2022 Anthology

WRITING MEMOIR & JUSTICE

Foreword by Diane Russo,
Archivist of The Riverside Church
Edited by Luvon Roberson, Elizabeth Mosier,
& Dr. Vernay Mitchell-McKnight

Riverside Writing Group

An Education Ministry Small Group of The Riverside Church

Messages from Clergy of The Riverside Church

Dear Readers,

I am so grateful for this anthology. It is a compilation of works created in the "Writing Memoir & Justice" series, which reminded us that our stories have power. In this anthology you will read about Uvalde, John Lewis, a couple on the F Train, and many powerful stories of the lives of people and of justice. Our stories and the stories of others that we tell have power and give witness. What stories need to be told that haven't been told? This anthology sheds light on many stories that we need to learn about. I learned so much from reading these stories and I pray you do, too!

I am reminded of the words of memoirist and educator Marcia Young Cantarella, "There have been the friends, classmates and allies with whom I have worked and played and who are change agents themselves yet unsung. There are so many that I know, and love and value who have been part of the battle for social good and equity. Yet so many are not recognized, let alone fully thanked for all they do or have done. This is my chance to do that through telling the story of how these people have been an amazing gift in my own life."

In the stories that you will read in these pages, you will be reminded of the power of memoir and reading about the unsung change agents. Thank you, Riverside Writing Group! Keep writing!

Grace and peace,

Rev. Bruce Lamb
Minister of Faith Formation
The Riverside Church

About The Riverside Writing Group

For nearly three years, the entire world has been held hostage by the COVID pandemic, which has thrown a black light on all manner of injustice, illuminating with glowing light for all of us to see centuries-old realities of inequity, brutality, disparities in health and wealth at the same time calling us as never before to see how – literally – we cannot live in this world without affecting (or infecting) each other. Planet Earth is the one home we all share. Humanness is our irrefutable bond.

So as to offer one pathway for Riverside Church and Friends to help build community in the pandemic and in a world of heightened awareness of generations of injustice and oppression, Riverside Writing Group was created by Luvon Roberson, Debra Bracey, Dr. Vernay Mitchell-McKnight, and Maitri Butcher, with pastoral guidance from Minister Charlene Wingate, Adult Education Committee. Rev. Bruce Lamb leads The Riverside Church Education Ministry.

Riverside Writing Group affirms our common human connection and invites all to join us in writing – in many different styles and genres – as a powerful tool for social justice: To write words that witness and speak truth to our shared humanness.

Each Riverside Writing Group series showcases a guest presenter — a well-known published writer — who focuses on a writing genre in a 40-minute presentation, followed by a 20-minute Q&A from participants. Riverside Writing Group then invites participants to join in four weekly prompt-based writing sessions focused on the particular writing genre, after which they may choose to read their work at our OPEN MIC Night. When feasible, we publish an anthology of work submitted by writers who participated in any component of the writing series, and we launch the anthology with a book party.

About The Riverside Writing Group

Our Mission
The mission of Riverside Writing Group is aligned with particular aspects of the following:

The Riverside Church | Article II Mission (excerpt):
Members are called to an individual and collective quality of life that leads to personal, spiritual, and social transformation, witnessing to God's saving purposes for all creation. Therefore, the Church pledges itself to education, reflection, and action for peace and justice and the realization of the vision of the heavenly banquet where all are loved and blessed.

Adult Education Committee of The Riverside Church | Mission Statement
The Mission of the Riverside Church Adult Education Committee is to collaborate in the learning and planning of programs in an inclusive, interactive environment of sharing that fosters spiritual growth, strengthens faith identity, and promotes social justice.

The key objective of Riverside Writing Group is to provide a welcoming, supportive forum for participants through specific genre-writing focus so as to express ideas as well as voice, and create and share writings that bring to life and strengthen The Riverside Church mission and the Adult Christian Education mission.

- Riverside Writing Group Co-Creators & Planning Team

About Our 2022 Anthology: Writing Memoir & Justice

Our anthology is a curated collection that showcases the work of writers who participated in any of the four weekly prompt-based writing sessions and/or registered for Riverside Writing Group's kick-off virtual session on "Writing Memoir & Justice" on 8.11.22. Our hands-on writing sessions were inspired by Dr. Marcia Young Cantarella's memoir *Recognize and Give Thanks* (The Chapel Hill Press, 2021), as well as by selections from the Archives of The Riverside Church presented by Diane Russo.

We invited those writers to submit their memoir and justice works in any literary genre to this anthology. We looked for contemplative, globally aware, truth-telling, and apathy-busting works, based on the writing prompts provided in the four weekly prompt-based writing sessions (via Zoom on 8.18.22, 8.25.22, 9.1.22, and 9.8.22).

We also invited the writers to join our private group page on Facebook, where they can find daily inspiration to write justice in the supportive community of fellow writers.

You are holding their memoir and justice writing in your hands.

-Riverside Writing Group Co-Creators & Planning Team

Foreword by Diane Russo

I am so pleased and honored to have partnered with the Riverside Writing Group for their fourth series, "Writing Memoir & Justice," and to write the foreword to this wonderful anthology.

As a partner in this series, the Riverside Writing Group planners invited me to share information about Riverside's archive and to showcase treasures from our collection highlighting Riverside's rich history of social justice. Throughout the series, we examined how the archives can be used to tell stories and interpret Riverside history, and ultimately how it serves as a memoir of The Riverside Church.

During our sessions, we learned how objects tell stories, how they invoke intellectual, emotional, and even physical responses in those who interact with them. We discovered how they engage the senses – they beg for us to look at them, examine them, touch them, and even smell them! Archives allows us to reach into the recesses of our own memory and remind us of long forgotten experiences. They also reveal to us what we misremember, which can foster deeper reflection and force us to ask ourselves why we remember events the way we do. Why do we focus on specific details but forget others? Such a full sensory experience with an archival object can unlock a flood of memories and emotions, and drive us to action!

As one writer of this anthology reminds us, an archival object doesn't have to be tangible. Using the well-known Spanish folk song, "De Colores", Paige Murphy-Young remembers the May 24, 2022, school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, by painting a colorful image of this tragic event and its repercussions.

Each week of the series, I was continuously impressed and delighted as writers used not only Riverside's archives, but their own objects and memories to spark creativity in their social justice writing. During one session together, we looked at a photograph of Martin Luther King, Jr., writing on scraps of paper as he made his way through a corridor to Riverside's pulpit on April 4, 1967. The archive has traditionally interpreted this image as Dr. King scribbling last-minute notes and edits to his famous "Beyond Vietnam" speech minutes before he gave it.

For our writers, however, the photograph sparked more creative interpretations. One writer imagined Dr. King was writing a letter to God, while another was drawn not to this historical giant, but to the unassuming young man beside him, who, as in a community of Quakers, is on hand to put in the hard work for justice and make things happen even if they aren't in the spotlight.

