

Chapter Six

What Is White Privilege?

Maggie Potapchuk

A Case Study

We swim in a sea of white privilege every day. As we were writing about it in this monograph, we too were not exempt from it. It is elusive, yet it surrounds us. It is invisible to those of us who have it and boldly apparent to those who do not. It is systemic, yet enacted at an individual level. When it does become visible, it can feel like taking a solid hit in the gut, the floor dropping away from your feet, and many other experiences that one feels when the enormity of the negative impact of our actions is dropped squarely in our laps.

We (Sally and Maggie) were originally contracted to produce a document for a national foundation to share information about white privilege in the context of community building work. There were several ideas about how this product might be developed, ranging from bringing together a multi-racial group of “experts” to producing an “introduction to white privilege” pamphlet. The deliverable evolved into this monograph focused on white privilege in foundation and community partnerships. We were not concerned at that point about two white women writing this monograph, because we had discussed having people of color contribute to it, we read a lot of literature written by people of color, and we knew several people of color whom we wanted to invite to be reviewers. We believed we were doing the proper research that would add what we needed beyond the perspective and experience we each had as white women dedicated to the elimination of racism. We gave ourselves permission to move forward with this approach and our permission was enough. We live in a system where we didn’t have to be accountable to anyone other than each other.

During the data-gathering stage we surveyed and interviewed several white people and people of color, including staff from the national foundation, to augment our own ideas and hear stories from the field. At that point we also contracted with an African American consultant to interview the people of color, while we interviewed the whites. He and one of his interviewees asked why two white people were writing this monograph. There it was: the hit in the gut, even though we had been through discussions of what this product could be; even though we had been reading and discussing white privilege intensely leading up to the writing stage; even though we had been thinking about the involvement of people of color in this process; and now we were in the implementation stage. Once this question was raised, we began to think about our process and how white privilege shaped our conceptualization, design, and implementation of the project.

We were keenly aware that our delay in including people of color meant that they would not have the same level of resources or time to develop their ideas that we had, since the process was well underway and the budget was finite. Donna Bivens from the Women’s Theological Center had written an excellent article on internalized racism, and we asked her if she would write a chapter on that same subject. Maggie had met her at a few gatherings and was impressed with the insight and wisdom she shared in each of those experiences. We also invited Barbara Major to share her perspective of being a community builder involved in foundation and community partnerships in New Orleans and other communities, as well as to be a contributor to the “What is Racism” chapter. We both knew Barbara from interactions at various meetings and always respected her crystal clear racial analysis, her frankness and depth of knowledge. We tried to be transparent with them about our concerns, the inequity of time and resources and our process thus far. Barbara and Donna reminded us that the process for developing the monograph reproduced the typical foundation and community partnership: with the white folks having more say, more

time, more resources and bringing on people of color only when the white people decided it was appropriate or necessary.

White privilege is systemic and plays out on many different levels. This is a profile of some of the dynamics of white privilege in this project. This type of analysis can be helpful when we work in communities.

Individual: Our assumptions of our knowledge and awareness on the subject and of our appropriateness as authors on this topic translated into actions or inaction. This resulted in us not having a diverse team at the beginning of the project. We also had to recognize how the opportunity to receive a grant, and our desire to receive a future grant, were unconscious and conscious undercurrents to our decision not to “rock the boat” with the foundation to ask for an extension. *Our responsibility is to question our perspective, discuss the situation with allies, and hold up the mirror to our process consistently – not just when it is convenient.*

Interpersonal: Though we had collegial relationships with Donna and Barbara, we did not take the time to develop our relationships, nor did we take the time to fully discuss our perspectives with each other. There was just enough time to write our chapters. This led to some misunderstandings about expectations, timelines and each other’s perspectives. *Our responsibility was to negotiate a new timeline that would include time and resources to do the front-end work with all four writers – including building relationships, discussing our perspectives, and developing our group expectations.*

Cultural: One frequent comment from the reviewers was that the white authors’ narrative was missing. We noticed our different comfort and awareness levels in sharing our stories. We (Sally and Maggie) struggled with how to add our own stories and have them be informative and real without being confessional statements that more reflected white guilt than white anti-racist development. *Our responsibility is for our personal stories to be “rigorous,” to ask questions, and to discuss how to change our behavior and/or attitude.*

