

Town of West Hartford

50 South Main Street
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

West Hartford remembers Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s last speech with a community read of "I've Been To The Mountaintop"

WEST HARTFORD, CONN. (March 20, 2018) – Join us on Tuesday, April 3, as we remember Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he delivered his last powerful speech in 1968, "I've Been To The Mountaintop." The next day, his life would tragically end at age 39.

"On this 50th anniversary, we wanted to continue King's mission of building a beloved community by symbolically carrying on his ideals with the art project and hearing the words of his speech," said Tracey Wilson, event organizer.

Beginning at 6:00 PM at Blue Back Square, over 50 people will each read a paragraph from King's speech. Speakers include students from the 16 public schools, clergy from houses of worship, members of the business community and civic organizations, as well as town leaders and activists.

"We wanted every segment of the community represented as we celebrate this remarkable man who chose peace over violence. You will see people as young as age 10 up to age 80, and all races and nationalities in between," said Liz Devine, event organizer.

At 5:00 PM, prior to the speech, also at Blue Back Square, the Connecticut Center for Nonviolence will lead a community art project where attendees can decorate a wooden block. Together the uniquely designed blocks create a small scale community representing the beloved community. Both events are free.

After the event, the art project will be showcased in the Noah Webster House exhibit space between the public library and Goldberg's Bagel.

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Historically, King's "I've Been To the Mountaintop" speech primarily concerns the Memphis Sanitation Strike. King calls for unity, economic actions, boycotts, and nonviolent protest, while challenging the United States to live up to its ideals. The issue is injustice and the refusal of Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants.

King warned the protesters not to engage in violence lest the issue of injustice be ignored because of the focus on the violence. He argued that peaceful demonstrations were the best course of action, the only way to guarantee that their demands would be heard and answered.

Additionally, the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis is coordinating events around the country, including a bell toll, to mark April 4, 2018, the 50th anniversary of his death. The West Hartford committee sent a letter to all the houses of worship asking that they toll their bells 39 times (King's age) at 7:06PM (time of death in Memphis). A synchronized toll among the churches and synagogues would send a message that his mission of nonviolence and of building a beloved community still matter to us here in Connecticut and in West Hartford.

The full story is here: <http://mlk50.civilrightsmuseum.org/mlk50-bell-toll>

The April 3rd commemoration is a continuation of a community conversation that followed the annual celebration on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life on January 15, 2018 at the town hall auditorium. The community is invited to another special event planned for Sunday, May 6, 2018, at the Charter Oak Academy, in which the documentary, "The Children's March," will be shown and a facilitated discussion will follow. The event is free.

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