

Ferguson Worship Collection

From the
Ohio River Group
*A Unitarian Universalist
Ministers' Study Group*

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Foreword

The Ohio River Group is a Unitarian Universalist Minister's Study group (www.ohiorivergroup.org) that meets annually near the Ohio River Valley to hear scholarly papers and hold discussion on a different topic each year. In 2013, we selected our topic for 2014 to be "Race." We knew that 2015 was the 50th anniversary of Selma, but we couldn't know then just how timely the topic would be and how the summer of 2014 would erupt with the tragic deaths of black men across our country at the hands of law enforcement. And as we got ready to go to Ohio River Group this year, we were mindful of our Missouri colleagues' call for us to respond to Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, Missouri.

These readings were compiled by our members in the course of an evening, representing our personal selections for what we might do in a worship service devoted to Ferguson and racial justice. While some of the "obvious choices" are included, some are not, partly because our members often focused on resources that other members might not know about as we each shared a couple of resources with the group.

We offer this more publicly in the hopes that it might prove useful to others as they respond to the "Call to Ferguson."

~ Cynthia L. Landrum

Table of Contents

Worship Elements	4
Chalice Lightings & Opening Words.....	4
Responsive & Unison Readings.....	4
Readings	5
Poems.....	7
Prayers, Meditations, and Lamentations.....	10
Hymns	11
Other Music	12
Quotations.....	12
Sermons & Rituals.....	13
Closing Words.....	14
Additional Resources	15
Children's Stories	15
Books	17
Films and Videos.....	17
Websites and Articles	18

Worship Elements

Chalice Lightings & Opening Words

"Why a flaming chalice?" the question comes.
It's the cup of life, we answer.
A cup of blessings overflowing.
A cup of water to quench our spirits' thirst.
A cup of wine for celebration and dedication.
The flame of truth.
The fire of purification.
Oil for anointing, healing.
Out of chaos, fear, and horror,
Thus was the symbol crafted, a generation ago.
So may it be for us,
In these days of [sorrow, uncertainty, and rage].
And a light to warm our souls and guide us home.

~Lisa M. Doege [Written for Sunday after 9/11; one may change the emotions in the second to last line for other occasions.]

"We can never make the world safe by fighting. Every nation must learn that the people of all nations are children of God, and must share the wealth of the world. You may say this is impracticable, far away, can never be accomplished, but it is the work we are appointed to do. Sometime, somehow, somewhere, we must ever teach this great lesson."

~ the Rev. Olympia Brown

Responsive & Unison Readings

#584, "A Network of Mutuality," by Martin Luther King, Jr.
#567, "To Be of Use," by Marge Piercy
#463, (My heart is moved by all I cannot save...) by Adrienne Rich
#488, (Hold fast to dreams...) by Langston Hughes
#666, "The Legacy of Caring," by Thandeka
#587, "We Were Never Meant to Survive," by Audre Lorde (use with caution)

Readings

“Far from Ease and Grace” by William Sinkford from [Not For Ourselves Alone](#) (Skinner House Books, 2014)

“They Will be Witness,” by the Rev. Carl Scovel from [Never Far From Home](#)

I will see you. For every eye that refused to look, my own eyes will cover you with respect. I will cry with you... for lost language, unnamed sufferings. I will laugh with you. I will stand with you. I will give you what you have given me.

~ excerpted from a poem by Beth Brant (Kienen'kéha/Mohawk)

If Martin Luther King Jr. is right that the arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice, a new movement will arise; and if civil rights organizations fail to keep up with the times, they will be pushed to the side as another generation of advocates comes to the fore. Hopefully the new generation will be led by those who know best the brutality of the new caste system – a group with greater vision, courage, and determination than the old guard can muster, trapped as they may be in an outdated paradigm. This new generation of activists should not disrespect their elders or disparage their contributions or achievements; to the contrary, they should bow their heads in respect, for their forerunners have expended untold hours and made great sacrifices in an elusive quest for justice. But once respects have been paid, they should march right past them, emboldened, as King once said, by the fierce urgency of now.

