

Discussion Guide

for the Keynote Presentation by Opal Tometi

at the March, 2015 Marching in the Arc of Justice Conference

Materials

- Computer with Internet access, a large monitor or a digital projector and screen, and speakers
- Name tags and markers
- A chalice and lighter or a battery-powered, LED chalice
- Journals and writing instruments
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Optional: Quiet, recorded music

Preparation

- Test your equipment and Internet connection.
- Queue the [video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-D-6Wxzs7o&index=4&list=PLDSCZgUZ8UO-BIw3IP6FGveWF5511BEVI) on You Tube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-D-6Wxzs7o&index=4&list=PLDSCZgUZ8UO-BIw3IP6FGveWF5511BEVI>
- Write the indented portion of discussion questions you plan to use on sheets of newsprint, and set aside.
- Optional: Choose quiet music to play while participants journal. One suggestion is [“Tired;”](#) watch and listen on YouTube.
- Optional: Open a word processing program on your computer so you can type and project the discussion questions and participant contributions rather than use newsprint. Another option is to use a dry erase board and markers.

I. Opening (10-15 minutes)

Welcome participants and invite everyone to make and wear a name tag.

Gather the group. Say that this workshop explores themes from a keynote presentation given by young adult Opal Tometi during the Marching in the Arc of Justice conference, sponsored in March of 2015 by the Living Legacy Project to commemorate the Selma Bridge Crossing 50 years earlier.

If this group is together for the first time or any participants are new, invite everyone to introduce themselves. Ask each person to say their name and, in one or two sentences, why they decided to attend this workshop.

Ask a volunteer to light the chalice while you read these chalice lighting words by Rosemary Bray McNatt, from the [UU Sankofa Archives](#), housed at Meadville Lombard Theological School.

Rev. McNatt wrote these words for the installation of Reverend Patrick O’Neill, after her return from Kenya in 2008:

Somewhere in Berkeley and in Boston and in Bujimbara,
someone lights a chalice, and its light shines on freedom;
Somewhere in Kansas City and in Koloszvar and in Kampala,
someone lights a chalice, and its light illumines truth;
Somewhere in Tierra del Fuego, and in Tulsa, and in Honolulu and in Havana, and in
Nashville and in Nantucket and in Nairobi,
someone lights a chalice, and love is made visible.
Today, we light this chalice and hold in memory,
the many chalices whose steady flames hold us.

II. Introduce the Video (3 minutes)

Say that Opal Tometi is a co-founder of Black Lives Matter and Executive Director of the Alliance for Just Immigration. In this keynote delivered on the Saturday morning of the Marching in the Arc of Justice conference, she talks about starting Black Lives Matter after the murder of Trayvon Martin as a project to transform how society looks at racial injustice and police brutality.

Suggest that participants take notes as phrases or ideas resonate with them during the video.

III. Show the Video (42 minutes)

Stop the video at the end of the keynote, before the Q&A, at around 42:06.

IV. Journaling (5 minutes)

Show the discussion questions. Say that participants will have time to discuss the questions, but first you would like to allow five minutes for journaling and/or reflection. If you wish, play quiet music during the five minutes.

V. Discussion (30 minutes)

Lead a discussion using any of the questions below. If you have a large group, break into smaller groups of four-five participants for 20 minutes of discussion. Return to the larger group to share some individual reflections during the last ten minutes.

1.

Tometi cites Salon articles about research that white people and white police officers see black children as older and less innocent than white children. Other research shows that white people feel less empathy for black people in pain and that white people view lighter-skinned

people of color as more competent, trustworthy, and reliable than their darker-skinned peers. She states that these implicit biases inform the thinking that drives the way our entire system works.

Do you find these observations surprising? Do you have experiences of bias based on skin color that support the findings? Other instances you can name of implicit biases against African Americans in our institutions? Do you agree these implicit biases undergird all our societal systems and structures? What about your congregation?

2.

What does the statement “Black Lives Matter” mean to you?

3.

How is the statement, “Black Lives Matter” different from the statement, “All Lives Matter?” Why do you think many African Americans adamantly call for discussions about how black lives matter rather than focusing on how all lives matter?

4.

Thinking about your personal history, when, where and with whom have you been able to have honest and forthright conversations about race? When has it been difficult or uncomfortable to have these discussions?

VI. Next Steps (15 -20 minutes)

Discuss any or all of the following questions.

- What is needed for Unitarian Universalists to be able to have honest conversations about racism against blacks?
- Tometi calls us to divest from structural oppression of black people. What would this look like if an individual divested? A congregation? Unitarian Universalism? Your community? Our country?
- Tometi encourages white racial justice allies to hold space for training before bringing communities together. She also recommends that when allies and Black Lives Matter and racial justice organizers come together, the group set guiding principles at the start of the meeting that call for the respect, creation, and nurture of black leadership. She suggests this could include asking white folks not to speak until a designated time. Consider and discuss this methodology and practice. Why is it important to support black leadership? Does your congregation already operate from a model of shared partnership where the people most directly affected by injustice are looked to as leaders? If not, what would need to happen to embrace this model?
- Tometi tells us that Black Lives Matter has declared 2015 the Year of Resistance & Resilience and that they now have 26 chapters in the U.S. Have you reached out to a

chapter near you? Consider and discuss attending one of their meetings. Consider and discuss inviting Black Lives Matter or racial justice organizers to speak at your congregation, from the pulpit or at a gathering. What would you need to do to prepare for such a gathering?

Invite participants to take a few additional minutes to journal about any commitments they want to document.

VII. Closing (5 minutes)

Lead, as a responsive reading, Reading 51 in *Lifting Our Voices: Readings in the Living Tradition*.

Offer participants the following additional resources:

- Black Lives Matter website, <http://blacklivesmatter.com/>
- Standing on the Side of Love webinar on Black Lives Matter, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egtARrRdaCU>
- Essence magazine article on Tometi, <http://www.blackalliance.org/essence-magazine-the-new-civil-rights-leaders/>
- Essence magazine's issue on Black Lives Matter, <http://www.essence.com/package/black-lives-matter>
- Implicit bias test from Project Implicit, <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
- Melissa Harris Perry: The Deaths of Black Men in America, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bzzoC1Y8I4>