

Anti-Racism:

The Prophets' Call to the Church

Book Reviews and Summaries

James Cone, <i>The Cross and the Lynching Tree</i>	2-5
Austin Channing, <i>I'm Still Here</i>	6-11
Robin DiAngelo, <i>White Fragility</i>	12-28
Jennifer Harvey, <i>Dear White Christians</i>	29-32
David Swanson, <i>Rediscipling the White Church</i>	33-34

Anti-Racism Video Links

1. The Awareness Test: (1:08)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahg6qcgoay4&feature=youtu.be>
2. How to Overcome Our Biases by Verna Meyers: (17:50)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYyvbGlnZkQ&feature=youtu.be>
3. What I am Learning from my White Grandchildren by Anthony Peterson: (18:54)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5GCetbP7Fg>
4. Implicit Bias by Melanie Funchess: (16:11)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fr8G7MtRNlk>
5. I'm Still Here by Austin Channing Brown: (18:42)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20Tgb1L5Bgw>
6. Let's Get to the Root of Racism by Megan Ming Francis: (19:34)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aCn72iXO9s>
7. White Allies 101 (Chandler Presbyterian): <https://vimeo.com/chandlerpres>
8. Race, Justice and the Church (Pinnacle Presbyterian): <https://www.pinnaclepres.org/race-justice-and-the-church>.
9. Structural Racism: Stony Point/Johnson C. Smith: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/curriculum/>

Curriculum

Facing Racing: A Vision of Intercultural Community	35-60
Waking Up White	61-78

The Cross and the Lynching Tree

by Dr. James Cone

Summary by Timothy Sexton:

<https://www.gradesaver.com/the-cross-and-the-lynching-tree/study-guide/summary>

Chapter 1: “Nobody Knows De Trouble I See”

The opening chapter takes its subtitle from the lyrics of an old spiritual to underline the intensity and awareness of the chasm which often exists between history as a series of objective factual events and history as the subjective written account of those facts. The examination of this theme is commenced with the example of how the humiliating torture and execution of a convicted criminal was transformed into a story which inspired the most powerful religion in the history of the world. People interpret the facts of history according to the narrative perspective in which it is told. The history of lynching African-Americans has not been told from their perspective because it is a subject that is more easily left unspoken. Shame, humiliation, and fear conspired to keep their version of history unwritten while the perspective of those doing the lynching was splashed heroically across the screen in fictional images in *Birth of a Nation*, while the ugly truth of factual imagery was suppressed by being kept out of history textbooks.

Chapter 2: “The Terrible Beauty of the Cross”

The focus of this chapter is on the ironic complicity of organized Christianity in the systemic effort to enact coercive fealty to authority upon black America through the act of lynching. Lynching is placed into juxtaposition with the Roman punishment of crucifixion in which the point was far less about punishing the criminal than sending the message to others to beware the consequences of overstepping their boundaries. The author also re-introduces conceptualization of written history as propaganda for its writers by analyzing the wide gulf—a gulf that can only be explained as a result of the power of controlling the facts of history by shaping and, if necessary, perverting the perspective of it—that separates the views of white Christian and black Christians toward understanding the symmetry of the cross and the lynching tree. The subject of lynching has no trouble inherently connecting the Roman cross for execution and the hanging tree for lynching as twin towers of terrorism while those connected to the legacy of carrying out lynching have historically seemed to be genetically averse to admitting this connection.

Chapter 3: Bearing the Cross and Staring Down the Lynching Tree

The focal character of Chapter 3 is Reinhold Niebuhr, a mostly unknown figure beyond the world of religious study today, but a man who composed the Serenity Prayer and was conferred upon by *Time Magazine* as the most important American Protestant since Jonathan Edwards. Cone’s criticism of Niebuhr can be boiled down to a sort of lip service support of black Christian concerns in America, (which even many positive review of the book question), is immediately situated for comparison against the central focus of this chapter: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It should be noted that Niebuhr was an outspoken supporter of King at a time when this was not necessarily true of equally influential white theologians. King is the focal character, but in the sense that he becomes a symbol of all those involved in in the civil rights movement which had the corollary effect of starting the transformation of the written history of lynching. The central event of that transformation was the startling murder of a young boy that has become perhaps as familiar with *Birth of a Nation* today, but when Dr. King organized his March on Washington was still locked in the vaults of unknown history to most of white America: the lynching of Emmett Till.

Chapter 4: The Recrucified Christ in Black Literary Imagination

This chapter opens with the poem by noted Harlem Renaissance writer Countee Cullen, “Christ Recrucified” which directly addresses the crucifixion of Christ in metaphorical terms as a lynching.

CHRIST RECRUCIFIED

BY COUNTEE CULLEN, 1922

The South is crucifying Christ again
By all the laws of ancient rote and rule:
The ribald cries of “Save yourself” and “fool”
Din in his ear, the thorns grope for his brain,
And where they bite, swift springing rivers stain
His gaudy, purple robe of ridicule
With sullen red; and acid wine to cool
His thirst is thrust at him, with lurking pain.
Christ’s awful wrong is that he’s dark of hue,
The sin for which no blamelessness atones;
But lest the sameness of the cross should tire,
They kill him now with famished tongues of fire,
And while he burns, good men, and women too,
Shout, battling for black and brittle bones.

The chapter is punctuated throughout with excerpts from poetry, slave narratives, song lyrics and other creative texts which appropriate history as a subject of artistic expression. Such artistic expression has long been the means of conveying “secret histories” composed by the oppressed whose story was excised from the official historical record. The history of lynching and what is seen as a brutally obvious link to crucifixion, which can only be purposely unseen through concerted denial, has been passed down from generation to generation in black America while remaining virtually unknown to white America because of a systematic suppression via the academic curriculum reaching across all disciplines, not just history.

Chapter 5: “Oh Mary, Don’t You Weep”

This chapter opens with a brief snatch of lyrics from the haunting jazz ode to the victims of lynching, “Strange Fruit.”

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swingin' in the Southern breeze
Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees

Pastoral scene of the gallant South
The bulgin' eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burnin' flesh

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather
For the wind to suck
For the sun to rot
For the tree to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop

The author then launches into one of the most horrific accounts of mob violence one can imagine: a young pregnant black woman being stripped, lynched, set on fire and having her unborn child cut from her body where it fell to the ground and was stomped to death, all of which happened in front of witnesses that included children. Making this story all the more unbelievable is that Mary Turner suffered this abomination because she dared to protest the earlier lynching of her husband, Hampton, who—get ready now—was only chosen as a victim because the idiotic members of the lynch mob could not locate the actual target of their hideous pursuit of justice and instead settled on an acceptable replacement. From this beginning the chapter begins a trek through the historical record to demonstrate how woefully misplaced is any possible conception that lynching in America was somehow a tiny dark blot upon history represented by an impossibly small number of exclusively male victims, most of whom probably were guilty of one crime or another. The focal characters of this chapter are those female, African-American artists whose journalism, histories, poems and songs have become metaphorical offspring of the courageous women who stood by Jesus during the crucifixion when all the male apostles were busy fleeing, denying and hiding from their responsibilities. Billie Holiday, Ida B. Wells, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harp become the face of the collective spiritual faith in Christ expressed through lamentation.

Emmett Till

Emmett Till was a fourteen-year-old boy brutally and viciously lynched in Mississippi in 1955 for the alleged “crime” of whistling at a white woman. Of all the countless cases of lynching in America, the author singles out Till’s not because it was particularly unusual more than any other, but because it was the one which changed the course of the written history of this abomination. The written history of lynching had been co-opted by white society which portrayed it in dramatic terms in *Birth of a Nation* and as justifiable carrying out of justice in multiple novels and historical account. Meanwhile, the perspective of the victimhood was silenced through intimidation, fear and shame. The graphic images of the aftermath of Till’s execution was the first actual photographs of a lynching ever seen by a vast swath of white America and had the effect of transforming the written history so that it accorded much more closely with the factual history.

Mary Turner

Mary Turner, by contrast, becomes a character worthy of her brief mention in the book specifically because her story of becoming a victim of lynch mob mentality is so relentlessly monstrous that one can only hope it is a unique case. She was the young pregnant wife of a man who had earlier been lynched only because the original target of the mob’s vengeance could not be located. When she dared to plead for some kind of justice, the result was an unspeakable violation of her body and her unborn child in full view of witnesses including children, none of whom did anything to stop it from occurring or bring anyone to justice afterward.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Niebuhr remains universally regarded as one of the five most influential figures in the history of American theology, and one of the chapters is characterized as a reflection upon his influence. Though highly regarded, the author calls into question not just Niebuhr’s commitment to black Christians on the subject of lynching, but his very understanding of how

lynching in America is synonymous with Roman crucifixion. Although Niebuhr was in the minority of influential white Christian leaders to actively and openly support Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement, he is ultimately castigated by the author for being intellectually sympathetic toward the plight of blacks, but incapable of genuine empathy.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

King is placed in juxtaposition to Niebuhr not on account of being black nor for having an obviously greater capacity for empathy toward victims of lynching, but rather as a contrast between the good man who doesn't act and the good man who does. The author does not criticize Niebuhr for being a bad man or accomplice to white supremacists, but more for contributing to maintaining the written history of lynching as the official story. King, by contrast, is hailed not for being a better Christian, but for actively taking the risks involved in forcing white America to read the unwritten history of lynching.

Countee Cullen, Ida B. Wells, Billie Holiday, et. al

That "unwritten history" of lynching was, in fact, written down and recorded as an account throughout the entire historical record; it just never made into the official academic curriculum. What history textbooks left out of the story of American justice (or lack thereof) was filled in through the fiction and poetry of black writers, the lyrics sung by blues and jazz singers, investigative journalism published in black-owned periodicals and newspapers and the court briefs filed by black defense attorneys. As with textbooks, much of this history never made it into the larger American consciousness of white society, but the fact that it existed at all always carried with it the potential that just perhaps maybe one day, truths too ugly to mention might one day become impossible to keep quiet.

I'm Still Here by Austin Channing Brown
I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made For Whiteness.
Convergent Books, 2018. (185 pages)

Summary by Kevin Nuener: <https://vialogue.wordpress.com/2018/05/22/im-still-here-review-notes/>

1. White People Are Exhausting

White people who expect me to be white have not yet realized that their cultural way of being is not in fact the result of goodness, rightness, or God's blessing. Pushing back, resisting the lie, is hella work. (20)

White supremacy is a tradition that must be named and a religion that must be renounced. When this work has not been done, those who live in whiteness become oppressive, whether intentional or not. (23)

My story is not about condemning white people but about rejecting the assumption—sometimes spoken, sometimes not—that white is right: closer to God, holy, chosen, the epitome of being. (23)

I offer this story in hopes that we will embody a community eager to name whiteness, celebrate Blackness, and, in a world still governed by systems of racial oppression, begin to see that there's another way. (23)

2. Playing Spades

...rather than my race being the elephant in the room, it seemed instead to be my secret knowledge. (25)

3. The Other Side of Harmony

...*harmony*—the absence of outright conflict—often leaves deeper complications untouched. (40)

Would I write that Christopher Columbus “discovered” America? Would I do the report on Malcolm X instead of Mark Twain? My parents left the decision to me. I could choose the better grade, or I could choose to affirm Blackness. (45)

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

I didn't have phrases like *white tears* (50) or *white fragility*, and I'm not sure I had even explored the term *white privilege* at that point in my life. But I was learning about these things all the same—not from theory, but from life. (51)

4. Ain't No Friends Here

Doing nothing is no longer an option for me.

5. Whiteness at Work

Confession: By the time I graduated from college, I thought I was the white culture whisperer. I was fearless. I thought any future encounters of racism would rear their ugly heads like purple dragons, and I had no doubt in my ability to slay racist nonsense wherever I found it. I was so wrong. Far from an imposing beast, I found that white supremacy is more like a poison. It seeps into your mind, drip by drip, until it makes you wonder if your perception of reality is true. (67)

...at an organization that promoted diversity in its mission statements and messaging. ...many people of color on our team had grown suspicious of those statements, suspecting that the organization wanted our racial diversity without our diversity of thought and culture. (69)

The role of a bridge builder sounds appealing until it becomes clear how often that bridge is your broken back. (69)

The ultimate expectation is that I will come to realize that white ways of thinking, behaving, communicating, and understanding the world are to be valued above all else. Rare is the ministry praying that they would be worthy of the giftedness of Black minds and hearts, so we must remind ourselves. It's the only way to spit out the poison. We must remind ourselves and one another that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, arming ourselves against the ultimate message of whiteness—that we are inferior. (79) We must stare at ourselves in the mirror and repeat that we, too, are fully capable, immensely talented, and uniquely gifted. We are not tokens. We are valuable in the fullness of our humanity. We are not perfect, but we are here, able to contribute something special, beautiful, lasting to the companies and ministries to which we belong. (80)

6. White Fragility

This is partly what makes the fragility of whiteness so damn dangerous. It ignores the personhood of people of color and instead makes the feelings of whiteness the most important thing. ... White fragility protects whiteness and forces Black people to fend for themselves. (89)

To stay committed to this work, I have to accept the constant experience of entrenchment and transformation. On the bad days, when entrenchment is lashing out, tearing down, pretending you don't have a name, this work feels soul crushing, dehumanizing. But on the good days, you witness transformation, openness, a willingness to change one's worldview. And for a brief moment, I can believe in the possibility that we are still inching toward justice. (98)

7. Nice White People

When you believe niceness disproves the presence of racism, it's easy to start believing bigotry is rare, and that the label *racist* should be applied only to mean-spirited, intentional acts of discrimination. The problem with this framework—besides being a gross misunderstanding of how racism operates in systems and structures enabled by nice people—is that **it obligates me to be nice in return, rather than truthful**. I am expected to come closer to the racists. Be nicer to them. Coddle them. (101)

...**the Relational Defense** ... rather than confess and seek transformation, the person defends their “goodness” by appealing to the relationships of those who “know” them. (102)

White people desperately want to believe that only the lonely, isolated “whites only” club members are racist. This is why the word *racist* offends “nice white people” so deeply. It challenges their self-identification as good people. **Sadly, most white people are more worried about being called racist than about whether or not their actions are in fact racist or harmful.** (104)

But the truth is, even the monsters—the Klan members, the faces in the lynch mob, the murderers who bombed churches—they all had friends and family members. (104) Each one of them was connected to people who would testify that they had good hearts. They had families who loved them, friends who came over for dinner, churches where they made small talk with the pastor after the service. The monster has always been well dressed and well loved. (105)

...for those on the receiving end, white guilt is like having tar dry all over your hands and heart. It takes so much work to peel off the layers, rub away the stickiness, get rid of the smell. Unsolicited confessions inspired by a sense of guilt are often poured over Black bodies in search of their own relief. (107)

I was expected to offer absolution. But I am not a priest for the white soul. (109)

White people really want this to be what reconciliation means: a Black person forgiving them for one racist sin. (110)

8. The Story We Tell

Ultimately, the reason we have not yet told the truth about this history of Black and white America is that telling an ordered history of this nation (116) would mean finally naming America's commitment to violent, abusive, exploitative, immoral white supremacy, which seeks the absolute control of Black bodies. It would mean doing something about it. Sadly, too many of us in the church don't live like we believe this. We live as if we are afraid acknowledging the past will tighten the chains of injustice rather than break them. We live as if the ghosts of the past will snatch us if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. So instead we walk around the valley, talk about the valley. We speak of the valley with cute euphemisms:

“We just have so many divisions in this country.”

“If we could just get better at diversity, we'd be so much better off.”

We are experiencing some cultural changes.

Our only chance at dismantling racial injustice is being more curious about its origins than we are worried about our comfort. (117)

We can lament and mourn. We can be livid and enraged. We can be honest. We can tell the truth. We can trust that the Holy Spirit is here. We must. For only by being truthful about how we got here can we begin to imagine another way. (118)

9. Creative Anger

To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious, is to be in a rage almost all the time. So that the first problem is how to control that rage so that it won't destroy you. Part of the rage is this: it isn't only what is happening to you, but it's what's happening all around you all of the time, in the face of the most extraordinary and criminal indifference, the indifference and ignorance of most white people in this country. — James Baldwin, 1961.

Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change ... Anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification.- [Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider](#).

I serve a God who experienced and expressed anger. ... Jesus throws folks out the building, and in so doing creates space for the most marginalized to come in: the poor, the wounded, the children. I imagine the next day's newspapers called Jesus's anger destructive. But I think those without power would've said that his anger led to freedom—the freedom of belonging, the freedom of healing, and the freedom of participating as full members in god's house. (127)

10. Ask why they want you. Get as much clarity as possible on what the organization has read about you, what they understand about you, what they assume are your gifts and strengths. What does the organization hope you will bring to the table? Do those answers align with your reasons for wanting to be at the table?