~ Michelle Alexander, [The New Jim Crow](#). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition (p. 247).

There is a profound ground of unity that is more pertinent and authentic than all the unilateral dimensions of our lives. This, a man discovers when he is able to keep open the door to his heart. This is one's ultimate responsibility, and it is not dependent on whether the heart of another is kept open for him.

Here is a mystery: if sweeping through the door of my heart there moves continually a genuine love for you, it bypasses all your hate and all your indifference and gets through to you at your center. You are powerless to do anything about it. It is utterly impossible to keep another from loving you. The word that love is stronger than hate and goes beyond death is the great disclosure to one who has found that when he keeps open the door to the heart, it matters not how many doors are closed against him.

~ “Keep open the door of thy heart” by Howard Thurman

But I must say to you this evening, my friends, there are some things in our nation and in our world to which I'm proud to be maladjusted. And I call upon you to be maladjusted and all people of good will to be maladjusted to these things until the good society is realized. I never intend to adjust myself to segregation and discrimination. I

never intend to become adjusted to religious bigotry .I never intend to adjust myself to economic conditions that will take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few, and leave millions of people perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of prosperity. I must honestly say, however much criticism it brings, that I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism, and to the self-defeating effects of physical violence.... Yes, I must confess that I believe firmly that our world is in dire need of a new organization – the International Association for the Advancement of Creative Maladjustment. Men and women as maladjusted as the prophet Amos, who in the midst of the injustices of his day, cried out in words that echo across the centuries – "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." As maladjusted as Abraham Lincoln, who had the vision to see that this nation could not survive half slave and half free. As maladjusted as Thomas Jefferson, who in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery, cried in words lifted to cosmic proportions – "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal. That They are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." As maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth, who could say to the men and women of his day "he who lives by the sword will perish by the sword." Through such maladjustment we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man, into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.

~ The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. [Ware Lecture](#), Unitarian Universalist Association, 1966.

My friends, don't let anybody make us feel that we are to be compared in our actions with the Ku Klux Klan or with the White Citizens Council. There will be no crosses burned at any bus stops in Montgomery. There will be no white persons pulled out of their homes and taken out on some distant road and lynched for not cooperating. There will be nobody among us who will stand up and defy the Constitution of this nation. We only assemble here because of our desire to see right exist. My friends, I want it to be known that we're going to work with grim and bold determination to gain justice on the buses in this city.

And we are not wrong; we are not wrong in what we are doing. Well, If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong. If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer that never came down to Earth. If we are wrong, justice is a lie, and love has no meaning. And we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

~ The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Dec. 5 1955 Speech to the Montgomery Improvement Association

Poems

[“Sources”](#) by Adrienne Rich

[“On the Pulse of Morning,”](#) by Maya Angelou

[“Call Me by My True Names”](#) by Thich Nhat Hanh

[“A Dream Deferred”](#) by Langston Hughes

[“If We Must Die”](#) by Claude McKay (Written for the “Red Summer” of 1919 which saw protests and riots across the country in response to lynchings and massacres.)

[“For She Who is Being Tried”](#) by MJ Abell (after Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 34: 9-12)

[“Wiki-Prayer: A How-To”](#) by Marvin K. White

[“Hard Rain”](#) by Tony Hoagland

“Causes: Yes, People: No.” by Vilma Szanthy Harrington (deceased UU minister)

Give me causes, Oh God, to theorize,
argue, talk about. Let me think
of problems far away.
Let me go to luncheons, dinners,
for tired celebrities, with long
speeches, speeches about causes.
Let me raise money, money to support
big offices with large staffs
to do a little good for someone,
someone far away.
Give me causes, Oh God,
Causes to forget
the miseries that are too close
to hide,
but don't, Oh God, don't let me be
involved
Awith people. People are too near.
People may enter my home, may cry
before my eyes.
People can be hungry, ragged, even
dirty.
They may ask me to give – to give

without publicity.
People may be rude.
They may ask me to identify with them
intimately, when all I want is not
to be involved.
I want to be interested, God, yes
interested. Causes help me to be
interested.
And informed. People get me
involved.
So give me causes, Oh God, to theorize,
argue talk about. Let me think
of problems far away.

