

**To:** The BridgeHacks Hackathon Judging Committee

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**Focus:** Cultural Education and Community Consolidation

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## **Synopsis**

The United States's tense social climate, stemming from cultural intolerance or ignorance, has greatly disrupted national unity since the nation's foundation. To combat the volatility of the situation, UniteUS implements strategies to encourage cultural education and advance community consolidation nationwide. Through outdated statue replacements and modern installations; daily online presentations of influential individuals from diverse backgrounds; and local community support through the promotion of diverse business owners, UniteUS strives to facilitate social good now and far into the future.

## **Social Issues Faced**

In the United States, preconceived notions regarding race, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, and cultural backgrounds have induced a lack of harmony, understanding, and cooperation within communities across the nation. Due to systemic bias against non-white, non-Christian, and female individuals--which has functioned as a plague to the United States since its foundation--social tensions remain at exceptionally high levels and continue to climb as the nation becomes increasingly diversified.

Without the acknowledgement and acceptance of such rich diversity within this country, social, political, and economic progress is highly limited. Moreover, as individuals avoid

addressing the United States's negligent treatment of marginalized groups, such groups will continue to feel oppressed, and cultural rifts will face perpetual amplification. Individuals' ignorance to the plight of these historically peripheral groups leads to the intensification of negative social atmospheres.

As such, one factor that contributes to such negative atmospheres within the United States is the display of statues (e.g. of individuals from Confederate backgrounds, or of people with unfair, corrupt, or outdated ideologies) that mark both the country's urban and rural landscapes. Since these statues reflect times of utter inequality, fail to represent the modern American populace, and serve as symbols of pain for many, Americans are actively calling for their removal and replacement with more modern figures.

### **Purpose of Project (How It Relates to Social Good)**

UniteUS, the name of our BridgeHacks project, seeks to facilitate cultural education and strengthen the United States's sense of community through a simple, interactive online platform. UniteUS was developed to attain social harmony to fight against the aforementioned social issues by implementing three components:

- 1) Supporting the erection of commemorative statues of accomplished individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds to replace unacceptable statues;
- 2) Providing cultural awareness through an educative daily presentation of influential individuals from historically marginalized origins;
- 3) Promoting local businesses owned by a diverse array of people to support economic equality and the local community.

With such strategies, UniteUS is designed to mend divisions between different cultural groups and finally deliver unification to enable social progress.

### **Commemorative Statues and Local Community Support**

The **first** component of UniteUS, as previously addressed, seeks to aid in erecting commemorative statues of individuals that represent the immense diversity present within the United States.

To do this, UniteUS first uses a nationwide communication network through which people can post their ideas for statues that can be erected within a proposed city. Making the selection of statues a democratic process where anyone can submit an idea helps to ensure that accomplished people of all backgrounds are able to be represented. Then, individuals from across the nation are able to vote for the statues that they personally feel are most suitable for bringing diversity and cultural awareness to the proposed city. In this way, everyone has the chance to participate in selecting the statues that are installed nationally. These statues will be linked to the online UniteUS platform so that people who are living in or visiting the city can see the commemorative statues that are in the area.

In order to remove previous statues to replace them with the user-selected statues, government approval and funding is necessary. This is possible through the implementation of user donations and petitions that individuals can sign to promote such actions. Please see

**Funding: Donations and Government Approval** for more information.

Lastly, these registered statues will contain information about the featured individual's life and achievements, including information concerning their cultural background. This cultural

information will then be linked to a list of small, local businesses owned by people from a cultural background similar to that of the memorialized individual. For example, if a statue of an influential Southeast Asian individual is erected, links to local Southeast-Asian-owned businesses will be provided alongside the description of the statue. Such support of local businesses exemplifies the **third** component of UniteUS, which aims to support the local community in an economic fashion.

### **Encouraging Cultural Awareness: A Person a Day**

The **second** component of UniteUS, called “A Person a Day,” greatly encourages cultural awareness and education by featuring images and descriptions of prominent individuals from diverse backgrounds on a daily basis. This component serves as an excellent, easily accessible way for people to learn more about such influential people, and it is especially useful when the physical viewing of informational statues is not possible.

Each day, a new person--out of the thousands who have positively impacted the United States--is displayed on the UniteUS platform. The celebrated individuals that are displayed will come from a variety of races, gender identities, ethnicities, sexual orientations, religious affiliations, etc. in order to showcase the beautiful diversity found within the country. This daily updating of featured people will keep users interested in the fresh, insightful content that this “A Person a Day” component of UniteUS presents.

Lastly, like the commemorative statues, “A Person a Day” will contain links to businesses owned by people of similar cultural backgrounds to that of the featured individual, which also exemplifies the **third** component of UniteUS. In this way, people can bridge the

economic gaps in the United States by supporting these businesses, while simultaneously bridging the social and cultural knowledge gap present in the country. Henceforth, “A Person a Day” will greatly help to diminish such ignorance pertaining to individuals from different backgrounds.