9. Define your terms. You and the organization may have different definitions of words like *justice*, *diversity*, or *antiracism*. Ask for definitions, examples, or success stories to give you a better idea of how the organization understands and embodies these words. Also ask (128) about who is in charge and who is held accountable for these efforts. Then ask yourself if you can work within that structure.

8. Hold the organization to the highest vision they committed to for as long as you can. Be ready to move if the leaders aren't prepared to pursue their own stated vision.

7. Find your people. If you are going to push back against the system or push leadership forward, it's wise not to do so alone. Build or join an antiracist cohort within the organization.

6. Have mentors and counselors on standby. Don't just choose a really good friend or a parent when seeking advice. It's important to have one or two mentors who can give advice based on their personal knowledge of the organization and its leaders. You want someone who can help you navigate the particular politics of your organization.

5. Practice self-care. Remember that you are a whole person, not a mule to carry the racial sins of the organization. Fall in love, take your children to the park, don't miss doctors' visits, (129) read for pleasure, dance with abandon, have lots of good sex, be gentle with yourself.

4. Find donors who will contribute to the cause. Who's willing to keep the class funded, the diversity positions going, the social justice center operating? It's important for the organization to know the members of your cohort aren't the only ones who care. Demonstrate that there are stakeholders, congregation members, and donors who want to see real change.

3. Know your rights. There are some racist things that are just mean, but others are against the law. Know the difference, and keep records of it all.

2. Speak. Of course, context matters. You must be strategic about when, how, to whom, and about which situations you decide to call out. But speak. Find your voice and use it.

1. Remember: You are a creative being who is capable of making change. But it is not your responsibility to transform an entire organization. (130)

10. The Ritual of Fear

11. A God for the Accused

It doesn't really matter. At the end of the day, Blackness is always the true offense. Whiteness needs just a hint of a reason to maintain its own goodness, assuring itself that there's no reason to worry, because the victim had it coming. He was a drug dealer. A criminal. A thug.

| We don't talk about white drug dealers this way. We don't even talk about white *murderers* this way. Somehow, we manage to think of them as people first, who just happened to do something bad. But the same respect is rarely afforded to Black folks. We must always earn the right to live. Perfection is demanded of Blackness before mercy or grace or justice can even be considered. I refuse to live this way. (146)

All those years ago, I learned in church that Jesus understood the poor. Because of Dalin, I realized that Jesus also understood the accused, the incarcerated, the criminals. Jesus was accused. Jesus was incarcerated. Jesus hung on a cross with his crime listed above his crown of thorns. It doesn't bring Dalin back. But it matters to me that my God knows what Dalin's body endured. Suddenly racial justice and reconciliation wasn't limited to Black and white church members; it became a living framework for understanding God's work in the world. (147)

12. We're Still Here

I am grateful for my ancestors' struggle and their survival. But I am not impressed with America's progress. (151)

Many call it progress, but I do not consider it praiseworthy that only within the last generation did America reach the baseline for human decency. (151)

For all their talk about being persecuted, white Christian Americans don't know this kind of terror. Generations of Black Americans have known nothing but this kind of terror. (156)

13. Justice, Then Reconciliation

In its true form, reconciliation possesses the impossible power of the lion lying down with the lamb; the transformative power of turning swords into plowshares. But instead of pushing for relationships that are deep, transformative, and just—instead of allowing these efforts to alter our worldview, deepen our sense of connectedness, and inspire us toward generosity (166) that seeks to make all things right—we have allowed *reconciliation* to become synonymous with *contentedly hanging out together*. (167)

Reconciliation chooses sides, and the side is always justice. | This is why white American churches remain so far from experiencing anything resembling reconciliation. The white Church considers power its birthright rather than its curse. (167)

...when they're not paired with greater change, diversity efforts can have the opposite of their intended effect. They keep the church feeling good, innocent, maybe even progressive, all the while preserving the roots of injustice. (168)

...dialogue is productive toward reconciliation only when it leads to action—when it inverts power and pursues justice for those who are most marginalized. (169)

In too many churches and organizations, listening to the hurt and pain of people of color is the end of the road, rather than the beginning. (170)

When white people stop short of reconciliation, it's often because they are motivated by a deep need to believe in their own goodness, and for that goodness to be affirmed over and over and over again. (171)

Reconciliation is the pursuit of the impossible—an upside-down world where those who are powerful have relinquished that power to the margins. (171)

Reconciliation requires imagination. (172)

Reconciliation is what Jesus does. When sin and brokenness and evil tore us from God, it was Jesus who reconciled us, whose body imagined a different relationship, who took upon himself the cross and became peace. (172)

Fortunately, Jesus doesn't need all white people to get onboard before justice and reconciliation can be achieved. For me, this is freedom. Freedom to tell the truth. Freedom to create. Freedom to teach and write without burdening myself with the expectation that I can change anyone. It has also shifted my focus. Rather than making white people's reactions the linchpin that holds racial justice together, I am free to link arms with those who are already being transformed. (173)

14. Standing in the Shadow of Hope

More often than not, my experience has been that whiteness sees love as a prize it is owed, rather than a moral obligation it must demonstrate. Love, for whiteness, dissolves into a demand for grace, for niceness, for endless patience—to keep everyone feeling comfortable while hearts are being changed. In this way, so-called love dodges any (175) responsibility for action and waits for the great catalytic moment that finally spurs accountability.

I need a love that is troubled by injustice. A love that is provoked to anger when Black folks, including our children, lie dead in the streets. A love that can no longer be concerned with tone because it is concerned with life. A love that has no tolerance for hate, no excuses for racist decisions, no contentment in the status quo. I need a love that is fierce in its resilience and sacrifice. I need a love that chooses justice. (176)

The persistence of racism in America—individual and societal—is altogether overwhelming. It doesn't lay the best fertilizer for hope to grow. (178)

Each death of hope has been painful and costly. But in the mourning there always rises a new clarity about the world, about the Church, about myself, about God. | And in this there is new life. Realignment. Rediscovery. | And on the really good days: renewal. (179)

...instead of waiting for the bright sunshine, I have learned to rest in the shadow of hope. (179)

White Fragility

by
Robin DiAngelo

White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. This insulated environment of racial protection builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what I refer to as White Fragility. White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. This paper explicates the dynamics of White Fragility.

I am a white woman. I am standing beside a black woman. We are facing a group of white people who are seated in front of us. We are in their workplace, and have been hired by their employer to lead them in a dialogue about race. The room is filled with tension and charged with hostility. I have just presented a definition of racism that includes the acknowledgment that whites hold social and institutional power over people of color. A white man is pounding his fist on the table. His face is red and he is furious. As he pounds he yells, "White people have been discriminated against for 25 years! A white person can't get a job anymore!" I look around the room and see 40 employed people, all white. There are no people

International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, Vol 3 (3) (2011) pp 54-70

of color in this workplace. Something is happening here, and it isn't based in the racial reality of the workplace. I am feeling unnerved by this man's disconnection with that reality, and his lack of sensitivity to the impact this is having on my co-facilitator, the only person of color in the room. Why is this white man so angry? Why is he being so careless about the impact of his anger? Why are all the other white people either sitting in silent agreement with him or tuning out? We have, after all, only articulated a definition of racism.

White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress.¹ Fine (1997) identifies this insulation when she observes "... how Whiteness accrues privilege and status; gets itself surrounded by protective pillows of resources and/or benefits of the doubt; how Whiteness repels gossip and voyeurism and instead demands dignity" (p. 57). Whites are rarely without these "protective pillows," and when they are, it is usually temporary and by choice. This insulated environment of racial privilege builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress.

For many white people, a single required multicultural education course taken in college, or required "cultural competency training" in their workplace, is the only time they may encounter a direct and sustained challenge to their racial understandings. But even in this arena, not all multicultural courses or training programs talk directly about racism, much less address white privilege. It is far more the norm for these courses and programs to use racially coded language such as "urban," "inner city," and "disadvantaged" but to rarely use "white" or "over-advantaged" or "privileged." This racially coded language reproduces racist images and perspectives while it simultaneously reproduces the comfortable illusion that race and its problems are what "they" have, not us. Reasons why the facilitators of these courses and trainings may not directly name the dynamics and beneficiaries of racism range from the lack of a valid analysis of racism by white facilitators, personal and economic survival strategies for facilitators of color, and the overall pressure from management to keep the content comfortable and palatable for whites. However, if and when an educational program does directly address racism and the privileging of whites, common white responses include anger, withdrawal, emotional incapacitation, guilt, argumentation, and cognitive dissonance (all of which reinforce the pressure on facilitators to avoid directly addressing racism). So-called progressive whites may not respond with anger, but may still insulate themselves via claims that they are beyond the need for engaging with the content because they "already had a class on this" or "already know this." These reactions are often seen in anti-racist education endeavors as

1. Although white racial insulation is somewhat mediated by social class (with poor and working class urban whites being generally less racially insulated than suburban or rural whites), the larger social environment insulates and protects whites as a group through institutions, cultural representations, media, school textbooks, movies, advertising, dominant discourses, etc.

forms of resistance to the challenge of internalized dominance (Whitehead & Wittig, 2005; Horton & Scott, 2004; McGowan, 2000, O'Donnell, 1998). These reactions do indeed function as resistance, but it may be useful to also conceptualize them as the result of the reduced psychosocial stamina that racial insulation inculcates. I call this lack of racial stamina "White Fragility."

Although mainstream definitions of racism are typically some variation of individual "race prejudice", which anyone of any race can have, Whiteness scholars define racism as encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources and power between white people and people of color (Hilliard, 1992). This unequal distribution benefits whites and disadvantages people of color overall and as a group. Racism is not fluid in the U.S.; it does not flow back and forth, one day benefiting whites and another day (or even era) benefiting people of color. The direction of power between whites and people of color is historic, traditional, normalized, and deeply embedded in the fabric of U.S. society (Mills, 1999; Feagin, 2006). Whiteness itself refers to the specific dimensions of racism that serve to elevate white people over people of color. This definition counters the dominant representation of racism in mainstream education as isolated in discrete behaviors that some individuals may or may not demonstrate, and goes beyond naming specific privileges (McIntosh, 1988). Whites are theorized as actively shaped, affected, defined, and elevated through their racialization and the individual and collective consciousness' formed within it (Frankenberg, 1997; Morrison, 1992; Tatum, 1997). Recognizing that the terms I am using are not "theory neutral 'descriptors' but theory-laden constructs inseparable from systems of injustice" (Allen, 1996, p.95), I use the terms white and Whiteness to describe a social process. Frankenberg (1993) defines Whiteness as multi-dimensional:

Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'Whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p.1)

Frankenberg and other theorists (Fine, 1997; Dyer, 1997; Sleeter, 1993; Van Dijk, 1993) use Whiteness to signify a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically and culturally produced, and which are intrinsically linked to dynamic relations of domination. Whiteness is thus conceptualized as a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a discrete entity (i.e. skin color alone). Whiteness is dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on myriad levels. These processes and practices include basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white people. Whiteness Studies begin with the premise that racism and white privilege exist in both traditional and modern forms, and rather than work to prove its existence, work to reveal it. This article

will explore the dynamics of one aspect of Whiteness and its effects, White Fragility.

Triggers

White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. Racial stress results from an interruption to what is racially familiar. These interruptions can take a variety of forms and come from a range of sources, including:

- Suggesting that a white person's viewpoint comes from a racialized frame of reference (challenge to objectivity);
- People of color talking directly about their racial perspectives (challenge to white racial codes);
- People of color choosing not to protect the racial feelings of white people in regards to race (challenge to white racial expectations and need/entitlement to racial comfort);
- People of color not being willing to tell their stories or answer questions about their racial experiences (challenge to colonialist relations);
- A fellow white not providing agreement with one's interpretations (challenge to white solidarity);
- Receiving feedback that one's behavior had a racist impact (challenge to white liberalism);
- Suggesting that group membership is significant (challenge to individualism);
- An acknowledgment that access is unequal between racial groups (challenge to meritocracy);
- Being presented with a person of color in a position of leadership (challenge to white authority);
- Being presented with information about other racial groups through, for example, movies in which people of color drive the action but are not in stereotypical roles, or multicultural education (challenge to white centrality).

In a white dominant environment, each of these challenges becomes exceptional. In turn, whites are often at a loss for how to respond in constructive ways. Whites have not had to build the cognitive or affective skills or develop the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement across racial divides. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (1993) may be useful here. According to Bourdieu, *habitus* is a socialized subjectivity; a set of dispositions which generate practi-

ces and perceptions. As such, habitus only exists in, through and because of the practices of actors and their interaction with each other and with the rest of their environment. Based on the previous conditions and experiences that produce it, habitus produces and reproduces thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions. Strategies of response to “disequilibrium” in the habitus are not based on conscious intentionality but rather result from unconscious dispositions towards practice, and depend on the power position the agent occupies in the social structure. White Fragility may be conceptualized as a product of the habitus, a response or “condition” produced and reproduced by the continual social and material advantages of the white structural position.

Omi & Winant posit the U.S. racial order as an “unstable equilibrium,” kept equilibrated by the State, but still unstable due to continual conflicts of interests and challenges to the racial order (pp. 78-9). Using Omi & Winant’s concept of unstable racial equilibrium, white privilege can be thought of as unstable racial equilibrium at the level of habitus. When any of the above triggers (challenges in the habitus) occur, the resulting disequilibrium becomes intolerable. Because White Fragility finds its support in and is a function of white privilege, fragility and privilege result in responses that function to restore equilibrium and return the resources “lost” via the challenge - resistance towards the trigger, shutting down and/or tuning out, indulgence in emotional incapacitation such as guilt or “hurt feelings”, exiting, or a combination of these responses.

Factors that inculcate White Fragility

Segregation

The first factor leading to White Fragility is the segregated lives which most white people live (Frankenberg, Lee & Orfield, 2003). Even if whites live in physical proximity to people of color (and this would be exceptional outside of an urban or temporarily mixed class neighborhood), segregation occurs on multiple levels, including representational and informational. Because whites live primarily segregated lives in a white-dominated society, they receive little or no authentic information about racism and are thus unprepared to think about it critically or with complexity. Growing up in segregated environments (schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, media images and historical perspectives), white interests and perspectives are almost always central. An inability to see or consider significance in the perspectives of people of color results (Collins, 2000).

Further, white people are taught not to feel any loss over the absence of people of color in their lives and in fact, this absence is what defines their schools and neighborhoods as “good;” whites come to understand that a “good school” or “good neighborhood” is coded language for “white” (Johnson & Shapiro, 2003). The quality of white space being in large part measured via the absence of people of color (and Blacks in particular) is a profound message indeed, one that is deeply internalized and reinforced daily through normalized discourses about good

schools and neighborhoods. This dynamic of gain rather than loss via racial segregation may be the most profound aspect of white racial socialization of all. Yet, while discourses about what makes a space good are tacitly understood as racially coded, this coding is explicitly denied by whites.

Universalism & Individualism

Whites are taught to see their perspectives as objective and representative of reality (McIntosh, 1988). The belief in objectivity, coupled with positioning white people as outside of culture (and thus the norm for humanity), allows whites to view themselves as universal humans who can represent all of human experience. This is evidenced through an unracialized identity or location, which functions as a kind of blindness; an inability to think about Whiteness as an identity or as a “state” of being that would or could have an impact on one’s life. In this position, Whiteness is not recognized or named by white people, and a universal reference point is assumed. White people are just people. Within this construction, whites can represent humanity, while people of color, who are never just people but always most particularly black people, Asian people, etc., can only represent their own racialized experiences (Dyer, 1992).

The discourse of universalism functions similarly to the discourse of individualism but instead of declaring that we all need to see each other as individuals (everyone is different), the person declares that we all need to see each other as human beings (everyone is the same). Of course we are all humans, and I do not critique universalism in general, but when applied to racism, universalism functions to deny the significance of race and the advantages of being white. Further, universalism assumes that whites and people of color have the same realities, the same experiences in the same contexts (i.e. I feel comfortable in this majority white classroom, so you must too), the same responses from others, and assumes that the same doors are open to all. Acknowledging racism as a system of privilege conferred on whites challenges claims to universalism.

At the same time that whites are taught to see their interests and perspectives as universal, they are also taught to value the individual and to see themselves as individuals rather than as part of a racially socialized group. Individualism erases history and hides the ways in which wealth has been distributed and accumulated over generations to benefit whites today. It allows whites to view themselves as unique and original, outside of socialization and unaffected by the relentless racial messages in the culture. Individualism also allows whites to distance themselves from the actions of their racial group and demand to be granted the benefit of the doubt, as individuals, in all cases. A corollary to this unracialized identity is the ability to recognize Whiteness as something that is significant and that operates in society, but to not see how it relates to one’s own life. In this form, a white person recognizes Whiteness as real, but as the individual problem of other “bad” white people (DiAngelo, 2010a).