“A Candle for Michael Brown, *et al*” by Chip Roush

This morning, I will also light another candle.
If we had the space, I would light ten candles,
or a thousand.

I light a candle for Michael Brown,
shot down in the street
and left to die without comfort.

I light a candle for Officer Darren Wilson
whose tragic mistake killed Brown
and changed his own life forever;

I light a candle for Michael’s mother,
sobbing over her son’s corpse.

I light a candle for all the black mothers
whose sons have been taken too early from them;
I light candles
for the black males who are killed
every 28 hours in this country
by law enforcement or vigilantes;

I light candles
for all the people
whose lives are lived in fear,
whose first instinct
is to load their weapon,

to don riot gear,
to climb onto military vehicles
and confront
the neighbors whom they fear so greatly.

I light a candle for all those who are unable to see
that institutional racism
is part of what creates that fear.

I light candles for our nation.
I light a different candle—
hundreds of millions of candles—
for human cousins
in whom fear, or shame,
or guilt or anger
have built walls
which separate us.

I light a candle
for our human impulse to blame—
to push away and disown the horror,
which only creates more separation.

I light a candle
for the chasm of grief
that stretches between us
and I light a candle
for all of our human cousins
who keep hope alive,
who are laboring—
right now, at this very moment—
to build a bridge
across the separation
and into other human hearts.

I light a candle
for all those
who breathe in suffering
and breathe out compassion.

I light millions of candles
in this one candle.
May its light guide us

in the days to come.

“For Michael Brown, Strange Martyr” by Hollis Huston

We don't know what you died for.
We don't know what you lived for.
We don't know what you were doing.
You weren't carrying a placard.
You weren't carrying a weapon.
You weren't trying to become a public figure.

Now in death you are a public figure,
Your death is a placard, but blank.
We only know what you were not doing:
You weren't committing a capital crime.

What you were doing is yet to appear.
In fullness of time something will happen,
And what happens will fill the placard.
The sentence hung on you from birth,
Strange fruit of the guilty tree, spelled out,
Falls ripe on the hot center stripe.

Prayers, Meditations, and Lamentations

“Lamentation 7/30/06” by José Ballester

I cry in the wilderness of my being as I behold the afflictions in our world.
I am stunned by the death and destruction that numbs us into acceptance
and indifference.
I weep before the images of parents carrying their children's lifeless bodies
and children trying to awaken their massacred loved ones.

I mourn how love and hope are dimmed in the pyre smoke of Lebanon, Israel,
Gaza, Iraq, Afghanistan and other ravaged places.
I am maddened seeing all sides of the conflicts and being asked to choose
which madness is righteous.
I feel my heart torn, seeing the victims of natural disasters and the
indifference we pay to their suffering.

We forsake our common bonds and pursue riches for our own sake.
We veil our greed with the cloak of patriotism and our thirst for blood with

the mantel self-defense.

We avenge a child's death by killing a child and thus condemn all children to ceaseless, senseless violence.

We speak of the sanctity of life and the importance of preserving every embryo while blithely reporting the latest casualty numbers.

We joyously kill with the hope of heavenly reward and carelessly squander all our earthly resources.

Prayer by Rev. Joseph M. Cherry

O, Spirit of Life, Spirit of Love, Spirit of Peace come unto me,
For I am filled with anguish and despair.

For I wish us all condemned to specters walking the earth to atone for our blasphemy and our silence, by warning others of our foolishness.

For I look upon our world and see no hope and look inside myself and feel no joy.

Show me the strength and fortitude I possess to confront injustice.
Show me the seed of hope that I might use to grow hope in others.
Show me the faces of all who suffer, and all who cause suffering so I may remember that they are all my sisters and brothers.
Show me there is still hope.

