For men who have followed women's lead in working to topple patriarchy, not just to end its chokehold but also to wake men up to how we collude with it, a question looms: In this historic Black Lives Matter moment (movement) where is the parallel collective societal awakening to women's plight?

To a large extent, the #MeToo movement represents that parallel societal awakening. The backlash against it—despite its tremendous gains—speaks to patriarchy's endurance, its hostile pushback. For many people, particularly men, #MeToo's searing truth telling helps us to "see"—many for the first time—how hard sexism and misogyny have been pressing down on women's necks. Yes, #MeToo wounded patriarchy, but didn't put it out of its misery. We best beware of this wounded animal.

My sense of optimism has been stirred by the accelerating change in consciousness among millions of people confronting our country's legacy of slavery after they saw the video of George Floyd's 21st-century lynching. Nevertheless, the simple fact that white people viewing it began to acknowledge our country's poisoned roots did not prevent police from murdering more Black men, or a Black man from being paralyzed after a police officer shot him in the back seven times.

Let's not forget the many Black women —like Breonna Taylor—who also have been murdered before and since. Black women have been central to resisting both misogyny and racism throughout the struggle for racial justice. (Indeed, Black Lives Matter was founded by Black women; lesbians who had been active in the labor movement and whose vision extends far beyond their personal politics.)

Men inclined to read a magazine dedicated to transforming masculinity (or men newly introduced to Voice Male) might say, Yes, I see that racism has a knee on the necks of Black people. But do they recognize that patriarchy has its other knee on the necks of women? Are they ready to acknowledge that white male supremacy provides the legs that allow those knees to stand? Are they willing to work so both legs buckle?

It is four centuries past time to do the right thing—to end white supremacy and to make reparations to Black people in the United States. It is also time to end the orangemandemic along with the coronavirus pandemic; each revealed how big a part racism and patriarchy have played in the unfolding story of 2020. As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of white women's success at demanding and winning the right to vote (it would take another four and a half decades before Black and other women of color also gained that right in practice), patriarchy's knee is still choking women. Men, we cannot work to topple the pedestal of racism and ignore the pedestal of misogyny.

The brilliant antiracist writer-activist Barbara Smith recently shared a friend's suggestion that what the country needs now is an anti–white supremacy Peace Corps. I'd like to broaden the idea to include an anti-patriarchy Peace Corps. Smith envisioned dedicated organizers “fanning out across the country to help communities figure out ways to rid their local schools, courts, workplaces, hospitals, and houses of worship of entrenched white supremacy” and patriarchy. We don't have to wait to begin fleshing out the details until January 20, 2021. Let's start working on it now.

Responding to this summer’s events, this issue is largely devoted to a special section, “Voices Against the Hard Rain of Racism,” a series of essays, poems and memoir pieces edited by E. Ethelbert Miller and Kirsten Porter. Ethelbert is an acclaimed poet and literary activist, a member of Voice Male's national advisory board who directed Howard University’s African American Resource Center for 40 years. In June I asked him to serve as guest editor of “Voices.” Happily, he agreed and invited his literary assistant, the talented writer-editor Kirsten Porter to coedit it with him. The fruits of their efforts begin on page 12.

Also in this issue is a story about the growing global Black Lives Matter movement; a feature about a new film on white male identity and the presidency —timed for release before the election—and a story about men and mask-wearing. We'd love to hear what you think.

Finally, the back cover of the magazine is headlined: “Believe in Gender Equality? Ever Thought of Running a Magazine?” It's a call to readers to help Voice Male find a new publisher, someone(s) to carry on our decades-long legacy of chronicling the antisexist, profeminist men's movement. I am ready for your suggestions. I will welcome your ideas. Please be in touch.

Rob Okun can be reached at rob@voicemalemagazine.org.
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A Journey of Organizational Change

As a publication that has long covered the global MenEngage Alliance and its regional members, we thought *Voice Male* would be interested in the new directions the North American MenEngage Network (NAMEN) is taking. Over the past several years, we have been deliberately engaging in a process of “decolonization”—transforming NAMEN from a network of predominantly older white male gender activists to an organization where marginalized voices are centered and new generations of leadership are developed. We understood that this process would require deep changes individually, interpersonally, institutionally and culturally. Our partnership as co-chairs—a younger black Caribbean man and an older white Jewish man—has been a critical part of this process. Supporting and challenging each other, we are building trust and learning skills in shared leadership. We are engaging in difficult conversations challenging patterns of white male dominance, and deepening our understandings of intersectionality, privilege and accountability.

We have committed to ensuring that intersectional lenses are applied in all our engagements to tackle the systems of oppressions, dominance and discrimination. We believe that multiple ideas, opinions and suggestions matter if we are truly value and appreciate the whole. This has been a welcomed phenomenon by many; it’s been challenging for others.

NAMEN is creating public spaces for addressing the intersections of racism and sexism in our membership meet-ups, community of practice webinars, and policy advocacy committee. As members of the global MenEngage Alliance (menengage.org), we are joining with regions around the world to dismantle patriarchy and white supremacy. We challenge others to recognize that this is, a “must do” if we are to find a way through the crises we face. We are heartened to witness the rising tide in a global societal transformation. "Oba yansafo yenkanasem yebunbe: A word to the wise is enough."

*Shane Joseph, MSW, RSW, Dr. Steven Botkin
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Letters may be sent via email to www.voicemalemagazine.org or mailed to *Editors: Voice Male*, PO Box 1246, Amherst, MA 01004.

Resources

*Voice Male* maintains an extensive list of resources related to boys, men and masculinities, gender equality, and sexual and domestic violence prevention, among other topics. It can be found on our website at [https://voicemalemagazine.org/resources/](https://voicemalemagazine.org/resources/). If you know of an organization to include, please email relevant information to info@voicemalemagazine.org.

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Gavin Harrison
1950–2018

A bequest from the estate of Gavin Harrison, the late South African anti-apartheid activist, Buddhist teacher and profeminist men’s work supporter, was recently awarded to *Voice Male* and the North American MenEngage Network (NAMEN.) *Voice Male* directed Gavin’s bequest to help underwrite its “Voices Against the Hard Rain of Racism,” the special section in this issue. NAMEN (namen.wildapricot.org) is using the bequest to support its efforts to engage its membership throughout the U.S. and Canada in sharing best practices in promoting healthy masculinities. Both *Voice Male* and NAMEN are deeply appreciative for our late friend’s abiding faith in our work to redefine manhood and to transform masculinity. (To read some of Gavin’s extraordinary poetry in the Winter 2014 issue, go to voicemalemagazine.org/petals-and-blood.)

*Humza Malik
via email*
Rednecks for Black Lives

Up until June of this year, Greg Reese of Campton, Kentucky, proudly featured a Confederate flag magnet on the trunk of his car. But after a series of realizations, including the police killing of George Floyd, Reese removed the magnet and created a new decal—one that reads “Rednecks for Black Lives.” The bumper sticker he designed features a new, inclusive, and colorful, Southern pride flag, according to Robin Young, host of NPR’s Here and Now.

Although he says it took him a while to admit the problem, he now feels “disgust” at ever having flown the Confederate flag, Ms. Young wrote. “Some of us still are in the dark or want to stay in the dark about [the Confederate flag],” Reese says. “And it was an icon growing up as a child. You saw it everywhere.”

Young says he started a Facebook group to engage people to join the movement and also connected with Southern Crossroads, a group of self-described hillbilly rednecks from Kentucky, in order to educate himself and others.

“You can sit back and say, you know, ‘Hey, this ain’t my fight.’ And a lot of us did for a long time,” Reese said. “But I want to be one of those out there pulling people into it because it is their fight. It always has been our fight. South, North, white, Black, Brown, Latinos—everyone needs to get in this.”

Young wrote that Beth Howard, organizing director of Southern Crossroads, came up with the slogan Rednecks for Black Lives. Young reported that while the term “rednecks” originated in the mid-1800s as a derogatory description of poor southern farmers with sunburnt necks, by 1900 it was reclaimed by southerners. Records show that many called themselves “proud rednecks” and wore red scarves to political rallies.

The tradition was continued when a major labor uprising occurred in 1921, Howard writes. Multiracial coal miners in Appalachia wore red bandanas to indicate they were in favor of unionizing. The full force of the government was brought down on these miners in what became known as the Battle of Blair Mountain in West Virginia, Young wrote. Many of them died fighting for a union that never came to fruition. “I want us to reclaim the word rednecks,” Howard said. “And our history and that history is made up of people rising up together. That gives us hope—and we need a lot of hope right now.”

Howard, who grew up in a poor, working-class mining family in rural Kentucky, says she was often angry at living a life where “poor people are sacrificed for a few to be rich,” Young reported. She says society taught poor white people to divert blame onto people of color for their struggles instead of the real culprits—money-hungry billionaires, politicians and big businesses. But that narrative, for her, changed when she learned about the original rednecks’ struggle for justice.

Young concluded, “As she writes, she’s now ‘showing up in defense of Black lives’ and invites other rednecks to do the same.”

[continued on page 6]
Stereotypical Masculinity Damages Men’s Mental Health

Men who harbor toxic masculinity attitudes such as aggressiveness towards LGBT people are more likely to bully and harass others, a new study has revealed. Researchers from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and Promundo, an international gender equality organization working to end men’s violence, examined 3,600 opinions on masculinity from men, also learning these men tended to experience depression and suicidal thoughts.

Based on the “Man Box” Scale that Promundo-US developed to assess harmful practices and stereotypes, the scale relies on 15 items including themes about self-sufficiency, physical attractiveness, acting tough, hypersexuality, control, and rigid gender roles. Dr. Elizabeth Miller, chief of adolescent and young adult medicine at Children’s Hospital, explained that while there have been many discussions about harmful masculinity in the research community and media, there has been no standardized way to measure it.

Researchers used data from 3,600 men ages 18–30 collected in 2016 to find the association between having a high score on the Man Box Scale and violence. They also found that the higher the score, the more men would engage in bullying and sexual harassment. The study, published in Preventive Medicine, reveals how detrimental toxic beliefs about masculinities can affect men, their peers, families, and communities, said lead author Amber Hill, a fourth-year medical student from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

Bullied Boys in Maine Bringing Guns to School

High school age males in Maine were three times more likely to carry a gun to school at least once in the previous year if they had received negative comments or been attacked based on either their sexual orientation or how feminine they seemed, a new study has found. While previous research has shown that bullied adolescents were more likely to bring weapons to school, the study from the University of Toronto aimed to identify specific types of bullying associated with that behavior, according to the researchers who collected answers from more than 3,500 Maine high school students. By doing so, they hoped to show how professionals and policymakers can decrease the likelihood of gun violence and improve relationships among kids.

“These are concerning results and continue to show the negative impact of bullying victimization among young people,” said lead author Kyle T. Ganson, an assistant professor at the University of Toronto and a former Maine resident. “Both gender- and sexual orientation–based bullying are common among adolescent boys, which we found may increase the likelihood of high-risk behaviors.”

End the War on Black Trans Lives

The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) honored Black trans, gender nonconforming, nonbinary and intersex people as leaders in movements for Black liberation during a webinar in August entitled, “End the War on Black Trans, GNC and Intersex People.” Among the Black trans women honored were Marsha P. Johnson, who was at the forefront of the Stonewall revolt in 1969, and Miss Major, who was incarcerated at the Attica (New York) prison months after an inmate uprising in 1971. Miss Major’s intersectional and abolitionist vision still guides our movements today.