Given the ideology of individualism, whites often respond defensively when linked to other whites as a group or “accused” of collectively benefiting from racism, because as individuals, each white person is “different” from any other white person and expects to be seen as such. This narcissism is not necessarily the result of a consciously held belief that whites are superior to others (although that may play a role), but a result of the white racial insulation ubiquitous in dominant culture (Dawkins, 2004; Frankenberg, Lee & Orfield, 2003); a general white inability to see non-white perspectives as significant, except in sporadic and impotent reflexes, which have little or no long-term momentum or political usefulness (Rich, 1979).

Whites invoke these seemingly contradictory discourses—we are either all unique or we are all the same—interchangeably. Both discourses work to deny white privilege and the significance of race. Further, on the cultural level, being an individual or being a human outside of a racial group is a privilege only afforded to white people. In other words, people of color are almost always seen as “having a race” and described in racial terms (“the black man”) but whites rarely are (“the man”), allowing whites to see themselves as objective and non-racialized. In turn, being seen (and seeing ourselves) as individuals outside of race frees whites from the psychic burden of race in a wholly racialized society. Race and racism become their problems, not ours. Challenging these frameworks becomes a kind of unwelcome shock to the system.

The disavowal of race as an organizing factor, both of individual white consciousness and the institutions of society at large, is necessary to support current structures of capitalism and domination, for without it, the correlation between the distribution of social resources and unearned white privilege would be evident (Flax, 1998). The existence of structural inequality undermines the claim that privilege is simply a reflection of hard work and virtue. Therefore, inequality must be hidden or justified as resulting from lack of effort (Mills, 1997; Ryan, 2001). Individualism accomplishes both of these tasks. At the same time, the individual presented as outside these relations cannot exist without its disavowed other. Thus, an essential dichotomy is formed between specifically raced others and the unracialized individual. Whites have deep investments in race, for the abstract depends on the particular (Flax, 1998); they need raced others as the backdrop against which they may rise (Morrison, 1992). Exposing this dichotomy destabilizes white identity.

Entitlement to racial comfort

In the dominant position, whites are almost always racially comfortable and thus have developed unchallenged expectations to remain so (DiAngelo, 2006b). Whites have not had to build tolerance for racial discomfort and thus when racial discomfort arises, whites typically respond as if something is “wrong,” and blame the person or event that triggered the discomfort (usually a person of color).

This blame results in a socially-sanctioned array of counter-moves against the perceived source of the discomfort, including: penalization; retaliation; isolation; ostracization; and refusal to continue engagement. White insistence on racial comfort ensures that racism will not be faced. This insistence also functions to punish those who break white codes of comfort. Whites often confuse comfort with safety and state that we don't feel safe when what we really mean is that we don't feel comfortable. This trivializes our history of brutality towards people of color and perverts the reality of that history. Because we don't think complexly about racism, we don't ask ourselves what safety means from a position of societal dominance, or the impact on people of color, given our history, for whites to complain about our safety when we are merely *talking* about racism.

Racial Arrogance

Ideological racism includes strongly positive images of the white self as well as strongly negative images of racial "others" (Feagin, 2000, p. 33). This self-image engenders a self-perpetuating sense of entitlement because many whites believe their financial and professional successes are the result of their own efforts while ignoring the fact of white privilege. Because most whites have not been trained to think complexly about racism in schools (Derman-Sparks, Ramsey & Olsen Edwards, 2006; Sleeter, 1993) or mainstream discourse, and because it benefits white dominance not to do so, we have a very limited understanding of racism. Yet dominance leads to racial arrogance, and in this racial arrogance, whites have no compunction about debating the knowledge of people who have thought complexly about race. Whites generally feel free to dismiss these informed perspectives rather than have the humility to acknowledge that they are unfamiliar, reflect on them further, or seek more information. This intelligence and expertise are often trivialized and countered with simplistic platitudes (i.e. "People just need to...").

Because of white social, economic and political power within a white dominant culture, whites are positioned to legitimize people of color's assertions of racism. Yet whites are the least likely to see, understand, or be invested in validating those assertions and being honest about their consequences, which leads whites to claim that they disagree with perspectives that challenge their worldview, when in fact, they don't understand the perspective. Thus, they confuse not understanding with not agreeing. This racial arrogance, coupled with the need for racial comfort, also has whites insisting that people of color explain white racism in the "right" way. The right way is generally politely and rationally, without any show of emotional upset. When explained in a way that white people can see and understand, racism's validity may be granted (references to dynamics of racism that white people do not understand are usually rejected out of hand). However, whites are usually more receptive to validating white racism if that racism is constructed as residing in individual white people other than themselves.

Racial Belonging

White people enjoy a deeply internalized, largely unconscious sense of racial belonging in U.S. society (DiAngelo, 2006b; McIntosh, 1988). This racial belonging is instilled via the whiteness embedded in the culture at large. Everywhere we look, we see our own racial image reflected back to us – in our heroes and heroines, in standards of beauty, in our role-models and teachers, in our textbooks and historical memory, in the media, in religious iconography including the image of god himself, etc. In virtually any situation or image deemed valuable in dominant society, whites belong. Indeed, it is rare for most whites to experience a sense of not belonging, and such experiences are usually very temporary, easily avoidable situations. Racial belonging becomes deeply internalized and taken for granted. In dominant society, interruption of racial belonging is rare and thus destabilizing and frightening to whites.

Whites consistently choose and enjoy racial segregation. Living, working, and playing in racial segregation is unremarkable as long as it is not named or made explicitly intentional. For example, in many anti-racist endeavors, a common exercise is to separate into caucus groups by race in order to discuss issues specific to your racial group, and without the pressure or stress of other groups' presence. Generally, people of color appreciate this opportunity for racial fellowship, but white people typically become very uncomfortable, agitated and upset - even though this temporary separation is in the service of addressing racism. Responses include a disorienting sense of themselves as not just people, but most particularly white people; a curious sense of loss about this contrived and temporary separation which they don't feel about the real and on-going segregation in their daily lives; and anxiety about not knowing what is going on in the groups of color. The irony, again, is that most whites live in racial segregation every day, and in fact, are the group most likely to intentionally choose that segregation (albeit obscured in racially coded language such as seeking "good schools" and "good neighborhoods"). This segregation is unremarkable until it is named as deliberate – i.e. "We are now going to separate by race for a short exercise." I posit that it is the intentionality that is so disquieting – as long as we don't mean to separate, as long as it "just happens" that we live segregated lives, we can maintain a (fragile) identity of racial innocence.

Psychic freedom

Because race is constructed as residing in people of color, whites don't bear the social burden of race. We move easily through our society without a sense of ourselves as racialized subjects (Dyer, 1997). We see race as operating when people of color are present, but all-white spaces as "pure" spaces – untainted by race *vis á vis* the absence of the carriers of race (and thereby the racial polluters) – people of color. This perspective is perfectly captured in a familiar white statement, "I was lucky. I grew up in an all-white neighborhood so I didn't learn anything about ra-

cism.” In this discursive move, whiteness gains its meaning through its purported lack of encounter with non-whiteness (Nakayama & Martin, 1999). Because racial segregation is deemed socially valuable while simultaneously unracial and unremarkable, we rarely, if ever, have to think about race and racism, and receive no penalty for not thinking about it. In fact, whites are more likely to be penalized (primarily by other whites) for bringing race up in a social justice context than for ignoring it (however, it is acceptable to bring race up indirectly and in ways that reinforce racist attitudes, i.e. warning other whites to stay away from certain neighborhoods, etc.). This frees whites from carrying the psychic burden of race. Race is for people of color to think about – it is what happens to “them” – they can bring it up if it is an issue for them (although if they do, we can dismiss it as a personal problem, the “race card”, or the reason for their problems). This allows whites to devote much more psychological energy to other issues, and prevents us from developing the stamina to sustain attention on an issue as charged and uncomfortable as race.

Constant messages that we are more valuable – through representation in everything

Living in a white dominant context, we receive constant messages that we are better and more important than people of color. These messages operate on multiple levels and are conveyed in a range of ways. For example: our centrality in history textbooks, historical representations and perspectives; our centrality in media and advertising (for example, a recent Vogue magazine cover boldly stated, “The World’s Next Top Models” and every woman on the front cover was white); our teachers, role-models, heroes and heroines; everyday discourse on “good” neighborhoods and schools and who is in them; popular TV shows centered around friendship circles that are all white; religious iconography that depicts god, Adam and Eve, and other key figures as white, commentary on new stories about how shocking any crime is that occurs in white suburbs; and, the lack of a sense of loss about the absence of people of color in most white people’s lives. While one may explicitly reject the notion that one is inherently better than another, one cannot avoid internalizing the message of white superiority, as it is ubiquitous in mainstream culture (Tatum, 1997; Doane, 1997).

What does White Fragility look like?

A large body of research about children and race demonstrates that children start to construct ideas about race very early; a sense of white superiority and knowledge of racial power codes appears to develop as early as pre-school (Clark, 1963; Derman-Sparks, Ramsey, & Olsen Edwards, 2006). Marty (1999) states,

As in other Western nations, white children born in the United States inherit the moral predicament of living in a white supremacist society. Raised to experience

their racially based advantages as fair and normal, white children receive little if any instruction regarding the predicament they face, let alone any guidance in how to resolve it. Therefore, they experience or learn about racial tension without understanding Euro-Americans' historical responsibility for it and knowing virtually nothing about their contemporary roles in perpetuating it (p. 51).

At the same time that it is ubiquitous, white superiority also remains unnamed and explicitly denied by most whites. If white children become adults who explicitly oppose racism, as do many, they often organize their identity around a denial of the racially based privileges they hold that reinforce racist disadvantage for others. What is particularly problematic about this contradiction is that white moral objection to racism increases white resistance to acknowledging complicity with it. In a white supremacist context, white identity in large part rests upon a foundation of (superficial) racial toleration and acceptance. Whites who position themselves as liberal often opt to protect what they perceive as their moral reputations, rather than recognize or change their participation in systems of inequity and domination. In so responding, whites invoke the power to choose when, how, and how much to address or challenge racism. Thus, pointing out white advantage will often trigger patterns of confusion, defensiveness and righteous indignation. When confronted with a challenge to white racial codes, many white liberals use the speech of self-defense (Van Dijk, 1992). This discourse enables defenders to protect their moral character against what they perceive as accusation and attack while deflecting any recognition of culpability or need of accountability. Focusing on restoring their moral standing through these tactics, whites are able to avoid the question of white privilege (Marty, 1999, Van Dijk, 1992).

Those who lead whites in discussions of race may find the discourse of self-defense familiar. Via this discourse, whites position themselves as victimized, slammed, blamed, attacked, and being used as "punching bag[s]" (DiAngelo, 2006c). Whites who describe interactions in this way are responding to the articulation of counter narratives; nothing physically out of the ordinary has ever occurred in any inter-racial discussion that I am aware of. These self-defense claims work on multiple levels to: position the speakers as morally superior while obscuring the true power of their social locations; blame others with less social power for their discomfort; falsely position that discomfort as dangerous; and reinscribe racist imagery. This discourse of victimization also enables whites to avoid responsibility for the racial power and privilege they wield. By positioning themselves as victims of anti-racist efforts, they cannot be the beneficiaries of white privilege. Claiming that *they* have been treated unfairly via a challenge to their position or an expectation that they listen to the perspectives and experiences of people of color, they are able to demand that more social resources (such as time and attention) be channeled in their direction to help them cope with this mistreatment.

A cogent example of White Fragility occurred recently during a workplace anti-racism training I co-facilitated with an inter-racial team. One of the white

participants left the session and went back to her desk, upset at receiving (what appeared to the training team as) sensitive and diplomatic feedback on how some of her statements had impacted several people of color in the room. At break, several other white participants approached us (the trainers) and reported that they had talked to the woman at her desk, and she was very upset that her statements had been challenged. They wanted to alert us to the fact that she literally “might be having a heart-attack.” Upon questioning from us, they clarified that they meant this *literally*. These co-workers were sincere in their fear that the young woman might actually physically die as a result of the feedback. Of course, when news of the woman’s potentially fatal condition reached the rest of the participant group, all attention was immediately focused back onto her and away from the impact she had had on the people of color. As Vodde (2001) states, “If privilege is defined as a legitimization of one’s entitlement to resources, it can also be defined as permission to escape or avoid any challenges to this entitlement” (p. 3).

The language of violence that many whites use to describe anti-racist endeavors is not without significance, as it is another example of the way that White Fragility distorts and perverts reality. By employing terms that connote physical abuse, whites tap into the classic discourse of people of color (particularly African Americans) as dangerous and violent. This discourse perverts the actual direction of danger that exists between whites and others. The history of brutal, extensive, institutionalized and ongoing violence perpetrated by whites against people of color—slavery, genocide, lynching, whipping, forced sterilization and medical experimentation to mention a few—becomes profoundly trivialized when whites claim they don’t feel safe or are under attack when in the rare situation of merely talking about race with people of color. The use of this discourse illustrates how fragile and ill-equipped most white people are to confront racial tensions, and their subsequent projection of this tension onto people of color (Morrison, 1992). Goldberg (1993) argues that the questions surrounding racial discourse should not focus so much on how true stereotypes are, but how the truth claims they offer are a part of a larger worldview that authorizes and normalizes forms of domination and control. Further, it is relevant to ask: Under what conditions are those truth-claims clung to most tenaciously?

Bonilla-Silva (2006) documents a manifestation of White Fragility in his study of color-blind white racism. He states, “Because the new racial climate in America forbids the open expression of racially based feelings, views, and positions, when whites discuss issues that make them uncomfortable, they become almost incomprehensible – I, I, I, I don’t mean, you know, but...-” (p. 68). Probing forbidden racial issues results in verbal incoherence - digressions, long pauses, repetition, and self-corrections. He suggests that this incoherent talk is a function of talking about race in a world that insists race does not matter. This incoherence is one demonstration that many white people are unprepared to engage, even on a preliminary level, in an exploration of their racial perspectives that could lead to a shift in their understanding of racism. This lack of preparedness results in the

maintenance of white power because the ability to determine which narratives are authorized and which are suppressed is the foundation of cultural domination (Banks, 1996; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1990). Further, this lack of preparedness has further implications, for if whites cannot engage with an exploration of alternate racial perspectives, they can only reinscribe white perspectives as universal.

However, an assertion that whites do not engage with dynamics of racial discourse is somewhat misleading. White people do notice the racial locations of racial others and discuss this freely among themselves, albeit often in coded ways. Their refusal to directly acknowledge this race talk results in a kind of split consciousness that leads to the incoherence Bonilla-Silva documents above (Feagin, 2000; Flax, 1998; hooks, 1992; Morrison, 1992). This denial also guarantees that the racial misinformation that circulates in the culture and frames their perspectives will be left unexamined. The continual retreat from the discomfort of authentic racial engagement in a culture infused with racial disparity limits the ability to form authentic connections across racial lines, and results in a perpetual cycle that works to hold racism in place.

Conclusion

White people often believe that multicultural / anti-racist education is only necessary for those who interact with “minorities” or in “diverse” environments. However, the dynamics discussed here suggest that it is critical that all white people build the stamina to sustain conscious and explicit engagement with race. When whites posit race as non-operative because there are few, if any, people of color in their immediate environments, Whiteness is reinscribed ever more deeply (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). When whites only notice “raced others,” we reinscribe Whiteness by continuing to posit Whiteness as universal and non-Whiteness as other. Further, if we can’t listen to or comprehend the perspectives of people of color, we cannot bridge cross-racial divides. A continual retreat from the discomfort of authentic racial engagement results in a perpetual cycle that works to hold racism in place.

While anti-racist efforts ultimately seek to transform institutionalized racism, anti-racist education may be most effective by starting at the micro level. The goal is to generate the development of perspectives and skills that enable all people, regardless of racial location, to be active initiators of change. Since all individuals who live within a racist system are enmeshed in its relations, this means that all are responsible for either perpetuating or transforming that system. However, although all individuals play a role in keeping the system active, the responsibility for change is not equally shared. White racism is ultimately a white problem and the burden for interrupting it belongs to white people (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; hooks, 1995; Wise, 2003). Conversations about Whiteness might best happen within the context of a larger conversation about racism. It is useful to start at the micro level of analysis, and move to the macro, from the individual out to the

interpersonal, societal and institutional. Starting with the individual and moving outward to the ultimate framework for racism – Whiteness – allows for the pacing that is necessary for many white people for approaching the challenging study of race. In this way, a discourse on Whiteness becomes part of a process rather than an event (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002).

