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Remembering Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Through our scientific and technological genius, we have made of this world a neighborhood and yet...we have not had the ethical commitment to make of it a brotherhood. But somehow, and in some way, we have got to do this. We must all learn to live together as brothers. Or we will all perish together as fools."

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, *Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution*. King's final sermon at the National Cathedral, Washington, D.C. March 31, 1968, five days before his assassination

Dr. King would have turned 92 on January 15, 2021. I suspect were he still alive he like most of us would not have been surprised by the storming of the Capital on January 6, 2021. Trump and his minions among whom are, sadly, members of Congress have given us a steady diet of misinformation, and have struck down enemies with racist, misogynistic attacks as though they were playing a game of *whack a mole* but with dangerous consequences.

In a 1963 King wrote, *"Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction ... The chain reaction of evil - hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars - must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation."*

My fear is that Trump set in motion a "chain reaction of evil" that brought together a disparate tribe of right-wing hate groups who currently show no sign of skulking back into their dark corners even after Trump leaves office.

It is at these times we can go to the arts for comfort, solace, and necessary reflection. Through shared artistic experiences we can strengthen community bonds frayed during the Trump presidency and the pandemic.

Now more than ever we need the arts to hold up a mirror to society and to ourselves. Through theatre, literature, music, and art in all its myriad forms we can start a long overdue conversation and find a means to achieve social and racial justice and end white supremacy.

To that end Pentangle Arts will join that conversation with programming that continues to explore those themes in meaningful and engaging ways.

This spring Pentangle will bring Burlington-based poet Rajnii Eddins for two days of interactive assemblies at the WUHS High School using poetry and the spoken word to challenge students to examine their

own biases, and give students of color a safe way to share their experience of being a black student in a largely white school in a largely white state.

As noted in this space before, Pentangle has also joined The Vermont Mural Project which seeks to identify the ways we want our communities to be more equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist through creatively facilitated dialogue, with participants young and old, drawn from all of Vermont's 14 counties.

I close with an excerpt from Rev. Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, who delivered a sermon at the National Cathedral, in Washington, D.C., on January 17, 2021.

His sermon takes the form of an imagined letter from the Apostle Paul to America in a time of crisis, based on Dr. King's 1963 imaginary letter from the Apostle Paul to American Christians.

"But I must defend America's flawed democracy from the militants on the Mall. Yes, America has miserably failed to deliver to many of you the freedom and justice promised to all of you. Yet those who writhed in abortive insurrection resent Black citizens for demanding the very rights the Capitol insurrectionists feel they are being denied.

In the wake of this carnage, many citizens claimed that what occurred at the Capitol is not America. The sad truth is that, for many people, this is the only America they know. An America that spills blood in the name of misguided patriotism. An America willing to avert its eyes from truth in the glare of baseless conspiracy. An America that worships at the altar of the Second Amendment while making an idol of weapons and betraying the Second Commandment. An America that spews disgust at the dark foreigner and harbors hatred for the brown immigrant. An America that despises as enemies those who cry out that Black Lives Matter, while waving the traitorous banner of Confederate bigotry. This is America and has been America since America became America."

The Rev. Dr. Michael Eric Dyson is Professor of African American and Diaspora Studies and Distinguished Professor of Ethics and Society at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. He is the author of numerous books, including *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (2007), *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America* (2017), and, most recently, *Long Time Coming: Reckoning with Race in America* (2020).