Foreword by Diane Russo

With Dr. Marcia Young Cantarella's memoir *Recognize and Give Thanks* as a guiding framework for this series on memoir and justice, we also examined our own justice mentors past, present, and even fictional! By following Dr. Cantarella's example of using memoir to chronicle the legacy of her father, civil rights icon and activist Whitney Young, Jr., writers of this anthology wrote about their own justice guides, including both famous figures in history and those who are unknown and unnamed. Some envisioned their mentors interacting with each other, even though they were separated by time, place, and even reality, as Vernay Mitchell-McKnight does in her work entitled "Trouble." Other writers honor their justice guides by imagining conversations with them and putting to paper what they might say if they ever got the chance, as Karen Lew Biney-Amissah does to Yusuf Hawkins: *"I remember you."*

Writers of this anthology engage with archives, history, and memoir to write about justice and more importantly, to call readers to action. Each of these submissions, regardless of genre, are experiences and emotions expressed through writing, and as such are the things of history and worthy of being saved, of being archived. As we learned, when something is archived, it doesn't stay in a dusty box, forgotten on a shelf. It is made accessible so that others may learn, be sparked creatively, and be inspired to do justice.

Diane Russo
Director of the Archives
The Riverside Church

Introduction

"There are so many that I know, and love and value who have been part of the battle for social good and equity. Yet so many are not recognized, let alone fully thanked for all they do or have done. This is my chance to do that through telling the story of how these people have been an amazing gift in my own life."

These are the words of Marcia Young Cantarella, daughter of civil rights icon Whitney Young, about why she wrote her memoir *Recognize and Give Thanks*. And, as you'll see throughout this anthology, her words were our constant guide, ever present, in our "Writing Memoir & Justice" series, even as a medical crisis kept Dr. Cantarella from delivering her keynote address for this, our fourth writing justice series.

For this series, Riverside Writing Group collaborated with Diane Russo, archivist of The Riverside Church — who contributed the "Foreword" to this anthology – so as to select photographs, video and audio clips, artwork, and other treasures that guide us to see how Riverside Church archives are its institutional memoir. Riverside's archives reveal how at times in its 92-year history, this social justice church faltered and at other times failed to heed the call to justice.

Drawing from these archival materials that hold Riverside's memoir — its recorded, documented memory of peoples and events throughout our nation and world — our writers found inspiration to write about, write to, and even to write as, those people – whether acclaimed or little known or imagined – who are our justice mentors, who help guide us to love justice and do justice.

In drawing inspiration from Riverside's archives, our writers shine light on the work for equity and healing still to be done. They guide us to see how deep our need for such justice guides, mentors, and champions is in our fractured world today.

Much gratitude to Rev. Bruce Lamb for opening this collection with his "Message" and for his constancy as he oversees Riverside Writing Group, one of the small groups of The Riverside Church. Grateful, as well, to Rueben Martinez, who stepped in for Rev. Lamb to host some of our Zoom sessions and who became a vital contributor to the series by introducing our writers to the fictional character *La Borinqueña*, one of his justice guides. Diane also was an active, constant presence in our weekly writing sessions, showing up as well for our always boisterous, noise-making, fun-filled Open Mic Night that concludes each series.

Introduction

For their "Messages About Anthology-Making," I extend deepest appreciation to Riverside Writing Group Planning Team's Dr. Vernay Mitchell-McKnight and Elizabeth Mosier for this series. With them, I laughed often and with much joy as we three co-creators brainstormed, planned, and brought into being six sessions of Riverside Writing Group's fourth series and edited over many weeks the submissions to this anthology.

As you read these writings, I'm guessing that, like me, you'll find justice guides who are household names known around this world as well as those whom you will encounter here for the first time. I'm also guessing that, like me, you'll be filled with wonder at the lives these justice champions led and the equity and good they brought and continue to bring to their communities, this nation, indeed, to this world. Like me, you'll find how much the words of our justice writers inspire you to recognize and give thanks to the people who guide you to both envision and to work for a more just world.

I want, finally, to offer deep gratitude to all our justice writers featured in this anthology, as well as the 31 people who attended our kick-off presentation and the 104 justice champions who wrote with us in our four prompt-based writing sessions via Zoom for this series.

It is my fervent hope that you will use fragments of memory of a particular time in your life about your justice guide or justice mentor or justice champion to tell your own call-to-justice story, to write your own memoir and justice. Now, in this very moment, let it be so!

Luvon Roberson
Founder, Co-Creator, Planning Team
Riverside Writing Group

Post-scripts:

As you leaf through this volume, you'll come upon a photograph from TRC Archives of Riversiders protesting in 1999 against police brutality. Look closely and let us know: Who do you recognize?

You hold this anthology in your hands or scroll it online because of the good work of Rev. Jim Keat, Brian Simpson, MaryLennox Halfacre, and Jones Acquah, who are TRC/Communications Team.

Messages About Anthology-Making

What is Justice?

It is interesting how our thoughts about justice often begin with examples of injustice. We think about some appalling bias or discrimination that has taken place and then we look for persons or actions that mediate or eliminate the inequity. Those supportive persons and/or actions are thought to be serving justice. Is injustice a requirement for thinking about justice or can we imagine justice by itself, separate from its opposite?

In this fourth justice writing series of Riverside Writing Group, in which participants were encouraged to write about memories of justice, a number of submissions consider justice as something that can stand alone. As we all were inspired to think about people, places, archives, and artifacts that reflect how we remember justice, many writers expressed notions of justice that defined it more as a unifying principle—something that we should stand for even in the absence of injustice; something we should champion all the time. For example, we are told about a monk, Thomas Merton, who valued life for everyone worldwide, and about a pioneering social work advocate, Whitney M. Young, Jr., who left a legacy of commitment to justice. One submission introduces a justice superhero named "Justa," who inspires an army of ordinary folks to work for a better world.

Of course, we also have in this volume those samples of memoir writing that point out the need for justice so as to emend horrible injustices such as that which happens to immigrants, that which characterized the Wilmington riots of 1898 — a brutal race-based attack in 1989 in Brooklyn, New York — and the contemporary school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, of May, 2022.

Messages About Anthology-Making

We all hold in our memories episodes that constitute injustices reflecting everything from mini-transgressions to downright inhumanity. The profound insights that become evident as you read this anthology speak about justice both as a concept that ameliorates injustice and a way of thinking and living that will set a perpetual climate for fairness, anti-racism, and equity — make it a core value. In some ways, we hope these selections will worry you — make you ask yourself if you are leaving a legacy of justice that will be remembered so that, in the future, justice writers will cite your name as a positive influence they remember.

