

A Single Garment
January 17, 2021
Rev. Dr. Judith E. Wright

This weekend and tomorrow
as a nation we are celebrating the ministry and legacy,
of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
He changed the course of history,
with his preaching about equal rights for all people,
and advocating especially for people of color.

While it does not seem so very long ago in my mind,
Dr. King gave his "*I Have a Dream Speech*" in late August 1963.
That was fifty-eight years ago,
when he spoke before more than two hundred and fifty thousand people,
on the Washington DC Mall,
preaching about civil and economic rights and an end to racism in our country.

Today while much has been gained,
in terms of equal rights for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color,
there is still a lot of work to be done to assure equal rights.
One thing we can do is to read articles and books written by BIPOC.
There are now available a number of books and articles on racism and anti-racism,
by people of color, four of which I read to prepare for this sermon:

How to be an Anti-Racist by Ibram X Kendi.

My Grandmother's Hands by Reemaa MenaKem

Me and White Supremacy by Layla Saad

Breathe by Imani Perry, which is the UU common read for our faith for this year,

Our worship Committee will be presenting a service on this book on January 24th.

How to be an Anti-Racist is by Dr. Ibram X Kendi,
Who is an historian of race and discriminatory policy in America.
Dr. Kendi is currently the director at the Center for Antiracist Research at Boston University.
This is a book seeking to help us all understand and end racism in our nation.
Dr. Kendi writes of the detriment effects of racism today:

*“Racist ideas make people of color think less of themselves,
which makes them more vulnerable to racist ideas. And,
racist ideas make White people think more of themselves,
which further attracts them to racist ideas”*¹.

Dr. Kendi goes on to say that the main problem of racism,
is the common denial that one is racist, whatever the color of one’s skin. He says:

*Denial is the heartbeat of racism, beating across ideologies, races, nations.
It is beating within us.*²

He believes that when a person says “*I am not racist*,” that is too neutral a stance.

*One either allows racial inequalities to persevere, as a racist,
or confronts racial inequities as an anti-racist.*³

Dr. Kendi is asking each of us to look within ourselves,
to let go of prejudices we may hold towards certain groups of people,
and to instead focus on changing discriminating racial policies.
This means actively challenging thoughts such as those making
one group of people inferior or superior to another or others.

He defines *racism as the marriage of racist policies and racist ideas
that normalizes racial inequities.*⁴

¹ Ibram X. Kendi. *How To Be an Anti-Racist*. New York, Penguin Random House, 2019. Kindle, p, 5.

² Ibram X. Kendi. P. 7

³ Ibid, p.8

⁴ Ibid, p. 17

An example of racial inequity he gives is the fact that 71 % of Whites own their own homes, compared to 41 % of Latinx families and 41% of Black families in 2019. An equitable distribution would have all three groups owning homes around the same percentage – hopefully in the seventies or higher.

A racist policy, can also be defined as “institutionalized racism”, or “systemic racism.”

What is a racist idea? *Any idea that suggests that one race is inferior or superior to another racial group in any way.*⁵

It is the belief that because of the alleged innate differences within each race, that we have racial inequities in our society.

Anti-racists hold that *all races are equals in all their apparent differences.*⁶

An important current reality of racism in our country is its White supremacy culture, which is, indeed, the marriage of *racist policies and racist ideas, that normalizes racial inequities.*

White supremacy culture needs to be dismantled, and we, as Unitarian Universalist have one way to work on this issue for ourselves and the betterment of others.

Our UUA General Assembly in 2018 created a four- year congregational study action issue entitled “*Undoing Intersectional White Supremacy.*”

White supremacy is the racist ideology based on the belief, that White people are superior in many ways to people of other races,

⁵ Ibid, p. 19

⁶ Ibid, p. 19.

and therefore, should be dominant over other races.⁷

The intent of our UUA Study Action issue is to help each of us – no matter what the color of our skin, to grapple with the implications both within ourselves and in society at large, of white supremacy and its many manifestations.