Institutional: This relates to the issue of the perceived and real power of the foundation that is in control of the resources. This is an expansive topic, which will be discussed more deeply in other chapters. We felt institutional pressure to deliver the product. How much of this was institutionally applied and how much was self-applied is a key question. Some of the pressure was created by our own personal concern about the consequences of not meeting the deadline. We believed consequences could include not receiving a future grant and not being considered in the consultant pool. Some of the pressure was based on our desire to support the current equity work within the foundation. If we held up the mirror to this process with the foundation, what would be the implications? What would be the consequences for asking for more time and more resources? We never asked the question directly; instead our actions were driven by our assumptions of the answers. *Our responsibility was to include all four authors in our conversations with foundation staff, to make decisions together on how time and resources would be allocated and to advocate for the integrity of the process.*

A key and critical focus of this monograph on white privilege is the importance of white people consistently holding up the mirror to our actions and decisions, to reveal privilege and the actions and results that ensue. It is through these processes that we can become more aware, and then can use that awareness to act differently. It is extremely important to remember that no one is exempt from this responsibility. White privilege operates systemically as well as on these other levels. Those of us who are committed to equity and justice are no exceptions. We learn and change and must continually remove institutional and learned layers of racism. We must strive consistently to expand our awareness of the reality of white privilege, be diligent in not repeating mistakes, and respond quickly to new ones.

– Maggie Potapchuk and Sally Leiderman

Definition of White Privilege

In the past 10 years, there has been a significant increase in the number of books, conferences and workshops that focus on white privilege, as well as university courses on white studies. We will highlight a few theorists and activists whose research and activism have deepened our understanding of white privilege. In this chapter we are going to focus on three areas:

- Understanding more about how we learned to be white;
- Learning about some of the accumulated advantages that have resulted in whites faring better than people of color; and finally
- Identifying costs of this system to white people and what can we do to change things.

Sometimes in this chapter, we specifically speak to people who identify as white. Readers may have different emotional responses to the definition and discussions of white privilege (sometimes referred to as white skin privilege). This is normal. Whites have benefited over the years from being silent, for ignoring racist acts, for remaining ignorant about the privilege we receive based on our racial identity. Joe Feagin and Eileen O'Brien, authors of *White Men on Race*, enlighten us on living in this cocoon:

“The white collective, and particularly the white power structure, currently rewards those who generally conform to its views and standards. There is little motivation or reward within the white collective for those who dare to speak out against discrimination or who seek to develop anti-racist agendas. Instead, the pressure of the collective is toward keeping quiet about racial animus and discrimination in all but extreme cases, that is, to not ‘rock the boat,’ or question or reveal the ‘family secrets.’”¹

The definition of white privilege we will use for this monograph is:

White privilege is about the concrete benefits of access to resources and social rewards and the power to shape the norms and values of society that whites receive, unconsciously or consciously, by virtue of their skin color in a racist society.²

Peggy McIntosh, who wrote the seminal article “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,”³ takes this definition further and describes unearned advantage and conferred dominance. First, we need to acknowledge that there are unearned entitlements—things that *all* people *should* have—such as feeling

¹ Joe Feagin and Eileen O'Brien. *White Men on Race: Power, Privilege, and the Shaping of Cultural Consciousness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), p.237.

² Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, editors. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 97.

³ Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondence Through Work in Women’s Studies” (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, Center for Research on Women, 1988).

safe in public spaces, free speech, the ability to work in a place where we feel we can do our best work, and being valued for what we can contribute. When unearned entitlement is restricted to certain groups, however, it becomes the form of privilege that McIntosh calls “unearned advantage.” Unearned advantage gives whites a competitive edge we are reluctant to even acknowledge, much less give up. The other type of privilege is conferred dominance, which is giving one group (whites) power over another: the unequal distribution of resources and rewards.⁴

Many of us who are white are oblivious that this system exists, which is one of its successes. We assume this is the norm, we have been taught how to rationalize people being treated differently or faring differently. It is sometimes easier to look to people of color whom we deem ‘successful’ and wonder why others are not. It is easier for some white people to focus on the times we are treated differently because of belonging to an oppressed identity group (like women, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered, non-Christians or disabled groups) than to notice how we are treated differently because of the color of our skin.