Many white people have never been given direct or complex information about racism before, and often cannot explicitly see, feel, or understand it (Trepagnier, 2006; Weber, 2001). People of color are generally much more aware of racism on a personal level, but due to the wider society's silence and denial of it, often do not have a macro-level framework from which to analyze their experiences (Sue, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Further, dominant society "assigns" different roles to different groups of color (Smith, 2005), and a critical consciousness about racism varies not only between individuals within groups, but also between groups. For example, many African Americans relate having been "prepared" by parents to live in a racist society, while many Asian heritage people say that racism was never directly discussed in their homes (hooks, 1989; Lee, 1996). A macro-level analysis may offer a framework to understand different interpretations and performances across and between racial groups. In this way, all parties benefit and efforts are not solely focused on whites (which works to re-center Whiteness).

Talking directly about white power and privilege, in addition to providing much needed information and shared definitions, is also in itself a powerful interruption of common (and oppressive) discursive patterns around race. At the same time, white people often need to reflect upon racial information and be allowed to make connections between the information and their own lives. Educators can encourage and support white participants in making their engagement a point of analysis. White Fragility doesn't always manifest in overt ways; silence and withdrawal are also functions of fragility. Who speaks, who doesn't speak, when, for how long, and with what emotional valence are all keys to understanding the relational patterns that hold oppression in place (Gee, 1999; Powell, 1997). Viewing white anger, defensiveness, silence, and withdrawal in response to issues of race through the framework of White Fragility may help frame the problem as an issue of stamina-building, and thereby guide our interventions accordingly.

References

- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). (1994). *Teacher education pipeline: Schools, colleges, and departments of education*. Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.
- Allen, D. (1996). Knowledge, politics, culture, and gender: A discourse perspective. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 28(1), 95-102.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States* (2nd ed). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Casey J. Dawkins. (2004). Recent Evidence on the Continuing Causes of Black-White Residential Segregation. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 26(3), 379-400.
- Clark, K.B. (1963). *Prejudice and your child*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Derman-Sparks, L., & Phillips, C. (1997). *Teaching/learning anti-racism: A developmental approach*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Derman-Sparks, L., Ramsey, P. & Olsen Edwards, J. (2006). *What If All the Kids Are White?: Anti-bias Multicultural Education With Young Children And Families*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- DiAngelo, Robin J. (2010a). Why Can't We All Just Be Individuals?: Countering the Discourse of Individualism in Anti-racist Education. *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 6(1) . Retrieved from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5fm4h8wm>
- DiAngelo, R. (2006b). My race didn't trump my class: Using oppression to face privilege. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 8(1), 51-56.
- DiAngelo, R. (2006c). "I'm leaving!": White fragility in racial dialogue. In B. McMahon & D. Armstrong (Eds.), *Inclusion in Urban Educational Environments: Addressing Issues of Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice* (pp. 213-240). Centre for Leadership and Diversity. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.
- Doane, A.W. (1997). White identity and race relations in the 1990s. In Carter, G.L. (Ed), *Perspectives on Current Social Problems*, edited by (pp. 151-159). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Dyer, R. (1997). *White*. New York: Routledge.
- Feagin, J. R. (2006). *Systematic Racism: A theory of oppression*. New York: Routledge.
- Fine, M. (1997). Witnessing Whiteness. In M. Fine, L. Weis, C. Powell, & L. Wong, (Eds.), *Off White: Readings on race, power, and society* (pp. 57-65). New York: Routledge.
- Fine, M. (1997). Introduction. In M. Fine, L. Weis, C. Powell & L. Wong (Eds.), *Off White: Readings on race, power and society* (p. vii-xii). New York: Routledge.
- Flax, J. (1998). *American dream in Black and White: The Clarence Thomas hearings*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Frankenberg, E., Lee, C. & Orfield, G. (2003). A multiracial society with segregated schools: Are we losing the dream? *The Civil Rights Project*. Retrieved from http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/reseg03/reseg03_full.php.
- Frankenberg, R. (1997). Introduction: Local Whitenesses, localizing Whiteness. In R. Frankenberg (Ed.), *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in social and cultural criticism* (pp. 1-33.). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Frankenberg, R. (1993). *The social construction of Whiteness: White women, race matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Frakenberg, R. (2001). Mirage of an unmarked Whiteness. In B. Rasmussen, E. Klinerberg, I. Nexica, M. Wray (Ed.), *The making and unmaking of Whiteness* (pp. 72-96). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Gee, J.P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. London: Routledge.
- Goldberg, D.T. (1993). *Racist culture*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Hilliard, A. (1992). Racism: Its origins and how it works. Paper presented at the meeting of the Mid-West Association for the Education of Young Children, Madison, WI.
- hooks, b. (1995). *Killing rage*. New York: Henry Holt & Company.
- hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Horton, J. & Scott, D. (2004). White students' voices in multicultural teacher education preparation. *Multicultural Education*, 11(4) Retrieved from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3935/is_200407/ai_n9414143/

- Johnson, H.B. & Shapiro, T.M. (2003). Good Neighborhoods, Good Schools: Race and the “Good Choices” of White Families. In Doane, A.W & Bonilla-Silva, E. (Eds). *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism* (pp. 173-187). New York: Routledge.
- Lee, T. (1996). *Unraveling the “model-minority” stereotype: Listening to Asian-American youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Macedo, D., & Bartolome, L. (1999). *Dancing with bigotry: Beyond the politics of tolerance*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.
- McGowan, J. (2000). Multicultural teaching: African-American faculty classroom teaching experiences in predominantly White colleges and universities. *Multicultural Education*, 8(2), 19-22.
- McIntosh, P. (1988). White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondence through work in women’s studies. In M. Anderson, & P. Hill Collins (Eds.), *Race, class, and gender: An anthology* (pp. 94-105). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Mills, C. (1999). *The racial contract*. NY: Cornell University Press.
- Morrison, T. (1992). *Playing in the dark*. New York: Random House.
- Nagda, B., Zuniga, X., & Sevig, T. (2002). Bridging differences through peer facilitated intergroup dialogues. In S. Hatcher (Ed.), *Peer programs on a college campus: Theory, training, and the voices of the peers* (pp. 25-41). San Diego, CA: New Resources.
- Nakayama, T., & Martin, J. (1999). *Whiteness: The communication of social identity*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage.
- O’Donnell, J. (1998). Engaging students’ recognition of racial identity. In Chavez, R.C. & O’Donnell, J. (Eds.), *Speaking the unpleasant: the politics of (non) engagement in the multicultural education terrain* (pp. 56-68). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Omi, M. & Winant, H. (1986). *Racial Formtion in the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- Powell, L. (1997). The achievement (k)not: Whiteness and ‘Black Underachievement’. In M. Fine, L. Powell, C. Weis, & L. Wong (Eds.), *Off White: Readings on race, power and society* (pp. 3 -12). New York: Routledge.
- Sleeter, C. (1993). How White teachers construct race. In C. McCarthy & W. Crichlow (Eds.), *Race identity and representation in education* (pp.157-171). New York: Routledge.
- Sleeter, C. (1996). White silence, White solidarity. In N. Ignatiev, & J. Garvey (Eds.), *Race Traitors*. New York: Routledge.
- Smith, Andrea (2005). *Conquest: Sexual violence and American Indian genocide*. Cambridge, MA: Southend Press.
- Snyder, T. (1998). Digest of Education Statistics. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Department of Education.
- Tatum, B. (1997). *“Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? ”: And other conversations about race*. New York: Basic Books.
- Trepagnier, B. (2006). *Silent racism: How well-meaning white people perpetuate the racial divide*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse and Society*, 4(2), 249-283.
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1993). Analyzing racism through discourse analysis: Some methodological reflections. In J. H. Stanfield, & R. M. Dennis (Eds.), *Race and ethnicity in research method* (pp.92-134). London: Sage.
- Vodde, R. (2001). De-centering privilege in social work education: Whose job is it anyway? *Journal of Race, Gender and Class*, 7(4), 139-160

- Weber, L. (2001). *Understanding race, class, gender, and sexuality: A conceptual framework*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Wells, L. (1985). A group-as-a-whole perspective and its theoretical roots. In A. Coleman, & M. Geller (Eds.), *Group Relations Reader 2* (22-34). Washington, D.C.: A.K. Rice Institute.
- Whitehead, K.A. & Wittig, M.A. (2005). Discursive Management of Resistance to a Multicultural Education Programme. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 1(3), pp. 267-284.
- Wing Sue, D. (2003). *Overcoming our racism: The journey to liberation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wise, T. (2003). Whites swim in racial preference. Retrieved from <http://www.academic.udayton.edu/race/04needs/affirm20.htm>.
- Yamamoto, G. (2001). Something about this subject makes it hard to name. In M. Andersen, & P. H. Collins (Eds.), *Race, class and gender: An Anthology* (pp. 89-93). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Zúñiga, X., Nagda, B., & Sevig, T. (2002). Intergroup dialogues: An educational model for cultivating engagement across differences. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 6(1), 115-132.

Dear White Christians: Jennifer Harvey on Ferguson, Missouri

Eerdmans November 26, 2014

Christians are called to love our neighbor and welcome the stranger.

What do these biblical injunctions mean in a nation where a Black person, injured, alone, in need of urgent medical care after a brutal car accident cannot knock on a stranger's door seeking help without reasonable worry that he/she may end up killed instead? ([Jonathan Ferrell](#) and [Renisha McBride](#) both died this way one year ago.)

What does it mean for white Christians to proclaim a gospel of love while living in a country where African American men and women who encounter police for whatever reason are three times more likely to end up killed during that encounter than are white Americans who encounter police? (Though unarmed in 44% of these cases — [data from the FBI](#).)

The U.S.-American epidemic of violence against men and women of color is nothing new. Nor was the horrific killing of Michael Brown and the treatment of his slain body afterward in Ferguson, Missouri, unique.

What is unique in this moment is that the outpouring of rage, resistance, and righteous protest by men, women, and children in Ferguson has caught the attention of white U.S.-Americans — including white Christians. Outrage in Ferguson seems to be generating a new level of awareness among whites about the epidemic of violence against men and women of color and the epidemic rates at which their killers walk free.

But Ferguson raises many difficult questions for those who claim to follow Jesus. These questions are urgent. They won't go away any time soon. They also are so difficult we may find ourselves afraid or unwilling to ask them at all, let alone equipped with ready answers.

But ask them we must.

Dear White Christians,

What does it mean for white Christians to claim to love neighbor and stranger while our brothers and sisters of color daily live with the prospect of state-sanctioned violence — death — never far off?

What does it even mean to be “white” and “Christian” in this nation?

Ferguson's outrage is the kind that comes when a community is unsurprised by a killing like Brown's. It's the kind that comes when a community is oh-so-tired of the relentless predictability of it all.

It may surprise or frighten white U.S.-Americans, but the resistance happening right now is best understood as that of a community oppressed and subjugated for so long that it finally dares to insist this: that it *will* assert its rights, *declare* its very humanity even if and when the “appropriate channels” and “standard systems” of justice violently refuse to do so.

But Ferguson undeniably exposes something else that is critical for the church to recognize. It lays bare the truth about the depth and width of our racial alienation in this country.

Since the end of the civil rights era, we in the church have loved to lift up the vision and accomplishments of the civil rights movement, and talk about our Christian call as that of seeking racial “reconciliation.” We have continued to imagine ourselves as part of a “beloved community” — even when we've admitted we have yet to fully realize this vision.

Ferguson requires us to admit how inaccurate this narrative — how inadequate this vision — really is.

In contrast to the story we tell in church, in the late 1960s [Black Christians spoke](#) with increasing frequency, power, and righteous anger about the failures of civil rights. These Christians were clear not only that visions of beloved community

were still far from being realized, but that attempts to realize beloved community were not nearly enough to change the actual circumstances of the African American community.

Black Christians pointed to evidence that had become more and more pronounced as the 1960s progressed that white Christians, comfortable with reconciliation-talk, were far less willing to throw energy and efforts into transforming social structures that could actually address issues of poverty, employment, and police violence.

Black Christians made plain that white Christians were overly focused on abstract visions of reconciliation when they should be committing, instead, to repentance and repair. Concrete and material forms of repair were required to both demonstrate the authenticity of repentance and actually create *just* racial transformation.

We might think of this as Black Christians saying to whites by the end of the 1960s something along the lines of what Jesus said to Zacchaeus: “You want fellowship and reconciliation? Come down from the safety of your high perch. Admit the ways you have used this unjust system to your benefit and give back what is now due. Open up your home, yourself, and your future to radically different possibilities.”

As it turned out, white Christians would not tolerate this message. The more prophetic, theological, and Christian this Black Power analysis became, the more quickly white Christians — even those who had been allies in the civil rights movement — repudiated, rejected, and ran away.

And for the most part, we’ve never gone back.

Reconciliation has remained our mantra.

And Ferguson has exposed how inadequate it has been.

We may be in a *kairos* moment — a moment when *everything* changes. Ferguson makes clear how far from reconciled we are. This distance is, in large part, the result of white Christians having not (yet) truly taken up the work of repentance and repair.

But we can.

Those of us anxious, aching, grieving and distraught over what’s happening in Ferguson are not without guidance. Black Christians have told us over and over again what it must mean to be “white” and “Christian” in this nation. They have made plain what it might look like for white Christians to love neighbor and stranger.

Our job is to finally listen and to respond. White Christians are called by God, right now, to repentance and to the biblically-required work of repair that always accompanies it.



This is a painful moment. But it may also be a *kairos* moment. If we will only do our part. Jennifer Harvey is Associate Professor of Religion at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. Her newest book, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (in the *Prophetic Christianity Series*), has just been released from Eerdmans. She is a regular contributor to the *Huffington Post* and keeps her own blog at *formations. living at the intersections of self, social, spirit*.

**Jacob Thielman on Harvey's Dear White Christians:
"Something More Is Required of Us"**
Eerdmans January 8, 2015

“Not only through tacit approval and acquiescence has the Christian Church indirectly given its approval to lynch-law . . . , but the evangelical Christian denominations have done much towards creation of the particular fanaticism which finds its outlet in lynching.”

— Walter White, national secretary of the NAACP, 1929

When I was a student in the Chicagoland area, I once took a trip downtown to visit a daycare sponsored by a student organization of which I was a part. We played with kids of single parents, kids whose parents couldn't afford to send them to a paid daycare, kids who had nothing good to look forward to after school, kids with slim chances — all racial minorities. We didn't kid ourselves that we were providing much meaningful help, or about the education we were getting about ourselves in the process.

At least I didn't. But it was something, if barely.

As we left that night, a police cruiser pulled up beside our little band (which was made up entirely of white college kids) and asked what we were doing in this part of town after dark. There was a certain sneer in the officer's voice that I couldn't identify. We were exhorted to be careful and advised to go home. A friendly warning, I suppose.

Last fall, here in Grand Rapids, a young black man who goes to my church was stopped by a police officer in the neighborhood in which he lives. He was riding his bike. He was questioned vigorously and treated as a suspect for crimes unknown and nonexistent before the officer finally let him go.

In her book Dear White Christians, Jennifer Harvey makes it clear that these unequal experiences are the rule, not the exception. Or better, they are the norm, the system, the facts on the ground. They are material realities not solved simply through amending our attitudes or our speech.

But Harvey's book is not directed to police officers who profile young men based on their race. It is directed to “justice-minded” Christians — people who, as the subtitle suggests, are still longing for racial reconciliation despite the failure (for all its successes) of the Civil Rights Movement to achieve it. And Harvey's question to people like me is very simple: how can we, as white people, continue to call for reconciliation when the material damage that was done through slavery and the era of Jim Crow goes unaddressed — and in fact continues to have material consequences that are perpetuated often by the very people who claim to long for reconciliation?

Harvey sketches a brief history of the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement and the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. to lend some context to this question. She makes the telling point that while slavery cost many black people and families everything — impoverishing, disenfranchising, and even incarcerating multiple generations of innocent people — reconciliation does not cost those who have benefited from this oppression anything at all. To reconcile is, it might appear, free. No wonder it's so popular! You would be crazy not to say you are for reconciliation.

Dear White Christians,

From this perspective, even the statement that reconciliation is “inadequate” itself falls short; as if this sort of action or attitude were even on the correct scale. The “reconciliation paradigm,” as Harvey calls it, must give way to a “reparations paradigm” which seeks to address the material harm that white people have brought about and benefited from.

It seems to me that in this racially charged environment — an environment which, as I have seen, stretches from the toughest ghettos to the sleepest suburbs — the least our experiences merit is an honest conversation about white responsibility among those who are still holding nearly all the cards.

Dear White Christians invites white people into that uncomfortable conversation about their material responsibilities, given the history of material injustice into which we have all been born.