“Black trans women and femmes have long been at the center of our movements, innovating from the margins and ensuring we all get free,” M4BL outreach strategist Mickey B. said. “Black trans, gender nonconforming, nonbinary and intersex people have had to get creative...to survive racism and white supremacy alongside ableism, transphobia, homophobia and gender-based violence. Our mandate for Black liberation insists we uplift the contributions of all of our Black freedom fighters,” Mickey B. said. “We cannot and will not allow white supremacy, ableism and misogyny to erase our vibrant history on the path to Black liberation.”

The Movement for Black Lives is committed to defending all Black lives and works “to deepen efforts to center a Black trans and queer feminist politics that fights for disability justice, reproductive justice and an end to all gender-based violence.” M4BL.org

Iranian Women Detail Sexual Abuse

Iranian women took to Twitter not long ago to break years of silence by sharing detailed accounts of sexual abuse, naming alleged abusers with hashtags such as #rape, #assault and #NoMeansNo. Alleged abusers include well-connected and famous Iranians—star athletes, media and arts figures, doctors, and educators.

The online movement was sparked by an early August tweet by an anonymous user explaining how one could convince a woman to engage in sexual activity on a first date by kissing her without asking and pretending it was because “her beauty was striking.” (Facing a huge backlash, the user deactivated his account.) The unprecedented support of Twitter users encouraged not just women but also men to reveal
Men @ Work

the names of their alleged perpetrators, which even led to uncovering some individuals accused of serial abuse.

In one case, multiple women said they’d similarly been raped after being drugged with a perpetrator’s homemade wine. Tehran police arrested that suspect and called for others who had possibly been assaulted by this person to come forward, according to a report by the Islamic Republic News Agency. Iranian media began covering the issue soon after the police acknowledged the online movement by arresting the alleged serial rapist. As of early September the issue had not been covered on national television.

UK Young Men Say Feminism Has Gone Too Far

Some young men in the UK believe that feminism has gone too far in its pursuit of equality, according to a new report by the UK-based anti-extremism organization, HOPE Not Hate. The report, “Young People in the Time of COVID-19”, found half of the young men surveyed believe feminism “has gone too far and makes it harder for men to succeed.” Researchers surveyed more than 2,000 young men between 16 and 24 about their ideological beliefs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Only one fifth (21 percent) of the male participants did not agree that feminism had gone too far and less than half of male participants, 39 percent, believed it is a more dangerous time to be a woman than a man in Britain. Meanwhile, nearly one in five had “negative” views about feminists. HOPE Not Hate researchers attribute the anti-feminist perspective popular among younger millennials and Generation Z men to the growing far-right ideology seeking a foothold in the UK. “Men’s rights and anti-feminism are increasingly becoming a slippery road to the far right, appealing to young men feeling emasculated in an age of changing social norms,” according to the report. Founded in 2004, HOPE Not Hate advocates against racism and fascism, among other issues.

White Christian Bigotry

By James A. Haught

racism is much stronger among America’s white Christians than among churchless whites—and it always has been. That’s the message of a new book by social analyst Robert Jones, head of the Public Religion Research Institute.

White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity contends that white churches didn’t merely adopt the nation’s surrounding racism—but actually fostered it, locking it into the culture. Today, white Christians display more prejudice than non-Christians.

Here’s a sample: PRRI agents asked thousands of people whether police killings of unarmed black men are mere “isolated incidents” or if they reveal deep-rooted hostility to African Americans. Among white evangelicals—the heart of the Republican Party—71 percent chose “isolated incidents.” But just 38 percent of churchless whites agreed.

Another example: Some 86 percent of white evangelicals think the Confederate flag is “more a symbol of southern pride than of racism”—but only 41 percent of whites share that view.

When PRRI interviewers read this statement—“Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class”—churchless whites agreed at a much higher rate than white Christians did.

Obviously, white Americans who don’t attend church are more sympathetic to downtrodden minorities than white Christians are.

Jones grew up a Southern Baptist and studied at a Southern Baptist seminary before he awakened to the entrenched racism engulfing him. Now he is combating it.

Growing up in the 1940s, racism was absolute in America. Blacks were treated as an inferior subspecies. They were forced to live in squalid ghettos, forbidden to eat at all-white restaurants, hotels, theaters, pools, parks, clubs, schools, neighborhoods, jobs and the rest of white society. White supremacy permeated America so much that it seemed normal.

I became an adolescent newspaper reporter in the early 1950s, when the civil rights movement barely had begun. In a staff meeting, our editor vowed that our paper never would print “n——r weddings.” Later, under a new publisher, the paper became a fierce crusader for integration and equality.

The private lake where I lived had bylaws requiring members to be “white Christians,” excluding Jews also. When I filed a proposal to admit minorities, leaders panicked and canceled the annual meeting. But the lake eventually integrated. (Technically, I didn’t fit the Christian requirement, because I was a renegade Unitarian.)

At that time, I didn’t notice that white churches fostered segregation any more than all other elements of society did. But I defer to the greater knowledge of Jones of the Public Religion Research Institute, who has spent his life studying this field.

As PRRI agents surveyed thousands of Americans, Jones created a “race index” to identify which groups are most bigoted. White evangelicals scored highest at 78 percent. Irreligious whites rated 42 percent. He told CNN:

“President Trump, who has put white supremacy front and center, has brought these issues from just barely below the surface into plain view.... White Christians have inherited a worldview that has Christians on top of other religions, men over women, whites over blacks.”

James Haught, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is editor emeritus of West Virginia’s largest newspaper, The Charleston Gazette-Mail, and is the author of 12 books.
The police killing of George Floyd has sparked a worldwide reckoning. Former Minneapolis, Minnesota police officer Derek Chauvin certainly had no idea that when he used his knee as a weapon to kill George Floyd—pressing his knee on Floyd's neck for seven minutes and 46 seconds—his act would ignite worldwide protests. Within days of the May 25 police murder—captured in a cellphone video shot by a 17-year-old female—tens of thousands of protesters were marching against police brutality and racism around the world. In June, Vox reporter Jen Kirby began chronicling the global dimensions of the Black Lives Matter movement. What follows is an edited version of Kirby's report.

Protests against racism in the wake of George Floyd's murder erupted on nearly every continent. People took to the streets in London, Brussels, Seoul, Sydney, Monrovia, and Rio de Janeiro. A mural honoring Floyd was painted amid the rubble in opposition-held Idlib, Syria. The video of Floyd's murder, shared widely on social media, made "people think about how it was relevant where we were," said Stephanie Collingwoode-Williams, a spokesperson for Belgian Network for Black Lives, a collective formed in June to bring activist organizations together in Belgium.

When Americans went out on the streets to protest, and kept going out day after day after day, it catalyzed a movement around the world. And, as in the United States, there are glimmers that, this time, it might be different.

Statues of figures from countries’ colonial pasts are falling. Governments are reexamining policies when it comes to policing. Protesters worldwide are saying the name of George Floyd, but also Collins Khosa and Adama Traoré and Belly Mujinga, Black men and women in other countries who died in police custody or whose deaths have not been fully investigated.

While whatever happens long term is uncertain, Black Lives Matter is now a global rallying cry and a gut-punch reminder that its message still needs to be repeated everywhere.

Solidarity protests cropped up around the world as uprisings enveloped the United States at the end of May and into June following the police killing of Floyd. Those have continued and expanded and have now become movements of their own. This is especially true in Western Europe, where many countries are still grappling with their colonial legacies and the systemic inequities minorities face, including immigrants from Africa and the Middle East.

"We stand alone in terms of creating our momentum—not just responding to what’s happening in the US," Alex, a 29-year-old organizer with Black Lives Matter UK, said. "But at the same time, obviously, solidarity is really, really important, and we operate under the same banner, ‘Black Lives Matter,’” adding, “I think that’s because we understand that what happens over there also happens over here.” And US activists, she said, know that, as well. “And so we understand the connections there as well as the connections with other people and other parts of Europe. So we’ve also connected with groups in Germany, in France, and in Belgium,” Alex said. “There’s so much in common.”

Much of Europe also saw protests

This sentiment has been repeated elsewhere in Europe, where protests stretched from Ireland to Italy. In June, about 10,000 people protested against police brutality and racism in Brussels, Belgium. The demonstration was sparked by George Floyd’s
murder, but was also about Belgium’s colonial history and its current inequities. Demonstrators scaled a statue of King Leopold II, the Belgian ruler who killed millions of Congolese people, and hoisted the flag of the Democratic Republic of Congo below it. Protesters across the country defaced Leopold landmarks, splashing some with red paint. One in Antwerp was set on fire and has since been removed—although the right-wing mayor said he did so because it was a “public safety issue,” according to the New York Times. More than 75,000 people signed a petition asking all Leopold statues to be removed by June 30, the anniversary of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s independence.

In France, protesters confronted racism and whether the country honors its commitment to equality. “Of course, France and America are very different countries, but they have a common enemy in racism,” Maelle, a 23-year-old protester in Paris, told France 24. “Nothing will ever change until people are educated about racism.” The protests have revived calls for justice for Adama Traoré, a 24-year-old French man of Malian descent who was killed in police custody, and many who believe was killed by a police chokehold and also couldn’t breathe. The French government announced in June that police could no longer use chokeholds when arresting people.

Germany has also seen massive protests, some of the largest outside of the United States, as it reckons with anti-Black racism that some activists say is discounted in the country that
Khosa died of blunt force trauma. The South African National Defense Force said it found no wrongdoing by its soldiers, that there was no link between Khosa’s death and the encounter. Some have pointed out the parallels between Floyd and Khosa: the slightness of the alleged offense and the brutality of the police’s response.

Brazil’s version of the George Floyd protests also decried police violence and the administration of Jair Bolsonaro, who has willfully ignored Brazil’s coronavirus disaster. Brazil has its own complicated racial history, though the country is mostly black or mixed-race. It also has a troubled present with police violence; last year, Rio de Janeiro had a record number of police killings: more than 1,800, according to a New York Times analysis.

Police and military police often kill with impunity in Brazil’s favelas; a Brazilian Senate report said that, “the Brazilian state, directly or indirectly, perpetrates the genocide of the young black population.” That same population is also most vulnerable to the coronavirus, and Bolsonaro, who has a history of racist remarks, has done little to stop it.

Protests also erupted in Seoul, South Korea, and the K-pop group BTS has raised more than $1 million for Black Lives Matter. In Japan, protesters took to the streets in Tokyo and Osaka, where the Black Lives Matter chapter of the Kansai region organized a protest in honor of Floyd and against racism and police brutality. “A lot of friends in the U.S., and their families, are participating in the Washington, D.C., protests. Their power to come together gave those of us in Japan the power to come together as well,” said Alyse Sugahara, a 33-year-old African American woman, the Japan Times reported. A local incident also galvanized demonstrators: a video, a few weeks ago, of a Kurdish immigrant dragged from his van by police in Tokyo.

Canada, Australia, Argentina, Jamaica, and the Philippines also witnessed protests, both those that focused outward on the US, and those that looked inward at their own issues with police brutality and racism against Brown, Black, and Indigenous communities. The protests also became memorials to all those the system has failed.

Although they took place in different time zones and on different days, the demonstrations have become a global mass gathering at a time when many parts of the world are still in lockdown—or just easing out of it—because of the coronavirus.

The pandemic was supposed to be the “great equalizer”; no one immune, everyone vulnerable. Instead, it laid bare the inequities: In how lockdown and curfew laws were applied, and in how lockdown and curfew laws were applied. In who could afford to stay home and who could not. In who got help and who got left behind. Who got sick and who died.

The violence of George Floyd’s death occurred against this backdrop of discontent, in a world that is unrecognizable in a lot of ways—but one that has also amplified inequities. “The people knew racism is also like a virus,” Collingwoode-Williams, the spokesperson for Belgian Network for Black Lives, said, adding it is one that “we’ve been dealing with longer.”

