

Within Us!
(For Black History Month celebration at Medford City Hall)
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By Vijaya Sundaram

What country do we give our children?

What do we say
When they ask us,
“Where were you when the country
Lost its way?”
“Where were you when black and brown folk
Were maligned?”

Did you change some minds
Did you fight for all?
Did you stay at home, and weep
Over a dying nation,
And wallow in despair?

A nation that forgets its debts is doomed
A nation that denies its roots will soon
Descend into chaos and sorrow.

Remember the spirits
Of those who led us to a better day,
Whose spirited disagreement
With the status quo
Changed the discourse
Around race and belonging
Bending it towards a better
Morrow, away from sorrow.

Some, who died
While their words continue
To move, to enrich, inspire, lead,
Others, living, who sowed the seeds
Of a better Union.
Others, living among us, who lead,
True patriots who love their country,
Who sorrow over its descent
Into distrust and hatred,
Whose work is disparaged
And where “wokeness” has become

A pejorative, when it really is
About awakening our better selves.

Martin, and Malcolm, Medgar and Rosa,
Ruby and Bayard, Fannie Lou, and Harriet,
Claudette and Angela, Daisy and Melba,
Ella Baker and Ida, and Abernathy and John Lewis,
For Dubois and Langston, Toni and Alice,
And all the young folk today leading us
In racial justice, in awakening sleeping minds .–
We remember them, and salute them,
And ask ourselves this question:
They gave everything for us.
They're giving everything for us.

What shall we give our children?

What will shape this nation
So riven by strife and mistrust
And fear of the other?
What will turn us towards love
Hope, trust, and service?
Who will guide us now?

The answer is within.
It's always been within us.

A nation that forgets its debts is doomed.
A nation that denies its roots will soon
Descend into chaos and sorrow.

The answer lies within.
We need to look,
To seek, and to find it.
What we do with it
Will define us
As a country, as a people,
As humankind.

Weakness lies in hubris,
In denial, in hatred, in smallness.
To aim for human kindness
Is a sign of strength.

And where shall we find it?

And what country do we give our children?

The answer is within.

It's always been within us.
