement to replace the typically punitive approach to juvenile justice with a restorative justice approach, which included a ten-week CPR project.



Samples of drawings created by youth arrested following the Neo-Nazi intrusion

Following a series of listening and visioning sessions, the CPR project saw youth collaborate with neighborhood mentors and local artists to envision and guide the creation of a mural, *Rising Above Bigotry*, that was installed on a prominent street near their high school. Participants reported feeling empowered during processes of truth-telling, rejection of negative self-perceptions, envisioning the mural, and planning to reclaim the park. The mural, which replaced memories of hate with visions of hope, was unveiled by participants on the one-year anniversary of the neo-Nazi intrusion before an audience that included state and city elected officials, law enforcement officers, and community members.



Mural: *Rising Above Bigotry*; Artist: Yusuf Lateef

Participants announced their main neighborhood goal to convert Wilson Park into a youth-centered outdoor gallery and recreational area. This was one way of restoring and reclaiming their neighborhood and creating safe spaces for gathering, playing, and organizing.

Reflecting on the incident and its aftermath, participants expressed deep concerns about the cumulative effect of racial injustices on their lives and neighborhoods. While working to restore themselves and their neighborhoods, youth also wished to address racial bigotry within the individuals and institutions that served them. This, they felt, was a more holistic restorative agenda. Youth emphasized the value, both aesthetic and social, of community-based art that accurately reflects the insights and visions of neighborhood residents.

Following completion of the project, participants and neighborhood mentors expressed a desire to replicate the CPR process and continue to organize for racial and economic justice. Between 2006 and 2015, several more youth groups worked on US-based CPR projects and produced over a dozen murals, five performance art pieces, a photo exhibit, a community art gallery, and the start of a reflection park in North Toledo.

Toledo youth have consistently expressed fears related to tensions and mistrust between youth and local law enforcement. In 2008, the Toledo Police Department collaborated with youth on a CPR project that produced a mural entitled, *Youth Engage Police Officers*. The project goal was to have a replica of this mural installed in all area stations and to then gift replicas to Police Chiefs in other cities across the U.S.



Mural: *Youth Engage Police Officers*; Artist: Sal Schichiano



Mural: *Rise*; Artists: Adam Russell, Yusuf Lateef

The next year, 2009, saw the production of several murals, each a testimony to the wisdom, creativity, and power of young leaders. *Rise* speaks to the desire of a group of young men to rise above violence and serve as role models for younger generations. In the mural, youth represent the powerful elements of fire, water, earth, and wind.

Young people continue to place themselves at the center of their visions to achieve self and community transformation. Protesting the negative labels thrust upon them, youth take on new roles as community organizers, strategic problem solvers, and representatives of neighborhood councils.



Mural: *Rescue Youth*; Artist: Nate Masternak



Mural: *From Chaos Comes Clarity*; Artist: Edgar Ramirez

*Rescue Youth* reflects a recurring theme—a yearning for safe spaces to gather, play, deliberate and organize. This mural expands the very first project goal and calls for the creation of *Youth Visions Reflection Parks* in all neighborhoods. *From Chaos Comes Clarity* portrays youth bursting through their mural in a move to make their visions a reality. More than 100 youth from various organizations have informed CPR murals and every mural serves as a call to action. In 2009, using spoken word, hip-hop, and skits, youth unveiled their murals at the historic Ohio Theater, to an audience of more than 300.

**CPR abroad:** In 2007, in partnership with the International Democratic Education Institute at Bowling Green State University, Toledo youth participated in an exchange with South African youth that saw youth representatives from Toledo and KwaZuluNatal, engage in discussions about common concerns and visions for change. Their deliberations informed *Global Youth Parliament*, which was exhibited at the 2010 US Social Forum alongside replicas of other CPR murals. In 2009, two teenagers from North Toledo accompanied Dr. Gonsalves and her South Africa partner, and participated in a week-long dialogue with a group of youth in Cape Town, South Africa. Toledo and Cape Town youth presented their art work at the International Conference on Civic Education held in Cape Town.