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With the concept of white privilege being elusive, we need to understand it more fully so we can truly understand its systemic nature and how it is engrained in what we do every day. Alan Johnson shares some examples in his book *Privilege, Power, and Difference*. As you think about these examples and how they apply to community building work, please also notice the ones that evoke an emotional response for you personally.

Institutional Examples

As whites we are:

- Less likely than Blacks to be arrested. Once arrested, we are less likely to be convicted and, once convicted, less likely to go to prison, regardless of the crime or circumstances. Whites, for example, constitute 90% of those who use illegal drugs, but fewer than half of those who are in prison on drug use charges.
- More likely than Blacks [and Latinos/as] with comparable credit histories and income to have loan applications approved and less likely to be given poor information or the “runaround” during the application process (such as being steered to predatory lenders).
- Charged lower prices for new and used cars than people of color are. This is due in large part to residential segregation, in which whites have access to higher-quality goods of all kinds at cheaper prices.
- Represented in government and the ruling circles of corporations, universities, and other organizations is disproportionately high numbers.
- Clustered in communities with the best access to quality job opportunities, schools, and community services.

⁴ Allan G. Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001), p.26-27.

Individual or Interpersonal Examples

Whites:

- Are more likely to control conversations and be allowed to get way with it. We are also more likely to have our ideas and contributions taken seriously—even those that were suggested previously by a person of color and dismissed.
- Can generally assume that when we go out in public, we won't be challenged and asked to explain by white people or people in authority what we are doing. We are also much less likely to be attacked by hate groups simply because of our race.
- Are more likely to be given early opportunities to show what we can do at work, to be identified as potential candidates for promotion, to be mentored, to be given a second chance when we fail, and to be allowed to treat failure as a learning experience rather than as an indication of who we are and the shortcomings of our race.
- Don't have to deal with an endless and exhausting stream of attention to our race. We can simply take our race for granted as unremarkable, often to the extent of experiencing ourselves as not having a race.
- Can reasonably expect that if we work hard and “play by the rules,” we'll get what we deserve, and feel justified in complaining if we don't. It is something other racial groups cannot realistically expect.⁵

Having these white privileges has less to do with how we show up as white people and more about how our whiteness is typically affirmed, respected, and accepted. If we are perceived to be white by others, than a particular set of privileges are conferred on us. If we only see white privilege on the individual level and counter with, “I didn't ask for these privileges” or “I don't expect it,” that is missing the point. Almost no one—white or person of color—is individually (or even collectively) asking to be privileged or oppressed. We were born into a system that disadvantages African American, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Native American and Latino/a Americans and provides benefits to those who are identified as whites. We may not be responsible for the creation of the system, though we have a responsibility concerning how we respond to it.⁶

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Learning To Be White

So how do white people, as individuals and as groups, learn to consider themselves the racial identity group called “white?” If we look closer at our lives, we really started to learn to be white at an early age⁷, even though for many

⁵ Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*, p 27-30.

⁶ Paul Kivel, White Benefits: An Exercise, (www.paulkivel.com, accessed October, 2005), p. 4.

⁷ To learn more, see Debra Van Ausdale and Joe R. Feagin, *The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001).

families it was typically not discussed directly among family members or friends. We simply modeled what we saw and heard, unaware of how the world was constructed for the benefit of us and fellow whites. The messages we heard at a very young age were mostly covert, yet crystal clear.

Depending on our ages and income, we may have lived completely segregated lives, going to predominantly white schools, having white teachers, going to completely or nearly all-white social and religious activities. We may or may not have known that African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino/a or Native American students in other schools received our used textbooks or were schooled in more rundown and less well-equipped buildings.

Some of us may have had the experience of being part of planned desegregation of schools. Then, we might have heard a different discussion from our parents. It may have been about the dangers of bussing into undesirable neighborhoods, or of the decline in the quality of our education or why students of color “kept to themselves” or caused trouble in our schools. For some, it was the catalyst for their family to move away. There was sometimes no discussion about our segregated neighborhoods and schools, but rather typically a *covert message conveyed to us: white people live in this neighborhood and people of color are supposed to live over there.*

Even if we lived in a very integrated world, with role models who were advocates of civil rights, nearly every white person knew other white people who were afraid of people of color.

