



The Unitarian Church in Westport

Press Release

January 30, 2021

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Unitarian-Universalists Offer Informative Series on the History of Racial Injustice in America

Inaugural Program: Sunday, February 7, 10:40-11:45

The women of the [Unitarian Church in Westport](http://uuwestport.org) are launching a series of programs focused on the history of black lives in America and its effects on our country today. The series, entitled ***Revealing History: How We Got Here, Why It Matters***, will launch with its first program Sunday February 7 at 10:40 AM in a multi-media event entitled ***Racial Injustice: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration***. The program will include a guest speaker from the Equal Justice Initiative, founded by Bryan Stevenson, author of [Just Mercy](http://justmercy.com); a musical work from Wilton's own Andy Gundell with voiceover from Desmond Tutu, and other notable artists and artwork. To access the ZOOM link for the service and this program, visit the church's website at uuwestport.org.

The Unitarian Church in Westport is offering a unique program on Sunday, February 7, about the historical roots of police brutality and mass incarceration. The free online program, ***Racial Injustice: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration***, is the first of a new community awareness series offered by a group of women committed to racial justice.

Each program in the series will be a multi-media event designed to speak to both mind and heart. The group believes that they needed to learn the truths of the experience of Black Americans in order to gain a greater understanding of racial injustice and inequality today. These truths will be delivered by advocates, academics or other experts. Distinguishing this series from other educational events, the group has added visual and auditory experiences intended to generate greater connectedness to the history and its consequences.

The February 7 program, which starts at 10:40 AM immediately following the Unitarian service, will illustrate the terrifying and degrading consequences of white supremacy for Black Americans, past and present. It will begin with a montage of images, including photography and works of art, and a live performance by slam poet, Joan 'Lyric' Leslie. Ms. Leslie has been a member of two national poetry slam teams and is a two-time Queen of the South Poetry

Slam Champion. Through her poetry, she seeks to empower youth and encourage communities of color to share their truth.

Following the spoken word performance, Elliot Spillers, Justice Fellow at the [Equal Justice Initiative](#), will discuss EJI's work to end mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, challenge racial and economic injustice and protect basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society. EJI, located in Montgomery, Alabama, was founded by human rights advocate and author Bryan Stevenson, whose book *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* was the basis for the 2019 movie *Just Mercy*.

The program will conclude with another montage and a musical work written by TUCW member, Andy Gundell. "Prayer," an anthemic song of inspiration and hope, was recorded with Gundell's American and South African colleagues and features the voice of Nobel Peace Prize winner, Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

There will be a question and answer period following the guest speaker as well as an open mike session after the formal program concludes at 11:45 am. The open mike session is meant to provide a forum for the audience to share their reactions to any or all elements of the program.

The idea for this series grew out of a collective reaction to the murder of George Floyd, whose final utterances of "I can't breathe...Mama," compelled the women, many mothers themselves, to gain a deeper understanding of systemic racism, discrimination and racial injustice. Convinced of the importance of understanding history in order to gain a deeper appreciation for the origins of current day challenges, the women have named their series ***Revealing History: How We Got Here, Why It Matters***. Future topics may include voting rights, residential segregation and education.

The women's group believes that this series is just the beginning of their work to inspire, connect and act, all part of the mission of their Unitarian-Universalist church, physically located in Westport, CT. Eventually, they would like to partner with other local women's groups to amplify voices for racial justice and identify or create new opportunities for meaningful action.

The women say that their lives have been changed by what they have learned so far. They hope others will find similar inspiration. Says one member, "I discovered the hard truth that if I remain silent and do little about the problem of racism, I am a passive collaborator in this violence. I want to change and become part of the solution."

Due to its theme and content, the February 7th program is intended for mature audiences. For the Zoom link, visit the church's website at www.uuwestport.org. Contact TUCWomen@gmail.com with questions.