Jen Kirby is a foreign and national security reporter for Vox, where a version of this story first appeared. Reach her at jen.kirby@vox.com.
COVID-19 changed every aspect of the MenEngage global symposium (which begins in November), except one: the urgent need to have it. The coronavirus pandemic brought into sharp focus the social, gender and racial inequalities and health disparities facing people around the world. With the world looking ahead to a post-COVID future, Joni van de Sand and Laxman Belbase, codirectors of the global MenEngage Alliance, discuss why now is the time for those looking through a “men and masculinities” lens to convene a global symposium in support of gender justice, women’s rights, LGBTQ+ rights, racial justice, climate justice, and social justice more broadly.

What was originally planned as an in-person gathering in Kigali, Rwanda, was reenvisioned as an online symposium.

The global healthcare crisis of 2020 has further exposed the fault lines in systems of injustice around the world. Amidst the uncertainty, hardship, and loss, feminist voices have begun sharing visions of a post-COVID world. That is why we believe it is vital that those working to transform masculinities and engage men and boys must come together.

With the future uncertain, it is vital that we create spaces for authentic dialogue, where we can all listen, share, learn and create new strategies for how to work to transform masculinities to support a future based on gender justice, women’s rights, LGBTQ+ rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, climate justice, economic justice, and social justice more broadly.

The overwhelming disparity in cases of and deaths by COVID-19 among marginalized communities illustrates the inhumane and tragic social order in which we live. At a time when the world needs systemic changes that address essential healthcare for all globally, many leaders are choosing authoritarian and punitive responses that fuel narratives of fear and division. At the same time, recent protests around the world demonstrate a public outcry for change, encouraging a thorough transformation of masculinities, particularly the role of violence and oppression in leadership. In short, the third MenEngage Global Symposium—previous gatherings were in Rio de Janeiro (2009) and New Delhi (2014)—is coming at a time of significant global reckoning and change.

“COVID-19 is compounding inequalities and injustices in all kinds of ways,” Bafana Khumalo, cochair of MenEngage Alliance said, “We must ask how rigid norms and attitudes around ‘being a man’ continue to fuel and exacerbate these issues. As feminist movements, racial justice movements, climate justice voices, and other social justice movements around the world grow,” Khumalo continued, “how can those working to transform masculinities and engage men and boys add meaningful value to the transformative changes that this moment is calling for? That is a key question that the symposium aims to address.”

Ubuntu

In February, before the majority of countries implemented lockdown measures, a group of MenEngage members from around the world met in Rwanda to plan for the symposium. The concept of “Ubuntu” came up early in the discussions. Often translated as “humanity towards others” or “I am because you are,” Ubuntu speaks to the heart of MenEngage’s vision and mission.

Fidele Rutayisire, executive director of the Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre, recalls: “There was excitement about ‘Ubuntu’ as the symposium name. It is a concept born out of African thinking and identity, is at the heart of MenEngage’s work.

Ubuntu—“I am because you are”—a concept born out of African thinking and identity, is at the heart of MenEngage’s work.

Mobilizing to Explore the Past, Present and Future of Feminist-Informed Work with Men and Boys

At the start of 2020, we were looking forward to hosting a vibrant, inclusive, global in-person event in Kigali, Rwanda, in November, but the ongoing uncertainty, risks, and reality of COVID-19 meant we had to adapt. The situation has meant stepping back to rethink the format for the event. It meant...
Voices Against the Hard Rain of Racism
A Special Section Edited by E. Ethelbert Miller and Kirsten Porter

We write while the earth moves, while the motion of history pulls or, at times, drags us forward. Our essays and poems are the footprints of witnesses. 2020 should be described as nothing more than a scab of darkness. A year filled with too many graves and lost prayers. 2020 is a year of too many failures and leaders and governments ignoring science. It has been a year of blue disaster on the part of policing our cities across America. The death of George Floyd made the world realize that Black Lives Matter. Gone is Black invisibility. To embrace “All Lives Matter” is once again an unfortunate way of saying, I cannot see the wrongs committed against Black people.

Let us always remember that Black people were considered property in America and not given the rights or protections similar to other human beings. Black Lives Matter because Black people refuse to be furniture. Black people will no longer be treated like a fallen deer under the knee of a hunter.

It is important to view Black Lives Matter as a global umbrella moving people under it to action. The #BLM Movement is a protection against the hard rain of racism. Many people are beginning to see and understand Blackness with 2020 vision.

As editors of this special section of Voice Male, we invited a diverse group of writers to share their voices in our pages, giving them a shelter from the storm. We wanted to lift up Black voices but also ask, how do people who are not Black view our changing world? What are women writing when they review the past actions of men in their lives? Is there a common ground we can call America and how do we weave our stories together in search of a common language? We believe in the power of the personal narrative. Writers are capable of challenging systemic power and institutions of white supremacy. When we claim our voices, there is hope for change and healing. Our collective healing begins when we share our stories and find a calm in the storm to listen—not to one another.

Our essay collection begins with Soojin Pate’s story of raising her daughter in a racist world. Pate must teach her child—and herself—how to be resilient and hold on to the hope that change is possible. Fighting for this change is not the onus of Black people. Holly Karapetkova points out in her essay that racism is an addiction that all white people can succumb to if they do not work hard every day to confront and reject racist thoughts and beliefs. In a blend of jazz and personal reflection, Clifford Thompson imagines a “Wonderful World” in the future where our children will not feel the rain of racism he has endured his entire life. In one of the featured poems, “What a Wonderful World,” Sean Murphy questions whether the world Thompson dreams of is even possible in our country where we must reconcile with such a dark history of oppression. How can a world without racism be realized? Rachel Reinhard may offer some ideas for this in her discussion on growing up with a different perspective on race living in a “community of people committed to making the world anew.” Lynda Tredway shares this sense of commitment; she writes about taking accountability for white violence through quilt making—promoting community healing piece by piece.

And what can be said for the women—and men—holding pieces of themselves and whispering me, too? Julie Walls holds up these pieces of herself, courageously sharing her story of survival and searching for a safer, kinder world. When we share our truth, we take back our power. Sarah Trembath has devoted her life’s work to exposing the darker truths of our country’s history. Her story reveals how challenging it is to have conversations with people who believe in the myths of old history books, and yet our ability to build connection with those who think differently is crucial for hearts to change. Truth and community are also at the root of Emily Ruth Rutter’s essay; she believes Beloved Communities are only attainable when we can acknowledge our ancestors’ wrongs and reject those white supremacist institutions we have been raised in since birth.

Focusing on where we are now in America, John Feffer examines how our lives have changed dramatically under quarantine conditions during a devastating pandemic. He wonders how the demise of both white privilege and American privilege will change the way our country is seen by the world. In his essay, Aaron Jenkins looks at systemic oppression as well. He feels compelled to venture out of quarantine to march with his students, praying for the Black bodies killed in America’s white power rainstorm. Radical feminist and writer Robert Jensen lends his critical expertise to examine “entrenched injustice” and call for the end of all hierarchical systems. And in the midst of great despair, we circle back to our children who carry the hope for our future. Zeina Azzam writes to her not-yet-born grandson with the tenderness and love of a woman who has seen too many wounds from racial discord and wants something better for all children entering the world.

Too many of us are walking around with wounds. In this special edition of Voice Male, we welcome you, our readers, to listen to the stories of our writers. Their voices call out for a better world and the healing of ourselves and our nation.
I’m an Asian American mother who is raising a mixed-Black daughter in Minneapolis, Minnesota. My daughter was six years old when Mike Brown was gunned down in Ferguson, Missouri, by police officer Darren Wilson in 2014. And she had just recently turned seven when police fatally shot Tamir Rice, 12, while he was playing in a Cleveland park.

By that time, she knew about slavery via Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass and about segregation via Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. So when I told her about how our country is sad because Black boys and men are being killed by the police, her first response was, “Are they going to kill Daddy?” Her second response: “Are they going to kill me?”

On May 26, 2020, my daughter and I, along with the rest of the world, watched George Perry Floyd call out for his mama. As protests and vigils were being organized, I asked my now 12-year-old daughter if she wanted to participate. She said yes. So we made signs and marched and biked to George Floyd’s memorial site on 38th Street and Chicago Avenue, the corner where he died. By participating in these activities, we ended up having conversations about the importance of protesting, the difference between a riot and an uprising, and the power of being able to grieve and mourn collectively during a national tragedy.

We also immersed ourselves in abolition literature. My daughter took an online class on the history of policing sponsored by Freedom Lifted, in partnership with Chicago Freedom School and Assata’s Daughters.* I started reading articles and attended virtual teach-ins. After my daughter’s class ended, I asked her what she thought of the police prior to taking the course. “I like them even less,” I chuckled because I told her I came to the same conclusion after my own self-education.

As the three of us—my daughter, her dad, and myself—gathered over a Father’s Day meal, we talked about George and how incredibly painful this day must be for his children. And we asked ourselves, “When is this ever going to end? When is our country going to stop oppressing and killing Black and Brown people?” The questions hung in the air.

We don’t know when white supremacy will end. But we do know that a temporary salve to white supremacy is immersing ourselves in communities and narratives that remind us of our power, agency, and humanity. We let the questions linger, while we moved on to celebrate our daughter’s final grades from school and honored the father in our midst who has lived through the uprisings of the 1960s only to see a similar unfolding of events nearly 40 years later. The fact that he is still alive is a miracle. So we cherished that moment around the table where father, daughter, and mother reflected back to each other our goodness, our sweetness, and our resilience.

*Freedom Lifted provides social justice education through training and tours related to the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. Deep South. The Chicago Freedom School (CFS) was inspired by the Mississippi Freedom Schools of the Civil Rights Era. CFS provides training and education to inspire youth activism, leadership development, and movement building. Assata’s Daughters is an abolitionist organization led by Black women working to inspire and organize young Black people in Chicago through political education, leadership development, and mentorship.
I came of age in Atlanta in the 1980s and early ’90s. My all-white neighborhood espoused many of the racist values of the Old South, but I was fortunate to attend an extremely diverse school (thanks to a county busing program) where I formed relationships with Black children that challenged those values. I had amazing Black teachers who did their best, in spite of a largely white supremacist curriculum, to teach me a few things about my country’s history of slavery and segregation. I was also exposed to powerful literature by writers of color, like June Jordan and Nikki Giovanni, in addition to critical race theory and post-colonialism, in both college and grad school. Why, then, did it take me until well into my thirties to become what I would call an antiracist? I’ve heard racism described as a virus quite a bit lately, and the analogy makes a lot of sense. But for me as a white person, fighting racism has felt a lot like a continuous, exhausting experience of battling an addiction.

As with any addiction, the biggest hurdle keeping me from overcoming my racism was denial. I often used my upbringing and education as evidence that I wasn’t a racist, and I spent valuable energy defending my mental status quo rather than being open to real change. It’s hard for us white folk to accept, but if you’re white in America you are almost certainly somewhere on the racism continuum. Being on the racism continuum doesn’t equate with being a KKK member. You can be an intelligent, caring person and still have racist views and behaviors because you are surrounded by white supremacy—and you receive—benefits from helping to uphold white structures of power. Acknowledging the problem was a first (difficult) step that allowed me to lower my defenses and open myself to criticism and change.

Once I’d admitted my problem, like many addicts I was still prone to inaction. I knew intellectually about the destructive nature of white supremacy, but I did little to intervene. I was afraid to talk, teach, or write about race because I was afraid of ruffling feathers, making mistakes and looking foolish—and also afraid of doing damage with my white ignorance. I saw racism as a problem that primarily impacted people of color, so I felt they should be the ones to take the action. Of course, the truth is that racism was created by white people, is perpetuated by white people, and white people must take part in dismantling it. And at a certain point, I realized that white silence itself was a big part of the problem. The first real conversations I had about race did not go as smoothly as I would have liked and my first poems about whiteness and race went the way of the electronic trash bin. I listened, got feedback, revised, and became a stronger antiracist. None of this growth would have happened had I not been willing to start the conversation.