If we have any hope of transforming the world and changing ourselves,
we must be:
bold enough to step into our discomfort,
brave enough to be clumsy there,
loving enough to forgive ourselves and others.

May we, as a people of faith, be granted the strength to be:
so bold,
so brave,
and so loving.

Hymns

#6, "Just As Long As I Have Breath"
#95, "There Is More Love Somewhere"
#131, "Love Will Guide Us"
#149, "Lift Every Voice and Sing"
#153, "Oh, I Woke Up This Morning"

#156, "Oh, Freedom"
#169, "We Shall Overcome"
#210, "Wade in the Water"
#318, "We Would be One"
#401, "Kum Ba Yah"
#1030, "Siyahamba"
#1053, "How Could Anyone"
#1009, "Meditation on Breathing"

Other Music

Music of the Civil Rights Movement

"Ella's Song," by Bernice Johnson Reagon, Sweet Honey in the Rock ("We who believe in freedom cannot rest...")

"I Am Willing" by Holly Near

"Keep on Moving Forward" by Pat Humphries

"Avila," by the Wailin' Jennys

The Music of *Les Miserables*

"Law Is for the Protection of the People" by Kris Kristofferson

Quotations

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good [people] to do nothing."
~ Attributed to Edmund Burke

I cannot wipe away your tears, but I can teach you to make them holy
~ Anthony DeMello

"There are some things in our social system to which all of us ought to be maladjusted. Hatred and bitterness can never cure the disease of fear, only love can do that. We must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love."
~ The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. We will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood, and speed up that day when all of God's children all over our nation and the world will be able to walk the earth as brothers and sisters, and then we can sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual – "Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty we are free at last."

~ The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ware Lecture, Unitarian Universalist Association, 1966. <http://www.uua.org/ga/past/1966/ware/index.shtml>

He who passively accepts evil
is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it.
He who accepts evil without protesting against it
is really cooperating with it.

~ The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Silence in the face of evil is itself evil.

God will not hold us guiltless.

Not to speak is to speak.

Not to act is to act.

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Sermons & Rituals

Ritual: "A Chorus of Voices" – a number of voices shared by worship leader, without attribution or contextualizing

Ritual: "Wailing Wall" – a wall display into which people can place their sorrows in written form

Ritual: Practice of lifting up the efforts of the local police, if appropriate.

"Cruel Summer" by Michael Tino available at www.uufellowship.org/cruel_summer

Excerpt from "To Fear Less and Love More" by Jennie Barrington

I'm glad that he reminded us that these are not just black-white issues and injustices, but that they encompass many races and ethnicities. The United States is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic nation and, in fact, it always has been. So in contemplating the situation in Ferguson, I recalled a true story which, though I only learned of it recently, happened in October of 1992, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. You may not have known, as I had not, that in that city racial conflict is very high and frightening, including between people who are white, and people who are Japanese. Yoshi Hattori was a sixteen year old Japanese exchange student, whose host family were members of the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge. Two months into his stay, Yoshi was invited, along with Webb Haymaker, his host family brother, to a Halloween party for Japanese exchange students. Yoshi was dressed in a tuxedo like John Travolta from *Saturday Night Fever*. The boys mistook the home of Rodney and Bonnie Peairs for their destination, because the addresses were similar, and there were even Halloween decorations outside of the house. Yoshi and Webb rang the front doorbell but, receiving no response, began to walk back to their car. But Bonnie Peairs had looked out the side door, and seen the two teens. Frightened, she told her husband to get his gun. Mr. Peairs pointed his gun at Yoshi and said, "Freeze." We think that, with being unfamiliar with language

