

Resources on May 2017 Theme: Privilege

Love is the motive, but justice is the instrument.

—Reinhold Niebuhr

There is nothing uniquely evil in these destroyers or even in this moment. The destroyers are merely men enforcing the whims of our country, correctly interpreting its heritage and legacy. It is hard to face this. But all our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body.

—Ta-Nehisi Coates

Yes it is not our part
to master all the tides
of the world,
but to do what is in us
for the succor of those
years wherein we are set,
uprooting the evil in the
fields that we know,
so that those who live
after us may have clean
earth to till.

What weather they shall have
is not ours to rule.

—J.R.R. Tolkien

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What we need is such a re-enforcement of the gentle power of religion that all souls, of whatever color, shall be included within the blessed circle of its influence.

—Fannie Barrier Williams

It is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long cherished or a privilege he has long possessed that he is set free — he has set himself free — for higher dreams, for greater privileges.

—James Baldwin

I Will Not Apologize

I ain't got a crust or crumb, to get some I'd be well obliged
Murder is comodified, felon for the second time
Never was I into chasing trouble I was followed by
Facing trouble with no alibi, had to swallow pride
Vilified, victimized, penalized criticized
Ran into some people that's surprised I was still alive
Look into my daughter's eyes, wonder how can I provide
Got to get from A to B but how can I afford to drive?
Messed around, tried to get a job and wasn't qualified
Had to see a pal of mine, got to get the lightning rod
Now I'm in the black Impala looking for the dollar sign
Palms get the itching man I got to get the calamine
Before I fall behind, guess the grind will be my 9 to 5
I will not be conquered by, I will not apologize

—The Roots, lyrics by Black Thought

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Breathe Restlessness into Me

Thank you for all I forget are gifts,
not rights.
Forgive me for all the grievances
I remember too well.
Save me from the self-pity,
the self-seeking,
the fat-heartedness
which is true poverty.
Guide me, if I'm willing
(drive me if I'm not)
into the hard ways of sacrifice
which are just and loving.
Make me wide-eyed for beauty,
and for my neighbor's need and goodness;
wide-willed for peace-making,
and for the confronting power
with the call to compassion;
wide-hearted for love
and for the unloved,
who are the hardest to touch
and need it the most.
Dull the envy in me which criticizes
and complains life into a thousand ugly bits.
Keep me honest and tender enough to heal,
tough enough to be healed of my hypocrisies.
Match my appetite for privilege
with the stomach for commitment.
Teach me the great cost of paying attention
that, naked to the dazzle of your back as you pass,
I may know I am always on holy ground.
Breathe into me the restlessness and courage
to make something new,
something saving,
and something true
that I may understand what it is to rejoice.

—Ted Loder

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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.

—john a. powell

It is very easy to pretend to understand what one does not understand. Often the degree to which we oppose a thing marks the degree to which we do not understand it. Sometimes we use our opposition to an idea to cover our own ignorance. We express our dislike for things, sometimes for people, when we do not understand the things we pretend to dislike; when we do not know the people for whom we have the antagonism.

If I knew you and you knew me,
And each of us could clearly see
By that inner light divine
The meaning of your heart and mine;
I'm sure that we would differ less
And clasp our hands in friendliness,
If you knew me, and I knew you.

—Howard Thurman

To Whites, I Was an Oddity

My parents and siblings have light tan-colored skin and my brother and older sisters had big fluffy dark Afros, as was the style of the day. All but me, and occasionally my mother, who did not have kinky hair, were identifiably black.

When my little blond friend's mother learned I belonged to the black family that had funny foreign cars and funny foreign people in funny clothes who came and went, she told me to go home and not return....

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I was a child, ill-equipped to negotiate whatever fear or threat this adult mother had projected onto me. I had no reference and no words to explain to my mother why I was bewildered when I returned home from playing that day, and so I silently stewed in a combination of disgrace and rage....

Though today I pity that uneducated mother, I recognize her treatment of me as the same vicious strain of hatefulness held in the hearts of the adults who screamed and spat at little Ruby Bridges.

Revisiting the event is akin to recalling a first kiss — in reverse.

It was not a revelation, nothing given. On the contrary, it felt as if something precious personal was stolen. It was a premature removal of a comfort intended to remain intact throughout one's childhood, like innocence or safety.

What about a little girl scares an adult so much they need to terrify or humiliate her, and what happens to that adult when they witness she is protected not by the National Guard but by a bullet-proof dignity passed down from generations? And what have they passed down to their children?

—Michaela Angela Davis

It is not accurate or, for these times, bold enough to just say that America has a race problem; ...America is a race problem.

—Haki R. Madhubuti

Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, the cry is always the same: "We want to be free."

—Martin Luther King, Jr.