The chilling quote above, cited from James Cone’s *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, rings only too true to a white southern evangelical like myself. There is, on its face, nothing wrong with evangelical fervor, but its abuses run so far and so wide that it can be difficult to see how its virtues could outweigh those sins. In truth, they don’t. The good news is neither news nor good in such mouths anymore. Something more is required of us than resting in the comfort of abstract reconciliation — just as something more was required of Zaccheus, and the rich young ruler, and the rich man who ignored Lazarus. If evangelical fervor is ever rightly directed in the hearts of the powerful, then as in all believers it is directed first and last toward humbling oneself as a sinner before our Savior — and this not for some eventual puffing up, but because there is no other posture for those who know the one true God, before whose burning justice we can only know His love as mercy.

Jacob Thielmann



Rediscipling the White Church

Copyright (c) 2020 by David Winston Swanson.

Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. www.ivpress.com

Approaching racial segregation and injustice from the perspective of discipleship can move white Christians to a place we have rarely gone—to lived and sacrificial solidarity with our neighbors. There is nothing quick or simple about this. Our definition of discipleship implies the lifelong formation of communities of Christians: *Following Jesus (into the kingdom of God) to become like Jesus (through habit shaping practices that orient our desires) in order to do what Jesus does.* But for this discipleship to effectively confront the other discipleship of our racialized society, we need to be precise about the challenges that await us. Otherwise, the cultural tools to which white Christianity defaults will undermine our best efforts.

It's important to realize that a discipleship approach to racial justice and reconciliation depends on a *community* of Christians. There's nothing especially innovative about this; for generations, Christians have gathered for corporate worship and, by participating in shared liturgical practices such as singing and Holy Communion, have together had their desires aimed toward the kingdom of God. By its very nature the Christian life is communal; individuals find new life within the locally expressed body of Christ. It's not that we lose our individuality when we become Christians, but that who we are as individuals finds fuller and truer expression within the community of saints.

As basic as the corporate nature of the faith is to Christianity, it can be a hard thing to remember in a society that holds individuality as one of its highest values. A number of years ago, as we were just starting our church, one of my mentors told me that the hardest part of planting a church would be simply learning to be the church. This made no sense to me at first—the hardest part of starting a church was just getting a few people to show up! But over time, his wisdom became clear. It's one thing to gather a collection of individuals; it's something else entirely for those individuals to see themselves as a community, as a people with a shared identity who, despite countless differences and disagreements, commit to remaining with one another.

So the discipleship practices that orient us toward the reconciled kingdom of God are *corporate* practices, which means that white Christians must begin thinking of ourselves not only as individuals but also as a group. And in my experience, this is tough! When I talk to white Christians about racial reconciliation or the importance of multicultural ministry, the response is typically enthusiastic. But if I begin talking about white people, white Christianity, or even racial whiteness, the response is tepid or sometimes combative. When mixed with our racialized society, the problem of individualism is that many white people refuse to see ourselves as white. We want to be thought of only as individuals.

As the cultural majority in this country, the problem for white people is that we don't think of ourselves as a distinctive culture but as the neutral standard by which other cultures are categorized. As a white man, I can go through my life unaware of what it means to be white. My assumptions, histories, aspirations, and even my physical representation are portrayed in textbooks and media as the cultural norm.

The ubiquity of white culture makes it a challenging dynamic for white people to claim. Then there is the disturbing way that white culture, when it *is* publicly claimed, is done so by avowed racists and ethnonationalists—hardly the sorts of movements most of us want to be associated with! Despite these real obstacles, for white Christianity to move beyond its segregation, we must recognize our whiteness. But for now we must acknowledge that we have been born into a world that sees us as racially white and assigns us certain unearned privileges because of it. When I begin a conversation with something like, “As a white man . . .” I am acknowledging the way our racialized society has categorized me and, more difficult to admit, the ways I've internalized this racial sorting.

This doesn't mean that I should *only* be known by my white identity; my extended family, diverse neighborhood, and church community are all groups wherein I am shaped and known. But it does mean that, in order to resist the hyper-individualism

that typically subverts white Christians' attempts at racial justice, I must come to see that I am not culturally neutral but a member of a particular racial and cultural group.

Because of my commitment to racial justice, I sometimes receive emails from friends and family members with links to heartwarming stories about racial reconciliation. Sometimes these are videos about former avowed racists having been befriended by a person of color and changing their racist ideology. Others have been news stories about white police officers who go out of their way to care for a black or brown young person who needed a helping hand. These emails always make me smile; in the midst of so much racial injustice, any little reason for encouragement goes a long way. But they also point to another of white Christianity's overused tools: relationalism. Because white Christians reduce systemic racial inequity to broken relationships influenced by personal prejudice, the most common approach to addressing racial injustice has to do with building or restoring personal relationships.

Relationships across cultural divides are essential to the biblical vision of reconciliation, but the way personal, individual relationships are elevated in white Christianity above systemic change and social justice is a huge barrier to that same biblical vision. We are right to grieve the segregation within the body of Christ.

As important as racial reconciliation is, our goal is not to make every white church racially diverse but to move these churches toward lived solidarity with the entire body of Christ. By acknowledging and confronting racial discipleship, our reimagined discipleship practices will begin forming communities to confess and confront the conditions that cause segregation and injustice.

This is why focusing on discipleship is not an easy way out for white Christians. Quite the opposite! While welcoming people of color into our congregations or ministries would scratch our relational itch, the underlying factors related to our segregation remain unaddressed. In contrast, by reorienting our desires and imaginations toward the reconciled kingdom of God—a formation involving the reshaping of long held, often unconscious racial habits—we are doing the difficult work of facing our complicity with the injustices suffered by our family in Christ. We are also committing to the sacrificial journey of solidarity that, while certainly relational in character, will lead us to confront the material sources of our segregation. This is a risky journey, one that requires deeply formed love for our King and his kingdom.

Adapted from [Rediscovering the White Church](#) by David W. Swanson.



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission

Racial Equity & Women's Equality Ministries

FACING RACISM:

A Vision of the Intercultural Community

Antiracism Study Guides





Racial Equity & Women's =bMWh fU Ministries

Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community Antiracism Study Guides

Week 1. Biblical Imperative to Antiracism

Introduction

The Bible provides a firm foundation and compelling imperative to engage in antiracist work. There are at least four different biblical themes that can ground and motivate antiracism. While we will read some selected texts, it is important to recognize that these themes are not confined to isolated verses. Rather, they are woven throughout the biblical witness.

Creation

Read: Genesis 1:1-31
see also Psalm 104

We are all part of God's intricate and amazing creation. We did not bring ourselves into being, rather we receive our existence as a gift from God. Our lives are interwoven with all of creation, including the stars, planets, oceans, animals, trees, and plants around us. We are all part of creation that God has made and declared good.

God created all the cosmos in an intricate interwoven system of life. When humanity elevates one group over another, or falsely declares particular groups less good than others, we usurp God's place as creator of all that is. We deny our interrelation and proclaim our judgment more powerful than God's.

Image of God

Read: Genesis 1:26 "Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness."

Humanity is made in the image of God. The 1999 PC(USA) Policy Statement on Antiracism (*Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community*), builds upon the image of God in all human persons as fundamental to the rejection of racism. While humans

have many differences, we are all children of God, made in the image of God, and therefore of equal worth, value, and dignity. The 1999 Statement calls us to a vision of humanity without racism that is “grounded in our common origin as children of God from which we derive our inalienable worth, dignity, and sanctity.”

All humans are made in the image of God. It is therefore falsehood and deception to deny the full humanity of any group of people.

God loves diversity

Read: Acts 10:9-23

While focusing on the image of God emphasizes how all human persons are fundamentally the same, the differences between persons are also valuable. The Bible portrays God as delighting in the variety in creation (see Job 38-41). In the New Testament, the God of Jesus Christ offers grace to all people, regardless of their social group or status. Jesus spoke with and honored all those he encountered, including respectable Jewish men, women, tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, Samaritans, and Canaanites. The book of Acts recounts the momentous decision to proclaim the gospel to the gentiles, who were at the time considered unclean by the Jewish followers of Jesus. Peter's initial hesitation to have anything to do with gentiles is overcome by a series of visions in which God tells him, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” Once convinced, Peter tells others, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34). People do not have to all be the same in order to be loved by God. There is room in God's grace for vast differences. And the grace of God does not erase differences, but rather invites unity among them. When the Spirit came upon the people at Pentecost, each person present could hear the believers speaking in his or her native language (Acts 2:1-11). God did not provide a new language that erased all native tongues. Rather, God created understanding within the diversity of languages present.

God loves variety and diversity. The grace of God is not contained within particular human groups, nor does God's grace erase our differences. Racism falsely proclaims that difference is negative, rather than evidence of God's abundant creativity.

God loves justice

Read: Jeremiah 9:23-24

Another Biblical theme that compels us to anti-racism work is God's delight in justice. The prophets of the Hebrew Bible continually proclaim God's care for those who are

oppressed and God's demand for just action. Jeremiah says that God "delights" in justice (Jer. 9:24). In Amos, the LORD calls for the people to "establish justice in the gate" and "let justice roll down like waters" (Amos 5:15, 5:24). The prophet Micah states that what the LORD requires is "to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

God delights in justice. Racism, as systemic inequality, is fundamentally unjust and therefore against the will of God.

Discussion questions:

1. Which of these four biblical foundations for anti-racism work (creation, image of God, diversity, and justice) speaks most powerfully to you? Why?
2. The Bible has often been used to support racism. What are some ways you have heard or seen this happen?
3. How can our church community counter racist interpretations of the Bible?

Resources:

Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community. 211th General Assembly (1999) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (insert Minutes reference)
Jennings, Willie James. "A God Who Joins," 15 April 2015,
<<http://caldwellchapel.blogspot.com/2015/04/a-god-who-joins.html>> .

Week 2. Envisioning a New Way of Life Together

Introduction

As we strive to create a world that more closely reflects God's love of justice and diversity, it can be helpful to have a shared image to evoke our common hope. Two such images are the Beloved Community and the New Creation.

Beloved Community

Read: 1 John 4:7-8
see also Ephesians 2:19

Many verses in the Bible speak about the importance of community building. The 1999 policy statement of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is entitled *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community*. But what exactly does the term "Beloved Community" mean, and where does it come from? The phrase "Beloved Community" was first coined by the philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce. However, it was Martin Luther King, Jr. who popularized the term during the Civil Rights Movement. For Dr. King, agape love--the type of love revealed in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross--is at the core of the Beloved Community. It is a love directed towards the neighbor (1 Corinthians 10:24), which "does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people, or any qualities people possess" (Washington 2003, 19). It is a vision of community where "Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood" (The King Center 2014). In the same vein, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s policy statement affirms the vision of the Beloved Community by claiming that "every person's right to be free, to be treated as persons not things, and to be valued as full members of the human community are gifts from God... All persons are mutually linked and meant to live and grow in relationship with each other as we share a common destiny" ("Facing Racism" 1999, 3).

Discussion Questions:

1. Is the term "beloved community" familiar to you? If so, who taught you this phrase?
2. What is the closest experience of community you have had to this vision? What made that community possible? Was it a diverse group? Why or why not?
3. How might our church community move one small step closer to beloved community?

New Creation

Read Isaiah 65:17-25

Another way to imagine a new way of life together is to envision the New Creation, also called the Kingdom of God. Letty Russell, a 20th century Presbyterian theologian, begins with an eschatological (end of time) vision of what God intends for the fulfillment of creation. We see something of what God intends for us in the biblical accounts of God's love for us. Looking back to what God has done, particularly in Jesus, we see what the future ought to look like. This "eschatological future" of the New Creation is "the goal or purpose of life that is prefigured in the coming of Christ and opened up by the promise and actions of God" (Russell 1979, 164). This vision of the New Creation gives us guidance and courage to act for justice here and now, as we are called to live towards and anticipate the future God intends for us. Russell claims we must "begin from the point of view of New Creation and of what God intends us to become in Jesus Christ" (1979, 15). Beginning with the future, as we know it in the memory of God's love for us, we can act with justice and hospitality now.

These two images, Beloved Community and New Creation, give shape to our hope for more faithful life together. While they are quite similar in envisioning right relationships, they also have some differences. Although the image of the beloved community has always been a vision for the future, for many it is also associated with the past, that is, with the Civil Rights Movement. This can be an empowering association or a painful reminder of the limitations of our progress. Similarly, the image of New Creation can seem either impersonal or prophetically inclusive of environmental concerns. These images are not definitions of the future we seek, but rather gestures towards the promises of God.

Discussion Questions:

1. What associations or feelings does "New Creation" evoke for you?
2. How might issues of ecology be related to issues of racism?
3. How could our church community move a bit closer to New Creation?

Resources

Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community. 211th General Assembly (1999) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (insert Minutes reference)

The King Center, "The King Philosophy: The Beloved Community," 2014, <<http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy#sub4>> (20 August 2015).

King, Jr., Martin Luther. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington. New York: HarperOne, 2003.

Russell, Letty M. *The Future of Partnership*, [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1979].

Week 3. PC(USA) and Racial Reconciliation

Read Micah 6:8

**He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justice, and to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God?**

Introduction

Most local churches adapt a unique mission statement that summarizes in clear and simple language what the church sees as its primary aim in the community in which it worships and serves and in the broader world. These statements appear in bulletins, newsletters, pamphlets, and handouts and are periodically recited by the congregation. Mission statements help us to remember who we are and what we are about.

The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. also has a mission statement that appears in *The Book of Order* in a section entitled "The Mission of the Church." This section lists "The Great Ends of the Church," a concise statement of who we are and what we are about as a denomination. The Great Ends of the Church are: the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world (*Book of Order*, F-1.0304).

The Great Ends of the Church are a uniquely balanced statement of the church's mission, a statement that makes it clear our mission is focused on worship, proclamation and nurture on one hand and on preservation, promotion and exhibition of the Kingdom on the other. This same balanced focus and responsibility in mission is evident in our confessions and our church policies and actions.

Through the years the PC(USA) has made the promotion of social righteousness an integral part of its mission as a church, with varying degrees of success. Racial justice is one of the areas where the promotion of social righteousness has been pursued. In this section of our study guide we will briefly review several areas in recent church history where this witness has evolved into the policy positions and structure that exist today.

Discussion Questions

1. Does your church have a mission statement? Review it and examine your mission for similarities and common elements to the Great Ends of the Church.
2. The Micah passage gives a straightforward formula for what the Lord requires. How many elements of this formula are apparent in your mission statement?
3. Can you think of instances where the church has been successful in promoting social righteousness? Examples of where it has been less successful in recognizing and promoting social righteousness?

The Confession of 1967

In the middle of the 17th century, the English Parliament convened a group of men to provide guidance on matters of faith and worship. The group met at Westminster Abbey over a period of years and produced a confession of faith that was adopted by the Church of England in 1647. The Westminster Confession of Faith, with various revisions, has been the primary confession of Presbyterians for generations. While Presbyterians in the United States edited out particularly British references to state religion, we still lacked a unique statement addressing the requirements of faithfulness in this country. The church found that testimony in the creation of The Confession of 1967, which states, "The purpose of the Confession of 1967 is to call the church to that unity in confession and mission which is required of disciples today" (*Book of Confessions*, 9.05) Indeed, the time had come for a dynamic statement of confession and mission given the challenges of modernity and the constant threat of geopolitical forces.

So arduous was the task of creating The Confession of 1967 that it was eleven years in the making. Its central theme is reconciliation: between God and humanity and among human beings. It states, "This [reconciling] work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the foundation of all confessional statements about God, man, and the world. Therefore the church calls men to be reconciled to God and to one another" (*Book of Confessions*, 9.07). The confession is very pointed in acknowledging challenges to this task, stating, "In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity, and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations (*Book of Confessions*, 9.43)." The question of race and racial justice was one of these aforementioned concrete situations.

The Confession of 1967's statements on race and racial justice comprise the church's first comprehensive policy stance on racism and establishes roots upon which later policy statements and actions grow. The confession unequivocally asserts, "Therefore the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it (*Book of Confessions*, 9.44)." This focus on reconciliation, thoroughly

grounded in scripture and affirmed by actions of the church, forms the foundation upon which the church's anti-racism work firmly rests.

Discussion Questions

1. Are you familiar with the Westminster Confession of Faith? What are some of your memories of this confession and its importance to the church?
2. Are you familiar with The Confession of 1967? What are some of your recollections about this confession and its importance to the church?
3. In what ways does the theme of reconciliation continue to be appropriate for these times?

Council on Church and Race

The scriptural requirement to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God is a towering challenge in a world that embraces a win-at-all-costs philosophy, that routinely sees kindness as a weakness, and that views humility as a form of inadequacy. In a world that sets up this type of dichotomy between what Christians are taught to believe and what the world teaches, it is easy to mouth platitudes but much harder to commit to action. In adopting The Confession of 1967, the Presbyterian Church was clear about what it believed. Now it needed to put structures in place that would express these beliefs in action.