Like any addiction, there is no magic silver bullet that will eradicate racism forever. Working against racism has, for me, required constant vigilance, listening, and effort. Being indoctrinated with white supremacy from an early age means it can feel like a comfortable norm to fall back on. But surrounding myself with positive role models—antiracist people, books, culture—has made this work much easier.

One of the ways I’m still struggling to be a better antiracist is in terms of advocacy. I have taken steps to change hearts and minds—including my own—but real change must also impact policy and law. Education and the arts often drive the cultural change that, in turn, drives political and legal change. Without actual antiracist laws on the books we aren’t going to move past white supremacy. As an introvert I’m not always comfortable putting myself into a public sphere, but I’m trying to do better. Showing up at protests, calling lawmakers, and donating money to groups like the ACLU and BLM are ways I’m trying to be an advocate and ally.

As a white person in America, I didn’t choose white supremacy—it was waiting to claim me from the moment of my birth. However, I can choose to actively resist its claim, and I can continue to hope that the lessons I’ve learned the hard way might help create a future where antiracism, not white supremacy, is the birthright I pass down to my own children.
“To be the first generation in this country, with another culture always looming over you, you are the ones who are born homeless, Bedouins... You’re torn in two. You get two looks at the world. You may never have a perfect fit, but you see far more than most ever do.”
—Diana Abu-Jaber, Arabian Jazz

Through a darkened window
I look for the moon of my childhood.
It was bigger then, closer
with rays spread like illumined hands
against a deep blackness,
between night and morning.
After we crossed the sea
then the ocean
leaving home behind
I began to see everything
like this moon’s light,
bayna bayna, in-between,
bookended by other elements,
defined by borders not its own—
I was a green shoot
sprouting from two leaves,
a river meandering between banks

that spell its shape, give it a name.
My dreams were flower petals
pressed in pages of a book
about aliens and travelers.
I lived in the canyon
between a mother language
and an adopted tongue,
bayna bayna, betwixt and between...
I looked for others who collect stories
about childhood moons,
oceans crossed with faith
that we will press against each other
on the other side,
make something new:
two eyes wide open,
two looks at the world,
lifting up our in-between-ness
not knowing if one day
we would see far more
than most ever do.

*Bayna in Arabic means “between.” Bayna bayna translates roughly as “betwixt and between.”
I hear babies cry / I watch them grow / They’ll learn much more / Than I’ll ever know. Those lyrics are from “What a Wonderful World,” written by Bob Thiele and George David Weiss and recorded famously by Louis Armstrong in 1967.

1967: the Vietnam War raged, as did protests against it; that year’s “long, hot summer” saw upwards of 150 so-called race riots across the United States. Perhaps those are the reasons why “What a Wonderful World,” which eventually became a standard, was not an instant success, at least in the U.S. (it went to number one in the U.K.). While some may have found the song to be much-needed balm in turbulent times, others no doubt considered a song about a “wonderful world” to be, in that cataclysmic era, as out of touch as a piece of art could get.

I was four years old in 1967. For a little bit, I could have been one of those babies Pops heard crying, and he might have watched me grow as he headed toward the end of his life, which came four years later. “What a Wonderful World,” sung in Armstrong’s gravelly, grandfatherly voice, has the power to bring tears to my eyes, because I hear in the words he sings—They’ll learn much more / Than I’ll ever know—a handing-off of the world to us kids, a way of saying, We did what we could. It’s yours now; you can do better. And yet a lot happened on Pops’ watch. Martin Luther King Jr’s agitation drove the signing of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. Pops himself—decades after giving the nation and the world a new sound—took President Eisenhower to task for his handling of desegregation. He helped leave us a better world.

It was still a very imperfect world, as five subsequent decades—and especially the last four years—would so amply demonstrate. We crying babies of 1967 grew to be middle-aged men and women, and perhaps we came to believe that some hateful things would always be. Along the way I heard babies cry, and I watched them grow; and today they are loudly rejecting what some of us came to accept. They’ll learn much more than I’ll ever know—and thank God, they already have.

What a Wonderful World?

I see trees of green, stoic in the setting sun, strange fruit a shadow that shames Nature, unnatural, some rot that blossoms inside certain men, a privileged pestilence (in the dark sacred night), like the perverse hope of hate, like anything other than love: bad memories abounding as His Story repeats itself (He ain’t me, at least)—a last long gasp of confused fury, at long last? And I think to myself: what a wonderful world these prayerful types fancy: the purity (of a bright blessed day) when a bleached Christ returns to our corrupted earth, with blood and fire to baptize the worthy and the right.

I see skies of blue and clouds of white sheets, but also black Ks behind the eyes of gray men in blue uniforms, the streets a stage for their St. Vitus Dance; blood on hands pumping gas into the tearful eyes of brothers (and sisters), muscle militarized—and presumptively innocent of anything they might do—in the service of protecting the mighty frightened men who order their marching. And I think to myself: what a wonderful world this is, in the red and dry eyes of those whites.

Look: the colors of the rainbow, on flags and in crowds, defiant solidarity in the name of what never was, (we had a dream). I see friends shaking, their hands cuffed as faceless forms stuff them roughly into unmarked cars, b/c that’s how it’s done these days, only now there’s a new democracy: anyone—and it could be everyone—in their sights, naked of weapons or clothes altogether, empty of violence and filled with such unforgivable thoughts of freedom, now…and I think to myself: What? A wonderful world this never was.

How do you do?
How do you do
How do you do
I love you.
(It’s never enough
But it’s everything
We need; all we lack.)

I think. To myself:
What? A wonder Full World.
Yes. I think
(to myself):
What a wonderful world.
Oh yeah?

—Sean Murphy
We need a Foucault pop-up doll to appear whenever we once again, after again and again, exert control over the bodies of Black men and boys. We, as a culture worldwide and particularly in the US, violate Black men and boys’ rights—individual and collective—to the full human experience. In the first instance—denying life by murdering, assassinating, and lynching Black bodies. The daily repeated micro-aggressions turn into the perpetual traumatic stress of survival.

As a white, Midwestern daughter, I experience racism’s pangs in my family raising a mixed race daughter. As a mother, I hear the all-too-regular stories of my daughter, her father, and her husband. One night in downtown DC after a concert at the Warner Theater, my daughter walked to her car. Her father had reached the car before she did. My daughter found her father pressed up against the car by police who were questioning him and asking for ID. When she said he was her father, they continued as if they could not bear to be wrong.

As a teacher, I hear similar stories of racism from my students—Black men and boys whose gifts are a treasure in and for our society. I see and attempt to counter the ways that Black boys and young men are mistreated in our punishing and oppressive school discipline systems.

Then I read about the appeal for help to the federal government from five Black men in Kentucky during the time of Reconstruction as 147 persons were lynched in the state between 1865 and 1876. By striking terror into hearts and minds, lynching extended what could no longer be accomplished by enslaving. I remember the first time I learned about the African kingdoms and Mansa Musa. I recall the story of Ida B. Wells, a heroine whose story I taught as a history teacher.

Because I want the unknown names of the victims of lynching to be memorialized, remembered, counted, as an artist and a history teacher and a memory keeper, I make quilts for each state—often several quilts for some states—to remember the thousands of men and women lynched in America. Not just in the south, not just Black men and women—controlling Black people was the impetus for the heinous acts. Using the state tree as the central image for each quilt, I make a leaf or a pine needle or a palm frond for each person and inscribe each name on the quilt back.

The project “The Lynching Trees: Leaves of Redemption for America” exemplifies what James Cone says, “When we remember, we give voice to the victims...the lynching tree reveals the true religious meaning of the cross of American Christianity today...and the cross and the lynching tree can help us know from where we have been and where we must go.”

I am often asked: When did lynching end? It hasn’t; it is ever present. We see state-sponsored lynching in the streets of America and in the criminal justice system. Or I am asked: What is it like to do this work? One long prayer of redemption to face the history that James Baldwin asks us to face—“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced”—in the great hope that we can face the horrors of our collective history, engage in truth and reconciliation and reparations, and redeem a possible future for our country. I want to be part of this generation of American patriots who say enough is enough.
I sit in the warm, silky dirt beneath the sugar maple whose leaves are dense with protection. I sit drumming on my thighs and knees avoiding attention. Drumming in secret, the heartbeat of the earth, drumming to connect my heartbeat with hers.

Each Sunday after Mass, my father invites my older sister, brother and I to sit under the Sugar Maple. I am the only one to accept. It began as a wonderment. My father is a dangerous man, brutal, violent, a sexual predator, a beautiful man of the Leni Lenape tribe. What could this man offer my six-year-old self beyond his monstrousness? How tempting to romanticize what he taught, his heritage, reduced in narrative to shaman, drunk, cigar store Indian, savage, warrior. He taught the sacred. How to feel into the core of myself, to feel my life energy, how to feel beyond the bark and wood of the tree into her essence, how to feel they are the same and in this mingling lives love. In this mingling I may feel my perfection to be the same as the trees.

How to pray by asking guidance from turtle, flower, swaying grasses, the stars, and ocean. How to hold a leaf, running my fingers over the veins, knowing they are the same as mine—the thunder of the storm, the passion in my soul. How to be cradled in the musky grass at night watching fireflies and luminous stars, knowing as the shaman and the physicists tell us, we are all stardust. Each lesson infused with the teaching, there is no separation except as a projection of the fearful mind. You are me and I am you. When one person cannot breathe, no one can breathe.

These lessons of beauty and love, endless in their gifts, open the portal to stories of truth beyond the secrets. I learn of my grandfather’s terror of the Carlisle Indian School with its motto, “Kill the Indian, save the man,” leading him to abandon our family name, choosing his children to pass for white. My father’s unusually delicate features betraying his Indian-ness providing him with the disguise that was a curse. In my grandfather’s desperation to save his son, he stripped him of his identity, his belonging, causing him to become a ghost walking alone. We sit drumming in near silence, the constant “Shh, shh, shh; be silent, be silent, be silent.” I learn that to be separated from who you are cuts you from your soul; his need to drink and abuse a crying out in aching protest, the knife he carried concealed at his waist a symbol, not a weapon. How can a man learn who he is, bring his gifts to the world, allow a life to unfold in beauty and grace when he must hide who he is? His memoir a thousand pages of “I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know.” How can he learn to dance?

Never on Sunday, my father came to my bed to commit the worst things a person can do to another, always turning me over so he could not see my face. In the elasticity of time, I wonder. Was this to spare us both, grasping at the seemingly last shred of our humanity?
“Crossing the Empathy Bridge”

By Sarah Trembath

When one of the nation’s statues of Christopher Columbus faceplanks onto the pavement—or when a sculpture of a European colonizer gets shoved off its base so that an Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo man can dance upon the platform—my community smiles. When statues of Teddy Roosevelt, Stonewall Jackson, or Robert E. Lee get hoisted off of their pedestals and hauled off to storage, we feel a sense of relief.

Though, I realize some people feel apprehension or anger. Recently I engaged in an online conversation about the trend of activists destroying monuments of colonizing and slaveholding men. An old friend, Elaine, had posted in opposition: “History is not there for you to like or dislike. It is there for you to learn from it. … It’s not yours to erase. It belongs to all of us!” “Amen!” said the first two comments underneath it. Two more people piped in later: “You got that right!” And, “Thanks Elaine. If we allow history to be erased, it won’t stop there. Very scary times.” That’s the one that got me to reply.