If we think about the authority figures, the heroes, the entertainers, and newscasters we saw growing up, they were almost always white. When we think of who entertained us on TV, we realize that there were many stereotypes we learned by the roles people of color played: the maid, the sexual object, the criminal, the spy, the jokester, the warrior, etc. Think about the leaders our parents listened to regarding politics, economics, parenting, etc. It is only in the past decade or so that we realized we didn’t hear about some of the other heroes in World War II. There is finally recognition for the contributions of the Tuskegee Airmen, code talkers, and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team,⁸ etc. *An underlying message we learned is: whites lead and people of color in leadership roles are exceptions.*

Another issue was learning about who we were supposed to date and be friends with. In some cases the message was very clearly stated: “You will never marry a Black man.” But in most cases we could just observe who was in our parents’ social circles. Some of us have stories of when we ventured out and made friends with someone of a different race. A few of us were fortunate to have this type of childhood friendship; for others the friendship was discouraged or forbidden. *The message of whiteness many of us heard was very clear: stay with your own kind or deal with the consequences.*

Even if we lived in a very integrated world, with role models who were advocates of civil rights, nearly every white person knew other white people who were

⁸ “The 442nd Regimental Combat Team was sent on an intense and dangerous mission to rescue another U.S. Army regiment that was trapped by the Germans during WWII. The 442nd was composed entirely of Japanese Americans and, despite the fact that their families, relatives and friends were wrongfully imprisoned back in the U.S. because of their Japanese ancestry, the 442nd became the most decorated combat unit of its size in the U.S. military during WWII.” (www.asian-nation.org/442.shtml, accessed July, 2005).

afraid of people of color. Sometimes we learned to be white by absorbing this message of fear—hold on to your purse on city streets, lock your car doors when you drive downtown, stay alert at the fast food restaurant or the mall, don't go into certain neighborhoods after dark—because those were the places we were most likely to encounter people of color, particularly young males of color. *The strong message many of us heard is: be afraid of anyone who is different.*

“I had an experience that showed how fully my own sense of being white was linked to feeling safer with white people than with people of color and how that was untrue for people of color. I was working on a project in Michigan with an African American female colleague. We were planning to meet at a particular hotel late in the day. I had already arrived at the hotel when my colleague called to say she had gotten caught in a sudden blizzard. The highway patrol was pulling all the cars off the road and my colleague had to find shelter. She was tired, didn't know where she was, and was frightened about being in the “middle of nowhere” in a blizzard by herself. I started to tell my colleague that she shouldn't worry, she was in a very safe, rural area of Michigan. In my mind I was thinking we were in a white area, not one of the dangerous Black neighborhoods in Detroit or Flint. My African American colleague said—incredibly relieved—“Oh, don't worry, I see some Black families and I'll stick with them.” That was when I realized that seeing those Black families would have been the signal to me that the area was dangerous; my African-American colleague saw it as the signal that the area was safe.”

– Sally Leiderman

On some basic level most whites understand and acknowledge that people of color over the years have been treated unfairly. ... But guilt and shame many times cloud the explanation because it is difficult to accept that one's attitudes and behavior caused another person distress and disadvantage ... It is even more shocking to think how one's government and community institutions have created and reinforced these oppressive policies and laws.

Whites have few public role models and therefore few to look to for guidance and courage to understand what it means to be white and to have privileges. In Becky Thompson's book *A Promise and a Way of Life*, about 39 white anti-racist activists, she focuses on their contributions and the limitations of white anti-racism work in key social justice movements. She speaks to the importance of self-awareness: “This is the essence of self-reflection, a practice that is essential if people are to understand how to contribute to other people's struggle and yet not try to control it; to see when they have institutional power and when they do not; and to deal effectively with the historical relations between different identity groups.”⁹

Accumulated Advantages

What gets in the way for whites to recognize this concept of white privilege is guilt and shame. On some basic level most whites understand and acknowledge that people of color over the years have been treated unfairly. We have different explanations, based on our worldviews, life experiences, analyses of power, racism and oppression, knowledge of history, and, often, the amount of contact