Dr. Vernay Mitchell-McKnight
Bronxville, NY

Messages About Anthology-Making

Excavating Memory as Social Justice Activism

When I first joined Riverside Writing Group, logging into our Zoom room from Philadelphia in Fall, 2021, I was impressed by how these writers formed such a strong and supportive community in a socially-distanced time. The COVID-19 pandemic had made our everyday lives an emergency, but here were people — thoughtful and joyful people! — who found opportunity in this disruption, gathering weekly online to keep their focus on creating and sustaining a fair and equal society, and amplifying their voices through the editorials, essays, poetry, and stories they drafted and revised. As I told Luvon Roberson, my friend who founded Riverside Writing Group: This community felt to me more vital and affirming than a typical writing group. As members shared aloud their responses to various writing prompts, I could hear the passion and conviction in their words, which went straight to the heart of equity, diversity, and human rights.

And so, I was glad to be asked to lead a session on writing social justice memoir for Riverside Writers Group, a year later, in September, 2022. As a writer and teacher, I have found that our personal stories can change hearts and minds, as a form of social justice activism. Telling truth that transcends our own contemporary experience begins with paying attention to the stories that call to us from history, often through the everyday objects that people touched, made, used, and carried, which speak of the absences and omissions in the "official" record.

As writers, we can best answer this call — connect readers with the truth we want to amplify — by asking ourselves: What part do I have in this story? What can I bring to its telling? So, to fan the spark of inspiration struck by Riverside Church archivist Diane Russo in the opening session of this series, I spoke to those gathered about excavating memory, comparing our social justice memoir work to the painstaking, important work of archaeology. I suggested that, through our commitment to truth and to each other, practiced in this collaborative, courageous writing process, we are recovering, repairing, and reclaiming personal and institutional history that might otherwise be lost or forgotten or suppressed.

Particular objects evoke social justice stories, reminding us of the people who serve as our justice guides and mentors and champions; of injustices we have witnessed and want to rectify; and of questions that provoke us to find answers. In recalling the occasions when we or those people whom we admire took action to fight injustice, we trouble history's false or incomplete narratives and unfold a map of inspiration that others might follow.

Messages About Anthology-Making

As a prompt, I asked members to bring an evocative object to our meeting, and to reflect on its meaning so as to write a justice story. I was surprised, moved, challenged, and inspired by the responses my fellow writers produced. As you read their work in this anthology, I believe you will be, too.

Elizabeth Mosier
St. Davids, PA

Weekly Prompts: Our "Writing Memoir & Justice" Series

Our justice writers, inspired by the following prompts offered by Luvon, Elizabeth, and Vernay in our weekly writing sessions via Zoom, submitted the works featured in this anthology.

WRITING PROMPTS – 8.18.22

Prompt 1. Which *one* image or audio in your memory inspires you to write your own call to justice story?

> Write a letter or poem or essay or song lyrics or OpEd or short story or skit/performance piece, or soliloquy (you talk to yourself) or monologue (you talk to others), or any other form/genre you choose.

Prompt 2. Which *one* image or audio in your memory inspires you to write to your justice guide /mentor/ champion?

> Write a letter or poem or essay or song lyrics or OpEd or short story or skit/performance piece, or soliloquy (you talk to yourself) or monologue (you talk to others), or any other form/genre you choose.

Prompt 3. Write about how the title of Marcia Young Cantarella's memoir *Recognize and Give Thanks* inspires you to write memoir and justice.

WRITING PROMPTS – 8.25.22

Prompt 1. Using any writing genre you choose, tell how archives can inspire children or youth to work for justice causes.

Prompt 2. Search your memory. Then using any writing genre you choose, tell how the arts have influenced you or provoked you to work for justice.

WRITING PROMPTS – 9.1. 22

Prompt 1. Write about your object as evidence that uncovers a hidden story or contradicts a story you've been told.

Prompt 2. You have a question for your object. If your object could speak, what would it say?

Prompt 3. Write about your object as a window that opens onto to a lost person, time, or place.

WRITING PROMPTS – 9.8.22

Prompt 1. How would your fictional justice character use social media to forward the cause of justice? What platform, emojis, memes would the fictional character use or invent? Why?

Prompt 2. Describe possible interactions between your fictional justice character and a real-life, well-known social justice icon. How would they approach each other? What would they say? What kinds of actions would they plan to do together to forward the cause?

Prompt 3. Tell the story of your fictional character through small actions that character takes for justice when no one is watching.

Yusuf

I. Lower Manhattan

The air was brisk as I stepped onto Mott Street, excited to attend the first day of school. I had just walked the two blocks from my home, passing Grandpa's storefront, feeling proud to be on my own as an independent eight-year-old. My entire world was within a five-block radius.

That night was one of the first moments I started to find comfort in seeing the 25-foot tall golden statue shooting up from a castle-like building in the distance overlooking Elizabeth Street. A beacon that reminded me of home.

Good night moon, good night Civic Frame.

II. Summer of 1989 – Brooklyn, New York

The sun plays a game of hide-and-seek as it floats in and out, between the trusses of the Manhattan Bridge. I'm listening to my Walkman as I ride the D Train into Brooklyn. The Metropolitan Transit Authority student pass: R, N, D, Q, 4, 5 , 6, A, C, E, L. I could ride them all – and explore the city, my city, and any neighborhood, seemingly with no limits.

Stand clear of the closing doors

Next stop is Canarsie-Rockaway Parkway

Ch-nk go home!

What are you doing in this neighborhood?

It's my city, too. It's only words – I've heard it before.

Yusuf

* * *

Before I had ever learned about Vincent Chin,

I knew of Yusuf.

It's all over the headlines – August 23, 1989:

– A mob of bat-wielding white youths

– Thirty teens chase, shoot youth, 16

– Racially-motivated attack

This time, it's not just words.

This, too, is Brooklyn.

III. Today

If Yusuf and I could speak, I would tell him...

I remember the protests

I remember Rev. Sharpton

I remember community

I remember you.

* * *

My partner whispers...

Eyes Forward, Love.

Yusuf

* * *

Yusuf K. Hawkins was a 16-year-old Black teenager from East New York, who was shot in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, at the time a predominantly Italian-American neighborhood, on August 23, 1989. 1980s Brooklyn is where I spent my formative years. Yusuf and I were the same age, both teenagers growing up in New York City. I don't ever remember not being aware of my race, especially as I move through different city spaces feeling the weight of stares, ready for the slurs thrown my way. But Yusuf's murder was the first time I saw the impact of physical racial violence and injustice in a place so close to home. From that point on, I started to intentionally work on racial justice issues, informally at first and then more formally as I got older.

Karen Lew Biney-Amissah
Manhattan, NY

De Colores[1] , Uvalde

Green sneakers; pink backpacks; aqua balloons; T-shirts of red, of purple, of rainbows.

Family and friends, gathered: Awards Day is here! Fourth-graders mastering the skills they'll share tomorrow: math, science, sports, arts, leadership, and more; absorbed in that ineffable age when everything's possible, when so much is in store!

Hugging *la familia* good-bye till school's out for the day, back to their classrooms they buoyantly scamper. Ahead is a summer with family and friends. They're eager to master football passes and pitching; eager to sing, dance, and paint; eager to travel, swim, and just be!

Nevaeh Alyssa Bravo, Jacklyn Cazares, Makenna Lee Elrod, Jose Manuel Flores, Jr.

