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SKELETONS IN THE AMERICAN CLOSET

Rev. Scott W. Alexander, Preaching

Sunday, January 15, 2026

UCN

I would like to begin this morning by asking for a measure of your indulgence…for I would like to begin my reflections -- on this Martin Luther King Sunday, when we (by moral necessity) focus our attentions on the complicated (and painful) issue of race in America – by talking about the history of **my own particular American family**…BECAUSE I BELIEVE IT IS DIRECTLY RELEVANT TO OUR BROADER DISCUSSION ABOUT RACE IN AMERICA.

So bear with me now as I quickly lay out my own family's American story...and how it directly relates

to the on-going moral struggle we have with Race in America today

[PICTURE AND CAPTION OF WINTHROP'S GREAT FLEET GOES UP ON SCREEN]



John Winthrop's "Great Fleet" arrriving in Salem Harbour 1630

My mother's Puritan ancestors – impoverished immigrants by the name of John and Sarah Reed -- landed in Salem, Massachusetts (almost 400 years ago now) as a part of John Winthrop's ***"Great Fleet"*** fleeing religious persecution…with 700 other desperate early settlers in the year 1630. And my Father's "Alexander" Welsh ancestors similarly

arrived from the British Isles many generations ago. So my particular American family (White and European) has had **almost 400 years** -- and fully over **12 generations**! -- to achieve what we like to think of as ***"The Great Promise and Dream of America***." And indeed my family has greatly benefited from the abundant opportunity we were given for ***"life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."***

Both my parents were raised (in the early 20th Century) with lives of <u>extreme privilege</u>, resulting from the fact that both of my Grandfathers

[PHOTOS ABD CAPTIONS 0F MY GRANDFATHRS PROJECTED SIDE-BY-SIDE ON CHANCEL SCREENS]



Mark Clayton Ewing

[TODD…PICTURE OF MY OTHER GRANDFATHER GOES HERE]

Charles Alexander (on my Father's side) and Mark Ewing (on my Mother's) – were successful and wealthy industrialists – Charles in steel manufacturing (he ran the world's largest steel mill in

India) and Mark in hydroelectric power (his company electrifying much of Central Wisconsin) .

[PICTURE AND CAPTION OF MY MOTHER GOES UP ON SCREEN]



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This passionate commitment of hers is something of a surprise (I think) because she grew up in a very sheltered environment in virtually all-White Northern Wisconsin, where her exposure to people

of different races and cultures) was incredibly limited. But somehow by the time she reached adulthood, Mother had a passionate commitment to work in and with the African-American community, for greater educational, economic, and social equality of all.

Upon graduating from Northwestern University (with a degree in Social Work, in the early days of World War II) my Mother -- who had plenty of opportunities to choose a comfortable and conventional life like those pursued by her 3 brothers – instead went to work (for very low pay) at a struggling "neighborhood settlement house" in the slums of Syracuse New York, where she worked with the children of the poor…mostly African American…to help them become successful adults. For the duration of the war, she lived in that rough-and-tumble neighborhood where she worked

with two roommates -- an African-American social worker colleague (a wonderful woman with whom she remained friends for her entire life) and (and this is a story unto itself)

[PICTURE AND CAPTION OF NISEI WOMAN DURING WWII IN AN INTERNMENT CAMP]



Nisei woman during WWII in a Japanese internment Camp

a Japanese American woman whom my mother had managed to liberate from an internment camp for Japanese in California (again, motivated by her deep

commitment to social justice and equality) …by finding her a job at the Settlement House and personally signing documents promising the military authorities that she would take both financial and legal responsibility for both this woman's activities and welfare. My Mother remembered these years working in the slums of Syracuse as some of the most purposeful and rewarding of her life.