In 2015, funded by a Fulbright Specialist Grant awarded to Dr. Gonsalves, the India CPR project brought domestic workers, students at the Roshini Nilaya School of Social Work, and local artists and landscape architects together to create a mural and reflection park at the entrance of the Roshini Nilaya campus. The park, featuring a mural about domestic worker exploitation and the need to expand domestic worker rights, serves both as an organizing space for domestic workers and as a space to raise awareness about domestic worker issues.



Mangalore Reflection Park entrance



Domestic workers share workplace issues with students and artists



Mangalore Mural; Artists: Rathan Ruby, Sharath Kulal, Naveen Kumar, Vikram Shetty

## Next Steps

---

Started in 2014 with support from neighborhood residents, community leaders, the Mayor's office, Commissioner of Parks and Recreation, Toledo Police Department, Lucas County Juvenile Court, The Ohio Arts Council, and US Department of Labor-funded *YouthBuild*, the reflection park is a work in progress and youth are eager to complete it in 2017 and use it as a model for replication in the city and beyond. Following a 2015 Fulbright Specialist assignment using the CPR strategy in India and with plans to continue CPR work in South Africa, plans are also underway to seed CPR in US-based institutions of higher education.

Participants in Toledo have urged for city-wide implementation of the CPR approach as a holistic development strategy and the following components have been suggested as integral to all projects:

- **To create youth-friendly spaces.** The CPR program should use more neighborhood and institutional green spaces to build galleries and recreational areas for youth to safely play, deliberate, and organize
- **To groom socially conscious young leaders.** The CPR process should continue to empower youth to effectively address pressing racial, economic, and related injustices in their communities. CPR's specific focus on these issues make it an important complement to existing after-school and arts programming.
- **To spur action-oriented civic engagement.** The youth-centered, action-oriented racial justice discussions CPR engenders should be used as a springboard for local organizing and policy advocacy.
- **To promote institutional social responsibility.** The CPR educational component on racial justice and the art produced should help improve local government/institutional effectiveness and accountability to the communities served.

## About the Project Lead

---

Dr. Lorna Gonsalves is a long-time educator, counselor, and organizer who has spent her career working to promote civic engagement and create inclusive communities.

In her academic career, Gonsalves has taught Ethnic Studies, Sociology, and Women's Studies at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), where she also served as the Associate Provost for Diversity, overseeing campus-wide antiracism programs that garnered recognition from the Ohio Governor's office and President Clinton's Initiative on Race. Her students' artistic expressions depicting insights about racism have been displayed at the Toledo Museum of Art. At the University of Connecticut-Storrs, she was the Director of Global Outreach at the UNESCO-affiliated Institute for Comparative Human Rights.

Gonsalves has been involved in efforts to address institutional racism in a variety of settings. A strong proponent of community policing, she has conducted antiracism workshops for police chiefs across Ohio. At the Washington DC-based National League of Cities, she organized a racial justice campaign through which officials from more than 200 cities in 48 states developed and implemented antiracist agendas.

Since the early 2000s, Gonsalves has been working to support youth-led organizing in the US and abroad. She developed the Creative Peaceful Resistance (CPR) program which uses creative expression as a tool for self-realization and community transformation. On a national level, replicas of CPR murals have been displayed at community and conference sites and during plenaries at the US Social Forum. On a global level, she has worked with youth in Mexico, Switzerland, and South Africa, and recently completed a Fulbright Specialist assignment using the CPR strategy in an India-based institution of higher education.

Gonsalves has received numerous awards for her work, including the "Hero of Compassion" award from the Multifaith Council of Northwest Ohio, the Community Building Award from the State of Ohio Martin Luther King, Jr. Commission, the Aegis and Telly award for the documentary film, *Undoing Racism*, and the Black Catholic Charities' Drum Major Award for her work in Toledo communities.

Born and raised in India, Gonsalves moved to the United States in 1972. Her academic background includes a diploma in Opera Performance awarded through the Royal Academy of Music in London, a B.A. in Psychology from Sophia College for Women in Mumbai, and an M.A. in Counseling and Ph.D. in Sociology from Bowling Green State University.

Contact: [lornagonsal@gmail.com](mailto:lornagonsal@gmail.com)