Joined classrooms, so familiar, yet something — something's changed. A big kid in black with a huge assault rifle barges into your classrooms. Teachers, eyes wide and glassy; voices clear and strong: "It's going to be okay." "Get under your desks, just for now." Then crashing loud shots! Screams! Pain! Agony! Fear! The bravest friends try to — quietly — call the police, to call 911.

[1]José-Luis Orozco: *De Colores*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rn43pLNtlY

De Colores[2] , Uvalde

"We are going to be okay." "This happens all the time." Searing pain! Confusion! Betrayal? And such heavy. . . heavy. . .fatigue . . .

Eliahna Garcia, Mrs. Irma Garcia, Uziyah Garcia, Amerie Jo Garza, Xavier Lopez

Uniforms of blue-grays, and khakis, olive or tan; bright, shining badges and the dull black of bullet-proof vests, of assault rifles and pistols.

Armed officers from sundry forces eventually gather, more than 370 in all. Three officers approach the classroom hall but quickly retreat when the shots head their way. And in the sterile hallways they stay for 73 minutes: minutes when children are shot, when children bleed out in pain, when children die.

Finally, the 77-minute siege is ended by two Border Patrol officers who finally breach the door and dispatch the shooter.

Jayce Carmelo Luevanos, Tess Mata, Maranda Mathis, Mrs. Eva Mireles, Alithia Ramirez, Annabell Rodriguez, Maite Rodriguez, Alexandria "Lexi" Rubio

Aging bouquets of dusty-brown roses, deep-violet columbines, bruised-yellow tulips hang on rows of white crosses.

Months later, investigations abound. Profound failures — both systemic and individual — are being exposed; truths are being set free. Hallway videos graphically/tragically refute Governor Abbott's assurances the day after: The shootings ". . .could have been worse," he professed, praising law enforcers' "amazing courage by running toward gunfire."

[2]José-Luis Orozco: *De Colores*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rn43pLNtlY

De Colores[3] , Uvalde

Yet another school shooting; yet another reckoning: Will this one make a difference? Turn the tide?

Layla Salazar, Jailah Nicole Silguero, Eliahna Torres, Rojelio Torres

Light brown and dry, Uvalde's soil is showing its cracks. Subtle signs of life emerge: dusty-green tendrils with tiny blossoms of white, bright yellow, and crimson.

The days that pass from May 24, 2022, will not dampen Uvalde's white-hot resolve. Parents, aunts, uncles, friends, rise to the hour: testifying before Congress; protesting; leading the cause for justice and peace.

Paige Murphy-Young
Lakeway, TX

[3]José-Luis Orozco: *De Colores*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rn43pLNtlY

Trouble: Part One

John Lewis – an African-American civil rights leader, activist, and member of the U.S. Congress. He encouraged people to fight hard and get into some "good trouble" to advance social justice.

Fiddler – a musically-talented slave on a Virginia plantation, whose fictional life during the late 18th century was chronicled in the book *Roots*, as he did whatever he could to bridge the gap between pleasing his white captors and making life more tolerable for the slaves.

No one has figured out how these two justice icons of different times and places managed to walk and talk together — maybe a time portal, perhaps a miracle for the cause of justice.

John and Fiddler met on the plantation to compare notes concerning the lives of Black people. Fiddler noticed the pin John wore proudly, displaying the letters BLM, and asked about the meaning. John explained that the letters stand for "Black Lives Matter." While the actions and meaning of this activist group were interesting to Fiddler, he stopped John from talking about the three letters, since slaves were forbidden to know anything about alphabets. But John pressed on, determined to convince Fiddler that, as the musician for the slave master's household, he was in a leadership position that could quietly and slowly build a resistance movement among the slaves. Fiddler had unique access to the slave master, the plantation house, and the slaveholding family — a position of trust and opportunity.

Fiddler assured John that it was not as easy as it seemed. He was under the same brutal rules as other slaves. John pushed back harder, assuring Fiddler that a musician had a unique opportunity to get close to the family and thus, to gather strategic information. He retold the story of Black Lives Matter, telling how it began as a small idea and grew into a real movement of substance and action.

Bit by bit, Fiddler became convinced it might be possible to begin making good trouble by planting certain ideas among the more militant slaves and letting those ideas fester and thrive. His mind was set — there was no going back. John was so unswerving in his passion for justice, Fiddler became that way as well. He decided to begin a movement of good trouble on the plantation, saying, "If I perish, I perish."

Trouble: Part One

To demonstrate his allegiance to this cause, Fiddler defiantly scratched "BLM" in the wood of his fiddle and began to hold secret meetings at night with other slaves. However, during one fancy event when Fiddler performed at the plantation house, someone noticed the scratches on the fiddle and sounded the alarm that this musical slave was somehow learning to write.

Naturally, the master was horrified by this grave breach of rules forbidding literacy among slaves. Fiddler had speculated he might perish for his assertive justice-promoting actions, and he almost did because the master whipped him until he was bloodied and near death.

Dr. Vernay Mitchell-McKnight
Bronxville, NY

Trouble: Part Two

Realizing his responsibility for instigating Fiddler's life-threatening trouble, John quickly dragged the bloody, unconscious slave through the time portal until they were in John's time — the 21st century. Once he nursed Fiddler back to health, John began to school the bewildered ex-slave about battles for justice such as women's suffrage, the civil rights movement, the poor peoples' campaign, and the various marches on Washington. He reiterated the continuing need to get into good trouble in the name of justice. Paraphrasing Margaret Mead, John assured Fiddler that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.

Understandably, Fiddler questioned this thinking. "If it's possible to achieve change with a small group of thoughtful people marching, protesting, and voting," he asked himself, "why has it not yet been achieved three centuries after his time on the plantation?" Attempting to know more, he found a plethora of important justice-related issues to learn — many multisyllabic, tongue-twisting words: homophobia, gerrymandering, antisemitism, redlining, etc. There was a veritable dictionary of words affiliated with the cause. One that especially fascinated him was "human trafficking." He surmised that this phrase helped people to avoid the more practical word, "slavery."

Yet, as he became more knowledgeable, Fiddler thought he would never understand phenomena such as reality show personalities and people who manufacture pillows becoming prominent political figures, how money earmarked for poor children is diverted and used for luxury items for the well-to-do, and the necessity of passing laws so people would not ban Black hairstyles.

In time, with John as the experienced teacher and Fiddler as the inquisitive learner, this duo represented Double Good Trouble. That became their identifying insignia: DGT. Together they wished to concoct an event of 21st-century proportions that would grab and keep everyone's attention.

Trouble: Part Two

* * *

All of us who are the unsuspecting victims of DGT only know that each time we try to watch any media production — broadcast, cable, streaming, podcast, fictional universes, what have you — we keep seeing the letters DGT followed by messages hyping equal rights and equal opportunity. These messages have saturated our world and our thinking. We can't attend a concert or sports event without seeing these justice memos in gigantic letters on the jumbotron. Even the ever-moving ribbon at the bottom of the screen prods us to think about justice and the lack thereof. We get subliminal justice messages on items as benign as candy wrappers or the new M&M's shaped like fiddles and inscribed with the letters DGT. Someone certainly went through a heap of trouble to pull this off.

