

Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.

On an August day in 1963, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. climbed the marble steps of the Lincoln Memorial and said to a quarter of a million civil rights supporters stretched along the mall in the U.S. Capitol,

Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.

Today, almost six decades later, we still feel in our bones and in our hearts this mountain of despair.

- The heartbreak of Black Newton moms afraid for their children's safety because of the color of their skin.
- The anguish of our young students of color experiencing racism in the halls of our schools and desperately seeking more teachers, more police officers, and more role models who look like them.
- The confusion when "Zoom bombers" disrupt classes, meetings and candidate gatherings with racist rants.

- The anger of finding a white supremacist and anti-Semitic banner hung on a bridge a little over a week ago here in our City.
- The tragedy of this pandemic disproportionately harming people of color.
- The heavy burden of knowing that systemic racism is threatening not just people's health but also economic opportunity, educational achievement and their quality of daily life.
- The horror at the murder of a Black man, George Floyd, under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, and
- The outrage at seeing the Confederate flag carried through the halls of Congress as a violent mob stormed the U.S. Capitol.

We are burdened by a mountain of despair.

We are burdened by a mountain of despair, but
Newton is hewing out of it our own stone of hope.

In June, many of us joined our neighbors and took to the streets, we raised our voices, and we took a knee in peaceful protest to proclaim that Black Lives Matter.

We listened to the voices of our neighbors rise together for racial justice – Newton Interfaith Clergy leaders, members of Families Organizing for Racial Justice - FORJ, the Newton Human Rights Commissioners, the stalwarts of the Harmony Foundation, the advocates in our Newton Coalition of Black Residents, and more.

Hope alone, however, is no longer enough.

As a young girl in the 1960s, a Detroiter, I clearly remember the race riots that enveloped our community. I remember, too, the hope I had when I watched our community leaders, including my Dad, coming together to confront the systemic reasons for the racial divide.

It's a hard thing that I think we all learn as we grow up, that the hope we carry in our young hearts for a

brighter world cannot on its own lift the clouds from our skies.

The progress we've made is not enough. In a few moments, we will hear our Newton Public School students speak the truth that we adults have had decades to do more, to do better, and we simply haven't done enough.

We need hope.

But we also need to act. We need to keep moving forward.

Now is the time to build on the anti-bias training that we've started with our Department Heads to look at all we do at City Hall through the lens of equity, whether social services and human resources or public health and mental well-being.

Now is the time to learn from the Newton Police Reform Task Force which I organized and from the Newton Police Department members who organized themselves so we make policing better.

Now is the time to make sure our zoning and housing policies open Newton's doors wider, just as Reverend Howard Haywood urged us to do.

Now is the time to put what we are learning about systemic racism and implicit bias from our Overdue: Confronting Race and Racism community dialogues, not just into what we say, but what we do.

Now is the time for to truly hear all our students and be a more anti-racist, inclusive school community.

Now is the time to transform the worry, pain, hurt and injustice of racism into meaningful and enduring progress.

Let me close with the wisdom of Reverend King. He said,

The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

President Obama, on the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination turned, this into a call for action as the arc doesn't bend on its own.

Now is the time to work together and pull with all our might to keep bending our good City of Newton toward justice.