I felt something in that last comment. It was not the raving of some MAGA-dupe whom one could dismiss as aggressive, but a person concerned about her heritage. She was someone feeling a loss in a way that caused her to say, “scary.” What I felt, in response, was empathy across difference. This, according to life coach Simma Lieberman, is a typical strength of female communication styles: a desire to connect and seek consensus.

Because the woman on Elaine’s thread had gently worded her comment, I had the space to imagine how I’d feel if it were my heroes coming down. My mind roamed to moments when famous Black activists have passed. I’d felt strangely vulnerable. It was as if somewhere deep inside these human pillars existed—holding some part of me up without me even knowing. Could that be how she felt? I decided to let my reply be soft—a tone that some leftist activists like me seem not to consider these days as we choose to lob insults and slap labels on people instead.

“But Elaine,” I said, deciding to address the stranger sideways by speaking instead to my friend. “Statues don’t just keep history, they celebrate it.… [And] the descendants of those people who actually were written out of history are saying, ‘It’s time to stop worshipping certain historical figures as heroes.’ Most U.S.-educated people know nothing of the underbelly of colonialist “heroes” or the extent of the torture, gore, and rape that was associated with “heroic” men enslaving other humans. But I asked Elaine anyway, “Don’t you think the public will be much better served by not worshipping men who committed terrible deeds?” To my surprise, she responded. “Point noted, you are correct!”

I was thrilled that the exchange went that way. Not just because she agreed with me but because the exchange was civil. Despite the animosity that can run amok on social media, I still want to believe in connection. While some of the highest of officials in government are calling for renewed suppression of minority perspectives on history, that brief online exchange left me feeling hopeful. So I asked another friend—who has neoconservative friends—“Do you think that through open conversation they can come to see why so many people think those statues need to come down?” “Some,” my grade-school friend Patty said. “It’s a matter of education. They have to be willing to listen and relearn. They need to read!”

Patty’s comments confirmed what I’ve learned as a teacher of young people from many different places and stations in life; there is often a big difference in what people know about the same subjects. School children can actually learn opposite perspectives in their schools and hometowns. “Christopher Columbus was an explorer.” “Christopher Columbus was a colonizing conqueror.” “The Civil War was fought for states’ rights.” “The Civil War was fought over slavery.”

Embracing connected ways of addressing worldview difference seems, in fact, to be our only hope out of the trap of the past. Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild calls any such acts of connective conversation “crossing the empathy bridge.” At a time when the “respect deficit” threatens to engulf us all, she says, “It’s very important when you can understand the lens through which a huge proportion of Americans see the world.” Help me understand what you see as heritage, and I’ll help you understand what I see as ethics—this move towards connection is such a bridge.

I will always smile when I get to witness the dramatic demolition of some false idol into a shattered statue. But with a paradigm shift that acknowledges why others so different from me feel the way they do, I may become a bigger part of the solution for change as a champion of connection in this era of antagonism and interpersonal combat.
In these turbulent times, while a pandemic wreaks havoc on the world and particularly on its most vulnerable members, people of all ages, races, ethnicities, and genders have taken to the streets. Audre Lorde’s reminder that “your silences will not protect you” seems to be on everyone’s lips. I, too, have been a participant in the protests and also someone on the sidelines making phone calls, sending emails, and working with friends, colleagues, family, and students to realize the aims of #BlackSpring. Having been engaged in this work for some time, I have also felt galvanized and inspired by all of the newcomers. Practically everyone I know—childhood friends, family members, colleagues, students, neighbors, and social media “friends”—is suddenly interested in anti-racism. As we enter into a new phase in the uprising, accountability is on my mind.

Perhaps this concern with accountability stems from my own background and anxieties, along with my concern for others. I am a white woman born and raised in North Carolina who can trace my maternal ancestry back to Jamestown, Virginia. Raised in an environment shaped by both ancestral violence and deep familial traumas, I have never been able to lay claim to a fantasy of innocence. In fact, at least in some respect, the horror and shame of my family’s participation in settler colonialism, chattel slavery, and Jim Crow led me to pursue degrees in African American literature and the promise it holds for casting off white-supremacist modes of thought.

I have made a commitment to decolonizing my mind and behavior, and this is a promise I must keep. But accountability must also be communal if we are to remake and re-envision a society that is more prone to commodify and criminalize than it is to nurture and sustain. For example, in the midst of many self-congratulatory posts about attending protests and writing anti-racism action plans and reading this or that article or book, my mother sent my sisters and me a brief email: “Descendants of slave owners have a compelling responsibility to address racial injustice. Stand up, stand with, and stand for racial equality is a battle cry for us all.” In her own way, she was holding us accountable, reminding us to be co-conspirators in the struggle for freedom and liberation not just in this moment but as part of an ongoing movement.

Holding ourselves and our communities accountable is not predicated on calling people out but instead on calling them in, abiding by the ethic of radical love that Martin Luther King, Jr., James Baldwin, bell hooks, Cornel West, and others write about so movingly. After all, a beloved community is not one that offers warmth and affection without critique; it is one that collectively dismantles the forces of domination in order to realize our whole human selves in solidarity with one another.

I have made a commitment to decolonizing my mind and behavior. This is a promise I must keep, but accountability must also be communal.
they arrive pulling t-shirts over their heads my compromise with the anti-gang task force colors cannot be displayed with a red t-shirt on red for love red for creation red for blood there are six now beautiful teens all in foster care all male all black all felons me an Indian woman red alone the other social workers gone missing too hard they say too scary they say too painful they say yes I say we eat sandwiches talk laugh turn all the lights out but one the shadows rise up this is a secret society of shame boys in care here in the cool dusky evening in a barren conference room high above the city we settle they look to me we agreed to be safe with each other a long time ago to share grief sorrow fear how to imagine a dream how to imagine hope this is sacred space we create art designed to elicit the inner collages of who we think we are collages of who we wish to be hundreds of sheets of giant post-its on walls zen circles we each draw upon entering the moment of leaving the outside world and entering this one can the mind be set free for the body to create for the heart to speak reams of bulletin board paper rolled out on the floor they lay down I trace their bodies they trust me to close their eyes it takes gentle time guided meditation connect to our bodies where the wounds live rolling off the paper charting on the silhouette pain sorrow rage fear where is healing located love hope forgiveness hang them on the walls me too you too Ms. J they ask me too I say we make Native drums from skins and soft wood donated by a friend we drum our heartbeats we drum freedom they leave the drums with me nothing is safe outside these walls four decades hundreds of beloved children they are present they go missing they move from placement to placement they show back up they flee to the street they are trafficked they arrive again they die by their own hands in school parking lots by their parents hands they are returned home they are adopted I rarely get to say goodbye tonight they ask what do you have for us I ask tell me a lie that has been told to you about yourself that you still believe silence I wait silence nah Ms. J don't believe any of that bullshit they all agree to agree the air fills with tension silence I read from a list I am not lovable I am stupid I was never wanted it's my fault I am lazy I am ugly I smell the saltiness of tears before I see silent streaming one head goes down on the table two heads three all but me straining to keep my head above the drowning I don't stop I am not worthy I ruined my mother's life I ruined my father's life I am somebody's bitch someone rises picks up a drum we all rise we begin to drum the room full of vibration enough to drive the darkness out we move to the enormous window overlooking the river shimmering under starlight we drum to the river we are a wall we are a wall of warriors

—Julie Walls
I’ve enjoyed the privilege of working out of my home for 20 years. I never liked commuting. I’ve preferred to set my own hours. I always thought of an office as the worst place to do focused work.

Since the pandemic hit, more people have been forced to work from home, where it is often a less-than-ideal alternative. Maybe you’re competing with a spouse for work space. Maybe your children require attention. Maybe you just don’t have the tools to do your job properly from a remote location.

Still, from the point of view of day-to-day risk, working at home remains a privilege. “Essential workers” must continue to report to work and put themselves at greater risk of infection. The distinction between those who work at home and those who don’t threatens to replace the traditional way of dividing the workplace: white-collar versus blue-collar.

Even as some work at home and others continue to show up at workplaces, many millions more have lost their jobs altogether. To have any work at all these days is becoming a privilege in itself.

Just as we all have multiple identities, we all occupy overlapping circles of privilege that are frequently invisible to the fortunate even as they are painfully obvious to the marginalized. The quarantines have served to reveal class privilege. The Black Lives Matter protests have helped to highlight white privilege. The #MeToo movement has exposed male privilege. But in this country, the novel coronavirus has underscored and simultaneously undermined one privilege above all.

Americans have enjoyed an exceptional status for much of the last century. Pearl Harbor and 9/11 aside, the homeland has not been attacked. As the world’s largest economy, America has provided at least the illusion of advancement to all its citizens, and the “American dream” has functioned as a beacon for many millions of would-be immigrants around the world. Participating in a longstanding democracy that social movements have continuously improved, Americans have had the privilege to act as the subjects of politics rather than merely the objects.

Large-scale tragedies, civil war, famine, economic collapse—have always happened in some other unlucky part of the world. Oceans, wealth, and luck shielded the United States from these scourges. No more.

The United States is currently the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic. It has suffered more infections and deaths than any other country. Our vaunted health care system has been overwhelmed. Our government spouts anti-scientific nonsense.

And now Americans are no longer welcome around the world.

I’d lined up two international trips in 2020: to Germany in the spring for a conference and to Edinburgh in August for the Fringe Festival. I didn’t think twice about buying the tickets. I didn’t need to worry about visas. With the exception of North Korea, I’ve never had any difficulties traveling to any corner of the world. Talk about privilege.

Both events were cancelled. I’ve barely traveled much beyond my neighborhood in the last few months, much less contemplated foreign adventures.

But now Europe is starting to return to some semblance of normality. It has re-opened its borders to the citizens of a dozen countries. The United States isn’t on the list. The Trump administration has defiantly built walls to keep out immigrants. Now the world wants to wall off America.

This extraordinary deflation of American exceptionalism will continue to have implications for geopolitics for years and decades to come. For the time being, however, I and many Americans will have to get used to working and staying at home, not just as a function of a restructured workforce, but as a people whose global privileges have been suspended.
In 1998, when he was 17, Aaron Jenkins participated in a three-week summer pilgrimage retracing the path of the 1961 Freedom Rides from Washington, DC, into the deep South. The pilgrimage was part of a year-long leadership, training, and cultural education program for high school juniors offered by Operation Understanding DC, a Washington non-profit organization. The OUDC program drew lessons from the history of Black and Jewish communities in America in order to end racism and anti-Semitism and help students to critically explore race and culture in America.

Through my first-hand exposure to the civil rights movement, I gained a greater understanding of what others did to create change. I learned the names and roles played by pivotal foremothers such as Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Claudette Colvin. All were women who would train and work with fellow freedom fighters such as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Medgar Evers, and John Lewis. Participating in the OUDC program started my own journey in understanding institutional oppression and developing the belief that these racist systems could change. Over a decade later, I joined the staff of OUDC, becoming a teacher and mentor to students who could hopefully be tomorrow’s change makers.

In July of 2013, my OUDC students were one week into their three-week summer journey—the same summer pilgrimage that I had taken when I was their age. We'd just finished a discussion on the connection between race and history when America provided a critical learning moment: the verdict in the George Zimmerman trial was announced. The man who killed Trayvon Martin was found “not guilty” on all counts in Trayvon’s death. A 17-year-old high school student, Trayvon was the same age as many of my students. He was the same age I was when I participated in the OUDC program and only three years older than Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African American youth lynched in Mississippi in 1955 after being accused of flirting with a white woman in her family’s grocery store.