* * *

As for John Lewis and Fiddler — they know that they and their crew of expert hackers will get caught eventually. That's the point! You devise and participate in the good trouble, and get caught in order to shine light on the cause. But for now, they bask in their DGT joy. The last time anyone saw these two agents of justice, they were marching and fiddling their way across the Edmond Pettus Bridge.

Dr. Vernay Mitchell-McKnight
Bronxville, NY

And Mr. Charles, too.

He owned the laundry store.

The one on 108th Street, there on Northern.

Across from the A&P and catacorner the liquor store.

Next to Moody's, Mister Moody – the grocer who sold you bologna with the rind and Spam and Saltines and canned sardines and Vienna sausages in tin that came with a tiny key – who was all about the sale.

He wraps your bologna in wax paper.

You pay.

You exit.

Not so Mr. Charles.

West Indian? Haitian? Jamaican? Bajan?

Tallish. Brownish. Eyeglass wearing. Gray. Bearded.

You open the door

And Mr. Charles, in that lilting deep voice of his:

"Bidding you Welcome, Young Scholars!"

And my little sister Dee and I, lighting up, almost, wanting to claim what he saw in us.

And Mommy, practically glowing, to be seen, and named, and marked:

Why, she, birthing remarkable girls?

And then, "And you know we taught the world," he'd say. "Learned men came from the Western world to Timbuktu, our scholars teaching them, enlightening the world."

And reaching for our weekly offering, he'd often say:

A Child's Tribute to Corona-East Elmhurst

"Our huge universities made of mudbrick, looking like sand, and our libraries stretching miles and miles. Dark Ages? Not ours. Not then. Ours, an Age of Enlightenment."

And Dee and I, possibilities and heads filled, minds ignited, selves enlarged,

would smile and marvel, nodding our heads, carefully turning, looking over at Mommy and always, always, always

looking 'round the laundry

Seeing those huge white machines

stacked one atop the other

like giant 10-foot tall red ant hills

rising above the fiery veldt

Seeing inside, clothing – the whites, the coloreds, swirling swishing churning

And feeling the fierce heat of the giant black dryers standing like sentinels in the back

Making us, sometimes, sweat – that hot!

Their knocking, thunk, thunking, rumbling, drumming, steady humming, thump, thump, thumpin'

And reminding us of a people – long ago

And a continent far away — he first showed us.

And Mr. Charles, now setting down lightly and with good care our bags filled with all manner of evidence of our living,

would then walk us to the front door, bidding us, always:

"Be well. Do well. Farewell, till next bidding, Young Scholars."

Luvon Roberson
Harlem, NY

Post-script: Imagine a community filled with justice guides. Mr. Charles was just one guide among dozens who gave me the eyes to see myself and the world beyond the lies told. I give thanks for growing up in that community. What a gift!

Mr. Caesar James

We called her Jimmie, but my grandmother's name was Leora James. We did not know her family because she was estranged from them for decades. She left for graduate school at Columbia, which admitted (a few) Black students,* and, according to her, she was disowned by her father. In college in 1970, I studied African-American history and learned of the Wilmington race riots of 1898. In the process, I discovered Jimmie's family was from that area, and I tracked down her surviving brother Josh, who was an infant when she left.

I learned about Southern family and memory when I called his home, explained to his wife Lalage who I was, and was startled when she asked after the health of "dear Leora," whom she could never have known. I traveled to their North Carolina home and explained to my newly-met great-uncle and aunt that I was researching the 1898 events for my class. The topic was not popular there, but my uncle, a local judge, convinced the local librarian to pull down some records from a top shelf in a closet.

Then Uncle Josh and Aunt Lalage introduced me to a tall, elderly gentleman. He was an eyewitness. He had been in his early 20s and on his way to work in Wilmington when he encountered the rioters. He was also the only person I met who actually remembered my grandmother as a girl and young woman, before she left for good. His name was Caesar James. His mother had been enslaved by my great-grandmother.

I should have found better words; I should have asked more questions; but I was young and stunned. I am old now and I still do not know the words to say.

Recently, I read a *New York Times* essay by Michael Frank entitled, "What It Took for Stella Levi to Talk About the Holocaust,"** that opens this way:

> "There is something unique about the way cataclysms are preserved in oral histories. In his 1936 essay 'The Storyteller,' Walter Benjamin draws a distinction between the printed novel and the oral tale, where experience is 'passed from one mouth to the next.' The direct line of transmission is significant: The story you hear from a living witness embeds itself into the mechanisms of memory, as I've learned firsthand, like no other."

I have seen this transmission of the Holocaust myself. I have seen this transmission of the atomic bombings myself. I have also experienced this transmission of slavery. These cataclysms are embedded in my heart.

Leslie A. Sussan
Silver Spring, MD

**For context on early Black students at Columbia University, see https://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu/content/treatment-and-framing-early-black-students-columbia-university-0.*

*** Frank, Michael. "What It Took for Stella Levi to Talk About the Holocaust." The New York Times, 14 September, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/14/opinion/stella-levi-holocaust-survivor.html?searchResultPosition=1*

Arsenic & Old Rikers

Rikers Island is the arsenic of old white 1664 Potter's Field.

Rikers is the dish-pan of burnt-to-a-crisp justice.

Rikers is the ruins of yesterday's today.

Rikers is the Island where every man and woman is an island of doom, despair, and dis-possession.

How do you get into Rikers Island?

How do you get out of Rikers Island?

Somnambulist politicians seek a bookie to give them better odds.

Hook a handicap that Rikers will drown and a monument to a new

Atlantis will appear.

Rikers is a five-alarm fire surrounded by gallons of broken polluting water hoses.

Rikers is contamination unto itself, pepper-sprayed with vials of toxic chemicals that can never be cleansed.

How do you get into Rikers Island?

How do you get out of Rikers Island?

Rikers is unpurified, unmitigated, unquenchable lust for misbegotten power.

Rikers is not a state of mind, it is state-less.

How do you excavate the truth from its labyrinth of lies?

How can Rikers live for another day without stealing another Soul away?

If the Creator has a Master Plan, now is the moment for the Archivist of Rikers to appear and unveil the monumentality of its horrors.

Arsenic & Old Rikers

End perpetual punishment.

Let the inmates take equity positions in the Asylum.

Banish the Board of Corrections to Bethlehem.

Decontaminate the shower stalls, watering hoses for the caged and soiled pants.

Thus spoke the stand-ins for a remake of "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari."

No longer a silent horror flick, this re-shoot has everyone un-strait-jacketed, in search of an 18th-century mystic while self-hypnotized.

The brutal, irrational, and authoritarian intersect with trauma, fear, and paranoia.

