

Readings from The USG White Supremacy Teach-In

I want to pray with you. ©

By Maria McCabe

I want to pray with you.
But first m'hijitos, can we talk?

You see I come with history,
I come with movies inside my head.
Did you know I once cleaned houses
to pay for school?

I come from courage and mountains,
the muted song of humble grief.
I travel with exquisite courtesy,
sometimes it's hard for others to understand.

I am not Sharks and Jets,
or cocaine kingpins,
or hotel maids,
or even enchiladas.

I am the lament of the Taino
for Borinquen, Tierra del Encanto.

I want to pray with you.
But do you know m'hijitos?
Sometimes I am afraid my prayers
are asked to take a different elevator than yours.

Shunted to God's service entrance,
the line for people without passports.
Busboys. Lawn guys. Supermarket checkers
with lightning quick hands and accents in their
names.

María is happy to serve you.

Mestiza. Elder of the borderlands.
Ciudadana sin fronteras.
Half breed woman. Creator of my own dignity.
Poet of my own historia.

It means so much to me to pray with you!
I pray that we will learn each other's language.
I challenge you!
Perdón -- I forget my manners...
I invite you.

Can you learn mine?

"There." © By Connie Simon

Feels like we've been traveling forever

but we're still not there.

Lord knows we've tried – each in our own way –
to get there, wherever "there" is.

Working groups, task forces, coalitions, allies.

Resolutions and programs.

Catchy acronyms and fancy names.

We think and think and talk and talk.

Then think and talk some more.

Lord knows we've tried – each in our own way –
to get there,

wherever "there" is.

They try so hard to include me.

But I thought I was already included.

Now I feel like an outsider.

Lord knows we've tried – each in our own way –
to get there,

wherever "there" is.

I know it's better than it was.

But it still feels like I'm supposed to

set aside a piece of who I am

in order to belong.

I won't do it.

My Unitarian and Universalist ancestors worked
too hard

for me to give up now.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper whispers softly in
my ear, "keep going, child."

Yes, ma'am. It's a struggle sometimes but

I don't feel no ways tired.

We've made some progress and we'll make
some more.

We'll keep trying. We'll get there someday.

Wherever "there" is.

“Lean In” From “the Oxford Talk” by Tim Tyson

...lean into it. I am talking here about racial discomfort. I have certainly felt my share of it, through the course of my work, and I recommend racial discomfort to you. Lean into it. That is, doing exactly the opposite of your first instinct, which is to retreat as fast as possible, and is also perfectly logical. None of us wants to feel uncomfortable. But there is no way we can have a fruitful and candid conversation about race in an interracial setting and always feel comfortable. But it won't kill you to feel a little uncomfortable.... Go ahead, lean into, and listen. Listen to other people, of course, but listen to your discomfort. It will teach you a lot. You'll be okay. And we'll get better at this.

“The Invisibility of Whiteness”

by John A. Powell

The invisibility of whiteness means that one doesn't have to notice that one is white. So there are people, and then there are black people. There are people and there are Latino people. And people—just people, just folks—turn out to be white, but we don't notice it.

White people have the luxury of not having to think about race. That is a benefit of being white, of being part of the dominant group. Just like men don't have to think about gender. The system works for you, and you don't have to think about it.

So they live in white space and then they don't have to think about it. First of all, they think about race as something that belongs to somebody else. The blacks have race; maybe Latinos have race; maybe Asians have race. But they're just white. They're just people. That's part of being white.

“The Privileges of a Racist System”

by John A. Powell

The thing that's really slick about whiteness, if you will, is that most of the benefits can be obtained without ever doing anything personally... There are a whole set of assumptions that flow from being white, just like there are a whole set of benefits that flow from being male—you know, being a man doesn't mean that you have antipathy toward women, but if society is patriarchal, which a lot of people say it is, it means that the way resources are distributed in society benefits men. In that sense, men are not innocent, even though they may not personally have antipathy toward women. In the same way, in that sense, whites are not innocent. They're given the spoils of a racist system, even if they're not personally racist.

“The Offensiveness of My Pain”

A reflection by Shane Paul Neil

I'm on my way to a job where I am the only black person in my office. I work with people who either don't know or don't care about Alton Sterling or Philando Castile. They are going to ask me “How are you this morning?” and the simple truth is that I can't be honest. I can't say that I'm scared and angry and that I want to take a mental health day. I can't say that I and people like me subconsciously fear for our lives on a daily basis.

I can't say how I am this morning because it will make them uncomfortable and offended. The offensiveness of my pain is why we have to remind America over and over again that Black Lives Matter: because if you lack empathy for our tears it's likely that you lack respect for our lives.

I See Here from Time to Time is from Rev. David Eaton's sermon titled “Racism is Alive and Well”, delivered at All Souls UU Church in Washington, DC, November 10, 1985. <http://www.meadville.edu/uploads/files/64.pdf>

The proposed 8th principle states:

“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.”

“Spirit of the Pioneer” by Melvin Hoover

We can't change the past, but we can learn from it and build on it.

We can't control the future, but we can shape it and enhance the possibilities for our children and grandchildren.

We can't discern in the present the fullness of our actions and their impact, but we can be pioneers in our time, exploring fully the crevices and cracks where knowledge and new insights might be found.

We can explore our spectrum of relationships and confront our complacency and certainty about the way things are.

We can dare to face ourselves in our entirety, to understand our pain, to feel the tears, to listen to our frustration and confusion, and to discover new capacities and capabilities that will empower and transform us.

In the spirit of the pioneer, let us now go forth.