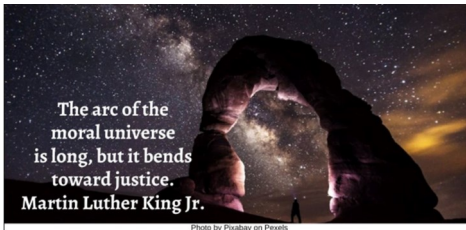




EXPLORATION

Activism

Readings



1. *Hope in the Dark*

Rebecca Solnit, a renowned writer, historian, and activist, has made significant contributions to the field of activism through her insightful and thought-provoking works. Solnit's writings often explore themes of power, social change, and the role of activism in shaping the world.

One of Solnit's notable books is *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*, which examines the importance of hope and perseverance in activism. In this book, Solnit argues that even in times of darkness and despair, activists must continue their work because change is often unpredictable and arises from unexpected places. She emphasizes the need for sustained, collective action and highlights the impact that seemingly small victories can have in bringing about larger social transformations.

Solnit also explores the concept of "prefigurative politics," which suggests that activists should strive to embody the values and principles they are fighting for in their own organizing and community-building efforts. She believes that activism should not solely focus on achieving specific goals but should also be a process of creating alternative systems and ways of being that challenge the dominant paradigm.

Solnit also frequently addresses the intersection of activism and gender. In her essay collection *Men Explain Things to Me*, she coined the term "mansplaining" to describe the phenomenon of men

condescendingly explaining things to women, often disregarding their expertise and knowledge. Solnit's work highlights the importance of addressing gender dynamics within activism and the broader social context.

Throughout her writings, Solnit encourages activists to embrace uncertainty, maintain hope, and recognize the collective power of ordinary people to effect meaningful change. Her work has inspired many individuals to engage in activism and has provided valuable insights into the challenges and possibilities of creating a more just and equitable world.

Source: Touchstones

2. *12 Rules for Activists*

by Saul Alinsky

1. "Power is not only what you have, but what the enemy thinks you have." Power is derived from two main sources – money and people. ...

2. "Never go outside the expertise of your people." It results in confusion, fear, and retreat. Feeling secure adds to the backbone of anyone. ...

3. "Whenever possible, go outside the expertise of the enemy." Look for ways to increase insecurity, anxiety, and uncertainty. ...

4. "Make the enemy live up to its own book of rules." If the rule is that every letter gets a reply, send 30,000 letters. ... No one can possibly obey all of their own rules. ...

5. "Ridicule is man's most potent weapon." There is no defense. It's irrational. It's infuriating. It also works as a key pressure point to force the enemy into concessions. ...

6. "A good tactic is one your people enjoy." They'll keep doing it without urging and come back to do more. They're doing their thing, and will even suggest better ones. ...

7. "A tactic that drags on too long be-

comes a drag." Don't become old news. 8. "Keep the pressure on. Never let up." Keep trying new things to keep the opposition off balance. As the opposition masters one approach, hit them from the flank with something new. ...

9. "The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself." Imagination and ego can dream up many more consequences than any activist. ...

10. "If you push a negative hard enough, it will push through and become a positive." Violence from the other side can win the public to your side. ...

11. "The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative." Never let the enemy score points because you're caught without a solution to the problem.

12. "...Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it." Cut off the support network and isolate the target from sympathy. Go after people and not institutions; people hurt faster than institutions. ...

Source: <https://slwainsights.com/saul-alinskys-12-rules-for-radicals/>

3. *On White Supremacy Culture and Why I Use These Words* by Carolina Krawarik-Graham

A common "issue" in anti-racism work is the use of the term culture of white supremacy or white supremacy culture, which many people view as charged, controversial, or even deeply offensive. Sometimes there are even challenges/dismissals from people in positions of power/authority about it.