[PICTURE AND CAPTION OF MY FATHER IS PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]



My Father Wendell W. Alexander

After the war, she married my Navy Officer Father (who had fought in Europe) and moved to Tulsa (and then Racine, Wisconsin), to raise us four boys. And my Mother's commitment to racial equality and justice – which began in Syracuse – continued

unabated. In the early 60's, she pretty much single-handedly created a thriving community center in the one black neighborhood in Racine – a predominately poor community that lay (predictably) at the bottom of a deep and depressing industrial valley right in the middle of town. After pulling both Black and White civic leaders together to launch the project, my social worker Mother not only provided the professional leadership and encouragement to get the educational (and personal empowerment) program off its feet, she personally provided the all the funds required to buy the center's first building…

[PICTURE AND CAPTION OF "THE PINK HOUSE" IS PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]



"The Pink House" Racine's "Neighborhood Empowerment Center"

A bright pink house -- after which the new center was named – which served as the institution's first Facility. Years later, the growing community center moved to a new and much larger building – and was named (at my Mother's insistence) ***"The Bray Center"***





“The Bray Community Center” – Racine, WI

after George Bray, an African American friend (and fellow Unitarian Universalist from the Racine UU church) leader in the community.

Today – more than 60 years later -- still proudly located in the predominantly Black neighborhood or Racine -- ***“The Bray Center”*** is a thriving social service institution in Racine, providing a wealth of

programming and support services for (primarily African American) youth and adults…including a gymnasium which is home to their chronically nationally-renowned basketball teams.

[PICTURE OF BRAY CENTER COMES DOWN OFF SCREEN]

Anyway…what I want to share is that all throughout my formative years, I watched as my Mother worked in Racine (and beyond) for racial empowerment, justice and equality, and instilled in me (and my three brothers) an understanding of the importance of this work in America. She always talked to us about (and modeled for us) the importance of America facing (**and working to rectify**) its centuries of terrible racial oppression and inequality.

All this pride we took in my Mother's racial justice work is perhaps why, following her death, my

brothers and I were shocked (genuinely shocked) as we went through a bunch of dusty, old family photo albums my Mother had in her possession – only to find a photo almost identical to this one:

PHOTO OF THE TWO KKK MEN IS PROJECTED UP ON THE CHANCEL SCREENS]



Photo, page 467
America: A Concise History, Third Edition
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A picture of two American men (probably from the 1920's) proudly armed with weapons and dressed up in their KKK outfits. Although we were able to trace this photo back to the Illinois side of our Ewing/Scharrs family, we have been unable to determine precisely who these two sinister men were, or why their picture was included our old family album. But I can only assume (Family albums being what they are) the scary looking KKK goons in the album (with their sinister hoods and shotgun at the ready) both were **ANCESTORS of mine** from the early years of the 20th Century. Could these two evil characters ***[SCOTT POINTS TO THE PICTURE OF THE 2 KKK MEN]***

be Great, Great uncles or cousins, perhaps, or – heaven forbid – someone even closer to me on the family tree? We just don't know precisely who they were, beyond the fact that are almost certainly a

part of my extended family…a shameful and embarrassing part of my ancestry as a Midwestern American of European descent. Though it pains me to acknowledge it, these ugly folks are -- simply put -- ***"My People"…***an indelible part of my personal heritage…just three generations back.

[PAUSE…]

Let me pause here and remind us all of the ugly and complicated history of the Ku Klux Klan. The KKK is the name given to a number of past and present fraternal organizations in the United States that have variously advocated white supremacy, racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, homophobia, and nativism. The first Klan was founded in 1866 (right after the Civil War) in the Deep South by veterans of the Confederate Army, with the sole purpose of

resisting Reconstruction and keeping the freed slaves ***"in their subservient place"*** at the bottom of the social, educational and economic order. This first Klan was destroyed in the early 1870 by President Ulysses S. Grant's vigorous enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1871 (also known as ***"The KKK Act"***)…but White Supremacy in America (as you all surely now know) has (so far) been impossible to kill.

The second incarnation of the KKK was a massive whites-only membership organization which sprang up in the 1920's (with many local chapters and millions of members, representing – believe it or not…and this is a shameful American statistic -- about **15%** of the nation's eligible white male population). This organization (which in many parts of the country including in Midwestern states like Ohio, Indiana and Illinois where it, again, had

hundreds of thousands of members) was responsible for many lynchings, fire-bombings and other violent activities directed against African Americans and their supporters. Like its predecessor, this 20th Century KKK (which the photo from my family album surely represents) was committed to maintaining the economic and social privilege and political power long afforded to White Americans…while denying advancement and equality (by force, intimidation, and murder if necessary) to African Americans. Mercifully, this organization (just as its predecessor) also collapsed after a couple of decades of sinister activities…and was virtually non-existent as an organized movement by the time of the Second World War.

