

Strike the Rock, Moses!

Exodus 17:1-7, Matthew 21:23-32 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

I am striking my own rock by writing two plays at the same time these days:

One play is entitled “*All My Shrinks Have Been Spies*”—a *Play of the Pandemic*”.

Although it is not a sequel to “*Stealing Kandinsky: A Case from the Stolen Art Files*” I began writing it as a response to audience members who wanted to know what happened with two of the people in that play—Lucy Swan, the art museum CEO and Jerome Jupiter’ ex-wife, and Jewel’s mother—Pearlie.

Her sister, Zora, is the shrink! And she is living her life on what the great author Somerset Maugham called—the Razor’s Edge.

The second play is called “*Fire on the River: An African American Liberation Story*”.

For this play, I am collaborating with Dr. Vernon Howard, the President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Kansas City.

We have set the play in the Kansas City’s historic 18th and Vine district on the **fictional** 100th anniversary of the only Black owned radio station in Kansas City.

In reality, Carter Broadcasting KPRS 103.3 is the oldest, continually [African American](#) family-owned [radio station](#) in the [United States](#)!

And the first black owned radio station west of the Mississippi.

Two DJ’s are on the sidewalk near the Gem Theater,

They have moved their studio equipment outdoors.

It's a Saturday, and people are passing by. They stop to listen.

From time to time, they report news, some good, some terrible—which causes people to wonder, in desperation:

“What if this hero or that heroine, living or dead, were here?”

Breonna Taylor has been killed! And no person, no system, no policy makers— will be held accountable for her death!

How can the spirit of Harriet Tubman come to our aid?

George Floyd has died in a police chokehold!

What would Malcom X or say?

What would he do?

What would Marvin Gaye sing?

Thus we meet and experience conversations between people such as:

James Weldon Johnson and James Rosamond Johnson, the brothers who wrote the poem and the music for *Lift Every Voice and Sing* and had it first sung by 500 children in the post slavery freedom school that still exists today in Jacksonville, Florida.

Singa and Zimbah, two west Africans being brought to the shores of America from a slave ship that is being burned— as they speak!—in order—to hide the crime of a slave trade that's been declared illegal.

Ida B Wells, the anti-lynching crusader, joins with Angela Davis, who the State of California tried to lynch in the early 1970's.

A controversial writer, newspaper owner and speaker—who was shunned by many in her time—Ida B Wells recorded the lynching of a black man who had proposed marriage to a white woman!

Another who stole a ham!

And a third who was accused of poisoning the white woman she worked for, when later found the husband confessed to doing it.

Ida B Wells unmasked the false narrative that Black people being lynched had committed crimes, often accused of raping white women, which even many African Americans had been persuaded to believe.

Colin Kaepernick and Malcom X and Michell Obama and James Baldwin are called out together by the DJ's Mike "The Music Rocket" Motley and Diamond Da' Queen to discuss strategies—what has worked and what hasn't in the 400 year history of African American struggle.

Another question raised amidst all this drama is: What is Black identity and what is White identity anyway?

The great author James Baldwin famously said, "White isn't a skin color. White is an attitude."

If there is a Black identity, doesn't it more have to do with the story of who a person is, who one's parents and grandparents were, what one has struggled with, survived, met, struggled with, transcended?

How all those people and experiences live inside one's brain and heart and muscles in music, movement, images, words—and what happens with any of our identities when our stories are stolen and destroyed, what happens when our stories are told and celebrated.

Note long ago, Stan Morgan, Steve Zeoli and I went to a great art exhibit at the Nelson which featured African American artists across the generations, much of it contemporary. We laughed out loud at one work that was captioned:

"I went to Africa. I went to the Mother Land. To find my people, right? Seven hundred million black people. Not one of them knew me."

Now—skin color obviously matters in this world.

The reason we are saying Black Lives Matter is not because black lives matter more than white lives.

It's because Black lives don't matter. Not enough. Not yet.

Most recently, the Jewish Community Relations Bureau of Kansas City, exposed a current example of this in a letter about the September 4th March on Kansas City.

“In our co-sponsorship of the September 4th March on Kansas City, we encountered yet another troubling incident. The Kansas City Police Department officers present at the start of our march harassed our privately hired security officers -- Black men, with licenses to carry firearms – pressuring them to disarm their weapons.