One manifestation is that of Black, Indigenous, People of Color experiencing a constant verbal and nonverbal racial microaggressions, or what Dr. Kendi prefers to call verbal and non-verbal racial abuse. Such racial slights and prejudices are slowly accumulated over a lifetime by a person of color. White people, consciously but more often unconsciously, unleash on Black people, microaggressions. Many people of color in our country live in daily fear for their safety, and for the safety of their loved ones.

Just recall the Black African American birdwatcher, trying to site birds in New York city's Central Park, being accused by a White woman, walking her dog, of going to harm her. He was saved by having used his cell phone to document her accusations⁸.

Or the woman in a hotel lobby recently wrongly accusing a Black youth of stealing her cell phone, and then physically attacking him.⁹

Or the heart-breaking description of a Black US Capital police officer, after the riot on January 6th, crying uncontrollably for fifteen minutes,

⁷ Wikipedia, s.v., "White Supremacy" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_supremacy.

⁸ [man birdwatching in central park - Bing](#)

⁹ [Multiple charges for woman accused of attacking teen in NY hotel - ABC News \(go.com\)](#)

saying that the rioters called him “the n-word” at least fifteen different times, When he stopped crying, he yelled and railed in the halls of Congress, against the white supremacy he had experienced that terrifying day.¹⁰

One of the most disturbing images of the riot on January 6th was of a man carrying a huge confederate flag in the House of Representatives. The confederate flag is associated with bondage and slavery for people of color. The flag cannot be separated from the Civil War’s Confederacy’s vice president’s words,

Alexander Stephens, who wrote in his infamous Cornerstone Speech, that slavery was “the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution,” and that the Confederacy had been founded on “the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man.”¹¹

The confederate flag would evolve from that terrible time, to be at Klu Klux Klan rallies, as well as during the Civil Rights Movement when segregation ended, and little children had to face angry crowds, just to enter a school building, to receive the education all deserve.

And more recently, such flying of Confederate flags has been associated, with states who fly such flags aiming to interfere in various ways with the right to vote for people of color.¹²

We need no better symbol of the existence of white supremacy in our midst today, as a nation than when we look at this image of a white man carrying a confederate flag in the House of Representatives on January 6th.

¹⁰ [Black Capitol Police officers say 'terrorists' used N-word \(nypost.com\)](#); [Black Capitol Police Officers Describe The Racism They Faced \(buzzfeednews.com\)](#)

¹¹ Clint Smith. *Confederates in the Capitol*. The Atlantic Monthly. January 8, 2021. [https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/01/..](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/01/)

¹² Southern Poverty Law Center. SPLC Defends the vote amid pandemic and historic election season Winter 2020. P. 1

We here in Laconia have seen people with confederate flags, flying on the back of their trucks or from their home windows. White supremacy lives here as well, not just in the South or in the riot at the Capital. The first week I was here as your new minister four and a half years ago, a truck with a confederate flag on its back was parked on our congregation's property, the as the driver was one of the persons working on the repair of our steeple. While I was trying to figure out what to do about this, and receiving calls from people in the wider Laconia community, upset and asking me, "what was I going to do about this?" - Jeri B., one of our intrepid members, confronted the worker, telling him we as a congregation don't believe in what his flag represented and asking him to remove the flag. In response, he moved his truck, off our church grounds, and onto the public street, with the flag intact.

Our UUA has been active in guiding us as a faith tradition, to examine white supremacy within us –including the policies and decisions and even promises unkept – that live within our congregations and faith movement, as well as in the communities and nation in which we live.

The current UU congregational study action issue calls for the undoing of Intersectional White Supremacy.

What does this word "intersectionality" mean in the context of white supremacy?

Intersectionality is an analytical framework for understanding how aspects,

*of a person's social and political identities combine
to create different modes of discrimination and privilege.*¹³

Intersectionality identifies different factors of advantage and disadvantage, which create overlapping social identities that may be empowering or oppressing.

Clearly, we are watching intersectional White supremacy unfold before us all during this awful, terrible pandemic.

Black, Indigenous and Latinx communities

have been hit hardest by the coronavirus,

and have poorer quality of health care to help them deal with the virus.

Sadly, Black Americans are 2.5 times more likely to die from the coronavirus than White Americans.