### **Funding: Donations and Government Approval**

In order to financially support the “Commemorative Statues” component (in other words, the **first** component) of UniteUS, a section for user donations is implemented into the UniteUS platform. Users will be able to monetarily contribute to the creation and erection of new statues, as well as the removal of old ones, by visiting the “Donate” section of the platform. Since this section for donations resides on the same platform as the statue-related component of UniteUS, users know the exact cause they are donating to, and can easily access information on the same page concerning how their donation encourages community consolidation and serves as a force of social good by leading to the installation of representative, respectable, and diverse statues.

Furthermore, user funding may not be fully necessary when government support is provided. Through grants and governmental aid, statues can be fully funded without financial input on behalf of users. Governmental financial support and approval of statue installation can be heavily promoted through the use of petitions. Thus, UniteUS uses a centralized location for petitions so that users are easily able to find petitions to support the installation of statues in their area (or elsewhere, if they desire) and efficiently send them to government offices. With hundreds or thousands of signatures, petitions become quite difficult for government offices to ignore, as it is blatantly visible that a great number of individuals are interested in the cause of

statue development. Thus, if the local government wants the support of its people, it is highly incentivized to take action by satisfying the myriad of signatures through its approval of the removal and establishment of statues.

### **Analysis and Supporting Evidence: Viability and Stability**

Injustice against and lack of acknowledgement of marginalized groups is a widespread American issue that is seldom addressed by the government. For example, concerning race alone, 58% of Americans--or nearly six out of ten people--say that race relations within the United States are decisively bad.<sup>1</sup> However, a large part of this observed discriminatory behavior simply stems from an absence of education regarding the adversity faced by peripheralized groups and an unawareness of their enormous value in American society.<sup>2</sup> Thus, promoting awareness and understanding of diversity--as UniteUS does through "A Person a Day"--is one guaranteed way to ensure the gradual eradication of prejudiced perspectives and instead promote social unity within the country.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of commemorative statues, removing outdated statues and replacing them with diverse monuments will seriously change the United States's cultural landscape and help to promote the modern diversity found within the population. For example, as of June 2020, there are at least 771 Confederate monuments within the country praising individuals who preached racist ideals of white superiority, and around 1,741 public Confederate symbols across the United States.<sup>4</sup> Yet, these thousands of Confederate monuments are representative of solely the 60.4% of non-Hispanic whites and not the 39.6% of BIPOC (Black, indigenous, and people of color) within the nation who suffer from the statues' negative implications.<sup>5</sup> Replacing these

statues with fair, justifiable alternatives of people from different cultural backgrounds would do much more to represent the American past and present than the monuments currently in place do, which is exactly what UniteUS aims to do.

Many individuals are concerned about the removal of statues indicating the erasure of the United States's history. However, the history of the nation is indelible; thus, we are not deleting American history, but rather stopping our celebration of whitewashed history by removing old statues.<sup>6</sup> By keeping outdated statues in place, it seems as though Americans continue to honor the fact that such celebrated white individuals with backwards ideologies still maintain the upper hand in our society. Thus, by replacing the statues, we begin to instead celebrate Americans of a plethora of diverse backgrounds. Additionally, the statues are a highly viable long-term solution, because they can be maintained for decades--or even centuries--and can be replaced as needed in the future. For example, the Statue of Liberty--an iconic monument for the United States that is representative of liberty--is 134 years old, which illustrates the fact that statues are a stable solution for commemorating diversity.<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, regarding petitioning, petitions are a successful strategy to induce change from a governmental level. For smaller, local governments, petitions are much more difficult to ignore. Yet, even at the federal level, any petition sent to the White House that gains 100,000 signatures within 30 days will be reviewed and delivered to the proper lawmaking council.<sup>8</sup> With a large and centralized UniteUS network, achieving the number of signatures to bring about change at the local or even federal level is certainly accomplishable.

### **Next Steps: Looking to the Future**

One of the most crucial steps in carrying out the functions of the UniteUS platform in the long-term is to expand the user network so that commemorative statues are easily installed nationwide, community support is ensured, and cultural education is facilitated. However, this will be more easily accomplishable due to the present social climate within the United States, where resentment for whitewashed history and a desire for change is sweeping across the country. Additionally, with the help of various social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and more, the goal of UniteUS can readily gain traction among a large audience. As such, helpful donations and petition-signing will inevitably increase in volume.

With “A Person a Day,” the featured individual changes on a daily basis, but there are hundreds of thousands of influential individuals from varying cultural backgrounds that can have their stories shared, so this is a stable component of the UniteUS project for future years. Likewise, the commemorative statues themselves will last for decades as addressed in **Analysis and Supporting Evidence**, so this is also a stable component of the UniteUS project. Lastly, with the stability of both “A Person a Day” and “Commemorative Statues,” local businesses owned by diverse individuals will indubitably be comfortably supported in the future, since all three of these elements of the UniteUS platform are interconnected.

### **Additional Annotations**

In UniteUS, the component “US” is representative of the word “us,” yet also serves as an initialism for “United States.”



## References

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