Conversely, when an armed white man, dressed in all black, appeared at the point of the Rally, scoping out the area above where the crowd would gather – at best, we can assume, to intimidate – the KCPD officers told our fellow organizers that there was nothing they could do because “he has a right to carry.”

It is difficult to see the disparities in these two interactions as anything but racially motivated.”

Black Lives Matter!— because Black Lives Don't Matter.

Even a Black President's life doesn't matter.

The preposterous lie that Barack Obama wasn't even born in the US and isn't a citizen is the most compelling argument that Trump initially made for his candidacy for President. And millions of people believed him— that a Black President's life does not matter.

They are trying to overthrow Obama Care—the Affordable Care Act-to prove it again.

Right now, millions of people realize that when it comes to the Supreme Court, Senator Mitch McConnell and his allies have one rule for a Black President and another rule for a White President.

Racism lies at the heart of this.

The sin of human inequality!

And now you can see clearly that when black lives don't matter—no lives matter. If Black lives don't matter. Women's lives don't matter. LGBTQ lives don't matter. Working people's lives don't matter. Senior citizens needing Medicare's lives don't matter.

It's a long list.

This is all more of a prayer really. A prayer to God. And a prayer to you. And we never know how far a prayer will travel or whose heart a prayer will enter.

Sometimes we have to be the answer to our own prayers and sometimes we have to be the answer to other people's prayers.

Our prayer right now is for real democracy, and we have to put our own shoulders to the wheel of that prayer, no matter how long that takes or how often God has to "stand us up when we are falling down.

I think Moses striking the rock in the wilderness where the former Jewish slaves were floundering—was a prayer.

Imagine!

Here is Moses striking the rock to try to find water for people who are desperately thirsty.

They've been enslaved for somewhere around 500 years and now they are free, but they really have nothing and hardly know where they are going, much less if they will ever get there.

We see what a great leader Moses was in his act of striking the rock.

How do we know this? The geography of the Bible!

The place where Moses struck the rock is named in the Exodus story as Rephidim.

Rephidim is located in a wadi on the Sinai peninsula.

A wadi is a dry riverbed or streambed, meaning it runs with water only during and immediately after a storm.

You see these in western Kansas and the High Plains, and in Missouri as well.

That's why we have places called Dry Creek.

What's intriguing about this particular wadi is that it lies at the western edge of an important oasis.

This is true to the present day.

The oasis is about three miles long and is surrounded by palms, vines and trees and is the Southern Sinai's largest oasis, often called the "Pearl of the Sinai".

A little of everything is cultivated here, from corn to barley, wheat to tamarisks, but the main harvest is still dates.

So Moses was wise in his decision to strike a rock at this location in the people's journey through the desert.

They needed hope in a time of despair and confusion, complaints as the story describes them.

An interesting parallel can be seen between their experience and that of the Africans who were enslaved here and then set free as a result of the Civil War.

I learned this from one of the speakers at the March on Kansas City.

You have heard of the phrase *Forty Acres and a Mule*. It's meaning lies in the aftermath of the Civil War, when a number of initiatives were taken, under that rubric of Forty Acres and a Mule and the Freedman's Bureau to provide land, housing, schools, equal rights to the freed slaves. Reparations. Acts of Repair of a Gross Wrong!

All these measures were underway when Lincoln was assassinated, and replaced by a President who was determined to roll back the orders and laws that Lincoln and his then Republican allies had enacted.

President Andrew Johnson specifically rescinded Special Order No. 15 which provided the forty acres to former slaves.

12 years after being freed, in the election 1876, the stage was set for Jim Crow to be created—a new form of slavery, the consequences of which are still crushing today.

I don't share this as a history lesson only.

The rock we need to strike in the months and years ahead of us, to bring life sustaining resources to a people enslaved and then re-enslaved in a variety of creatively evil ways from 1865 to the present, is reparations.

Repair the wrong.

Forty acres and a mule was reparations that never happened.

The Freedman's Bureau was reparations that were then undone.

We all have a stake in this, not just African Americans.

We can see that progress of women, working people, everyone needing affordable health care, senior citizens, LGBTQ persons, social security

recipients, and the land and environment itself are at risk of being undone, and in some instances are already being undone.

Strike the rock!

Become a Moses and strike the rock!

The rock in front of you. In your life!

Find God's power within you!

In our faith's language—the rock of Christ within you!

The deeds of power which they did—are now for you to do. Amen.

Rev Scott Myers

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Westport Presbyterian Church