For me, use of the term is a necessity for these reasons:

Because it's used commonly by many prominent writers and speakers on the subject of race and privilege, and one cannot actively pursue this work without coming across it

Because it's very uncomfortable for me to read/write/say white supremacy culture on so many different levels, not



the least of which has to do with sensitivities around my own national/cultural heritage, so it's my way of directly challenging my own right to comfort

Because when this term is used by someone from the dominant group (in this case, white), it is a very different experience, generally less antagonizing, and a bit more difficult to dismiss than when it comes from someone who's marginalized (in this case, someone of color)—and it is a way that I exercise my privilege toward laying groundwork for others' voices

And lastly, because I have been asked to use these words by people in oppressed communities, both directly and indirectly, because “white supremacy culture” most accurately and succinctly describes their harsh experience of systemic discrimination. It is one of the ways in which I express my allyship.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/white-supremacy-culture-and-why-i-use-these-words>

4. *In This Delicate Turning* by Rev. Marta Valentín

It is time to throw out our exceptional identity and humble ourselves... We have always done good in the world—it is in our DNA. The question is, are we ready to do better for our own people? Because the world includes every person in our faith—many of whom have been micro-aggressed right out the door. It is the silent revolving door that many do not want to acknowledge. It is time to look ourselves not just in our faces, but in our souls and ask ourselves, who are we, really? Which Unitarian Universalism are we taking into our future? If we have no intention of taking it to the promised land, then let's just acknowledge that. Let's Marie Kondo [i.e., discard] our unfaithful practices and release what no longer serves us and make room for what will. How

can we save the world if we can't save ourselves? Remember, I say this because love you and I need you to survive.

But I also need to say this, and I speak only for myself: I am running out of truths to tell and ways of saying them. It is time now to keep this beloved faith from fracturing, moreover, in this delicate turning let us remember that before anything, *ante todos, somos seres humanos*, [“before all, we are human beings,”] we are human beings who have chosen to travel together, to make a new, more just world together. We must continue to choose each other as companions if we are to accompany one another.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/delicate-turning>

5. *Activism Is Politically Essential to Society* by Jeffrey Ogbar

Activism is politically essential in a society like ours, with such a long history of legal and de facto discrimination.

[We need] smart, energetic, courageous activists with integrity and vision to push politicians and galvanize people when elected officials cannot do it.

Civil disobedience has helped realize everything from the 40-hour work week, child labor laws, voting rights for women and people of color and stronger environmental policies. To quote the abolitionist Frederick Douglass, “power concedes nothing without a demand.” Demands for expanded access to democracy and basic civil and human rights have resulted in radical permutations of civil disobedience — disruptive marches, sit-ins and illegal occupations of public and private spaces.

Activists can push, protest and demand for change.... Activists often make bold, defiant and resounding cases for the change that a politician may support but lacks the power to implement.

...Holding an elected position requires a willingness to engage in a range of compromises, power-sharing, deal-making, quid pro quo efforts with a cross section of interests — often in conflict with each other. Political expediency often means that fundamental systemic change is often tempered by the needs of the office.

...Smart, energetic, courageous activists with integrity and vision [must]

...push politicians and galvanize the people when elected officials cannot provide the radical vision or critical support to do so.

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2016/02/08/can-activists-be-politicians/activism-is-politically-essential-to-society>

6. *Ending Poverty*

by Jeffrey Keenan and Shannon Daley-Harris

Once we wake up to global poverty, we see all kinds of connections. We see ourselves reflected in others half a world away. We see poverty around the world echoed in ... [our country.] We see how the threads of poverty, health, education, and the environment are tightly interwoven. We see the relationships among how children grow, how women are treated, and how families fare.

Poverty is more than just a lack of money — it is a lack of opportunity, rights, and resources. It is created by ill health and poor or no health care, inadequate housing and transportation, illiteracy, and racial and gender discrimination. ...As much as we might long for a simple explanation for poverty, or a single solution to end it, we must tackle it as the complex, interrelated challenge that it is.

...But here's some good news: Just as the problems are interconnected, so too are the solutions. Solving one part of the problem can have a positive ripple effect.