We asked the students to share their feelings on the verdict. They decided to create a video and the hashtag #TrayvOnward to express their feelings, which ranged from “angry and frustrated but hopeful for change,” to “I felt surprised that I was not surprised.” Their sentiments showed me that the process of looking at history and gleaning lessons in the present mattered. It was powerful, but I later realized it was not enough.

On June 14, 2020, I marched. Travis and Dolapo, two of my former students who became my mentees, helped shake me out of the heaviness of the moment. The murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd made me realize I had learned to navigate oppression systems to survive, instead of working to dismantle them through taking action. When I was an OUDC staff member, I actively engaged in social justice issues and felt I was doing dismantling work. However, when I left OUDC, I was less active in, as Dr. King put it, “bending the arc of the moral universe towards justice.” When Travis and Dolapo reached out to me, it encouraged me to do more than just survive. Their calls—seeking direction from me as their mentor—reminded me that education must be combined with action. We attended the “Prayer Walk for Peace and Justice,” a Sunday morning march from the National Museum of African American History to the Black Lives Matter Plaza in front of the White House. Travis and Dolapo had motivated and inspired me as I had motivated and inspired them. They helped me remember that mentoring goes both ways. Their calls—seeking direction from me as their mentor—reminded me that education must be combined with action.

The murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd made me realize I had learned to navigate oppression systems to survive, instead of working to dismantle them.
It's getting harder for people in the United States to turn away from the sexism, racism, and inequality that is woven into the fabric of society. From the women's march of 2017, to the ongoing protests against white supremacy in policing and other institutions, to the wider attention being paid to extreme disparities in wealth—the demand for justice intensifies.

What connects the analyses behind today's different liberation movements? Do oppressive systems have common roots? How can we think in intersectional fashion about how injustice becomes so entrenched?

A productive place to start is the concept of hierarchy—one group's claim to a right to exercise authority over another group.

The first hierarchy I thought about critically was patriarchy. At the core of a system of institutionalized male dominance is men's assertion of the right to own or control women's reproductive power and sexuality. This is rationalized by patriarchal men—whether conservative or liberal, whether their sexism is of the hostile or benevolent variety—as inevitable, a kind of law of nature. Male dominance is justified as a natural hierarchy.

Such hierarchy is, of course, not natural and not inevitable. Hierarchy is not the only organizing principle that has shaped human societies. In fact, before the development of agriculture about 10,000 years ago, institutionalized hierarchy was rare. This domination/subordination dynamic emerged on a large scale only after humans developed the idea that they could own and control land, plants, and animals, which was followed by men claiming ownership of, and asserting control over, women.

White supremacy—the claim of Europe and its offshoots (the United States, Canada, Australia, etc.) to own or control the resources and labor of the rest of the world—is no more natural than men's claims on women's bodies. The domination/subordination dynamic of white supremacy that defines so much of world history for the past 500 years, just like the longer running project of patriarchy, enriches some at great cost to many and further entrenches an unconscious acceptance of hierarchy.

That's also the story of class hierarchy, which in the contemporary economy is rationalized through capitalist ideology that claims wealth disparities are necessary to create a productive society. The same applies to imperialism's claim that powerful nation-states' must exercise "leadership"—a polite synonym for domination—to organize the world's politics and economics for the benefit of all.

It should not be surprising—given the relentlessness of pro-hierarchy propaganda on multiple fronts over centuries, even millennia—that many people come to accept that life will always be a competition in which the winner dominates, that there's no hope for equity and fairness, that seeking control is "just the way people are." In some sense, of course, people are that way and human nature is compatible with hierarchy—when we live in social systems that reward this dominating behavior, people can adapt and many will conform. But other systems have existed in the past, continue to exist on the margins in the present, and are possible in the future.

We should reject not only the injustice and suffering that comes from these hierarchical systems, but the underlying idea that domination/subordination is our fate, that there is no other way to organize societies except with hierarchy. The health of the human family—especially the fate of women, people of color, working and poor people, the developing world—depends on rejecting the claim that this domination/subordination dynamic is inevitable. Also at stake is the health of the planet, the integrity of the ecosystems on which our own lives depend. The assertion by some humans of a right to dominate the larger living world—the ideology at the core of the high-energy/high-technology industrial societies—is ecocidal and, therefore, suicidal.

What does this mean for real-life political decision-making in real time? In the short term, we might decide to prioritize one issue over others, depending on the contingencies of history. In the moment, we might focus on one struggle that demands attention because of immediate threats. But over the long haul, we must dismantle all of these hierarchical systems. And if there is to be a decent human future—perhaps if there is to be any human future at all—we have to transcend the idea that hierarchy is inevitable.
Like a Song with Wings
Letter to My Yet-to-Be-Born Grandson

By Zeina Azzam

Soon I will meet you and call you habeebi, my love. It’s amazing that you are growing every day in your mother’s womb, that you carry our family in your bones and in your blood. A lovely thought: you carry us before we carry you.

Your history starts with music—it was your father’s trumpet and your mother’s voice that brought the two of them together. Their love has enriched our beautiful family story. And I want to tell you that ours is also a sad story because your great grandparents were refugees who were forced to flee their homes during the nakba, the Palestinians’ devastating catastrophe in 1948. They never could go back to live in Palestine and held a deep longing, haneen, for their homeland—and angst about its loss—until the day they died.

I inherited this mantle and its responsibilities and then your mother did, too. It’s in our bones and blood. You will learn that being Palestinian is at once a profound gift of history, culture, and identity as well as a quest for justice, adaalah, imprinted in our core.

As you get older you may question, what does this have to do with me? These stories will have happened three generations ago for you. Please hold on to them. As you understand more, you will feel the connection. And you will get angry that so many members of your mother’s family experienced this great dispossession. I hope that one day, you will be able to say that peace with justice came to your great grandparents’ homeland.

I used to hang a poster on my wall that said, “Palestinians have human rights, too.” This was our cry that you could say is equivalent to “Black lives matter.” As a people wronged, imprisoned, impoverished, wounded, and killed, it was crucial to affirm that we matter, that our lives are important, that we have fundamental rights. And now in this year that you will be born, we still feel we must make these assertions. The words “Black lives matter” circle around your mother and father, your house, and your neighborhood like a song with wings. These words are the bird that will save your generation.

You might think there is such heaviness in all this, a burden to carry throughout your life. Think of it as ni’mah, grace, that fills you with kindness. For me, being Palestinian has opened my eyes to appreciating other struggles. The Palestinian part of you will help you cultivate a heightened sensitivity to injustice.

My dear grandson, the world will welcome you despite the current turmoil because there is always room for starting anew. You will remind us of the one abiding privilege we have: asserting our love and our presence with the blessing of a new birth. Habeebi, I can’t wait to carry you in my arms.

The Battery
Charleston, South Carolina

The houses lining the battery stare at the sea, large windows watching the boats creep by.

Two centuries ago the cargo came chained at the ankles, smelling of vomit and salt.

Now cruise ships dump out mobs of tourists who take pictures of themselves beside the columned porches.

Everything is kept just like it must have been:

wisteria hanging from a trellis,
ivy climbing a gate,

scenes from Gone with the Wind before war kicked the city in.

Human bondage has been erased like a typo from the monuments,

John C. Calhoun’s bronze cast the last word towering 115 feet above the city.

—Holly Karapetkova
Voices Against the Hard Rain of Racism

Contributors

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Sarah J. Trembath is a poet, academic researcher, creative nonfiction writer, and lecturer in the writing studies program at American University. She has written two books: This Past Was Waiting for Me (2018) and It Was the Scarlet That Did It (2019). She is a former empowerment self-defense instructor and is instructor emeritus at Defend Yourself in Washington, DC.

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Patriarchy and Racism: Oppressive Systems at a Crossroad

By Ukumbwa Sauti

It seemed like a typical set of comments in a social media thread. A group catering to African/Black people was discussing topical issues. That day it was about the relationships between heterosexual men and women. One of the women claimed African men were not able to participate in patriarchy as we didn’t have the systemic power to oppress. I knew something was not right with that statement. I don’t often, if ever, challenge women on their take on patriarchy and I didn’t that time.

African women have told too many stories of abuse at the hands of men exerting power over them—all too many of them African men; I was keenly aware that African men were perpetrators of such oppression. We do have patriarchal power, although it is limited.

I call the patriarchal abuse and power that African men wield “provisional” or “conditional oppression,” confined in ways not true for European men. What the woman on the post was saying in her own way was that racism affects African people powerfully and is a foundational dynamic in our experience in the USAmerica. Racism can supersede nearly all semblances of power and agency that African men exercise. The example that immediately comes to mind is of Emmett Till’s murder at the hands of European/white men for the alleged “crime” of having inappropriately interacted with a European/white woman, Carolyn Bryant. Bryant had lied about what happened and the racist judicial system supported her claim. (A half century later, Bryant confessed that she had fabricated key parts of her charges against the 14-year-old.)

Too many similar situations have documented African men being falsely accused by European women and experiencing disproportionately more punitive sentences for similar or lesser crimes than European men. The judicial slap on the wrist given to Europeans Brock Turner and Jacob Anderson (both raped women students at their universities) is affirmation of racism working in concert with patriarchy.

Thanks to the Combahee River Collective, a radical Black feminist organization which centered its work around Black women and Women of Color (1970s and beyond; they coined the term “identity politics”), the concept of intersectionality in liberation struggles took form. It provided a new and growing context for analyzing systemic oppression. This context helps us to see the need to expand our vision across a singular oppression in order to understand the ways in which racism, class, and heterosexism work in concert with patriarchy and other oppressive systems.

History provides us with undeniable examples of the overlap of multiple oppressions in the legacy of criminal Christopher Columbus (who I call Criminal Columbus). During his reign of terror, he and his crew instituted rape as a weapon of war, among other atrocities. Later, during the chattel enslavement of Africans, the systemic rape of African women and relegation to breeding farms became a horrific part of European life in the colonies and the later United States of America. Racism was being given form and function at the hands of European/white and primarily male settler-colonizers. Patriarchy and racism were becoming seamlessly and dangerously fused—along with other oppressions—to secure the power, privilege and status of white Christian men in a growing global system that would engulf Indigenous peoples on nearly every continent. These entangled legacies are still present in USAmerican policies, capitalist economy and social politics.

Understanding the “provisional” oppression that Men of Color and Indigenous men can carry out in the context of how European men oppress African, Indigenous and other men, women and queer and non-binary people, can help us ground our liberation work. By acknowledging the intersections of patriarchy and racism, we can more clearly see the way forward toward a fuller liberation of all racially targeted populations. From there we will be able to provide men with a deeper, broader roadmap on the journey to freeing ourselves from the violent confines of unearned patriarchal and racist privilege and power.

Note to readers: “African” is used by this writer to identify those normally referred to as Black in the interest of a deeper cultural-historical validation that includes African people from the continent and in the diaspora. Similarly, “European” is used to denote white people to support greater historical and cultural consideration.

Ukumbwa Sauti, M.Ed., is a media producer, speaker, facilitator, and educator who has taught cultural media studies and media production for more than 16 years. A program developer and a facilitator for the Men’s Work initiative, he is a coeducator (with Jessica Mortell) at Conscious Consent Education. He can be reached at Ukumbwa@gmail.com.
S taying resilient in the fight for liberation from white and male supremacies isn’t easy. People of color have endless reasons to hold on to low expectations of us white people; likewise, women have endless reasons to maintain low expectations of men.

I am among the multitudes of women betrayed by men in whom I had put my faith. I have been utterly disappointed and harmed. At the same time, I have to acknowledge how devastating it is when a friend of color who had put her faith in me feels disappointed and harmed by me—in part because of my unexamined whiteness. It is hard to bear that stark truth: knowing I caused harm, knowing I fell short. I have been unconsciously playing my part in an elaborate, unjust system set up to benefit me—including keeping me oblivious to the harm I cause and “entitling” me to remain unaccountable.