Dr. Antony Fauci, Director of the CDC, gave voice to such disparities, based on race, minority status, and healthcare within our white supremacy society.

He said:

"The pandemic shines a very bright light on a failing in our society, that goes back decades and decades and decades.

And that is the social determinants of health that minorities, have to face literally from the time they're born.

So, we're not going to change that within the context of this outbreak, but we really need to make this be a stimulus for us to take seriously—

how do we address the social determinants of health?¹⁴"

This is a very clear example of the intersectionality of race, healthcare, and white supremacy.

¹³ [intersectionality meaning - Bing](#)

¹⁴ [Dr. Fauci on why the coronavirus is wreaking havoc on Black communities - CBS News](#)

Another example of Intersectional White Supremacy is the treatment of illegal drug offenders. While White people are just as likely as people of color to use illegal drugs, Black Americans are far more likely to be jailed for drug offenses. This is the intersectionality of drug use, race, white privilege, and prisons. In 2016 Black and Latinx people were grossly overrepresented in prisons at 56%, double their percentage in the US population. White people have the opposite happening in our prisons for drug offenses- about 30% are White, which represents about half of their percentage in the US population.¹⁵ Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow* was ground-breaking in revealing this intersectional reality.

One last example of intersectional white supremacy is in terms of environmental racism. This is a form of systemic racism where communities of color, are forced to live *in proximity to sources of toxic waste*. As a result, these communities suffer greater rates of health problems, because of the hazardous pollutants.

An example of environmental racism is documented in a 2007 study, that found that African American children were five times more likely to have lead poisoning from proximity to waste than White children.¹⁶ Thus, here we have the intersectionality of race, white privilege, and the disposal of toxic materials.

White supremacy is a **huge topic**.

¹⁵ Kendi, p. 24

¹⁶ Ibid.

As I was reading *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla F. Saad, I thought, this is an excellent tool to study White Supremacy.

Any congregational study- action issue

presented from our national General Assembly

begins with studying an issue thoroughly before taking action.

This particular study action issue on Intersectional White Supremacy

calls on us as UUs to study Intersectional White Supremacy as well, before acting.

The book, *Me and White Supremacy*, offers us a curriculum,

to study deeply how white supremacy is present in our lives.

I want to encourage you to read this book, carefully, slowly, reflectively.

If people are interested in reading and studying this book together,

let me know and I am happy to lead such a group.

Dismantling White Supremacy was clearly part of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's dream for our nation and the world.

He famously said: *I look to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.*

However, his vision was much greater than challenging White Supremacy.

In his "*I have a Dream*" speech Rev. King quotes from *Isaiah 40: 4-5* "*Every valley shall be exalted.*"

And at the end of his speech he gives a reference to *Galatians: 3:28*,

where St. Paul preached "*There is no longer Jew or Greek,*

there is no longer slave or free,

there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Dr. King's vision, his dream, was for there to be equality for all- No matter the color of one's skin:

He envisioned for all to be free, not solely Black folks.

For all to be without racism's harsh shadow on their lives.

And in that freedom, that liberation,
each person would be part of a whole,
each part valued equally as a precious human being.
All would know that we live in *a single garment of destiny* –.

Dr. King also quoted from Amos 5:24: “*But let justice roll down like water,
righteousness like a never-failing stream.*”

To do anti-racist work is to do the work of justice.
For those of us who are considered White,
If we choose to dismantle White Supremacy within ourselves,
Our world will no longer be a white-centered, white privileged reality.

Instead, we will find ourselves centered
in our UU seventh principle of the interdependent web of which we are each a part.
Within this interdependent web we can choose to work to end racism
and strive towards a vision such as Dr. King held,
of a world where there is
*justice, equity and compassion in human relations.*¹⁷

A world free of violence and hatred.
A world where all can be honored and held in love.
A world where, in Dr. King’s words,
*we shall hew out of a mountain of despair,
A stone of hope*¹⁸.

May it be so. Peace and love to you.

¹⁷ UU Second Principle.

¹⁸ Dr. King. *I have a Dream Speech*. August 28, 1963.