

The Prince George's Arts and Humanities Council
Creative We Stand



A Note From Our Executive Director

Today we are witnessing the power the ARTS have to disrupt, to heal, and to transform an unjust society. In this turbulent moment, creativity cannot stoically watch but profoundly ask in the words of internationally acclaimed singer, songwriter, concert pianist and civil rights activist Nina Simone, "*How can*



you be an artist and not reflect the times?"

We will dedicate space in our upcoming issues to share your answers to this important question.

Creative We Stand,



Rhonda Dallas & Son, Terrence
Executive Director/Chief Curator
Prince George's Arts and Humanities
Council (PGAHC)



Office of Prince George's County **Poet Laureate**



J. Joy & Sons -- Brian and Ronald

Neither Knees Nor Pandemic

J. Joy "Sistah Joy" Matthews Alford

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Pulling us from the lull of status quo
Today's carnage awakens us,
Has shaken the conscience of the world
As once again captured digitized images

Seen on flat-screens around the world
Convey atrocities that Black folk have
Endured in America for centuries

Face masks and gloves can't
Protect us from this pandemic
More lethal, more deadly than COVID-19
Black America has known this
Ravaging disease for far too long
No longer will we hide
A shame not ours inside Black rage
Behind fear or Black tears

America, this cannot continue
To be your legacy
The confluence of systemic discrimination
Racism, police misconduct and brutality, profiling,
Inequity in every arena,
Indifference, but all too often
Disdain for Black life is the reality
This is not a flaw in the system
It is the system
Entrenched injustice simply makes visible
Horrid realities that a color-blind society
Hides in broad daylight
See our color, see the beauty of our rainbow
We are beautiful when we are free

Through rage we shout at the sun
Pray to the Son
Bury far too many young
Give our innocent pre-adolescent children "the talk"

While wiping away tears, shaking our heads
No longer will distraught and bereaved mothers
Merely wring hands while tsk, tsk-ing about
Corrupt cops and court systems
Designed to maintain in lockstep
A march as steady and deadly as Auschwitz
Too many young Black men and women
Succumb as they struggle to breathe
Struggle to have their voice heard
Struggle to catch hold of a promise
That was never intended for them

Are you hearing us America
This great experiment
Can only succeed if all are free
You can only truly be America
If the promise is made real for all
Stretch it, re-shape it, re-make it
Start anew if necessary
But this time make it real
We have arrived
At a pivotal point
That won't let the door swing both ways
It calls us all to grow, go forward
Acknowledge our flaws
Without falling off the ledge
Neither we nor the world can un-see
What has been revealed
Neither knees nor pandemics allow
America to breathe amid yesterday's shallow air
She has for far too long, ignored, smiled, even laughed
While hiding her heinous secret in broad daylight
Everybody knows and has been complicit

In silence or acquiescence for fear that
The next victim be too close to home
Or worse...

It's no longer the elephant in the room
But rather, the entrenched, callous, calculated
Counted-on game of 'you can't catch-up'
Because the system is not yours'
The legacy of privilege has ensured
Your Golden Rule continues

But because of brazen fools who rule
Because one too many killings have
Been witnessed and cannot be refuted
Because fewer white sheets are bought
By Americans of conscience
Because the beauty of America's rainbow
Shines bright inside enlightened
Hearts, souls and minds
Because the breath of freedom
Now blows down urban and rural streets
Because truth can be neither constrained,
Contained nor contaminated
Corrupted shields of blue will no longer
Shield racists and bigots reigning terror
Menacing communities of color
Those who for far too long ruled
With impunity under protection of law

The scourge has contaminated the sacred
And now must be purged
No longer can corrupt cops operate

With immunity under flawed laws
Designed to protect, not citizens,
But systems built to project fear
Provoke hollow-hearted perpetrators who
Regale in glorified heinous lynchings
Made in the name of the law

Evil consumes merely by existing
This choke-hold must be broken
To those for whom the Black Lives Matter
Battle cry causes discomfort,
Rips away the false veneer of status quo
It was never intended to soothe you
This plea for humanity
Rightfully taunts those who yearn
For a broken yesterday
Today we shout it boldly
From lungs that demand breath
That demand that the sheets of bigotry
Be lifted and set on fire
That dead and disingenuous hearts and laws
Be revealed as the tortuous truths they are
Knees must be lifted before masks can be removed
This is how we wipe out, Annihilate the true pandemic
That has ravaged America for centuries

Listen America, we no longer sing
Our ancestor's song of freedom
You never understood the chorus
So today we shout Black Lives Matter
This message is our mantra
We shout we can't breathe

We now stand and demand
That you, America, be greater
Than any distorted history you ever proclaimed
Name it beauty, name it compassion
Name it love, name it life
Lived wholly, fully and free
But know this America,
Neither knee nor pandemic
Can block freedom from reigning supreme
The heartbeat of humanity demands it
Let us each be part of that heartbeat
Resilient, vibrant and fierce
Guiding, empowering, charging us all
To change and save one another
This is the true power of freedom and equality
The only hope for democracy

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PGAHC Thanks Our FUNDERS for
Helping Bring the Arts to
a Larger Audience!



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