But today – as you all painfully know – similar White Supremacy organizations (like the so-called ***Proud***

Boys…the ***National Association for the Advancement of White People***…the ***Aryan Brotherhood*** and about 100 of other racist – and Neo-Nazi groups -- are enjoying a sinister resurgence in these dark and dangerous times in American life.

[PICTURE OF MY KKK RELATIVES COMES DOWN OFF SCREEN]

This sad reality – that American racism and dozens of supporting organizations thrive -- is why I took the risk (this morning) of sharing **this painful little bit** of **my own family's "dirty laundry"** with you on this Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday. I share this **shocking and shameful photograph** from my own family's past **NOT** because I particularly feel any direct or personal guilt over it – some 100 years later. While I am definitely chastened by my ancestor's beliefs and

behaviors, I honestly do not feel any **direct personal responsibility** for (or **particular emotional connection** to) the **terrible (and, yes, evil) choices** some of my ancestors may or may not have made a century ago in the contexts of their own fearful, ignorant, prejudiced lives -- any more than I would take any personal credit today for all of my Mother's noble work – half-a-century ago now -- on behalf of racial equality and justice. **I share this simply as an undeniable part of my own family's complicated (but common) story…**

[MY FAMILY KKK PHOTO GOES BACK UP ON SCREEN]



Photo, page 467
America: A Concise History, Third Edition
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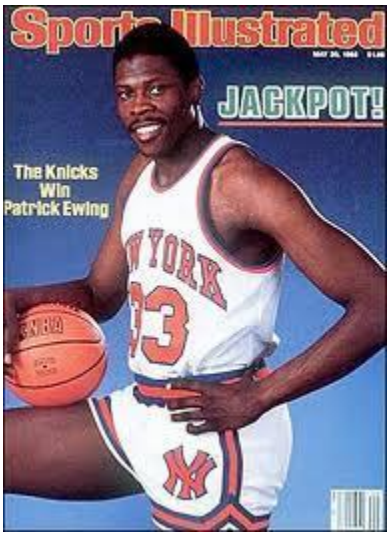
here it is, for all time, in photographic black and white -- because it serves me -- and all white Americans of European descent who are facing the tragic facts of America's violent and oppressive racial history -- as a stark reminder of the power,

privilege, and prejudice that has (over the history of this nation) given me (and all White Americans) such incredible advantages over those Americans who were enslaved (and then otherwise held down and oppressed) for generation after American generation.

[THE PHOTO OF MY KKK ANCESTORS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE SCREEN]

Just one more painful example from my own family history of this legacy of racial power, prerogative and privilege -- if I might. Both my parents (and I) descend from a long line of English descendants (Ewings and Alexanders) who "settled" American in the 17th and 18th Centuries.

[THE PHOTO AND CAPTION OF BASKETBALL STARS PATRICK EWING AND SHAI GILGEOUS ALEXANDER ARE PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]



PATRICK EWING



SHAI GILGEOUS ALEXANDER

The photos above are of NBA stars Patrick **Ewing** and Shai Gilgeous **Alexander**

Every time I see **"Ewing" or "Alexander"** name in basketball news, I am directly reminded of both sides of my family's slave holding past. For the undeniable historical truth is that these two star players share my family names for only one reason…their direct ancestors were enslaved and owned by one of **my English forbearers.** That's precisely how (of course) a majority of African Americans today came by their surnames…they were forced to adopt the last name of those who (quote, unquote) ***"owned"*** them.