...Our generation is the first to have the resources, technology, and knowledge to end poverty. But it won't be easy. Eradicating poverty calls for a comprehensive approach.... Eliminating poverty calls for partnerships large and small to transform our environment, trade policies, and international development. Ending poverty calls for direct actions to ease immediate suffering and systemic change to implement long-term solutions. We will shape the end of poverty by how we use our resources close at hand and how we increase the resources of those far away. All we need is the will to act.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/16982>

7. *Carson's Courage*

by Terry Tempest Williams

...Rachel Carson's spirit is among us. Like her, we can be both fierce and compassionate at once. ...We can carry a healthy sense of indignation within us that will shatter the complacency that has seeped into our society in the name of all we have lost, knowing there is still so much to be saved.

Call it sacred rage, rage grounded in the understanding that all life is intertwined. And we can come to know and continue to learn from the grace of wild things as they hold an organic wisdom that sustains peace

...Do we have the moral courage to step forward and openly question every law, person, and practice that denies justice toward nature?

...And do we have the imagination to rediscover an authentic patriotism that inspires empathy and reflection over pride and nationalism?

Rachel Carson's name is synonymous with courage. She dared to expose the underbelly of the chemical industry and show how it was disrupting the balance of nature. In *Silent Spring* we see her signature strengths on the page, and witness how a confluence of poetry and politics with sound science can create an ethical stance toward life. But perhaps Rachel Carson's true courage lies in her willingness to align science with the sacred, to admit that her bond toward nature is a spiritual one.

... I walked outside and sat on our back porch. The blinking bodies of fireflies were rising and falling above the grasses. They appeared as a company of code talkers flashing S.O.S. on a very dark night.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/view/28781/patriotism-and-the-american-land>

Wisdom Story

Fighting for Justice

by Touchstones

We tell the stories of famous young activists like Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai and celebrate their accomplishments. While they are beacons of hope, many more young activists deserve our gratitude.

Fertile ground for the *Brown v.*

the Board of Education of Topeka Supreme Court case that led to school desegregation was prepared in 1951 when Barbara Rose Johns, just 16 years old, organized a strike to protest the conditions at Robert Russa Moton, her all-Black high school in Farmville, Virginia. It led to the case *Davis v. School Board of Prince Edward County*, one of five cases reviewed as part of the *Brown* case. Unfortunately, Prince Edward County did not integrate its public schools until 1964.

In 1965, Mary Beth Tinker, a 13-year-old, and her older brother John wore black armbands in protest against the Vietnam War. School officials punished them for their controversial beliefs and actions. Their protest led to the 1969 *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District*, in which the Supreme Court ruled in favor of free speech in public schools.

In 2016, another 13-year-old, Anna Lee Rain Yellowhammer, a member of the Hunkpapa band of the *Standing Rock Sioux*, petitioned to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline that threatened to pollute the reservation's drinking water in North Dakota. Her slogan was *Mni wiconi* (Water is Life). She and others ran 2,000 miles from Standing Rock to Washington, DC, to publicize their cause. While the pipeline continues to operate, the tribe awaits an Environmental Impact Statement that may allow them to go to court again.

Emma González, David Hogg, Cameron Kasky, Alex Wind, and Jaclyn Corin led other students in the demand to end gun violence after the massacre at *Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School* in Parkland, Florida, in 2018. In response to their campaign, *#Never Again*, the Florida legislature passed gun legislation. The students inspired over 750 rallies in every state and every continent except Antarctica.

In 2020, following George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer, 16-year-old Shayna Avery, and her friends called upon their community in Berkeley, California, to join the *Stand with Black Youth March*. She expected 100 people, but the march drew thousands.

They would all tell us, "Go and do likewise."

Sources: Many, including *Kids on the March: 15 Stories of Speaking Out, Protesting, and Fighting for Justice* by Michael Long



Snippets

"The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and time. I urge each one of us ...to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside ...and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives here. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices. May we never forget that in the context of colonialism, that those who are colonized must be able to see clearly the nature of their dependence in order to free themselves." Audre Lorde

"...We are living in times that will demand courage. When people ask me how do I draw hope, how do I stay encouraged, how do I continue to show up? The answer is that I look back. I look back and I look at how my existence here today is owed entirely to the courage of people who came before me. And so, what do I owe myself in that moment and to those who come after me? To exercise courage in this moment." Bree Newsome Bass