This nightmare merry-go-round swaps tyrants with the tremoring, all gaming the duality of the psyche.

Why punitively segregate when you might recreate?

Why solitarily confine when you could compassionately release?

Why use a Federal Monitor if the stakes you so casually dishonor?

Why wait 'til 2027 to turn out the lights if overdoses and suicides beat the clock?

The time is nigh for a reckoning at Rikers.

F. E. Scanlon
Flushing, NY

I'm Just a Soldier

Like the eye of Horus, it sits in silent witness, encased like a fragile sword inside its triangular wood and glass sheath. The flag that draped my father's coffin tells his story. "I'm just a soldier," he once told me, detailing how he picked cotton for ten cents a pound, at the age of three. Too poor for adequate nutrition, he dropped out of school in the third grade, worked as a lumber jack, lived with his tormented mulatto father in a boxcar, and lied about his age to join the U.S. Navy.

Unwanted soldier, he learned his trade as a chef in combat, "went down on three ships, swam in the Pacific Ocean, turned red with American blood," was "shipwrecked off the coast of Africa," and "walked from Tunis to Algiers" (a distance of 520.3 miles), so his grandmother would know he was still alive. I remember him standing proud in his uniform, when getting ready to drive his five children and pregnant wife from California to South Carolina. He wore his uniform as armor against lynching while traveling in the American South. Unlike many others, he lived to tell his stories.

Port Royal, SC

How Do You Solve a Problem Like Tom Merton? Or A Brief Biography of Thomas Merton

Thomas Merton was one of two sons born to wealthy artistic parents. Due to inconveniences associated with parenthood (e.g. being dead), little Tom was shunted from guardian to guardian.

Tom went to Oxford (or Cambridge – one of those English schools) where he drank like a fish and conceived a child (whereabouts unknown today, but adopted and presumably well loved).

Tom studied William Blake.

Tom was sent to Columbia University in New York, where again, he drank and partied furiously.

Until, unfathomably, he became a catholic. (A catholic in the sense of "universal"? or a Catholic in the sense of a denomination sanctioning child molestation? I'm practically certain he didn't revere any hierarchy for the beauty of an organizational chart.)

He applied to the Franciscans to be a priest. "No single dads allowed." They slammed the door.

Then Tom went to the last place on earth you'd expect a hard partying, glib wordsmith to end up – Tom went to the Trappists in Kentucky.

The Trappists *didn't even talk*. Poor Tom was about to forfeit his ace in the hole! His volubility!

After a while, Tom holed up in a hermitage. And he was still popular. He even had a mysterious romantic interlude with a beautiful nurse he met while healing from back surgery.

Tom didn't cotton to nuclear war. He didn't cotton to discrimination. He said that for some reason, when men make a tool, or a toy, they are compelled to "try it out". He feared that this tendency would catapult the world into nuclear war, this tendency to play with toys of our own devising.

How Do You Solve a Problem Like Tom Merton? Or A Brief Biography of Thomas Merton

One thing really hurt Tom. An acquaintance of Tom's immolated himself to protest the Vietnam War. This nearly broke Tom's heart. Tom's message was the message of Jesus Christ, his Rabbi and Teacher: life.

In the summer of 1967, Tom made a trip. He went to the Far East to build theological bridges with Zen Buddhists. He took a shower because he was hot and sticky. He pulled the wire to turn off the light, and was electrocuted to death.

That summer, the summer of 1967, I was doing social work by building culverts in the Hocking Hills of Ohio. My poison ivy was so bad, I had running sores all down one half of my body – a firsthand experience of what it's like to be a leper (this was to stand me in good stead later in my life as I learned that being ostracized doesn't kill).

Patty Smith
Albuquerque, NM

Dr. L.C. Dorsey: Reaching for the Moon

A Child of Mississippi Plantations Becomes a Change-Maker, Presidential Advisor, and Global Citizen

Dr. L.C. Dorsey, a civil rights legend, brought Mississippi to life during a public forum organized by New Delhi feminists. Asked whether the civil rights movement brought change to Mississippi, she paused before answering – the audience waiting in that proverbial silence that makes noise of a mouse tiptoeing through cotton.

Dr. Dorsey spoke of the fear she experienced as a child on plantations in the Mississippi Delta, knowing that her parents could not protect themselves nor their children from anything a white person chose to do. She concluded, "Yes. There's been change. I no longer live with that fear. We have work to do; but it's not like that anymore." She had a lot to do with what changed Mississippi before she died in 2013. It is the example of this woman, who had no reason to believe she could change her world, that will help each of us find our own way to being change-makers.

To know her, you must ground yourself in the Mississippi Delta that reflects the legacy of slavery in ways unmatched by any competitors. This is the world into which L.C. was born in 1938 to a sharecropping family on a plantation in Washington County. She started working in cotton fields at age 8 for $1.25 a day. She received such education as was offered by plantation schools and worked those fields until, as she put it, "the civil rights movement came to Shelby."

L.C. volunteered for the dangerous work of registering voters, thinking there was "magic" in the right to vote — "It would make people pay us fair wages, would make us not be fearful of police when we saw them, would make mob crews disappear." She then worked for a federal Headstart program and from there was propelled into a lifetime of seizing opportunities to change her life and the lives of Black people. She developed The Delta Health Center in Mound Bayou, the first rural community health center in America, and The North Bolivar Farm Cooperative, a 427-acre farm.

At age 31, L.C. left Mississippi for education, ultimately earning a Doctorate in Social Work. Returning to Mississippi in 1973, she worked on prison reform, served as director of the Delta Health Center, became a clinical associate professor at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, and associate director of the Delta Research and Cultural Institute of Mississippi Valley State University.

Dr. L.C. Dorsey: Reaching for the Moon

L.C. once said of Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, “She had the ability to at the same time make you believe you could go get the moon and bring it back and make you believe you had a responsibility to go get it and bring it back without any guilt if you didn’t get it.”

I thought of L.C. when, among the many protest signs carried during 2016 and after, I saw one that proclaimed, “We didn’t come this far to come this far.” We who believe in democracy and justice will not stop here.

More on L.C. Dorsey: https://www.c-span.org/person/?18935/LCDorsey

Barbara Phillips
Oxford, MS

Connections

The F Train runs elevated for most of its journey, but Mouna and Walter aren't interested in the neighborhoods outside the windows of their subway car. They sit side by side, not touching, not speaking, seeing but not seeing, absorbed in their own thoughts and worries.

Walter breaks their silence. He takes Mouna's hand and says, "Our stop."

He has been here once before to visit Tarek. "It's this way," he says, guiding Mouna to an open stairway whose metal steps take them to the sidewalk.

Mouna cinches the belt of her coat a little tighter against the chill of dusk in early October, then takes Walter's arm. They proceed straight ahead, one block, then two.

"It's that building, yes?" Mouna says, pointing across the street, her voice catching.

"Yes," Walter replies. "How can you tell?"

"It looks just like prisons back home in Syria," Mouna whispers. "No windows. Just one small, filthy skylight, one small door, and a bigger door for the loading dock."

