



AGAINST RACISM

A Letter from Our Leadership

June 1, 2020

Dear Friends,

We are writing to you as the leaders of Washington Performing Arts—in solidarity, empathy, grief, and determination.

We deplore and denounce White supremacy and systemic aggression against Black and Brown members of our community, along with the escalating violence that has resulted in their injury and murder.

Like so many, we are shocked and saddened by the deaths of George Floyd, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, among the latest victims of violence against Black and Brown people. Witnessing the #ICantBreathe protests in Minneapolis, D.C., and around our country, we are reminded of two works of art that speak to this moment: one, in searing memory; the other, in triumph and hope.

Alongside necessary reform of law and custom that are long overdue, it is vital that we hold and maintain safe spaces in which people may express their outrage, grief, pride, and hope—and we will continue to strive to provide this platform for the artists we present.

Actions speak loudest. Art amplifies action.

Words united with music can say more than words alone, and in that spirit—and with wishes for peace, healing, and change—we share this archival performance of *The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* by Joel Thompson (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdNXoqNuLRQ&feature=youtu.be>), performed by the University of Michigan Men's Glee Club (<https://ummgc.org/>) with the Sphinx Symphony Orchestra (<https://www.sphinxmusic.org/sphinx-symphony-orchestra/>), conducted by Eugene Rogers.

Our own Men of the Gospel Choir, conducted by Theodore Thorpe III, Artistic Director, joined other men from the DMV to perform this work last March as part of *I am a Man* at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall. We were honored to hear their voices.

We also offer Gale Jones Murphy's powerful "Why Do We Sing?," (<https://youtu.be/z8-TmhJABCo>) the unofficial anthem of our Children of the Gospel Choir, led by Michele Fowlin, Artistic Director. The poignancy of the words is unmistakable: **We must sing 'cause we cannot keep silent.**

With our founder, Patrick Hayes' principle of "everybody in, nobody out" at front of mind, we will keep working to ensure that:

- space and voices are shared across partnerships, on stages, and as reflected by the artists and content of our events—and that this body of work will continue to include the voices of Black and Brown artists;
- digital resources, made accessible equitably through our ongoing partnership with DC Public Schools, complement continuing instruction by our teaching artists throughout all eight Wards of D.C.;
- we grow, learn, listen, and articulate—and hold each other to—clear expectations for anti-racism throughout our organization, including our staff, Board, Junior Board, and Women's Committee.

Washington Performing Arts has assembled an ever-growing list of resources that we have found helpful, and we invite you to explore them below.

With wishes for your safety and health,

Jenny Bilfield
President & CEO

Tom Gallagher
Chairman of the Board

SELECTED RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION & ACTION:

- Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture resource on talking about race (<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race>)
- Equity in the Center: Addressing institutional racism in the social sector (<https://equityinthecenter.org/>)
- The Antiracist Research & Policy Center (ARPC) at American University (<http://antiracismcenter.com/>)
- "An Antiracist Reading List," Ibram X. Kendi (published in the *New York Times*) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/29/books/review/antiracist-reading-list-ibram-x-kendi.html>)
- "Anguish and Action": The Obama Foundation (<https://www.obama.org/anguish-and-action/>)
- Pretty Good Design: Developmentally and age-appropriate resources for discussing race with Children (<https://www.prettygooddesign.org/blog/Blog%20Post%20Title%20One-5new4>)
- Embrace Race: Books to support conversations on race (<https://www.embracerace.org/resources/20-picture-books-for-2020>)

(List generated June 1, 2020)