The symposium is shaping up nicely, and we are so excited about it! Our community/government dialogue will culminate in an October 2020 virtual symposium, “The Time for Reckoning: Confronting Systemic Racism, Seeking Justice and Reimagining Society,” cohosted by the Center and the New York State Writers Institute. Its overarching goal is to imagine a just society where Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) no longer fear bodily harm or death at the hands of their community’s justice system. We soon will learn more about the thoughts and feelings of you, the people of our city, through whatever modes of expression you find most comfortable: prose, poetry, music, dance --- any way of conveying what you think and how you feel about law enforcement’s treatment of BIPOC individuals in Albany.

In the wake of George Floyd’s murder, local community voices have loudly, passionately, and forcefully demanded change in Capital Region justice systems. The “Reckoning” symposium will present the community’s demands, government officials’ response to the community, and the community’s assessment of the government response. Two Albany-centered panels will be featured: a “Community Voices” panel, and an in-studio discussion already scheduled for filming at WMHT with Alice Green, Mayor Kathy Sheehan, Common Council President Corey Ellis, and Police Chief Eric Hawkins. The dialogue resulting from the two panels will help set the stage for Albany’s reinvented public safety plan, mandated by the Governor’s Executive Order.

Here’s the really exciting part --- where you, the people, come in! The Center and the Institute will host a variety of perspectives on a symposium website we expect to launch in August. We are inviting participation from Black Lives Matter, Citizen Action, All of Us, and other grassroots community groups, and we intend to engage local high school and college students through teach-ins, group discussions, essay writing and short documentaries. The website will provide a multi-media, interactive and collaborative forum for the voices of community members who wish to share their views.

Additionally, there will be videos of such nationally-known experts on systemic racism as Robin DiAngelo, author of White Fragility, and Michael Eric Dyson, author of What Truth Sounds Like, sharing insights with Alice Green and Paul Grondahl. We are working at lining up other notable authors on the subject, including Ibram X. Kendi, author of How To Be An Antiracist, Michelle Alexander, author of The New Jim Crow, and other noted national experts. The website will also offer a treasure trove of resources for those who wish to learn more about systemic racism, its impact nationally and locally, and measures we can take to combat it.

Most importantly, the website will allow Albany residents to speak their truths through their artistic talents, and help frame the “Community Voices” panel for the October symposium.

Watch this space for additional symposium updates!