[PICTURE AND CAPTION OF GENERAL GEORGE MCCLELLAN IS PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]



My ancestor General George B. McClellan

There is <u>one last "Skeleton"</u> in my personal American closet that I must report. Through my paternal grandmother (whose maiden name was Mary McClellan) I am directly related to General George B. McClellan…who was (over the course of his lifetime) a railroad executive, a Civil War General (of dubious distinction as your Civil war buffs know)…the Democratic Party Presidential candidate against Lincoln in 1864, and (finally) the governor of New

Jersey. As the war began, one historian writes, McClellan ***"Was more interested winning the war than in ending slavery"*** in that (like many on the Northern side at the time) he publicly opposed the outright abolition of slavery. Needless to say, I am (in addition to everything else I have just shared with you about my American heritage) not terribly proud of this McClellan heritage…and am glad (frankly) he lost badly to Lincoln in the Presidential election of 1864!

[PICTURE OF GENERAL MCCLELLAN COMES DOWN OFFF SCREEN]

So…to tie all these personal stories together…While I profoundly wish it were otherwise, as a privileged American white male living in these supposedly enlightened early years

of the 21st Century …I personally have <u>some very ugly skeletons in my particular family closet</u>. Both the immorality of <u>SLAVE-HOLDING</u> (and tacitly allowing slavery) and the murderous lawlessness of <u>THE KKK</u> are <u>DIRECTLY in my extended family's past</u>…and I am sure that the same is probably true for many (but surely not all) of you (of White European descent) sitting here in this room this morning.

Now…let me pause right here to be **<u>very clear</u>** about something. I bring all this up (and share my own direct ancestral and familiar links to American racism) this morning **<u>NOT</u>** (believe me!) because I want to lay some sort of **BIG WHITE LIBERAL GUILT TRIP** on every light-skinned person in the room, myself included**.** Many vocal American "conservatives" and podcasters accuse progressives

like me of brow-beating white Americans for the racial sins of their ancestors…but nothing could be further from my interest this morning.

I bring up our collective racial past -- on this Martin Luther King Sunday in the year 2026 – NOT to make anyone feel bad…but to remind <u>us all</u> of the truth that as a nation, America is NOT EVEN CLOSE (not even close!) to being finished with the pressing moral and societal work of remediating the damage done (to Black and White Americans alike) by many generations (first) of slavery, and (following that) many generations of systematic economic, educational, and social oppression and inequality. In the year 2026, all Americans -- as citizens of our troubled and churning nation -- have a pressing moral duty to face our shameful racial past, and (and this is the hard part) promise to commit the

resources (economic, governmental and personal) that will continue to be required to (truly) heal the nation and to finally begin to "make things right. "

[PAUSE…]

And let me STOP RIGHT HERE and take a moment remind you of a bit more of American history -- this somewhat more recent and immediately relevant than my family past -- and then suggest to you where I think we must move as a nation in (regards to our on-going national struggle with the issues of race, discrimination, equality, and privilege). Following the watershed 1954 Supreme Court decision ***Brown VS the Board of Education*** (which began the painful and slow process of desegregating America's racially divided schools with the goal of providing equal and quality education for all Americans) following ***Brown***

VS the Board of Education for several decades Federal, state and local governments began to implement a wide range of **COSTLY REMEDIAL/TAX-SUPPORTED SOCIAL PROGRAMS** designed to correct the accumulated economic, educational, and social harm done to African Americans (and other discriminated-against racial minorities). The most systematic and noteworthy of these remedial programs were on the federal level, beginning the President Kennedy's ***New Frontier*** proposals which were expanded and extended (after President of Lyndon Baines Johnson who:

[PICTURE AND BULLET POINTS OF PRESIDENT JOHNSON IS PROJECTED UP ON SCREEN]



[One photo or the other projected]



President Lyndon Baines Johnson

1) Persuaded a reluctant congress to pass ***The Civil Rights act of 1964***;
2) Announced a wide ranging, remedial ***"War on Poverty"*** program, and

3) Pushed through congress a wide range of other support programs which he said would lead to ***"A Great Society."***

In the year 1965 alone – and I was amazed to be reminded of this when I did my research for this sermon – in the year 1965 alone, there were **115 presidential legislative recommendations** – 90 of which were quickly enacted by a supportive-and-somewhat-bilateral Congress -- launching wide-ranging AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAMS designed to help the poor and racial minorities (most especially poor African Americans who disproportionately – and again…for obvious historical and racial reasons -- suffered economic hardship).