To move toward consciousness and accountability is both destabilizing and exhilarating. I am unsteady and easily exhausted as I increase my awareness of white supremacy, a cruel system people of color have had to learn to navigate from birth. Strengthening my resilience to do antiracist work is something I must do so I can effectively listen, see injustice, acknowledge that I cause harm—and that all white people cause harm—and take action to achieve a collaborative, collective liberation.

I want to believe that anyone with male privilege can likewise show up with a keen desire to build anti-oppression resilience in himself—not just for me and other people who don’t hold gender-based privilege—but also for themselves. Staying true to this belief takes a considerable amount of resilience since I have more examples of why I shouldn’t believe in men than why I should.

Similarly, I want to have faith that white people—including white men—can break free of the supremacy strongholds grounded in institutionally embedded and socially constructed fears (e.g., fear of the feminine and of Blackness). When fears like these are permitted to fester and dictate the operations of institutions, police officers kill Americans of African descent with impunity and Black, trans women are murdered at alarming rates. Building resilience to see how I am implicated in white and male supremacy is urgent, difficult and liberating.

I am motivated to continue down this long road, a road that may or may not lead to social liberation, because A) resilience is power and B) I have very little interest in the alternative: living in an unconscious white person’s prison, clinging to my fears and justifications bolstering my false comfort of delusion. What would it look like to build this kind of resilience in our institutions, communities, relationships with others, and ourselves? How can we together face and transform both white supremacy and male supremacy?

Voice Male started out as the newsletter for the Men’s Resource Center (MRC) for Change in Amherst, Massachusetts, whose mission was to hold men accountable for men’s violence and to nurture men to develop their interior lives. In that spirit, I find myself asking: how do I increase my awareness of my inner violence (keeping myself within the prison of white and male supremacy) and outer violence (keeping others within the prison of white and male supremacy)? How do I bear what I will come to see? And finally, how do I integrate these awarenesses so that I can see that the work of liberation is not only clear and urgent but is my life’s purpose? How can you? How can any of us? While we all may have other goals in life, what is the point of any of them if we continue to unconsciously hold ourselves captive to male and white supremacy?

Amanda Pickett has worked with Voice Male since 2016 as both administrator and director of programming. She holds an M.A. in gender and cultural studies from Simmons University and a B.A. from the University of Connecticut. A former ESL teacher in South Korea, she works in career advising and professional development at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
Man Enough?
White Male Identity Politics and the American Presidency
By Jackson Katz

A prescient book on presidential masculinity serves as the jumping off point for a new film timed for release just weeks before the presidential election. Man Enough? White Male Identity Politics and the American Presidency is based on Jackson Katz’s Man Enough: Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton & the Politics of Presidential Masculinity (Interlink Books, 2016). Katz wrote the script with help from his longtime writing partner Jeremy Earp of the Media Education Foundation (MEF), which coproduced the film with Eat the Moon Productions (ETM). The film is directed by Eat the Moon’s Peter Hutchison and Lucas Sabean. (Hutchison directed the critically acclaimed surprise 2015 hit film about Noam Chomsky, Requiem for the American Dream, and Healing from Hate: Battle for the Soul of a Nation (2020). This article is based on the script for the film.

In 2016, Donald Trump pulled off perhaps the greatest upset in American political history—defying both polls and pundits. Two explanations for his shocking victory dominated media coverage. One was economic anxiety. The other was racial and cultural anxiety. While both explanations were legitimate, they only told part of the story. Yes, Trump won both white and working-class white voters by large margins. But a closer look inside the numbers revealed that it was white men, in particular, who were most responsible for Trump’s success.

Trump not only won by a huge, record-setting margin among white men with a high-school education, he won big with college-educated white men as well. But, contrary to conventional wisdom, his impressive showing with white men didn’t come out of nowhere. Trump’s outsized, tough-guy persona—and his wild popularity with white men across class lines—marked the culmination of a political shift that’s been more than a half-century in the making… a shift that’s seen working-class white men increasingly abandon the Democratic Party in support of a political movement that has directly undercut their material interests—yet, and perhaps more importantly, has offered them validation as men.

From its inception, the American presidency was conceived as a white male institution. In fact, for roughly the first hundred years of the nation’s existence, only white men had the right to vote and only those who owned land. And although black men finally won the right in 1870, women would still be barred from voting for another half century.

With such a history, it shouldn’t come as a surprise that all 45 U.S. presidents have been men. Or that 44 of those 45 have been white men. To this day, what it means to be “presidential” is inexplicably linked in the American imagination to what it means to be a “real man.” The symbolism we equate with the presidency tells the story. The president of the United States is the CEO of the most powerful nation on earth, the commander in chief of the armed forces, the father figure and protector from threats both foreign and domestic … titles that reinforce the idea that strength, leadership, and toughness are, by definition, masculine qualities.

As a result, an important qualification for any candidate has become proving they’re “man enough” for the job—clearly one of many reasons women have had such a hard time gaining traction in American presidential politics.

Women not only have to overcome the deeply sexist and unfounded assumption that men are somehow tougher than they are—they also have to find ways to live up to the masculine mystique that surrounds the presidency, without coming across as too pushy, too angry, or too unwomanly. (As then–Texas governor Ann Richards said at the 1988 Democratic convention, “After all, Ginger Rogers did..."

From its inception, the presidency was conceived as a white male institution.
For the first 100 years, only white men had the right to vote—and then only those who owned land.
everyday that Fred Astaire did. She just did it backwards and in
high heels.

But while regressive ideas about manhood have posed huge
challenges to women seeking higher office, they’ve also played
a central role in presidential contests between male candid-
dates as well.

In fact, since the 1960s, as a whole series of progres-
sive social movements have increasingly threatened tradi-
tional white male centrality and authority, American presiden-
tial campaigns, in many ways, have become a key staging ground
for the culture wars and the larger crisis in white masculinity. The
result has seen a fundamental political realignment.

From FDR and the New Deal through the sixties, most
blue-collar white men had been rock-solid Democrats. But in
the intervening years, working-class white men have voted
increasingly Republican—paradoxically, joining forces with
the wealthy elites and plutocrats that earlier generations of blue-
collar white men had vehemently opposed.

Understanding the role white male identity and masculinity
have played in this remarkable shift is absolutely crucial to
understanding not only the conservative ascendance in recent
decades, but also the daunting challenges that women, progres-
sive men, and people of color will continue to confront in future
runs for the White House.

Donald Trump and the Politics of White Male Grievance

While Donald Trump’s victory in 2016 has been characterized
as a radical break with political norms, in reality it represented
the culmination of a decades-long Republican strategy to brand
itself as the party where “real men” belonged.

Trump grew up wealthy, attended private schools, avoided
the draft in Vietnam, and left a long trail of failed businesses and
multiple bankruptcies in his wake.

But, like Ronald Reagan before him, Trump had established
himself as a master performer with a special gift for tapping into
masculine archetypes. Harnessing the power of reality television
and the tabloids, he cultivated a larger-than-life image as a quint-
essential American tough-guy businessman that would serve him
well in his run for the presidency.

Trump’s strategy to win the Republican nomination was
simple. First, channel white racial resentment and anti-immi-
grant hostility, and position himself as the strongman who could
build a wall and stem the tide. Then, humiliate and ridicule the
manhood of his fellow Republicans—in a manner straight out of
The Apprentice.

Whenever he got the chance, Trump presented himself as a
fighter—a tough guy, a “man’s man”—a “blue-collar billionaire”
who promised to upend the Washington establishment.

The idea that a feminist woman could become president after two terms of
an African American man was simply
too much for some.

Expressing a deep affection for guns and the need to
protect white men’s right to bear them, he leaned into aggres-
sive language in his speeches and tweets, even encouraging
violence by his supporters.

In a world defined by
struggles between winners and
losers—the strong against the
weak—he made a convincing

In the general election,
Trump waged an unapologeti-
cally misogynous campaign
against Hillary Clinton, openly
mocking the first woman
candidate of a major party,
stalking her on the debate stage,
questioning her stamina and
strength, leading—and encour-
ging—chants to “lock her up.”

While Clinton had plenty of
critics on the left, she had long
been the object of scorn and
derision on the right. From the
time she was a controversial First
Lady in the 1990s to her history-
making run in 2016, she had been a lightning rod for criticism.

And now, the idea that a feminist woman could become
president after two terms of an African American man was simply
too much for some. A conservative writer went so far as to dub
2016 “The Flight 93 Election,” arguing that the country was being
hijacked—and real men needed to “storm the cockpit” in order
to save it.

Trump’s close advisor and strategist, Steve Bannon (arrested
in August on fraud charges), recognized early on that Trump’s
resentment toward the cultural elites—whose respect he craved
but had never been able to earn—aligned perfectly with the rage
felt by many white men, angered by the loss of their “rightful”
place atop the social hierarchy.

Trump’s relentless attacks on so-called political correct-
ness, and constant charge that the country was growing soft,
came straight out of the Bannon playbook. Here was a guy who
understood you, who didn’t make you feel shame for being a
guy—particularly a white guy—even if his tactics involved ridi-
culing and bullying others.

Bannon was especially intent on weaponizing the power of
a generation of increasingly alienated young white men—now
gathering in dark, misogynistic corners of the internet. He moved
to harness the raw, grievance-driven anger of young men who
frequented platforms like Reddit and 4-chan—and used his alt-
right website Breitbart as a testing ground for crafting messages
to speak to white male alienation and anger.

In 2016, Trump won with white men across all class lines by
a record margin—with the largest gender gap among American
white voters in recorded history. While Trump had also won
a majority of white women, it was the striking margin of victory
among white men—and his ability to drive up the gender
divide—that made the difference. Tellingly, Trump even managed
to widen the Black gender gap—picking up 20 percent of the Black
male vote, 12 points higher than his performance with women
of color. Yet most discussions of the 2016 gender gap—as in the past—focused almost entirely on Trump’s problems with women voters, rather than carefully examining his overwhelming support from white men—regardless of their economic status.

Trump and Bannon intuited what men like Roger Ailes and Rush Limbaugh had known for decades: the way to build an audience—or expand a voter base—is to convince people you’re willing to fight back against the forces that are holding “real” Americans down—especially those who happen to be straight white males.

And as history has shown us—their instinct was right.

**A Must-See Film If We’re Going to Someday Elect a Woman President**

**Voice Male:** This film is about men, especially white men, but you say it’s a “must see” for anyone who wants to see a woman elected president. Can you elaborate?

**Jackson Katz:** The film explores the many ways in which the American presidency functions in the symbolic realm to reinforce white male centrality and authority. That is one of the main reasons why we have never elected a woman president. The gender politics of the presidency extends to the ways in which only certain types of men—even certain types of white men—have been considered “presidential.” Any woman who runs for president needs to understand all of this and figure out how to navigate the complex political dynamics surrounding some of the challenges and changes to white male identity in contemporary American society. Our film can help with that.

**VM:** You first started writing about white masculinity and the presidency in the early 1990s. Do you find your work on this topic is getting more traction in the Trump era? Or is it still an uphill fight to get mainstream political commentators to go beyond clichés about “angry white men”?