Faced with the indisputable turbulence and brutality of the civil rights era, Christian churches were compelled to respond. These were divisive times for the church. It was called to a lofty ethical and moral standard but its members lived in a society that tenaciously clung to detrimental social and economic traditions and deep seated discriminatory practices. Many of church members found it difficult to let go of long held beliefs and interpretations. The National Council of Churches in Christ, an organization of mainline Protestant churches, responded to this situation by creating a Commission on Religion and Race and by urging member denominations to do the same. These were the beginnings of what would eventually become the Presbyterian Churches' (UPCUSA & PCUS) Councils on Church and Race, which were formed to promote reconciling action on issues of racial justice. By designating these bodies "commissions" and "councils," the denominations gave them formal standing and the opportunity to influence church leaders and staff.

The Presbyterian Church realized the intrinsic difficulties in a predominantly white denomination understanding the true magnitude of the underlying issues in racial justice. Many members refused to recognize the problems of racism until the Civil Rights Movement made it impossible to ignore. Other members recognized the problem, and the complicity of white churches in maintaining racial injustice. The issue for the

Presbyterian Church was how to make effective decisions about what it should do when it was a part of the problem. Thus the Council on Church and Race was created "to be the focal point for the identification of issues and the development of churchwide policy relating to racial and intercultural justice and reconciliation" (*UPCUSA Minutes*, 23 May 1972, p. 747). The Council, by design and intent, was to be permanently diverse. This was a structural change in the denomination designed to give voice to those who previously had been virtually voiceless. The Council brought a challenging word to corridors that previously condoned silence.

The strength of this commitment to diversity and fairness was soon tested. In 1970 the Council on Church and Race approved a \$10,000 grant to the Angela Davis Defense Fund. Angela Davis, Ph.D. was a black faculty member at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). She was also a political activist, leader of the Communist Party USA, and affiliated with the Black Panther Party, a highly controversial black activist group in the 1960s and 70s. Dr. Davis was arrested for conspiracy relating to the armed takeover of a California county courtroom by the Black Panther Party that resulted in four deaths. The Angela Davis case was a vortex of social dissent for the denomination. Many saw Angela Davis as the antithesis of traditional American values and they were enraged that the church would be sympathetic to her and supportive of her defense. They petitioned the General Assembly to reverse the Council's decision.

In its response the Council stated, "The General Assembly, by establishment of a Council on Church and Race, has challenged Presbyterians to a more radical posture in the struggle for social justice and world peace than many American citizens care to assume. The call to Presbyterians to support those who conscientiously practice civil disobedience under extreme injustice, the call to bear witness for peace in international relations, 'and, in its own life, to practice the forgiveness of enemies,' (*Book of Confessions*, 9.45) all break with the conventional righteousness and mark our Church as a voice crying in the wilderness of moral complacency and chauvinism, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord!'" (*Minutes*, 24 May 1972, p. 994).

The money for the legal defense fund grant was quietly reimbursed to the General Assembly by a group of concerned Presbyterians and guidelines for the consideration and awarding of subsequent grants were approved by a later assembly. However, the grant action was sustained.

The Council on Church and Race was formally disbanded at the formation of the reunited Church [the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)] in 1983. Today, the work of the council continues directly through groups including the Advocacy Committee on Racial Ethnic Concerns and the Racial Ethnic and Women's Ministries area, as well as indirectly through other program staff and denominational agencies. The spiritual legacy of the Council resides in the people of the church who continue to advocate for and support its aims and objectives.

Discussion Questions

1. What kind of divisive issues have you experienced in the church and what are some of the common elements they share with issues of race and racial justice?
2. What are some of the most effective ways of advocating Christian values? Are there points at which the line should be drawn?
3. When have you been required to take a stand for Christian principles and values? What was the outcome?

Resources

"Race and the Rights of Minorities in America ACSWP," *Presbyterian Social Witness Policy Compilation*, 2010,
<[http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/gateway.dll/socialpolicy/1?fn=default.htm\\$f=templates\\$vid=pcdocs:10.1048/Enu](http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/gateway.dll/socialpolicy/1?fn=default.htm$f=templates$vid=pcdocs:10.1048/Enu)> (20 August 2015).

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part 1: Book of Confessions. Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2007.

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part 2: Book of Order. Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2013.

Week 4. Racism 101

Introduction

Having conversations about racial injustice is hard work. One of the difficulties is unspecific terminology. Words like “racism” and “racist” are used very loosely in common parlance. This creates a lot of opportunity for confusion, defensiveness, and unintended offense. In order to make conversation easier and more productive, let’s begin with some shared definitions.

Race

People come in different colors, shapes, sizes, and body types. They always have. Yet it was not until the era of Western colonialism that the concept of race was constructed. When European colonizers arrived on a new continent, they did not understand the subtleties of tribes, family groups, religious groups, or geographical regions that the current inhabitants of that land used to identify themselves. The colonizers lumped whole continents of people together into one new category, with skin color as its marker. That is how race was invented. It is a made-up category from the beginning. Also, the colonizers’ labeling of people according to skin color was not neutral observation. It served the economic and material interests of the colonizers to disregard the distinct cultures they encountered. The colonizers got to be the ones who named and identified whole peoples, while the self-identification of groups was erased. For example, before European colonizers arrived, the Americas were populated by several distinct groups, each with their own language and traditions. After colonization, the rich variety of societies within this large swath of land were all called Indians--a name that reflects the (mistaken) perspective of the colonizers, rather than the perspective of the people themselves. In a similar fashion, during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, people from a wide variety of cultures within the enormous continent of Africa were kidnapped, brought to a foreign land, and all lumped together as Negroes. While the words we used have changed--we now say Native American and African American--for the most part we retain a classification system based on the self-interested perspective of European colonizers from centuries ago.

The notion that all dark-skinned people were of one category simply did not exist before this time, when this classification system was created to enable and justify the subjugation of other peoples by European colonizers. The various racial categories (races or colors) that were invented at this time were placed in a hierarchy, with Europeans (whites) at the top. The categories evolved over time through now-defunct regulations that classified different Asian ethnic groups as either black or white, and several U.S. Supreme Court decisions that further defined who is considered white and who is not considered white. For example, *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* in 1923

further defined white persons as not inclusive of Caucasians of Indian descent (or those who do not fit the “common understanding” of Caucasian). This system of racial categorization is called white supremacy.

White Supremacy

While individual people might believe in the supremacy of white people as an ideal, the term white supremacy really refers to the system itself and its effects. Historically, the economic, social, and legal systems of the U.S. have been constructed with the assumption (spoken or unspoken) that white people are the normal citizens with which they are concerned.

Let's consider an analogy. Louisville, KY is a city built with the assumption that people have cars. It is car-centered, car-dominant, and car-identified. The public transportation system is not well-developed; we have buses that run limited routes on limited schedules. There are no subways. There are large sections of town with no sidewalks. There are bike paths for recreation, but cycling to work requires trying to find space beside the cars on the road. Driver's licenses are required for a whole variety of non-car-related activities, including opening a bank account. A person may get an alternate form of identification, but this requires going to the Department of Motor Vehicles. This structural feature of Louisville makes daily life much harder for people who do not have cars. Getting to work takes longer, getting to the doctor or the dentist can be tricky, and so on. White supremacy is like this. It is a structural feature of the U.S.: white-centered, white-dominant, and white-identified (Doucot 2010, see also Johnson 1997). White supremacy has been an unfortunate reality in this country since early in its inception. Indeed, from the moment race based (black) slavery became a dominant economic factor in the country's development, white supremacy became more and more intrinsic to the culture. History was distorted to substantiate it, laws were instituted to sustain it, and rationalizations were created to support it. Increasingly benefits, services, and opportunities were assumed to belong to white people. Freedom, citizenship, education, voting rights, and so forth were for white people. Very slowly, over the years, this has been challenged and some changes have been made. Yet these have been limited. By analogy, adding sidewalks everywhere in Louisville would help, but the basic services of the city are still so spread out that having a car is far easier than walking.

Racism

Racism is the term for the ongoing effects of white supremacy. It refers to the systemic and structural ways that our society is still white-centered, white-dominant, and white-identified. It is an ongoing structure of society that gives advantage to whites at the expense of people of other racial groups. Racism is ingrained in almost every aspect of

our culture and society. It affects us all--positively or negatively, directly or indirectly--on a daily basis.

This definition of racism is structural and systemic. It does not apply to individuals and it is not concerned with personal feelings or attitudes. There are persons who believe that white people are better than others, who harbor ill feelings towards people of other racial groups, and who perceive others through the lens of racial stereotypes. These persons are prejudiced and bigoted.

Of course, bigotry and prejudice contribute to systemic racism. But the tendency to frame racism in terms of personal attitudes does, too. Focusing on the feelings of individuals prevents us from recognizing and addressing the economic, legal, and societal structures that benefit white people and disadvantage others. It can also lead us too quickly to absolve ourselves of responsibility to change these larger structures. To return to the car analogy, if one person perceives the problem and chooses to walk, bike, or ride the bus, this does not change the reality of Louisville's car-centered structure. Likewise, if one or even many people do not harbor racial prejudice or bigotry, this does not change the inherited structures of our society that are white-centered.

Note also that this definition precludes so-called "reverse racism" or racism among different racial groups. When blacks harbor prejudice against whites, or Latinas/Latinos are bigoted towards Asian Americans, this cannot be accurately called racism because it is not structural. There is no structure in the United States that gives power and advantage to blacks over whites, or to Latinas/Latinos over Asian Americans.

Finally, it is important to recognize racism as one of a number of structural hierarchies of power. Sexism refers to the ways in which our culture is male-centered, male-dominated, and male-identified (Johnson 1997). Historically, the economic, educational, legal, and social structures of the U.S. have been built for men. The ongoing effects of these structures grant power and advantage to men over women and transgender people. These various structures of racism, sexism, classism, and so forth connect and overlap. The term "intersectionality" is used to describe this. For example, a black woman occupies the space where racism and sexism intersect. The way racism disadvantages her will be influenced by the structures of sexism, and vice versa.

Biblically, we consider racism as a sin against God and against humanity. It is helpful to recall that Reformed theology includes an account of original sin (a state we find ourselves in regardless of our own choosing) and actual sin (particular ways of being in the world that make original sin concrete and break relationship with God and neighbor). Racism is the original sin of the United States. No one alive today created the system of white supremacy. Although we are neither responsible nor guilty for creating this system, we recognize it as part of our fallen state and as a violation of who we are meant to be together. Trusting in the grace of God, we confess the brokenness

that we inhabit. We can also confess that it inhabits us. Born and raised in a wider culture of racism, some of the prejudice and bigotry has seeped into our minds and hearts. For those who are white, the temptation simply not to see the advantages that we reap from a sinful system is often too great to resist. And we have not done enough to change the structures of our society together. For these actual sins, we also confess. All confession takes place within the sure knowledge of the grace of God, who is eager not only to forgive us, but to empower us to repent and change our ways.

Discussion questions

1. In what ways have you experienced racism directly or indirectly in your life? Each group member is invited to share his/her experience as they feel comfortable. [Leader's Note: Keep in mind of the sensitivity of the subject as it relates to one's past hurt and pain.]
2. Through your observation and/or experience, how do you think the church has handled such issue of racism in society and also in the church?
3. What are some obstacles and stumbling blocks that we must overcome in order for us to move toward the Beloved Community, the New Creation?
4. If you overheard a discriminating comments or racially insensitive jokes being made by one of your friends or someone from your church or at work, what actions would you take towards those who make those remarks?
5. What one small step can our church take in order to eradicate racism in our society and in our church?

Resources

The Racism Study Pack. Louisville, KY: The Thoughtful Christian, 2009.
Johnson, Allan G. *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1997.
Doucot, Christopher. *Race, Class, and Gender*. Course taught at Central Connecticut State University, 2010.

Week 5. Enduring Legacy of Racism in the US

Introduction

While significant strides towards racial equality were made as a result of the Civil Rights Movement, the legacy of racism continues in the United States and has, in many ways, worsened in recent decades. Some historical societal structures that granted white people privileges and hindered people of color have diminished over time. Others, however, have had snowball effects that are difficult to stop and sometimes hard to recognize.

One of the toughest tasks in struggling for justice is to have the strength to look injustice squarely in the face. Although it is painful, acknowledging the ongoing realities of structural racism in the U.S. is a necessary step in moving towards the Beloved Community, the New Creation.

Economics

The fact that wealth can be passed down from parent to child means that the economic situation of our ancestors has a significant influence on our own. While this is most apparent in the very rich, even modest economic stability can benefit future generations. When parents are able to help with a sudden expense, such as a car repair, this can make the difference between keeping or losing a job. When parents or grandparents contribute towards a down payment for a first home, this has lifelong effects, as home ownership has been a primary form of investment in the United States. This means that the economic wrongs done to Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and others continue to have ongoing effects. There is enormous economic inequality along racial lines in the United States today, often referred to as the racial wealth gap. One study reports that in 1963, the average wealth of white families was \$117,000 more than the average wealth of nonwhite families. In 2015, the average wealth of white families is \$500,000 higher than both black and Hispanic families (Urban Institute 2015). If we look at median, rather than average, the problem persists. In 2013 the median wealth of white households was 13 times higher than that of black households and 10 times higher than that of Hispanic households (Kochhar and Fry 2014).

Education

The Supreme Court ruled against segregation in 1954. Many communities, primarily in the South, resisted integration in the early years. However, by "1972, due to a strong federal enforcement, only about 25 percent of black students in the South attended

schools” that were strongly segregated, meaning “in which at least 9 out of 10 students were racial minorities” (Hannah-Jones 2014). However, in the 1990s the Supreme Court greatly diminished efforts at desegregation and segregation is increasing. Today “some 43 percent of Latino and 38 percent of black students are in ‘intensely segregated’ schools” (Zalan 2014). A 2014 report notes that “Latino students have become more segregated every year since they began collecting data in the late 1960s” (ibid.). Such segregation is profoundly linked to inequality. A recent report from the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights “found that racial minorities are more likely than white students to be suspended from school, to have less access to rigorous math and science classes, and to be taught by lower-paid teachers with less experience” (Rich 2014).

Policing

After the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014, the Black Lives Matter movement has brought a renewed focus on how police interact with different racial and ethnic groups. The reality of racial profiling--when particular groups are suspected of criminal activity based on race alone--was brought to national attention in the 1990s. Communities across the country had enacted “stop-and-frisk” or “broken-windows” policing policies that resulted in African Americans and Latinos/Latinas being disproportionately stopped and questioned by police. Racial profiling of Arab Americans increased after September 11, 2001. People of color are disproportionately subjected to traffic stops, searches, and arrests for traffic violations. These strategies have proven counterproductive in reducing crime and have caused deep rifts between community members and police (Badger 2014).

Police misconduct, excessive force, and death within police custody also appear to be disproportionately concentrated on people of color. Although the United States does not yet keep track of these incidents, estimates publicly available put the number of people killed by police in the United States in 2014 at 1,149 (“The Counted” 2015). African-Americans and Latino/Latinas are significantly more likely to experience violence at the hands of police than white people. Native Americans are killed by law enforcement at a higher rate than any other racial group (Vicens 2015).

Mass Incarceration

The 1980s and 1990s saw a shift towards “tough on crime” politics, which led to policies such as harsh minimum sentences, “three strikes and you’re out” laws, and the war on drugs (ACLU). These policies increased the number of people incarcerated in the United States. The privatization of the justice system, including the development of for-profit prisons, exacerbated this problem by creating financial incentives for imprisoning

people. While the United States is home to only 5% of the world's population, we house 25% of the world's prisoners (ibid.)

The harm of mass incarceration falls primarily on people of color. For example, "despite the fact that white and black people use drugs at similar rates, black people are jailed on drug charges 10 times more often than white people" (ibid.). The consequences of this disparity in incarceration rates are enormous. "Incarceration pushes you out of the job market. Incarceration disqualifies you from feeding your family with food stamps. Incarceration allows for housing discrimination based on a criminal-background check. Incarceration increases your risk of homelessness. Incarceration increases your chances of being incarcerated again" (Coates 2015). In many states convicted felons cannot vote after release from prison, so racially biased incarceration also removes large numbers of people of color from participation in the democratic process. Mass incarceration has sustained racial inequality in the United States and severely impedes movement towards racial justice (ibid.).

Immigrants are often "detained" in centers not unlike prisons. A number of laws, including the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) of 1996, have encouraged long-term detainment of unauthorized immigrants for even minor offenses. The United States now has "the largest immigration detention system in the world," filled with "undocumented immigrants, unaccompanied minors, and asylum seekers" (Global Detention Project 2009). The detention centers in the United States, many of which have also been privatized for profit, have been widely criticized for human rights abuses and inadequate care.