And indulge me a quick (but I think telling) aside here about just one of these remedial programs. Back in the early 2000's when I served the ***River Road UU congregation*** in Bethesda one of the distinguished older members was a gentleman named Bradley Patterson

[PICTURE AND CAPTION OF BRADLEY PATTERSON IS PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]



UU Bradley Patterson

(who happened to be a staunch "Rockefeller" Republican) who was a member of the White House staff (he started by working for President Nixon)

through several administrations in the 60's and 70's…and who (among many other accomplishments) worked on developing anti-poverty programs during the Johnson Administration. One day – when Brad and I were discussing the persistent issue of race (and poverty) in American society -- he told me the story of a White House meeting in the mid-sixties with his boss, Sargent Shriver, who was in charge of Johnson's overall anti-poverty effort. In looking over a proposal to spend millions in poor, predominantly African-American rural and inner-city schools, Shriver noticed a budget line item for **hundreds of thousands of dollars of wall mirrors,** and skeptically asked the project manager <u>what possible use</u> the schools could have for so many mirrors. The project manager matter-of-factly replied, ***"The mirrors are for the classrooms, because so many of these***

impoverished children have never seen themselves in a mirror, and have not had the opportunity to develop appropriate self esteem or self awareness." Brad told me that this answer silenced the room. Let that little/shocking fact about the depths of American poverty in the 1960's sink into your psyche for a moment…

But…back to my broader history. In the 1960's and 70's, President Johnson's ***Great Society*** iniatives (and other remedial social programs designed to lift discriminated against minority populations out of poverty) enjoyed the widespread support of the American people, including (I remember) my parents (and their friends) who were totally committed to America achieving real racial and economic equality. **But…SADLY…VERY SADLY**…as the nation moved into the last two decades of the 20th Century (and

poverty in the African American and other minority communities proved difficult to eradicate – or even substantially reduce -- in many cities and rural communities) many in America became impatient (even hostile) to both the cost (and the possible ineffectiveness) of such programs. Economic and social conservatives in particular began to raise their voices (and political clout) **against** these **tax-supported remedial (AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION) programs**, and suggested that the great economic, educational and social gaps between various racial and ethnic groups in America could best be closed **NOT** by (quote-unquote) ***"throwing federal tax dollars at the problem"*** but rather by insisting that those who find themselves poor take more (quote-unquote) ***"individual responsibility,"*** for their own educational and economic

advancement, and ***"pull themselves up"*** – as the saying goes – ***"by their own boot straps."***

Under the weight of this conservative argument (and a growing resentment in many American quarters against paying taxes for any purpose) over recent decades (most especially over recent years as American conservatism has found a larger voice on talk radio and other venues) we have seen **a steady (and intentional) reluctance to fund** Federally mandated and financed **"remedial programs"** designed to compensate (and correct for) past racial discrimination and oppression. And there has also recently been a simultaneous and widespread roll back (in part due to several recent decisions of an increasingly conservative Supreme Court) of what are known as affirmative action programs…both in educational and business spheres. And since the 2024 election (as you all tragically know) DEI

programs of all sorts (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs) have been under systematic attack…most intensely from the Trump administration which seems hell-bent on decimating all remedial and affirmative action programs designed to "level the playing field" for racial minorities in America)

What is painfully clear -- in the year 2026 – is that for some time now America has been moving **away** from **concerted governmental investment** aimed at correcting long-standing poverty and racial discrimination...a trend which I (and many others) regard as a grave societal and moral mistake…for as I have said, I personally believe we are nowhere close as a nation to have sufficiently addressed the collective damage done by our shameful (and systematic) racist past.

