

Memorial: Pittsburgh and Jefferson Town

By Polly Walker

We gather to remember both the members of the Squirrel Hill Synagogue who were shot and killed in Pittsburgh, and the people of color who were gunned down in a grocery store in Jefferson Town, Kentucky.

It is difficult to make sense of these acts, and to respond in ways that do not escalate violence, but that seek to transform conflict. And it also is difficult for me to speak tonight, in part because my mentor, Ralph Summy, just passed away. He is the person that led me to learn from the research and practice of nonviolence, including the ways we can use our bodies and voices to oppose violence and injustice and to build a just peace.

There are many underlying roots of the violent acts that occurred in Pittsburgh and Jefferson Town: one that we see echoed in both of these atrocities is the use of discourse and terminology that supports violence toward minority groups. In contrast, we decry hate-based language that dehumanizes or that makes minority groups scapegoats for complex current economic or social challenges. We have the power to use our voices through language that empowers movements toward peace, that demands justice, and that cries freedom.

I close with segments from a poem from Sonia Sanchez, in which she addresses our power to disrupt systems of injustice that may at times seem impenetrable.

Haiku and Tanka for Harriet Tubman

By [*Sonia Sanchez*](#)

1

Picture a woman
riding thunder on
the legs of slavery ...

2

Picture her kissing
our spines saying *no* to
the eyes of slavery ...

3

Picture her rotating
the earth into a shape
of lives becoming ...

4

Picture her leaning
into the eyes of our
birth clouds ...

5

Picture this woman
saying *no* to the constant
yes of slavery ...

6

Picture a woman
jumping rivers her
legs inhaling moons ...

7

Picture her ripe
with seasons of
legs ... running ...

8

Picture her tasting
the secret corners
of woods ...

9

Picture her saying:
*You have within you the strength,
the patience, and the passion
to reach for the stars,
to change the world ...*

10

Imagine her words:
*Every great dream begins
with a dreamer ...*

May we join with Sanchez and Tubman in reaching for the strength and passion required to transform the violence we are facing in our communities.