Immigration

Throughout the history of the U.S., immigration has been a racially charged issue. At different points in U.S. history, immigration policies have been used to exclude people of certain racial groups and encourage people of specific national origins. While the 1965 Immigration Act eliminated the most restrictive and racially oriented immigration policies, immigration into the United States is still limited and regulated based on country of origin. This legislation also introduced a preference for highly skilled people and those with relations in the U.S. This has skewed immigration towards people who are well-educated and elite within their own countries, a marked departure from prior generations of immigrants to the U.S.

Wait times to enter the country vary based on the country of origin; those who seek a family visa as siblings of U.S. citizens from Mexico, India, and the Philippines, for instance, have wait times of over 20 years. Over 4.4 million people are waiting for visas. People from Europe experience a much shorter wait (VISANOW, Inc. 2015).

For those immigrants coming from Latin America, entry into the U.S. has become very dangerous. Immigration policies and processes as they currently stand leave little room to fill low-wage labor needs during economic upswings through legal immigration. The supply of low-wage jobs (and active recruitment south of the border by U.S. meat-packing and processing companies and U.S.-based agriculture) draws a stream of migrants looking for work, many of whom lack the proper permits. The building of the wall between the U.S. and Mexico forces unauthorized immigrants to use longer, more dangerous routes through the desert. Immigrants coming from southern Asia are seeking to enter the U.S. through Latin America, as well.

The language around immigration is highly charged and racialized, creating an atmosphere in which people from certain racial groups (particularly Hispanic/Latinos/Latinas and Asian) are seen by law enforcement and immigration enforcement as potentially undocumented, regardless of how long their families have been in the U.S. People from these immigrant groups are disproportionately impacted by negative cultural bias, regulations and changing laws around immigrants and the rights of immigrants to access services and housing. Despite evidence to the contrary, immigrants (especially those from Latin America and Asia) are accused of taking advantage of the U.S. instead of being important contributors.

Discussion Questions

1. Does any of this information surprise you? Why or why not?
2. How has the enduring legacy of racism affected you and your family? What does it mean if the answer to that question is not readily apparent?
3. How does racism play a role in the structures of our community, including business, education, and policing?
4. Do you see the realities of mass incarceration and immigration in our community? How?
5. How might our church take one small step towards justice in one of these areas?

Resources

American Civil Liberties Union, "Mass Incarceration," <https://www.aclu.org/issues/mass-incarceration> (23 September 2015).
"Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antiterrorism_and_Effective_Death_Penalty_Act_of_1996 (20 August 2015).
Badger, Emily, "The Long Halting Still Unfinished Fight to End Racial Profiling in America," <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2014/12/05/the-long-halting-still-unfinished-fight-to-end-racial-profiling-in-america> (23 September 2015).

Coates, Ta-Nehisi, "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration," *The Atlantic*, October 2015, <<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/10/the-black-family-in-the-age-of-mass-incarceration/403246/>> (15 October 2015).

Global Detention Project, "United States Detention Profile," March 2009, <<http://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/americas/united-states/introduction.html>> (20 August 2015).

Hannah-Jones, Nikole, "Segregation Now..." *The Atlantic*, May 2014, <<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/05/segregation-now/359813/>> (20 August 2015).

"Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal_Immigration_Reform_and_Immigrant_Responsibility_Act_of_1996> (20 August 2015).

Kochhar, Rakesh and Richard Fry, "Wealth inequality has widened along racial, ethnic lines since end of Great Recession," 12 December 2014, <<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/12/racial-wealth-gaps-great-recession/>> (20 August 2015).

Rich, Motoko, "School Data Finds Pattern of Inequality Along Racial Lines," *The New York Times*, 21 March 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/21/us/school-data-finds-pattern-of-inequality-along-racial-lines.html?_r=0> (20 August 2015).

"The Counted" <<http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database#>> (20 August 2015).

Urban Institute, "Nine Charts About Wealth Inequality in America," 2005, <<http://datatools.urban.org/Features/wealth-inequality-charts/>> (20 August 2015).

Vicens, AJ, "Native Americans Get Shot By Cops at an Astonishing Rate," *Mother Jones*, 15 July 2015, <<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/07/native-americans-getting-shot-police>> (20 August 2015).

VISANOW, Inc., "U.S. visa wait times: Who waits and for how long?" 2015 <<http://www.visanow.com/u-s-visa-wait-times-whos-waiting-and-for-how-long/>> (20 August 2015).

Zalan, Kira, "The New Separate and Unequal," *U.S. News & World Report*, 16 May 2014, <<http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/05/16/brown-v-board-of-educations-60th-anniversary-stirs-history-reality>> (20 August 2015).

Week 6. Responding as a Community of Faith

Read Mark 7: 27-28

He (Jesus) said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

Introduction

The church, as a community of faith, constantly strives to achieve the kind of unity and fellowship that allows it to worship God in Jesus Christ as one – one in adoration, trust and love. Jesus' triumph over oppression and death gives us the keys to this unity through grace, confession, and repentance.

The 1999 PCUSA policy statement, "Facing Racism," alludes to the difficulty of building a racially diverse community when it quotes Catherine Meeks, stating, "The inability of whites and blacks to come together as a unified worshipping community has far less to do with diversity in worship styles than has been accepted in the past. The problem lies in the unwillingness of blacks to be treated as children and whites to share their power" (p. 15).

In the Mark 7 text quoted above Jesus is asked by a Syrophoenician woman to save her possessed daughter. She is not Jewish and knows she may be repelled but she is desperate and believes fervently in Jesus' power. She begs Jesus to free her daughter from the demonic spirit but Jesus tells her his immediate responsibility is to save the Jews. She reminds him that God's grace is both ample and abundant for all who truly believe. Jesus relents and, because of her faith, her daughter is healed.

One of the reasons this passage grabs our attention is because of the incendiary language used. Name calling reminds us of the kind of language used by bigots and supremacists. Jesus understands his call to be one of ministry to the Jews but others believe in him and seek his grace. Jesus comes to appreciate this expanded call. Does God show partiality with God's grace? Certainly not.

God gives all of humanity the tools and spirit it needs to be one in Christ Jesus. No obstacles, no matter how ingrained or deep-seated, are strong enough to deny this unity indefinitely, and no force, no matter how pervasive or deceptive, is powerful enough to permanently eradicate this bond. Despite the apparent persistence and legacy of racism there is hope. If we have the courage to face the challenge we can choose to change current realities and achieve the kind of unity and fellowship that Christ demands, but it takes work and persistence. Grace is God's contribution but we

have responsibilities as well. These responsibilities include confession, which is perceiving and acknowledging the realities of our being, and repentance, which is changing our ways. Indeed, hope abounds!

Discussion Questions

1. Unity and diversity seem to be opposing concepts; what are some ways in which unity and diversity show themselves as complementary?
2. Are there ways in which those with power are slow to share it in your community?

Grace

"The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church" (*Book of Confessions* 2007). Presbyterians do not see themselves as God's singular expression of truth and faithfulness. We are an ecumenical people, members of the universal church of Jesus Christ. Our search for justice has no limits or boundaries; it, like God's grace, is free to all, infinite in scope and jurisdiction.

Issues of racism and racial justice are not limited to the United States. Racism is a worldwide phenomenon, as evidenced by South African apartheid. While Christians have undeniably supported racism in many contexts, there have also been many times when Christians advocated for justice and unity. The Presbyterian Church was active and effective in helping to bring about the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa through its participation in the ecumenical efforts led by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Presbyterian and Congregational), the World Council of Churches, and the National Council of Churches in Christ. These groups perceived the racist system of South African apartheid as not only a threat to the social and economic structures of South Africa and to its people but also to the unity of the Christian church, a church deeply divided in South Africa along racial lines. In 1982, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches declared apartheid to be a sin and a theological heresy.

In 1985, a group of mainly black South African theologians created the Kairos Document, which challenged the vicious policies of the Apartheid state, the complicity of many Christian communities, and the inadequate response of churches. The Kairos Document is a clear declaration that Christian unity—which is rooted in recognition of God's free grace—demands rejection of all racist policies and practices. In the document's opening chapter, "The Moment of Truth," it summarizes the racial turbulence that rocked South Africa and the divided state of the church by stating, "Both oppressor and oppressed claim loyalty to the same Church. They are both baptized in the same baptism and participate together in the breaking of the same

bread, the same body and blood of Christ. There we sit in the same Church while outside Christian policemen and soldiers are beating up and killing Christian children or torturing Christian prisoners to death while yet other Christians stand by and weakly plead for peace. The Church is divided and its day of judgment has come" (*Kairos Document* 1985). The document garnered worldwide attention and challenged the church to re-examine its understanding of unity and oneness in Christ Jesus. "The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church."

Unity is a central theme of another document written in the context of apartheid South Africa, the Confession of Belhar, which is anticipated to be the newest addition to the Presbyterian Book of Confessions. Written in 1982, the Belhar Confession admonishes the church to reject segregation and struggle for justice, stating, "unity is...both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought" (Belhar 1986).

Discussion Questions

1. How does God's grace create unity and oneness in a world of such expansive diversity?
2. How do divisions in the church challenge the power of God's grace and love?

Confession

The term confession has two meanings in Christian theology. One is the acknowledgment of sin before God and one another. We tell the truth about all the ways that we break relationship, turn away from what is good, and fall short of the glory of God. The oft-quoted expression, "confession is good for the soul" refers to the fact that for humans there is a therapeutic quality to recognizing and admitting failings and shortcomings. You cannot overcome what you fail to recognize as damaging and hurtful. Seeing the problem is the first step in solving the problem.

The second meaning of confession is a communal statement of belief. *The Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. declares the purpose of confessions as ways for the church to state its faith and bear witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ. It continues by saying, "In these statements the church declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, and what it resolves to do. These statements identify the church as a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions" (*Book of Order*, F2.01)

These two meanings are related. Confessions in the second sense, statements of belief, help us recognize our complicity and unfaithfulness. They help us know where we have turned away and need to confess in the first sense, to acknowledge our sin. Both forms of confession remind us of the power of God's grace. It is only because we know the grace of God that we can be honest about our fallenness. We confess in trust, hope, and faith. And it is only because we know the grace of God that we have a community of belief that can give an account of our hope in a formal Confession.

"Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community," makes continual reference to the Confession of 1967. This remarkable statement of faith serves as the foundation for the church's ministry of reconciliation. Speaking in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, the church in its Confession of 1967 asserts, "In (God's) reconciling love, (God) overcomes the barriers between brothers (and sisters) and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. The church is called to bring all (people) to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore, the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it" (*Book of Confessions*, 9.44).

When the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted through our presbyteries to add the Confession of Belhar to our Book of Confessions, this was an act of confession in both senses of the word. Relying on the grace of God, we both acknowledge our complicity in racism and affirm our communal belief that abolishing racism is one of the responsibilities of the church and of all Christians. The true unity of the church depends on it. In announcing the approval of Belhar by the presbyteries, the Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) said, "Done in a spirit of shalom and with a desire for wholeness, the church has said we acknowledge this confession to be relevant for such a time as this in the life of this denomination, and that we diligently desire to live into it as part of the body of Christ.

"We recognize our need to confess the ways this denomination has contributed to racism historically and even still today, and mourn all the ways we have fallen short. We believe this Confession, appropriated for this time and place, can bring about reconciliation and justice, and allow us to more fully follow Jesus in ministry and mission" ("Confession of Belhar approved by presbyteries," April 23, 2015). May it be so.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is confession therapeutic?
2. Is reconciliation possible without confession?
3. How does our church confess what we believe?

4. How does our church confess regarding the sinfulness of racism?
5. What are some other creeds/confessions included in the Book of Confessions and what are some of the matters of faith they address?

Repentance

Confession is recognition; repentance is change. Repentance means turning and walking in the other direction. It's one thing to understand something intellectually but something else altogether to live that new reality. Repentance is the gift and task of living a new reality.

Racism is sin. One of the simplest, most straightforward ways of defining sin is to see it as anything that creates estrangement or separation from God. Racism's divisiveness is abhorrent to our God of love. The truth is racism often cloaks itself in myths and laws that make it difficult to detect by those who benefit from its existence. That's why it is important for God's church to be sensitive to the cries of victims and the oppressed and, when appropriate, to repent. When asked why he associated with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus replied, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5: 31). Repentance, as an act of accepting and living a new reality, is very much an on-going responsibility of the church today. The unity we seek as a community rooted and grounded in Christ Jesus depends on our ability to repent.

Discussion Questions

1. What does repentance look like? Can you think of an example in our community?
2. What is one small step our church can take to repent of racism and live into the New Creation?
3. Does your church offer antiracism training? Would it benefit from the training?

References

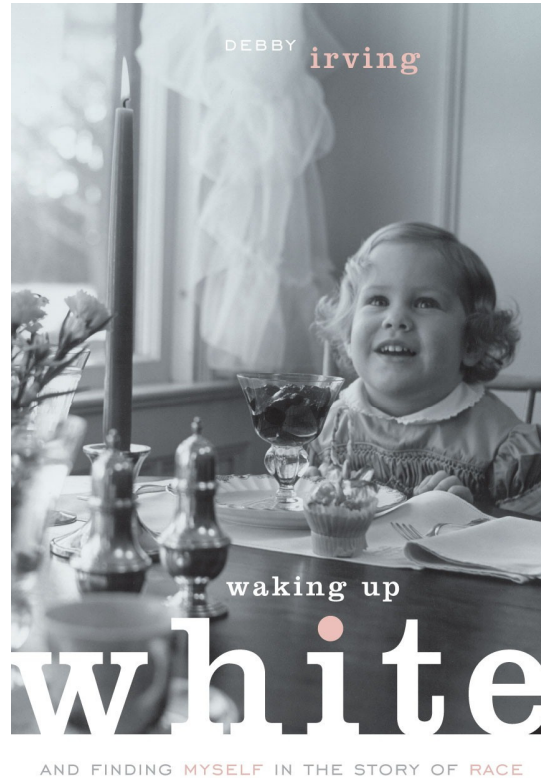
"Confession of Belhar approved by presbyteries," *Presbyterian News Service*, 23 April 2015 <<http://www.pcusa.org/news/2015/4/23/confession-belhar-approved-presbyteries/>> (20 August 2015).

Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community. 211th General Assembly (1999) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Kairos Document, 1985,
<<https://kairossouthernafrica.wordpress.com/2011/05/08/the-south-africa-kairos-document-1985/>> (20 August 2015).

Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race

By Debbie Irving



*A Study Guide from
The Reverends Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston*

Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race

Copyright © 2017
The Office of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronically, mechanically, photocopying, recording, or otherwise (brief quotations used in magazine or newspaper reviews excepted), without the prior permission of the publisher. The sessions, presbyteries, and synods of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) may use sections of this publication without receiving prior written permission of the publisher.

Contents

Introduction	1
About this study	1
Tips for facilitators	1
Practice listening	2
Practice creative flexibility	2
Practice “truth in love”	2
Practice relationship building	2
Practice partnership.....	3
Session One: Beginning your racial autobiography	4
Goal of the session.....	4
A reading of scripture—Ephesians 4:11–16.....	4
A selection from the Confession of Belhar.....	4
Quotations from <i>Waking Up White</i>	4
Opening prayer	4
Welcome and introduction	4
Discussion	5
Closing questions	5
Closing prayer	5
Session Two—What is race?	6
Goal of the session—To reflect upon our understanding of race	6
A reading from scripture—Romans 12:3–8	6
A selection from the Confession of Belhar.....	6
Quotations from <i>Waking Up White</i>	6
Opening prayer	6
Discussion	6
Closing questions	7
Closing prayer	7
Session Three—What is racism?	8
Goal of the session—To reflect upon our understanding of racism	8
A reading from scripture—John 17:20–23.....	8
A selection from the Confession of Belhar.....	8
Quotations from <i>Waking Up White</i>	8
Opening Prayer	8
Discussion	8
Closing questions	9
Closing prayer.....	9

Session Four—Where do we go from here?	10
Goal of the session—To identify next steps to take in understanding race and working to dismantle racism	10
A reading from scripture—Amos 5:14–15; 23–24	10
A selection from the Confession of Belhar.....	10
Quotations from <i>Waking Up White</i>	10
Opening prayer	10
Discussion	10
Closing prayer	11
Appendix A: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Resources for Further Study	12
Appendix B: Whose We Are and Who We Are	13

Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race A Study Guide



The Reverends Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston

Introduction

The Reverend Denise Anderson and the Reverend Jan Edmiston, Co-Moderators of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), have invited the church to read and discuss the book, *Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race*, by Debby Irving. This resource is designed to help groups respond to that invitation.