But – to be completely fair -- let me also pause and suggest right here that -- is so often the case when we look at vexing and persistent social problems -- I suspect that this national situation of ours (concerning race and remediation for historical discrimination) may be more complex than any of us – even as progressives -- want to admit. As I thought, in preparing for this sermon, about the dualism between:

[THE FOLLOWING IS PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]

THERE IS A DEEP DUALISM AND DIVIDE BETWEEN:

1) the liberal/progressive commitment to costly programs of social remediation (on the one hand)…and

2) the conservative insistence on encouraging more individual responsibility (on the other)…

it occurs to me (and please, let's all have a serious, open, and honest conversation about this) it occurs to me that when it comes to the dream of America achieving greater racial justice and social equality in America in the 21st Century, indeed these TWO (at first seemingly incompatible) PERSPECTIVES MAY EACH BE **SIMULTANEOUSLY TRUE**…AT LEAST TO SOME DEGREE.

1) First, as I have already said, because African Americans (in particular) historically suffered generations of spirit-crushing slavery (and the subsequent economic, educational and social subjugation they suffered in American culture) **ADDITIONAL AND SUBSTANTIAL GOVERNMENTAL REMEDIATION AND INVESTMENT (including vigorous DEI programs) WILL OBVIOUSLY BE REQUIRED** to bring about

true racial and social equality in these United States. **And --** at the same time --- AND PLEASE HEAR ME HERE…THE SAME IS TRUE WHETHER WE ARE TALKING ABOUT WHITE POVERTY IN THE HOLLOWS RURAL APPALACHIA…OR LATINO POVERTY IN THE BARRIOS OF SOUTH LOS ANGELES…OR BLACK POVERTY ON THE SOUTHSIDE OF CHICAGO…at the same time:

2) No amount of governmental remediation and investment will work unless those individuals (of **ANY** racial, ethnic or cultural background) now trapped in the cycle of poverty, joblessness, illiteracy and deprivation are able to step up and take INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY for the future of their own lives and the lives of their children. Although it is not without controversy, this is precisely the largely-conservative message that African American economist Thomas

Sowell…and social icon Oprah Winfree…and former cabinet officer Ben Carson…and other outspoken leaders in the Black community have expressed to Black audiences across the nation. Although as a ***"dyed-in-the-wool progressive"*** I always am inclined to unflinchingly support costly governmental anti-poverty programs (most certainly including DEI programs) , it also make <u>some sense to me</u> that that no amount of governmental remediation and investment (again, in **<u>ANY</u>** impoverished community) will work unless those families suffering from generations of poverty and discrimination are willing, able (and empowered) to play an active role (with governments committed to remediation and justice) in working to improve their own situations. Indeed one of the greatest (and sometimes overlooked) success stories of

American society over the last century is the inspiring (and in some ways spectacular) fact that millions upon millions upon millions of African Americans (whose ancestors were enslaved in chains as recently at just 150 years ago) WITH THE HELP, DON'T FORGET, OF TAX-SUPPORTED GOVERNMENTAL REMEDIATION AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND DEI **have** also diligently applied themselves (in situations where they were obliged to repeatedly surmount prejudice, racism, and discrimination)…and by working harder, longer, and smarter than other Americans had to, to achieve success as middle and upper class Americans.

The bottom line here is that I believe that <u>BOTH</u> liberals and conservatives have something to contribute here…as America struggles in the 21st Century to move the whole nation toward greater racial equality and justice. Liberals and progressives (both Black and White) are morally and politically right to call for more and better designed social remediation programs (that invest significant governmental resources in correcting past discrimination and oppression of all minorities and impoverished populations)…and conservatives (both black and white) are **<u>also</u>** morally and politically right to encourage "the impoverished" (of whatever race or background) to invest whatever they can of themselves if their personal situations (and those of their children) are ever to improve. It seems to me that when seeking to correct its racial and social inequalities, America should **<u>NOT</u>** be asked to choose

between the progressive commitment to GOVERNMENTAL REMEDIATION and the conservative insistence on INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY…it seems to me BOTH perspectives are required to get the whole job done.