"A loading dock for people," Walter registers, and asks, "Mouna, is this too upsetting for you to come here? We can go back."

Mouna cannot tell Walter how frightened she is to be just across the street from a building like the one into which her husband disappeared three years earlier. What was his crime? He had angered the Syrian regime with a critical newspaper editorial.

Connections

Neither can she share her terror that everyone around can see she is undocumented, as if she's wearing a garish letter "U" on a chain around her neck. The police had seen Tarek's "U" and arrested him and brought him to this prison. Would she be next? What was her crime? The same as her son's: Ignoring a "must leave" order after the United States had denied them political asylum.

"It is hard," Mouna affirms, her voice quivering. "I had to come, even though I cannot go in to see Tarek. I just need to be close to my son. I'll watch for you from this coffee shop."

Mouna slips Walter a note to give to Tarek. At the same time, in her mind's eye, she ties the end of an imaginary string to Walter's wrist.

"Thanks for being such a good friend, visiting Tarek when I cannot," she says. Her eyes follow Walter as he crosses the street to the small entrance door.

The string unrolls like a kite string with each step Walter takes. The taut connection holds as he presses the intercom button to request entry. Even from where she stands, Mouna can hear the metallic click of the door releasing. Walter pulls the door open, steps through and disappears from sight.

After a moment, Mouna, still clinging tightly to her end of the string, enters the coffee shop, slides into a booth, and waits.

[NB: "Connections" extends a scene in the film "The Visitor," a 2007 feature film, whose characters Mouna, Walter, and Tarek I count as social justice heroes.]

Carol Fouke-Mpoyo
New York, NY

Meet Daphene Rose McFerren

Can you see the little girl in her – a child with sparkling eyes, boundless curiosity? Can you see the terror as she, her sisters, and brother hold close to their mother? Can you see her mother, Viola, an educated woman, praying in terror as carloads of armed white men circle their home? See the child's relief as her father stops himself from charging out, alone, armed with fighting skills mastered when he risked his life in WWII ? Does she see in his eyes the anger and humiliation of returning home to be denied the vote? Can you hear the silence as no one asks why? They know the warning: *Stop registering thousands of Americans to vote – or die?*

Now imagine her pioneering entrance into Harvard University, one of the first women students of color, first from impoverished Southern farmlands. Can you see her from a rural high school walking into classrooms filled with sons and daughters of white privilege, children and grandchildren of graduates, groomed from nursery through preparatory schools to make Harvard "connections" in business, government, and universities? Do they stare with curiosity, or worse, patronize, disconnect, or summon their best noblesse oblige to befriend her awkwardly? Watch her as she graduates, enters Harvard Law School.

Watch her move into the heights of law and government, becoming a Department of Justice Prosecutor. U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno watched and asked her to become a special advisor. Later, she moved to the top of the legal profession and many high-level government agencies, universities, and organizations. Under President George W. Bush, she moved into elite law firms, easily becoming a partner with powerful contacts and material luxury.

Meet Daphene Rose McFerren

Can you see her decide to return home to Tennessee, to teach in Memphis University and guide the Hooks Institute of Social Change? See her preserve the work of her mother, father, aunts, and uncles, among thousands of the poorest of the poor, giving them the courage to register to vote, knowing not even registration would restore their vote. They could expect to lose jobs, homes, and to be barred from stores, gas stations, doctors, and even pediatricians.

Most important, she created ways to support students who are the first in their families to enter college, under tremendous pressure to quit in order to get jobs to support their families. Particularly young black men who are confronted daily with negative views of their potential and value. After working at the heights of power with fame and fortune, see Daphene Rose McFerren, Esq., choose to help others build better lives. As we walked along Memphis University paths, one student after another stopped to greet her with exuberant warmth.

Post-script:

I met Daphene Rose McFerren when she was a little girl and I was a volunteer for the Original Fayette County Civic and Welfare League. Later, I met her in Memphis, in 2016 or 2019, when she created a Memphis University exhibit on the voting rights struggle in Fayette County, Tennessee.

For a closer look: https://www.memphis.edu/tentcity and https://www.memphis.edu/benhooks/about/directors_message.php

Tita Beal Anntares
New York, NY

The Thrust for Equality: The Legacy of Social Work Advocacy

March 11, 1983, was the beginning of my equal justice movement journey on behalf of the contribution made by social work advocate Whitney M. Young, Jr.

The emphasis on equal justice, the major thrust of Mr. Young's legacy as Executive Director of the National Urban League, became common ground for education and information in the social work community. It was amazing to learn of the lack of information about the contribution made by Mr. Young in so many areas of our society.

These achievements included the proposal of the Domestic Marshall Plan for the improvement of underserved communities, the War on Poverty to eradicate poverty, the provision of job training, and improved housing. He also played a decisive role in establishing the Association of Black Social Workers due to the lack of African American inclusion in the National Association of Social Workers. A major contribution of Mr. Young was his influence in the American Institute of Architects with his request for the inclusion of more African Americans for employment and education.

The Thrust for Equality: The Legacy of Social Work Advocacy

It was out of this concern, as a former student at the Atlanta University School of Social Work during Mr. Young's deanship, that I chose a platform to pay tribute to his achievements. Thus, an annual tribute began on March 11, 1985, and has continued. Interest grew and the World Community of Social Workers was formed in 1992 to continue the spirit and legacy of his service.

The group includes Atlanta University Alumni and other committed social workers. Since the formation of the World Community of Social Workers, the ten-point Domestic Marshall Plan addressing all aspects of family and community life has been presented as an educational series for the social workers and general community. Annual tributes have included award presentations for those who have continued the equal justice movement begun by Mr. Young.

The World Community of Social Workers has gifted an original "To Be Equal" painting of Mr. Young to the Whitney M. Young Jr. School of Social Work in Atlanta, Georgia, where he served as the dean.

Velma D. Banks
Marshall, TX

The Just Gathering Pub

Light came in through the windows highlighting the dark shapes, sitting on wooden benches. At the bar, Pedro the lumberjack, aka "Palo," stared into his half-empty glass of beer. Next to him Big John, thin as a rail and barely six feet, bent forward half-asleep. The rest were all relaxed, matching the weather outside — the sun was still out but waning.

That's when the door burst open, and a dark figure filled it. Her voice was deep and strong when she said:

Rise! Rise, you men and women!

Rise up! It's time to fight

For our land, for our homes.

The time has come for us to go to WAR!

All conversations stopped. They gawked at the door

their expressions asking, Who is this?

Which is exactly what Little Ekkon, the carpenter, yelled:

"Who the heck are you?"

I am *JUSTA!* She yelled back.

Come to hunt for fighters,

Warriors that want to do battle

Battle for our families, for the poor, for the downtrodden.

I am searching for warriors to join the battle against evil,

Against the Evil Ones that are invading our neighbors' land,

Snatching our lads and young women, scraping their minds.

Who will come with me?