difference, Yoshi did not know what Mr. Peairs meant. He said, "We're here for the party." But Mr. Peairs shot him, and Yoshi died. As I read the transcript of the trial of Rodney Peairs, I found I was surprised at the deeply heartfelt remorse he felt, and continues to feel. His words serve to remind us all of the aching need for a greater compassion and a larger mercy. Mr. Peairs said, breaking into tears several times, "I want Yoshi's parents to understand that I'm sorry for everything... Boy, I messed up; I made a mistake." Mrs. Peairs said, "There was no thinking involved. I wish I could have thought. If I could have just thought." And after the trial Mr. Peairs told the press that he would never again own a gun. At the criminal trial, Mr. Peairs was acquitted. But in the civil trial, the court found him liable to Yoshi's parents for \$650,000 in damages. His parents used the money to establish two charitable funds in their son's name: one to fund U.S. high school students wishing to visit Japan, and one to fund organizations that lobby for gun control. Through the efforts of Yoshi's parents, his host family, and the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, one million Americans and 1.65 million Japanese signed a petition urging stronger gun controls in the United States. The petition was presented to Ambassador Walter Mondale, who delivered it to President Bill Clinton. Shortly thereafter, the Brady Bill was passed and, on December 3, 1993, Ambassador Mondale presented Yoshi's parents with a copy. To commemorate Yoshi, a quarry near his home in Nagoya, Japan, sent two large stones to the city of Baton Rouge, called, "The Peace Stones." But racial and ethnic conflict in that city has remained too high. The city could not find a place for the stones. So The Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge offered to keep them, until such a time as the city can accept them. They symbolize the church's ongoing quest for peace and justice for all peoples. In 1996, the church dedicated them as Peace Stones, and the public is welcome to visit them. At the dedication, the Senior Minister, the Rev. Steve Crump, named them, "Fear Less and Love More."

The Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, in giving sanctuary to the Peace Stones, is holding out the hope that the racial harmony the stones symbolize will feel at home throughout their city, one day.

Closing Words

"There is, finally, only one thing required of us-- that is: to take life whole, the sunlight and shadow together, to live the life that is given us with courage and humor and truth. We have such a little moment, out of the vastness of time, for all our wondering and loving-- Therefore, let there be no half-heartedness. Therefore, let the soul be ardent in its pain, its yearning, and in its praise-- Then shall peace enfold our days, and glory shall not fade from our lives."

~ The Rev. Kendyl Gibbons

Additional Resources

Children's Stories

Annotated Bibliography of Civil Rights Movement Picture Books by Emily Gage

[*We March*](#) by Shane W. Evans

Very simple word and picture book on the August 28, 1963 march on Washington. "We are hot and tired, but we are filled with hope. We lean on each other as we march to justice, to freedom, to our dreams."

[*I Have a Dream*](#) by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Some of the speech's text with beautiful illustrations by Kadir Nelson.

[*We Shall Overcome: The Story of a Song*](#) by Debbie Levy

Traces the story of this song from slavery to current day as inspiration for freedom fighters.

[*Let Freedom Sing*](#) by Vanessa Newton

A tour through major civil rights events using "This little light of mine" lyrics and how those lights changed things. (Includes Barack Obama's election.)

[*Martin and Mahalia; His Words, Her Song*](#) by Andrea Davis Pinkney and Brian Pinkney

The friendship and mutual inspiration of Martin Luther King, Jr and Mahalia Jackson.

[*Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up By Sitting Down*](#) by Andrea Davis Pinkney

The story of the Woolworth sit-ins in Greensboro, NC and its effects, with great language and inspiration.

[*Martin's Big Words*](#) by Doreen Rappaport

Life story of MLK, Jr. emphasizing the power of words to change things. Ends with: "His big words are alive for us today."

[*Child of the Civil Rights Movement*](#) by Paula Young Shelton and Raul Colon

Andrew Young's daughter gives her own perspective on her experiences of the freedom movement.

[*This is the Dream*](#) by Diane Shore and Jessica Alexander

Book in verse describing Jim Crow conditions, the leaders and people that changed it, and how things are now.

[*Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Sit-ins*](#) by Carole Boston Weatherford

An account of the sit-ins from the perspective of African American 8 year old Connie.