Let me just give one example of this possible "merger of liberal and conservative perspectives" that I think supports what I am talking about. Fifteen years ago when I lived in Washington DC, the then young, African American mayor Adrian Fenty **(who, incidentally, like Patrick Ewing, bears the name of the Scottish family who enslaved his ancestors)** announced (and this is pure, progressive remediation, folks) a

comprehensive, citywide **Adult Illiteracy Elimination Program**…which was **DESIGNED AT A PARTNERSHIP** between government (which provided the centers and the teachers) and the impoverished families -- who were asked to take the initiative to get themselves to where the help was being offered. As a taxpayer of the district – sadly aware that fully 1/3rd of the population of our nation's capital was at that time functionally illiterate -- I was thrilled with this multi-million dollar use of my tax dollars…for I believe that all citizens (as tax payers) have a role to play in this important work of social justice, equality and opportunity…and must not ever begrudge the cost of such work. We all have an urgent

responsibility to support all such programs designed to end (or at least mitigate) the legacy of American racism and inequality.

[PHOTO AND CAPTION OF THE REV. DR. CRYSTAL BUJOL IS PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]



THE REV. DR. CRYSTAL BUJOL

VERO BEACH, FL

And before I close this morning, let me share one more important idea. One of the Affiliate ministers who served with me at the UU Fellowship of Vero Beach, Florida was the Rev. Dr. Crystal Bujol (an astounding community leader with whom I spent some quality time just last week when I was down in florida) who repeatedly told our congregation there (which was – as a most UU congregations "overwhelmingly White") to not be afraid to (as she bluntly put it) ***"Use Their White Privledge."*** What she meant by this is that it is the **pressing moral duty and opportunity** for "White Folks" in this culture to use their and privledge to ensure that our culture stays focussed on the work of undoing American racial discrimination

and inequality. She was saying ***"use your White Privledge"*** to become ***"active allies"*** of the black community in this struggle.

[PAUSE…]

So…I end – this Martin Luther King Sunday in this pivotal year of 2026 – by affirming what I believe is **OUR** primary responsibility (those of us who are sitting here this morning enveloped by a cloud of great social and economic privilege and prerogative here in Wisconsin) as American moves forward from its unjust past. OUR primary responsibility -- in this great struggle to help America move toward racial equality and social justice – is (as citizens, voters and tax payers) is to do **everything we can** to ensure that our government (on the federal, state and local level) wisely and responsibly invests in affirmative action, remedial programs designed to end racially-based

poverty (YES…THIS MEANS FULL THROATED SUPPORT OF D.E.I. PROGRAMS WHICH ARE NOW UNDER SUCH SYSTAMATIC ATTACK FROM THE WHITE HOUSE AND ELSEWHERE…while never failing to encourage that those to whom the funds are directed step up to their part as well. It frankly saddens me that at this particular juncture in American history many comfortable and successful Americans want to forget and deny this truth about the necessity of the racial and economic justice work that remains for us as a nation to accomplish. But perhaps -- if we constantly remind ourselves about the persistent skeletons (the obvious and unjust skeletons) that remain in the American closet…skeletons of our violent and oppressive racist past which we have not yet succeeded in burying – perhaps we will find the national will to (once and for all) make this somehow right.

In particular, I pray that as committed and compassionate Unitarian Universalists we will be steady and reliable voices -- in our families…in our workplaces…in our social and friendship circles…in our neighborhoods and communities -- advocating for America to do the hard (and yes, still expensive and halting) work of undoing the damage and injustice of our racist past (and present). It is clear to me in the year 2026 the dream (of genuine racial equality and social justice) that Martin Luther King had for America will take **MUCH MORE** time and effort (AND MONEY…OUR MONEY!) than any of us would have hoped.

But this is <u>the dream</u> we must never defer…this is the dream we must never abandon…this is <u>the dream</u> we must keep at the forefront of the American agenda…the dream of an America with

genuine opportunity and equality for all. There is – to be sure -- a long, hard and costly road ahead for all of us…dear American friends…but we have no moral choice but to "stay the course"…swim up against dangerous political and social currents that would have us do nothing…and steadily strive to FINALLY…FINALLY as a united people begin to make things right.

AMEN.

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And thus in closing:



[PHOTO OF MARTIN LUTHER KING IS PROJECTED UP ON CHANCEL SCREENS]