About this study

“We need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.” Believe it or not, this was really good news to me when I heard it at the end of my first anti-racism training session. What I understood in a second was that it is okay to be uncomfortable. I heard this in a room full of brown, black, and white people, all with different experiences, all wanting God’s justice to be made real, all committed to loving one another. Thinking about racism in such a setting made me mighty uncomfortable, just as reading this book did. There are two wonderful gifts from this experience, though: when we pay attention to our discomfort, we can learn and change and love each other better, and we are all always (always, always, always!) held in the grace of Christ.

Here’s the thing: Being uncomfortable isn’t the only thing going on when reflecting on the stories in this book. What you’ll find by using the questions below is that your life is much richer than you thought, it’s more vibrant, and you have way more resources than you thought you did for understanding what’s going on with racism in our country. Learning about how to interrupt racism is part of learning how to be a disciple of Christ. We’re learning how to love God and love others as ourselves.

Tips for facilitators

You can be mindful about a couple of things that will help your study go well.

Identify in advance how much time the group will devote to each session. This will shape how you approach the discussion: how you structure the time and how you use the questions.

Invite the participants to read *Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race* before the study starts. It may be purchased at your local independent bookstore or ordered through Amazon.com.

If possible, inform the participants that the first session will focus on our understanding of who we are in relation to race.

Practice listening

- Pray: Open with prayer and close with prayer. A litany has been included in Appendix B that can be shared with group members to use for their personal devotion. It may also be used as the closing prayer for the study. While praying, remember to include times of silence in order to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to you.
- Keep eye contact: It's hard to maintain eye contact when we're uncomfortable with ourselves or others. When someone is speaking, maintain kind eye contact with that person. This will help build relationships and create safe space for people to struggle.
- Pay attention: A pastor I knew used to say "some people are hard of hearing, but some people are hard of listening." Sometimes we listen in order to say something back or have our chance at talking. Instead, pay attention to what the person speaking is offering from his or her heart and mind.
- Keep a notebook or journal: (1) Record questions, observations, or insights for your own reflection; (2) Invite others to keep a notebook or journal; (3) Try keeping a notebook for the group to record questions, observations, or insights week to week.

Practice creative flexibility

- Take the temperature of the room: In other words, see what the group as a whole is thinking about or asking. One way to do this is to repeat back what you're hearing. "What I'm hearing is this: _____." If the group is approaching the study a particular way, you can help them out. Maybe two smaller groups are better than a large group, maybe you need to start with a Bible study, maybe you need to meet in each other's homes, or maybe you need to meet around a meal. Maybe you want to throw out all the questions here and come up with your own!
- Take the lead and get feedback: It's great when someone can start out with the study and even better when the leader gets feedback from others about how to do the study. If you consult with a couple of other folks, the leadership and support of the group will be easier. Use the elements of the study as they are, redesign them, or do something completely new.
- Keep a box, basket, or bag of basic supplies: If you have the budget for it, keep small notebooks, pens, pencils, and even crayons or markers for people who learn with doodling.

Practice "truth in love"

- Truth and love need to go together for us to build each other up. In a study like this, that means being frank about our privilege and racism, but not judgmental of ourselves or each other.

Practice relationship building

- Consider setting your group size to be about 12–15 people. This is large enough to have good questions and a variety of stories to learn from, and small enough to build relationships as you go through the study. If time allows, you might add a relationship building activity at the beginning of each session. [Here are some exercises you can use or adapt.](#)

Practice partnership

- Strive to ensure that each person has the opportunity to speak.
- Make sure each person has the right to pass and not to speak if the person chooses.
- Mutual Invitation is a process for discussion designed to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak. It proceeds in the following way:

The leader or a designated person shares first. After that person has spoken, she or he invites by name another person to share. This does not need to be the person beside the speaker. The person who has been invited has two options:

- (a) to speak and then invite the next speaker;
- (b) to pass and then invite the next speaker.

The process continues until everyone has been invited. If participants passed, be sure to extend them another invitation.

Mutual Invitation was by Eric H. F. Law and described in *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*: St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993


Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible and are copyrighted © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and are used by permission.

Quotations from *Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race* (Elephant Room Press) are copyrighted ©2016 and reprinted with permission from the author, Debby Irving.


Session One—Beginning your racial autobiography

Goal of the session—To reflect upon who we are in relation to race.


A reading from scripture—Ephesians 4:11–16


 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

A selection from the Confession of Belhar 

 “We believe ... that that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God’s Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain” (*Book of Confessions*, Confession of Belhar, 10.3)

Quotations from *Waking Up White*


 “Waking up white has been an unexpected journey that’s required me to dig back into childhood memories to recall when, how, and why I developed such distorted ideas about race, racism, and the dominant culture in which I soaked” (Debby Irving, *Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race*, Cambridge, MA: Elephant Room Press, 2014, p. xii).


 As I unpack my own white experience in the pages ahead, I have no pretense that I speak for all white Americans, not even my four white siblings. Never before have I been so keenly aware of how individual our cultural experiences are. That said, all Americans live within the context of one dominant culture, the one brought to this country by white Anglo settlers. Exploring one’s relationship to that culture is where the waking-up process begins” (*Waking Up White*, p. xiii).

Opening prayer


 Open the session with prayer.

Welcome and introduction

 Welcome the participants.


 Briefly describe the study using these or similar words:


- *In response to an invitation from the Co-Moderators of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we will discuss some of the themes raised in the book, Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race, by Debby Irving. This will be a time of respectful conversation in which we will listen to one another as we share our experiences and understandings.*

 It may be helpful to establish some simple ground rules to guide the conversations. The group may be invited to identify ground rules. The following are common ground rules that could be used or adapted by the group.

- Take responsibility for what we say. Use “I” statements.
- Think carefully and prayerfully before we speak.
- Treat each other respectfully.
- Listen to understand not to debate.
- Ask for clarification when necessary, in an effort to understand one another.
- It is always okay to pass. We don’t have to respond to every question.
- Maintain confidentiality. What is said in the study group stays in the study group.


Discussion

 Read, or invite a participant to read, the scripture passage, the selection from the Confession of Belhar, and the quotes from *Waking Up White*.

 Invite the participants to discuss the following questions. The questions may be taken one at a time or time may be allowed for the participants to write their reflections on all the questions and then discuss what they have written in response to the questions.


- What is your racial heritage?
- Growing up, what kind of contact did you have with people from different racial backgrounds?
- What are your first memories of white people being treated differently than people of color? What are your first memories of people of color being treated differently than white people? Recall specific incidents if you can. How did you feel?
- How did important adults (e.g. family, teachers, ministers) and your faith community help you understand and interpret your experiences with racial groups different from your own? What did they tell you about specific groups?


Closing questions


 Invite the participants to reflect on the following questions. If participants do not have answers to these questions, invite them to consider the questions between the end of this session and the next session.

- What did you learn about yourself?
- What will you do with what you learned?

Closing prayer

 Thank the participants.


 Note that the next session will focus on our understanding of race.

 Close with prayer.


Session Two—What is race?

Goal of the session—To reflect upon our understanding of race.


A reading from scripture—Romans 12:3–8


 “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”

A selection from the Confession of Belhar 

 “We believe ... that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God” (*Book of Confessions, Confession of Belhar, 10.3*)

Quotations from *Waking Up White*

 “No one argues that human beings don’t come in different packaging. Anyone can see that skin color, eye shape, and hair texture look different among various populations. Yet whereas scientists were once limited to measuring skulls and studying nose shape to try to understand the differences, they can now collect, study, and compare blood and DNA sequences. No science supports the idea that genetic makeup follows the neat racial lines white people have created. No science links race to intrinsic traits such as intelligence or musical or physical abilities.” (*Waking Up White, p. 39*)


 “The biggest problem with America’s idea of racial categories is that they’re not just categories: they’ve been used to imply a hierarchy born of nature. Regardless of how racial categories came into being, Americans have been cast in racial roles that have the power to become self-fulfilling, self-perpetuating prophecies.” (*Waking Up White p. 41*)

Opening prayer


 Open the session with prayer.


Discussion

 Briefly remind the participants of the ground rules.

 Invite the participants to discuss the following question:


- Because of our last session, what did you notice? What did you do?

 Read, or invite a participant to read, the scripture passage, the selection from the Confession of Belhar, and the quotes from *Waking Up White*.

 Invite the participants to discuss the following questions:


- Have you given much thought to the concept of race? Why or why not?
- How has your understanding of race changed over time?
- How have you experienced racial categories shifting through time? What names have been given to races at different points in your life? Why did this happen?
- How did you learn that race, not a biological reality but a social construct, created advantage for white people at the expense of people of color?


Closing questions

 Invite the participants to reflect on the following questions. If participants do not have answers to these questions, invite them to consider the questions between the end of this session and the next session.

- What did you learn about yourself?
- What will you do with what you learned?

Closing prayer

 Thank the participants.


 Note that the next session will focus on our understanding of racism.

 Close with prayer.


Session Three—What is racism?

Goal of the session—To reflect upon our understanding of racism.


A reading from scripture—John 17:20–23


 “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”


A selection from the Confession of Belhar 

 “We believe ... that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted” (*Book of Confessions, Confession of Belhar, 10.3*).

Quotations from *Waking Up White*

 “Racism wasn’t about this person or that, this upset or that, this community or that; racism is, and always has been, the way America has sorted and ranked its people in a bitterly divisive, humanity-robbing system.” (*Waking Up White, p. 31*)

 “Segregation enables avoidance, which enables denial, which creates the illusion that white privilege doesn’t exist. But just because I didn’t see my skin color advantage didn’t mean it didn’t exist. As a white person, I don’t have to do *anything* to have skin color advantages conferred on me without my permission, without my awareness. I can choose to write and speak against it, but at the end of the day, as long as our racial system is intact, there’s nothing I can do to give away my privilege. I’ve got it whether I want it or not. The question is what will I *do* with it.” (*Waking Up White, p. 74*)

 “Here’s one way I’ve come to think about it. Think about three basic elements:


- skin color symbolism: using skin color to imagine innate levels of intelligence, athleticism, aggression, and so forth in oneself and others
- favoritism: the idea that one is best
- power: the ability to make decisions for and/or distribute resources to people

skin color symbolism + favoritism + power = systemic racism.” (*Waking Up White, p. 54*)


Opening Prayer


 Open the session with prayer.

Discussion

 Invite the participants to discuss the following question:


- Because of our last session, what did you notice? What did you do?

 Read, or invite a participant to read, the scripture passage, the selection from the Confession of Belhar, and the quotes from *Waking Up White*.

 Invite the participants to discuss the following questions.


- How have you understood racism? How has that understanding changed over time?
- How does the definition, “skin color symbolism + favoritism + power = systemic racism” speak to you? Does it make sense? Why or why not?
- How does a systemic understanding of racism change the work we need to do?
- What concrete steps can we take to challenge and dismantle systemic racism?

Closing questions


 Invite the participants to reflect on the following questions. If participants do not have answers to these questions, invite them to consider the questions between the end of this session and the next session.

- What did you learn about yourself?
- What will you do with what you learned?

Closing prayer

 Thank the participants.


 Note that the next session will focus on next steps.

 Close with prayer.


Session Four—Where do we go from here?

Goal of the session—To identify next steps to take in understanding race and working to dismantle racism.


A reading from scripture—Amos 5:14–15; 23–24


 Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

A selection from the Confession of Belhar 

 “We believe ... that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (*Book of Confessions*, Confession of Belhar, 10.7).

Quotations from *Waking Up White*


 How can racism possibly be dismantled until white people, lots and lots of white people, understand it as an unfair system, get in touch with the subtle stories and stereotypes that play in their heads, and see themselves not as good or bad but as players in the system? Until white people embrace the problem, the elephant in the room—and all the nasty tension and mistrust that goes with it—will endure. And the feedback efforts of people of color will fall on ignorant ears at best, or be misconstrued as too whiney or too angry at worst.” (*Waking Up White*, p. 153)

 “Self-examination and the courage to admit bias and unhelpful inherited behaviors may be our greatest tools for change. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable enough to expose our ignorance and insecurities takes courage. And love. I believe the most loving thing a person, or a group of people, can do for another is to examine the ways in which their own insecurities and assumptions interfere with others’ ability to thrive. Please join me in opening your heart and mind to the possibility that you—yes, even well-intentioned you—have room to change and grow, so that you can work with people of all colors and ethnicities to co-create communities that can unite, strengthen, and prosper.” (*Waking Up White*, p. 249)


Opening prayer


 Open the session with prayer.

Discussion


 Invite the participants to discuss the following question:

- Because of our last session, what did you notice? What did you do?

 Read, or invite a participant to read, the scripture passage, the selection from the Confession of Belhar, and the quotes from *Waking Up White*.


 Invite the participants to discuss the following questions:


- How often do you talk about race with your family and friends? Why do you think that is the case? What can you do to change?
- Think of a time when you were treated unfairly. What happened? How did you react emotionally and physically? How did you respond?
- Think of a time when you stood up for your rights or the rights of others. What did you do? Where did you get the strength or courage or grace to do what you did?
- What do you hear God calling you to change or to do through this study? What are your next steps to dismantle racism?

 If appropriate, discuss the following questions:

- What might the next steps be for our group, for our community?
- How will we determine, and take, those next steps? Make specific plans to do so.

Closing prayer

 Thank the participants.

 Close the session with the litany “Whose We Are and Who We Are” found in Appendix B or another prayer.

Appendix A

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Resources for Further Study

Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community, approved by the 222nd General Assembly (2016), <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/facing-racism-vision-intercultural-community-churchwide-antiracism-policy/>.

Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community Study Guides (Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries) <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/facing-racism-vision-intercultural-community-antiracism-study-guides/>.

The Confession of Belhar (available in English, Korean and Spanish). <https://www.pcusa.org/resource/belhar-confession/>.

The Confession of Belhar (Being Reformed—Faith Seeking Understanding), Cynthia Holder Rich (Congregational Ministries Publishing). Leaders Guide, www.pcusastore.com/Products/680751/the-confession-of-belhar-leaders-guide.aspx; Participant's Book, www.pcusastore.com/Products/680752/the-confession-of-belhar-participants-book.aspx.

Race and Reconciliation: Workbook—Confessions of 1967 and Belhar (Being Reformed—Faith Seeking Understanding), Clifton Kirkpatrick (Congregational Ministries Publishing). www.pcusastore.com/Products/680854/race--reconciliation-the-confessions-of-1967-and-belhar-workbook.aspx

A Study of the Belhar Confession and Its Accompanying Letter, Eunice McGarrahan (Office of Theology and Worship), <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/belhar-confession-study-guide/>.

30 Days with the Belhar Confession (Presbyterian Peacemaking Program). Available at store.pcusa.org. PDS# 2435816004.

Living the Gospel of Peace: Tools for Building More Inclusive Community, Eric Law (Presbyterian Peacemaking Program). Available at store.pcusa.org. PDS# 702700414.

Facing Racism: In Search of the Beloved Community, Lonna Lee (Presbyterian Peacemaking Program). Available at store.pcusa.org. PDS# 7027098002.

Practicing God's Radical Hospitality: Exploring Difference, Change and Leadership through the Spiritual Discipline of Hospitality, Teresa Chávez Saucedo (Presbyterian Women). Available at store.pcusa.org. PDS# PWR13060.

Race in a Post-Obama America, edited by David Maxwell (Westminster John Knox Press). Available at thethoughtfulchristian.com.

Appendix B Whose We Are and Who We Are

A litany drawing on scripture, the *Book of Confessions*, and the *Book of Order*

God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God, God created them; male and female, God created them.ⁱ

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus said, "You have given the right answer. Do this, and you will live."ⁱⁱ

We believe in one holy, universal Christian Church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.^{iv}

The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation.^v

The Church is to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.^{vi}

The Church is to be a community of witness, pointing beyond itself through word and work to the good news of God's transforming grace in Christ Jesus its Lord.^{vii}

The human tendency to idolatry and tyranny calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God.^{viii}

God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker,^{ix}

the church is a witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.^x

God sends the church in the power of the Holy Spirit to share with Christ in establishing God's just, peaceable, and loving rule in the world. God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ is the ground of justice and peace.^{xi}

The church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.^{xii}

*In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,*

***to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, Come, Lord Jesus!^{xiii}***

ⁱ Genesis 1:26

ⁱⁱ Luke 10:27–28

ⁱⁱⁱ Confession of Belhar

^{iv} F-1.0301, The Church Is the Body of Christ

^v F-1.0301, The Church Is the Body of Christ

^{vi} F-1.0301, The Church Is the Body of Christ

^{vii} F-1.0301, The Church Is the Body of Christ

^{viii} F-2.05, The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Reformed Tradition, adapted slightly for use in this liturgy

^{ix} Confession of Belhar

^x Confession of Belhar

^{xi} W-7.4001 Reconciliation in Christ

^{xii} Confession of Belhar

^{xiii} *A Brief Statement of Faith*, Lines 65–76