**JK:** When Donald Trump emerged as the frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016, I thought there would be enhanced interest in my work, and profeminist men’s work in general, because of all the research we’ve done and insights we’ve developed over the past few decades about the complex issues of men’s identity in the late 20th–early 21st centuries—especially issues related to white men. I don’t have data to back this up, but I can say that anecdotally, since the rise of Trump there has been an uptick in interest, but nowhere near what I had hoped. Outside of explicitly feminist publications, podcasts, or websites, it is still relatively rare to hear thoughtful commentary or analyses about masculinities and politics in mainstream or even progressive media. This is really disappointing because Trumpism here in the U.S. and the white nationalist movements threatening democracies in Europe are not only animated by white grievance; they are also reactionary backlash movements against feminism and LGBTQ progress. Like many other “strongmen” around the world today, Trump’s political persona is a caricatured example of a kind of throwback white masculinity that many people had thought was hopelessly anachronistic—until he was elected.

**VM:** You and your colleagues are releasing this film in the home-stretch of the 2020 presidential race. As an activist, what are you hoping to accomplish?

**JK:** We see the film not only as an educational resource but also as an activist intervention into the election debate. We hope people watch it—including people with influence in media and in progressive and Democratic Party circles. I think the story we’re telling is compelling, and the media clips and other visuals we’ve compiled are instructive in this political moment. One of the central themes of the film is that Trump didn’t emerge out of nowhere. White men—the heart of his base—have been moving right for decades, both in response to progressive changes in the racial, gender and sexual order, but also because the Republican Party and conservative media have deliberately framed presidential politics as a way for white men to “fight back” against challenges to their cultural power.

**VM:** Do you draw on political figures from earlier presidential campaigns?

**JK:** To illustrate the many issues we discuss we’ve got incredible footage from the 1960s and early 1970s of George Wallace, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan exploiting white anxiety through calls for law and order in a way that clearly positions the GOP as the “masculine party,” “tough on crime” and bringing order to chaos, a tactic Trump is clearly copying today.

**VM:** What are your plans for promoting the film, and how do you see it being used after the election?

**JK:** We plan to launch a creative guerilla marketing campaign that will make ample use of social media, and we’ll do our best to try and reach influential voices in media and political commentary. The film drives home the point that over the past half-century, the right has convinced millions of white men—with disastrous consequences—that the way to respond to an increasingly diverse and rapidly changing society and world is to seek refuge in outdated and discredited ideas about “manhood,” and try to reclaim lost glory. That’s the message of Donald Trump’s (and earlier Ronald Reagan’s) slogan “Make America Great Again.” Our hope is that *Man Enough?* makes the case that there are much healthier and more productive ways for white men to welcome and adapt to the times.
“Fellas, is it gay to not die of a virus that turns your lungs into soggy shells of their former selves, drowning you from the inside out? Is wearing a mask to avoid death part of the feminization of America? Is it too emasculating to wear a mask to protect others around you? Does staying alive make you feel weak? According to many American men, yeah.” So wrote journalist Alex Abad-Santos in a piece in Vox recently.

In reviewing poll after poll through midsummer, he found that far fewer U.S. men were likely to wear masks than were women. What follows is an edited version of his article.

A Gallop survey recently found that 34 percent of men compared to 54 percent of women responded they “always” wore a mask when outside their home and that 20 percent of men said they “never” wore a mask outside their home (compared to just 8 percent of women). What’s startling about these numbers is that it’s now been months since the US first implemented measures, including statewide lockdowns, in response to the coronavirus.

For months health experts and medical professionals have stressed the importance of wearing masks, as more and more research has found that the virus spreads through face-to-face close contact like talking, sneezing, and coughing. As US cases and deaths continue to rise, scientists are finding that men are more likely to die from Covid-19 and still do not know why.

Even with deaths and rising cases, why don’t more men wear masks? The reason is maddeningly simple: Masks aren’t considered manly.

Attempts have been made to make masks aesthetically more stylish, more age-appropriate, and more sustainable in a hope to appeal to the maskless and change their ways. Sports heroes like LeBron James and Mike Trout have been photographed playing with masks on. And when Donald Trump finally wore one in public in July, his supporters rushed to praise him. (Nevertheless, in the following weeks he was never again seen donning a mask.)

Still, some see masks as weakness, and men, regardless of politics or race or sexuality, don’t like being seen as weak. This virus can’t do pushups or race cars, so the usual displays of dominance are meaningless. Instead, it can best be battled by, of all things, putting on little cloth accessories.

The coronavirus has issued an undeniable taunt to American men on their home turf, and some have chosen to prove their virility through risk with no foreseeable reward. It’s a narrow vision of manhood that ignores other tropes like self-sacrifice and being a protector. Performative masculinity for an audience of one puts many more people at risk. The solution would be so easy, if it weren’t left in the hands of the so-called manliest men in the country.

Americans can tell you how the coronavirus has completely changed their lives. From buying habits to social gatherings to commuting (or not) to the way we work out, the pandemic has altered our day-to-day existence. But not everyone’s behaviors have changed the same way.

The personal difference, experts say, comes down to how we respond to threats and stress. In crises, humans go into fight-or-flight mode, and we rely on our instincts. Those instincts tell us whom to listen to, which messages are important, and whose behavior to emulate. That notion about being sensitive to important messages and signals is central to why certain men are more likely to go against health directives and not wear a mask.

“The notion is masculinity is a status that you constantly have to prove,” Peter Glick, a Lawrence University professor and senior scientist at the Neuroleadership Institute, told me. Glick specializes in overcoming biases and stereotyping. “Any sort of stumble is perceived [as you losing your masculinity]. So if you do have a stumble, then you have to reestablish it. And if you perceive a mask as ‘Oh, I’m scared of this little virus’—that’s weakness.” The phenomenon is called “precarious manhood,” a term coined by Joseph A. Vandello and Jennifer K. Bosson, researchers from the University of South Florida.

Why does shame work to deter men from wearing masks? Are some men more interested in their own masculinity than in their community?
Will Real Men Wear Masks?

There's an entire industry to masculinize inanimate objects to make them “worthy” of men using them. “War Paint” is makeup specifically branded for men. So were Kleenex’s “Man-Size” boxes and "Brogurt," a yogurt for bros, before being rebranded after public mockery. And the Dude Wiper 1000, according to its semi-ironic, tongue-in-cheek website, “is not some ordinary bidet attachment,” as it has “blasters” to clean even the manliest of butts.

Going by capitalism’s penchant for man-plifying objects and knowing about men’s fragile relationship to their masculinity, it would seem that the obvious way to get more men to wear masks would be to make the manliest version of a mask possible. Maybe put guns on them, or a football team, or make a mask that makes men feel like a super-soldier spliced from Rambo and Captain America.

You can see the effect in sports and athletic wear, where companies like Nike and Under Armour are making masks that superheroes might don. They’re sleeker, curved like shark fins. In June, Under Armour launched its Sportsmask, which it promised would “reinvent” the facemask for athletes. The Nike Strike Snood, which kind of makes the wearer look like Bane or a ninja, is sold out. GQ’s pick for masks includes one that makes you look like “you’re in Mortal Kombat.”

For men concerned with masculinity, the appeal is for masks not only to look cool but also to allow you to do masculine things like run faster, lift heavier, and be stronger. At the same time, in Asia, designers are incorporating new tech and fashion into their masks. But according to health officials, appealing to consumerist impulses isn’t the best way to change men’s, or anyone’s, behavior.

Glick and Reny echoed a sentiment that health experts say: To get people to change behavior, masks have to become a socially accepted norm. Once people start accepting masks as normal behavior, like they do wearing seat belts and not smoking indoors, the number of people going against the norm decreases.

Getting to that tipping point is a lot easier said than done. Laws and mandates that the government used in the past in regard to seat belts and smoking took time for everyone to adjust to—time we don’t have due to how fast the coronavirus is spreading in the US. And while experts say people are likely to emulate behavior they see from leaders, Republicans like Trump and Pence haven’t consistently modeled good mask behavior or messaged how important they are to our health.

“So a good start would be to have stronger repeated signals from elites (particularly Trump) on the importance of mask-wearing as an easy and cheap way to slow the pandemic,” Reny said. “Having publicly ‘tough’ men (actors, athletes, some musicians) and other Republican elites also join in and wear masks would help.”

There’s evidence of this working. Former vice president Dick Cheney’s daughter posted a picture of him wearing a mask with the hashtag #RealMenWearMasks.

—Alex Abad-Santos

Alex Abad-Santos is a senior culture and entertainment reporter at Vox where a version of this article first appeared.
we were able to explore new paths and visions for how we connect and convene as a global network—across contexts, regions, and time zones. “Our goal,” Rutayisire said, “is to have an engaging and inclusive format that will break with common barriers to participation such as high costs, long distance travel, visa requirements, and family and work obligations. Instead of hosting a privileged few at one face-to-face event, the new approach means we can open up the event to even more people than we had originally planned.”

Humberto Carolo, MenEngage cochair (along with Khumalo), said, “The change in approach will require us to think innovatively, make use of different technologies, and support those unfamiliar with online spaces, or who lack easy access to them. We intend to include as many voices from as many backgrounds as possible to help shape the political agenda of MenEngage Alliance.”

The result will be a largely online event from November 10 to 12, which will only be the beginning of a series of MenEngage Ubuntu symposium events and activities running over a number of months during 2021. Instead of a single event, the symposium will also include activities, discussions, and opportunities to connect—online and face-to-face. It will bring together members from across global MenEngage networks, along with partners, researchers, and activists from around the world.

Feminisms, Intersectionality, Accountability, Transformation, Power-with

The symposium aspires to create spaces for authentic dialogue where we challenge ourselves and each other to step up to be accountable to women and girls and feminist movements and step back to give space for the voices that are too often silenced or ignored. Importantly, it will be a time for inspiring and seeking consensus on collective action. To help us in this vision, a political framework has been developed featuring five crosscutting themes: Feminisms, Intersectionality, Accountability, Transformation, and Power-with. The themes are intended as a starting point to guide MenEngage in how we reflect, share, learn, explore, critically examine, and advance together through the symposium. It is expected keynote addresses will address each one, exploring their interconnections, and politicizing their relevance for work to transform masculinities and engage with men and boys for gender justice, women’s rights, LGBTIQ&A rights, racial justice, climate justice, and other social justice issues.

Finally, the symposium aspires to be a platform for collective sharing, questioning, learning, knowledge-strengthening, and—ultimately—accountable action for gender justice. It aspires to help strengthen a global community that acts responsibly, purposefully, inclusively, and in solidarity with our partners, friends, and each other across social justice movements. We hope the Ubuntu symposium will inspire, develop, and renew a common political agenda and strategy to meet the urgency of today’s existing and emerging challenges. By aligning ourselves with and adding value to the work of women’s rights and social justice movements, we believe we will contribute to building a better world, one we share with all people in solidarity.

To find out how you can get involved with the MenEngage Ubuntu symposium from November 2020 onwards, go to menengage.org/symposium.

Joni van de Sand and Laxman Belbase are codirectors of the global MenEngage Alliance. They can be reached at joni@menengage.org and laxman@menengage.org.

Exploring the past, present and future of feminist-informed work with men and boys around the world

Key themes of the opening plenaries and subsequent program:

Feminisms
Intersectionality
Accountability
Transformation
Power-with

Key dates:
10–12 November: Opening plenaries, online with some in-person events for local attendees in Kigali, Rwanda. Other attendees will be able to join the three-day program of keynote speakers, plenaries, and creative performances online.

November 2020 onwards: Monthly program of online events and activities. Some in-person events are being organized by regional-level MenEngage networks.

Mid-2020: The organizers aspire to hold a closing event; its form will depend on what is possible in light of COVID-19.
Voice Male is a superb, groundbreaking publication offering a powerful way to engage men in working towards gender justice and to encourage younger men to learn new ways to become a man. Every individual and institution interested in gender equality and violence prevention should subscribe and spread the word!

—Judy Norsigian, coauthor and former executive director, Our Bodies, Ourselves

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—Eve Ensler, playwright of The Vagina Monologues, founder of Vday

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Thanks,

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