"I remember talking with a friend who has worked for many years at the Catholic Worker, a ministry to the poor in New York City. Daily she tries to respond to waves of human misery that are as ceaseless as surf in that community. I asked her how she could keep doing a work that never showed any results, a work in which the problems keep getting worse instead of better. I will never forget her enigmatic answer: 'The thing you don't understand, Parker, is that just because something is impossible doesn't mean you shouldn't do it!'" Parker Palmer



“Since ... [the] war in Iraq, I’ve been thinking about A. J. Muste, who during the Vietnam War stood in front of the White House night after night with a candle. One rainy night, a reporter asked him, ‘Mr. Muste, do you really think you are going to change the policies of this country by standing out here alone at night with a candle?’ ‘Oh,’ Muste replied, ‘I don’t do it to change the country, I do it so the country won’t change me.’” *Anne Lamott*

“Take a few moments to contemplate the question ‘What gifts do I bring to share with my Earth family?’ Go within and take an emotional scan or inventory of all the qualities that make you who you are. Be sensitive to the feelings of joy and passion that will accompany any authentic gift you have come to share. Today, commit to seeking new ways to open up the gift you are by sharing it with others.” *Dennis Merritt Jones*

“I had to face into my overdoneness. I had been baked too long in my legitimate activist hopes and lost the sense of balance and humor that were my only way of negotiating my work/family conflict. Where had it gone? It had gone to overwork, conceit, indispensability, and the other usual traits of ineffective activists. When things come to be ‘all up to us,’ an insidious dependency has tied us up in knots. We are prisoners, not the servants, of our activism.” *Donna Schaper*

“Activism is the art of creating social change. It requires courage, resilience, and a deep understanding of the power dynamics at play in our world. It is about challenging the status quo and envisioning a more just and equitable society. Activism is not a one-time event; it is a lifelong commitment to dismantling systems of oppression and building a world where everyone

can thrive. It is about amplifying the voices of the marginalized and standing in solidarity with those who have been silenced. Activism is the fuel that ignites social justice, and without it, progress becomes stagnant.” *Angela Davis*

“Social justice activism is the refusal to accept the world as it is and the audacity to imagine a world that could be. It is about recognizing that we are all connected, and that the liberation of one is intricately tied to the liberation of all. It is about understanding that our struggles are not isolated incidents, but part of a larger system of oppression. Activism is the act of disrupting that system, of demanding accountability, and of working towards a future where every person has an equal opportunity to thrive. It is a lifelong commitment to empathy, compassion, and justice.” *Bryan Stevenson*

“Spirituality without activism is an incomplete journey—a path that leads to inner peace but fails to address the external injustices that plague our world. Activism without spirituality is a restless pursuit—a path that seeks change but lacks the depth and grounding necessary for sustained transformation. It is in the integration of the two that we find the true power to heal and create a more just and compassionate world. Through the union of spirituality and activism, we become catalysts of change, driven by love, guided by wisdom, and fueled by a burning desire for a better world.” *Unknown*

“These people [of extraordinary character] are gifted with an irrational faith. Their faith is irrational in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. They maintain their vigil for peace, day in and day out, no matter how dismal their situation becomes. These are the people who look into the gloom and see the foundations of light, who fail to be dissuaded from doing what is morally correct despite years of setbacks or minute gains, who show in their words and deeds how we can turn our torments into triumphs.” *Scott A. Hunt*

Questions

1. In reading #1, Rebecca Solnit, in her book, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*, highlights the importance of hope and perseverance in activism. Do you agree that these are important in activism? Why or why not? Looking back, what social issues involved sustained effort over many years to bear fruit? By contrast, what gains for social issues have been lost recently? What does this mean in terms of hope and perseverance? Solnit is concerned about the intersection of gender and oppression. In her book, *Men Explain Things to Me*, “she coined the term ‘mansplaining’ to describe the phenomenon of men condescendingly explaining things to women, often disregarding their expertise and knowledge.” This androcentric, i.e., male-centered worldview undergirds patriarchy and oppresses women. What are examples of activism that have opposed this oppression of women? What more needs to be done?
2. In reading #2, community activist and political theorist Saul Alinsky offered 12 rules about activists. Rule number two is “Never go outside the expertise of your people.” When he was president of the UUA (2001-2009), Rev. Bill Sinkford was concerned that we tended to do this by being involved in far too many issues with far too little impact. How would this be a problem? He felt that we should focus on issues where our historical efforts supported such focus. For him, marriage equality was an issue where UUs had the credibility to take the lead. Do you agree? What other issues do you think we have the credibility to take the lead? Why? In other issues where we had less credibility, Sinkford believed that we should work to be good allies by letting those with more credibility take the lead. Do you agree? Why or why not? What does this mean in terms of racism? Why?