Everyone looked around with surprised looks.

What in tarnation is going on here? their expressions said.

The Just Gathering Pub

She who called herself Justa walked to the middle of the room.

Her strides were long and sure. She stood tall, her abundant, kinky, silver hair framing her face. She wore dark, protective armor — a metal vest and skirt, over long pants and mud-covered leather boots. She circled the room with her eyes and in a calm and clear voice said loudly:

Who is with me? We cannot let our neighbors fall. The Evil Ones have a large, well-equipped army, but they don't belong in this land. We must beat them back, shovel them like manure out of this land. Who here is with me? Drop your beer, leave your whiskey, your rum, pick up your guns, your rifles, grab your weapons and join me!

Come, follow me, follow your hearts. You know the history of your mothers, your fathers, your grandparents. When there is a battle to fight, good, strong men and women of fierce hearts must lead the way. Carve a path for our children to follow and become the example. The valiant and courageous must stand up and fight with Justa and fight for justice for all.

At dawn the next day, everyone gathered outside. Some came in wheelchairs, with walkers and canes, waiting in silence, filled with pride and anticipation.

When Justa stepped outside the pub, she saw the large gathering. An army of men and women, young and old, prepared to follow her from here to kingdom come. Ready to stand with her and fight for what's right. In the crowd, held aloft by a lad on a horse, waved a bright yellow flag with a black J in the center.

Melva C. Lewis
Long Island, NY

Seconds Frozen in Time: *A Conversation with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Inspiration: A black-and-white photograph of Dr. King, sitting in a room with a small group of people, which includes Whitney M. Young.

As I looked at this photograph, I thought of the world in which we live.

I feel that our world has been placed in a giant caldron. In the caldron, our globe has been plunged into boiling water. In the water, our planet is boiling; arising from the steam are climate change, racial injustice, gender discrimination, stifling poverty, waves of death caused by the use of automatic weapons, white and Black rage, corporate greed, crime and violence, crying women and children — a planet screaming in anguish!

I see in my mind's eye that I am walking down a very long corridor. As I walk, I see the photograph has been enlarged and is hanging on a wall at the end of the corridor. Dr. King, who is engaged in a deep conversation with Whitney Young, sees me coming.

Yesterday, I stepped into the photograph. I asked Dr. King if I could speak to him. The other people in the photo disappeared. Dr. King, still a man in his thirties, pointed to an empty armchair near him.

I sat down and struggled to control my quivering stomach and found that my voice would not leave my throat. He smiled and patiently waited for me to speak.

Finally, I stammered: "Sir, I don't know what to do! Education has flung the doors of opportunity open to many people of color, but racism has been renewed, it gained strength again, it slammed the doors shut, and changed the locks. Your shoes are still too big to fill. What shall we do?"

Dr. King took a deep breath and said, "The steps that I left for you to follow were only meant to direct some of the way forward. Just remember that the arc of the universe is long but it bends toward justice."

Dr. King continued, "We, as social justice activists, through our power, passion, and persistence, bend the arc toward justice. This is our life's work."

He stopped talking and shook his head gravely. "Daughter, there is much to be done…now get to work…and know that you are not alone."

He looked at me closely and smiled, saying, "There are difficult days ahead...There is only one way to walk: it is forward."

I woke up.

Regina M. Tate
Brooklyn, NY

Briefly Noted

The Honorable A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr.

The Honorable A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. was a mentor to many and a justice champion for all. He was the youngest judge appointed to the federal district court in Philadelphia at the age of 35, and rose to become the Chief Judge of the Third Circuit Court of Appeals prior to his retirement from the bench. Judge Higginbotham's decisions reflected a dedication to fairness and justice.

Recognizing his accomplishments as one of the top jurists of our time fails to capture his extraordinary accomplishments. Despite facing racial prejudice, including as a student at Purdue University when he was forced to sleep in an unheated attic, Judge Higginbotham did not respond with anger, but with an unwavering dedication to addressing social injustices and becoming a change agent.

After graduating from Yale Law School with honors, his career included both private practice and an extraordinary array of public service appointments. In his early years, he served as an advisor to President Johnson after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., serving on the Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. Judge Higginbotham was a consultant to Nelson Mandela, and assisted in drafting South Africa's constitution after the fall of apartheid. Notably, he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Clinton and the highest award from the NAACP, the Spingarn Medal. He was an accomplished writer, publishing two books focusing on race and the law, and over 100 scholarly articles.

Despite commitments that would have overwhelmed most, Judge Higginbotham also taught at numerous universities and was a devoted mentor to numerous young students and lawyers. I was fortunate to be one of his students, and was blessed to have had him as a mentor and friend.

Anne Chain
Fort Washington, PA

Briefly Noted

Benjamin Lay

There are a lot of people I see as models for how to live a human life that seeks to build social justice. One is Benjamin Lay, a Quaker who lived in great simplicity in the late seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century. He was a Spirit-led radical abolitionist who was "read out of" (expelled from) Friends meeting in the Philadelphia area for his dramatic and unceasing witness against enslavement of his fellow human beings.

Despite our community's sanitized history, Quakers in Benjamin Lay's time were highly involved in the buying, selling, and keeping of enslaved African people. He was a radical and unstinting truth-teller. I think he also lived with joy — he was married to a fellow Quaker named Sarah, who seems to have been a kindred spirit and strong supporter of his ministry.

Friend Benjamin lived the last years of his life in a cave outside Abington, Pennsylvania, and there are Friends in Abington Quaker Meeting today who can show you the way to what might be the same cave.

Other people on my list: Janusz Korczak, Elizabeth Freeman, Thich Nhat Hanh.

If you'd like to know more about Benjamin Lay's exemplary life and witness, read historian Marcus Rediker's beautifully written biography *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist.*

Tory Rhodin
Montpelier, VT

Photograph from The Riverside Church Archives

Riversiders Protest Police Brutality (1999)

Take a look at these Riverside Church justice champions. Who in this photo do YOU recognize? Please email luvonroberson@yahoo.com.

From Susan Warsan…

I recognize and give thanks for being present with then Social Justice Minister Rev. John Vaughn, and with Carolyn Britton Mitchell (I think), Susan Rogers, Marianne Montero, Kathy Todd, Judy Turnock. Also, at the back holding the banner pole is a former Riverside Church trustee Cheryl Pollard (I think).

I think Carolyn Britton-Mitchell is on my right. Susan W. (4th from right, standing).

Photograph from The Riverside Church Archives

Riversiders Protest Police Brutality (1999)

From Judy Turnock...

I recognize and give thanks to Ruby Sprott and Susan Wersan. Can't remember last name of Sue kneeling in front. I also see Rev. John Vaughn standing, in back.

From Verneda Lights...

I recognize and give thanks for churches and congregations that are agents of peace, in service to Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

NOTES

NOTES

Riverside Writing Group

The Riverside Writing Group is a small group of
The Riverside Church Education Ministry led by Rev. Bruce Lamb.

www.trcnyc.org