[Freedom Summer](#) by Deborah Wiles

A story of two friends, one white and one Black, in the South in 1964.

For Older Readers (but still with lots of pictures)

[Through My Eyes](#) by Ruby Bridges

First hand account of Ruby Bridges' experiences, integrating (by herself) a school in New Orleans in 1960; includes photos, news accounts and historical context.

[We are One: the Story of Bayard Rustin](#) by Larry Dane Brimmer

Biography of a sometimes overlooked activist, who helped make the 1963 March on Washington a reality.

[Rosa](#) by Nikki Giovanni

An account of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

[Freedom's Children](#) by Ellen Levine

No pictures, but first hand accounts by children actually involved in the freedom movement.

[We've Got A Job: 1963 Birmingham Children's March](#) by Cynthia Levinson

Stories of young people who were there help tell the stories from various perspectives.

[March, Book One](#) by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, Nate Powell

A graphic novel of John Lewis' civil rights activism, first in a trilogy (not all published.)

[A Dream of Freedom: Civil Rights Movement from 1954-1968](#) by Diane McWhorter

Year by year chronology with photographs with an epilogue of the "unfinished work".

[Heart and Soul: The Story of Africa and African Americans](#) by Kadir Nelson

Introductory history from slavery through the Civil Rights movement with ideals of democracy, freedom and independence.

[If a Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks](#) by Faith Ringgold

A young child gets on the bus and hears the story of that special seat.

[We Shall Not Be Moved](#) by Velma Maia Thomas

Covers the Passage from the Great Migration to the Million Man March with photographs and replica of original documents.

[Civil Rights Movement for Kids: A history with 21 activities](#) by Mary Turck

Uses plays, crafts, songs to help make these stories come alive in different ways.

Books

[*Country of My Skull*](#) by Antjie Krog

The following are selections from the Ohio River Group reading list from 2014:

[*The Selma Awakening*](#) by Rev. Mark Morrison Reed

[*A Larger Memory*](#) by Ronald Takaki

[*The Roundhouse*](#) by Louise Erdrich

UUA materials on "[*The Doctrine of Discovery*](#)"

[*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*](#) by Sherman Alexie

[*Down Sand Mountain*](#) by Steve Watkins (a Novel for Young Readers)

[*Learning to Be White*](#) by Thandeka

[*The New Jim Crow*](#) by Michelle Alexander

[*Voices from the Margins*](#) by Jacqui James and Mark Morrison Reed

[*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*](#) by Maya Angelou

[*Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement*](#) by Vincent Harding

[*The Souls of Black Folk*](#) by W. E. B. DuBois

Films and Videos

[*Do the Right Thing*](#). Dir. Spike Lee. Universal City Studios, Inc., 1989.

[*Crash*](#). Dir. Paul Haggis. 2004.

[*Amandla!*](#) Dir. Lee Hirsh. 2003

"The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross" (PBS series hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. <http://video.pbs.org/program/african-americans-many-rivers-cross>)

“Dakota 38” (documentary available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pX6FBSUyQI>)

Harry Belafonte’s acceptance speech at 2014 Governor’s Awards
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yfj6Ja86lCs>

Websites and Articles

“[The Race Card Project: Six Word Stories](#)” (NPR)

“[12 Things White People Can Do Now Because Ferguson](#)” by Janee Woods (Quartz)

“[Things To Stop Being Distracted By When A Black Person Gets Murdered By Police](#)”
by Mia McKenzie (Black Girl Dangerous)

“[Actor gets real on CNN about the dehumanization of black men](#)” by Egberto Willies
(Daily Kos)

“[Ferguson: breaking out of post-racial hypnosis](#)” by George Ciccariello-Maher (Roar
Mag)

“[A Mother’s White Privilege](#)” (Manic Pixie Dream Mama)

“[The Ultimate White Privilege: Darren Wilson and Being ‘Afraid For Your Life’](#)” by
Katie McDonough (Alternet)