3. In reading #3, Carolina Krawarik-Graham explains the necessity of using the term white supremacy. How do you feel about the term? Why? How does white supremacy culture impact people of color? What are some examples? Is it a term that whites should use to acknowledge the reality and impact of white privilege? Why or why not? Krawarik-Graham concludes, using the term, white supremacy, “is one of the ways in which I express my ally-ship.” Does this make sense? Why or why not?
4. In reading #4, Rev. Marta Valentín presents a critique of Unitarian Universalism writing, “It is time to look ourselves not just in our faces, but in our souls and ask ourselves, who are we, really?” How would you answer her question? Valentín states, “It is time to throw out our exceptional identity and humble ourselves.” What is the nature of our exceptional identity? How does it get in the way of institutional and cultural change within our religious tradition? She also writes, “Which Unitarian Universalism are we taking into our future? If we have no intention of taking it to the promised land, then let’s just acknowledge that.” Do you have a view of the promised land? What is it? Do we have the courage and resilience to travel together to reach it?
5. In reading #5, Jeffrey Ogbar asserts that, “Activism is politically essential...” Do you agree? Why or why not? He contrasts activists with elected public officials, noting that “Political expediency often means that fundamental systemic change is often tempered by the needs of the office.” Ogbar quotes, “abolitionist Frederick Douglass, [who said] ‘power concedes nothing without a demand.’” Do you agree with Douglass? Why or why not? In terms of social issues, how would you compare activists with politicians in terms of achieving positive change? Ogbar notes that, “Activists often make bold, defiant and resounding cases for the change



- that a politician may support but lacks the power to implement.” In this sense, how can activists help politicians make important, but difficult decisions involving social issues?
 6. In reading #6, Jeffrey Keenan and Shannon Daley-Harris address global poverty. In Mark 14:7 Jesus stated, “The poor you will always have with you.” Do you agree? Why or why not? The authors write, “Poverty is more than just a lack of money — it is a lack of opportunity, rights, and resources. It is created by ill health and poor or no health care, inadequate housing and transportation, illiteracy, and racial and gender discrimination.” A Brookings report agrees noting, “For many poor people in the United States, narrow income measures of poverty fail to reflect the multiple barriers and challenges that they face.” Why do some blame the poor for being poor? Is there any validity to this perspective? Why or why not? The authors note that “Just as the problems are interconnected, so too are the solutions. Solving one part of the problem can have a positive ripple effect.” Assuming this is true, what parts of the problem of multidimensional poverty would you engage first? Why? How can activism engage both “direct actions to ease immediate suffering and systemic change to implement long-term solutions?”
 7. In reading #7, Terry Tempest Williams writes about the lasting influence of Rachel Carson. Like Carson, she writes, “we can be both fierce and compassionate at once.” Williams calls this sacred rage. Have you experienced sacred rage? About what? What role can sacred rage play in activism? Tempest asks if we have the moral courage to seek justice for nature and “to rediscover an authentic patriotism that inspires empathy and reflection over pride and nationalism?” Where do you stand in defending nature? In being a true patriot? Williams writes that “Carson’s name is synonymous with courage,” noting that it lied, in part, in “her willingness to align science with the *sacred*, to admit that her bond toward nature is a spiritual one.” How can Carson serve as a role model as people engage the vast array of problems that humans have caused regarding the climate?
- The following questions are related to the Snippets**
8. Audre Lorde writes, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” What do you think she meant? Do you agree with her? Why or why not? Who are the masters? What are some of the master’s tools? Her concern was racism and homophobia. What oppressions are you most concerned with? Why? She was also concerned with internalized oppression, writing “I urge each one of us ...to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside ...and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives here.” Why is internalized oppres-



