

To: Mayor John Compton  
Washington Grove Town Councilors  
McCathran Hall  
Washington Grove, MD, 20880

Dear Mayor and Town Councilors,

I have lots of feelings about this race issue facing my home community. I am a white Jewish person, widowed after 23 years married to a black man and mom to three biracial children. I've lived in WG since 2015. Currently I'm recovering from surgery and singing the praises of WG Cares, my wonderful neighbors and friends in the Grove, and the character of the Grove itself.

I totally support Dick C.'s entire letter, brings me to tears actually, bringing up old troubles. For example, there are things that are difficult to understand or notice unless you are black. My husband, until his death from cancer in 1994, constantly corrected my racism when I wasn't aware I was thinking or acting with racism. I used his input in running Student Assistance groups in high schools in VA. After he died, I needed to openly request black co-workers to mentor me because I knew I was missing the input from a black perspective. Some things you can't un-see. I got mentors for my children too. My son (8 when his father died) says that's the best thing I ever did for him, taught him to ask the questions of appropriate people and hear different answers than I might give him for the same question.

My roommate in college thought I had a "Jew 'Fro" to hide the horns she was taught Jews had. She asked to move to another room. The next semester they placed me with a black person. But I learned that being called "dirty Jew" or being told "you are going to hell" as I was told as a Jewish child is NOT the same thing as the racism done to black people. Racism is not a "misjudgment", it's an expression of white supremacy.

Taking a black man with cancer and an unknown infection to the hospital was my worst nightmare. But we also got kicked out of restaurants, redlined in Denver, and refused a rental in Virginia. The many past experiences make me more sensitive to racism though, and open to anti-racism thoughts even when it hurts to be corrected.

### ***A few responses to others:***

A picture in Joan Mahaffey's presentation depicting black people walking through the Grove does NOT lessen the effects of racist deeds nor does it show acceptance of black people as Grovers. They were not free to be a real "part of life in Washington Grove" or even a little free to verbalize objections to the racism here. And they silently knew it.

I also believe people doing blackface and mocking an African American's religious faith knew exactly what they were doing, that it was racist, and that it was in line with white supremacy beliefs. I'm sure the power of the Black church frightens white supremacists. (Notice how they try to discontinue "souls to the polls".) We should not excuse racism just because it was prevalent. Actually, it makes it more imperative that we publicly acknowledge its error.

### ***Useful Questions:***

I'm sure you can get better questions to consider from Ibram X Kendi's publications, but here are a few to consider from my life:

1. When the police with dogs and guns came running into the circle chasing a Black male, did you make sure it was followed up by complaints to the police, even if you didn't have a Black son who might have been walking in the Grove, as several of us did.
2. I noticed in the high schools where I worked in Virginia that many white people did not look Black people in the face to say hello or to remember who they are. Do you?
3. Do Black hairstyles annoy you, especially locs? Does constant changing of hairstyles or wigs bother you? (I often remember or describe people by their hair, do you? Hair is a critical issue in racism.)
4. Have you heard, in recent times of a white student sent to in-school suspension (ISS) or kept out of the classroom because of his/her hair?
5. Can you watch the Fani Willis/Nathan Wade trial questioning any financial benefits to the DA without wondering if they would ask those detailed sexual questions if they were white?

***In sum:***

I don't think the issue of the Town Hall renaming is critical to our anti-racism goals, and I agree we've argued it enough for now, but I think we can all agree we are living under a new philosophy than what existed in the 1880's. Perhaps a plaque at the town hall listing Mr. McCathran's positive contributions would be useful.

Confronting racism doesn't eliminate appreciation for all the exceptionally good things about this community, it only makes it more appropriate to back those things up with future positive growth in the direction we have been going lately.

We need to figure out a way to spread the knowledge of our anti-racism intentions (looking forward to another long letter about this as promised, Dennis) and to encourage the support of neighbors who understand more than we do about these issues.

We could apologize, accept the fact that it wasn't understood by many at the time, and publicize that we are part of a forward moving plan to unhook from the white supremacy of today, even if it feels hurtful to some well-meaning loving people connected to the past.

***The challenge:***

Are we "ready to fully engage with all of our brothers & sisters" as Dick notes, or do we have more work to do and more questions to ask ourselves, before we can open our hearts to a better world even in the face of the current climate in this country?

One day at a time!

Nan Aitel-Thompson

Very grateful to be living in Washington Grove!!

cc:listserv