the White House night after night, for years, holding a lighted candle to protest the Vietnam War. When asked how he thought this made any difference, he replied, “Oh, I don’t do it to change the country,

ism is “the audacity to imagine a world that could be.” Do you agree? Why or why not? In what ways does the world fail to live up to what you imagine it should be? Stevenson adds, “It is about recognizing that we are all connected, and that the liberation of one is intricately tied to the liberation of all.” What promotes this recognition? What hinders it? Do you agree or disagree with him? Why or why not? How can we work to have more people recognize that we are all connected and act accordingly?

sion so damaging? She concludes, “May we never forget that in the context of colonialism, that those who are colonized must be able to see clearly the nature of their dependence in order to free themselves.” What does she mean by this? To whom does it apply? Do you believe that the impact of colonialization continues? Why or why not?

9. Bree Newsome Bass writes, “We are living in times that will demand courage.” She draws hope and courage from “the courage of people who came before me.” From where do you draw courage? She asks, “what do I owe myself in that moment and to those who come after me?” What is your answer to her question?

10. Parker Palmer writes about a person who worked for the Catholic Worker movement, who was probably Dorothy Day. The Catholic Workers have protested injustice, war, racism, and violence of all forms. Parker asked her how she could do what she did when things never seemed to get any better. She responded, “The thing you don’t understand, Parker, is that just because something is impossible doesn’t mean you shouldn’t do it!” Do you agree with her? Why or why not? Consider reports that Climate “Doomers,” who believe that climate change is happening, but nothing can be done about it, are replacing Climate Deniers. Which is worse? Why? How do you respond to Domsday scenarios? Why?

11. Anne Lamott writes about A.J. Muste, a minister, political activist, and pacifist, who stood in front of

country, I do it so the country won’t change me.” His activism was a prophetic imperative. How are you preventing what is wrong with society from changing you?

12. Dennis Merritt Jones asks you to reflect on this question, “What gifts do I bring to share with my Earth family?” What is your answer? How have you shared your gifts? What new ways can you share your gifts? How can your gifts contribute to the work of justice on behalf of the common good?

13. Minister and professor Donna Schaper writes, “I had to face into my overdoneness.” She had “baked” too long in her activism due to “overwork, conceit, indispensability, etc.” Have you seen people do this in their activism or in another part of their lives? What were the causes of their overdoneness? Or your overdoneness? She concludes, “When things come to be ‘all up to us,’ an insidious dependency has tied us up in knots. We are prisoners, not the servants, of our activism.” Have you or someone you know been a prisoner and not a servant of activism? Or of something else? What was that like? What would you do in response?

14. Lifelong activist Angela Davis writes, “Activism is the art of creating social change.” In what ways is activism an art? She notes that activism requires, “a deep understanding of the power dynamics at play in our world.” Why is this necessary? What power dynamics are you aware of? How do they keep the status quo intact? Can power dynamics be shifted? How?

15. Bryan Stevenson writes that activ-

16. An unknown writer focuses on activism and spirituality, writing “Spirituality without activism is an incomplete journey,” and “Activism without spirituality is a restless pursuit.” They suggest that spirituality must address injustice and that activism must be spiritually grounded. Do you agree? Why or why not? What is the problem with spirituality that ignores activism? With activism that ignores spirituality? Which do you think is more challenging: adding activism to spirituality or adding spirituality to activism? Why? When the two are integrated, “we become catalysts of change, driven by love, guided by wisdom, and fueled by a burning desire for a better world.” Do you agree?

17. Scott Hunt writes about people with irrational faith who continue to work for peace despite “seemingly insurmountable obstacles.” Do you know anyone with this kind of irrational faith? Does their faith make sense? Why or why not? What happens when people stop working in service of very difficult causes? What role does hope play in such a faith? As Dorothy Day said, “Just because something is impossible, doesn’t mean you shouldn’t do it.”