⁹ Becky Thompson, *A Promise and A Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 370.

we have with people of color. But guilt and shame many times cloud the explanation because it is difficult to accept that one's attitudes and behavior caused another person distress and disadvantage. It is even more shocking to think how one's government and community institutions have created and reinforced these oppressive policies and laws. Part of understanding white privilege is knowing how just having white skin has resulted in accumulating so many advantages, and understanding how it affects what we own and the opportunities we have been given over the years. Larry Adelman, executive producer of *Race – The Power of an Illusion*, has outlined historical accumulative advantages for whites on his website about the film. A few are highlighted here chronologically, along with some current policies:

1830

“The Indian Removal Action forcibly relocated Cherokee, Creek and other eastern Indians to west of the Mississippi River to make room for white settlers.”

1862

“The Homestead Act gave away millions of acres of land—for free—of what had been Indian Territory west of the Mississippi. Alien Land Laws passed in California and other states reserved farm land for white growers by preventing Asian immigrants, ineligible to become citizens, from owning or leasing land.”

1877

“Jim Crow laws instituted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and not overturned in many states until the 1960s, reserved the best jobs, neighborhoods, schools and hospitals for white people.”

1934-1962

“The Federal Housing Administration made it possible for millions of average white Americans—but not others— to own a home for the first time. The federal government backed \$120 billion of home loans in which more than 98% went to whites. Today, black and Latino mortgage applicants are still 60% more likely than whites to be turned down for a loan, even after controlling for employment, financial, and neighborhood factors.”

1935

“The Wagner Act granted unions the power of collective bargaining; it helped millions of white workers gain entry into the middle class over the next 30 years. The Wagner Act permitted unions to exclude non-whites and deny them access to better paid jobs and union protections and benefits such as health care, job security and pensions. The Social Security Act of 1935 provided a safety net for millions of workers, guaranteeing them an income after retirement. But the act specifically excluded two occupations: agricultural workers and domestic servants, who were predominately African-American, Mexican, and Asian.”

1952

Racial barriers to U.S. citizenship were not removed until the McCarran-Walter Act, and white racial preferences in immigration remained until 1965.¹⁰

1968

Lobbyists for the banking industry drafted the Housing and Urban Development Act, which allowed private lenders to shift risks of financing low-income housing to the government, creating a lucrative and unregulated market for themselves. . . . The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights investigation later revealed FHA officials collaborated in financing the flight of low-income whites out of inner-city neighborhoods, and then aided unscrupulous realtors and speculators to arrange purchases of sub-standard housing by minorities desperate to own their own homes. . . . Bankers then foreclosed on mortgages of thousands of these uninspected and sub-standard homes, ruining many inner-city neighborhoods. In response HUD red-lined inner cities, making them ineligible for future loans, a decision that destroyed the value of inner-city housing for generations to come.”¹¹

1990

“A 1990 study of the National Institute on Drug Abuse revealed that while only 15% of the 13 million habitual drug users in the United States were Black [10% were Latino]¹² and 77 % were white. . . . A Los Angeles Times article in 1995 revealed the ‘Black and Latino crack dealers are hammered with 10-year mandatory federal sentences while whites prosecuted in state court face a minimum of five years and often receive no more than a year in jail.’”¹³

1992

A study by the National Law Journal examined the Environmental Protection Agency’s response to 1,177 toxic waste cases and found that polluters of sites near the greatest white population received penalties 500% higher than penalties imposed on polluters in minority area. In a review of 64 studies examining environmental disparities, the National Wildlife Federation found racial disparities outnumbered disparities by income. Corporations systematically target Native American reservations when looking for locations for hazardous waste incinerators, solid waste landfills, and nuclear waste storage facilities; Navajo teenagers develop reproductive organ cancer at 17

¹⁰ Larry Adelman, *Race—The Power of an Illusion*, (www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm, accessed June, 2005). Citation for advantages listed from 1830-1952.

¹¹ George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness,” a chapter in Paula S. Rothenberg, editor, *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2002), p.66.

¹² Prison Activist Resource Center, “African-Americans and the Criminal Injustice System,” www.prisonactivist.org/factsheets/racism.pdf#search='native%20americans%20racism%20statistics, accessed October, 2005).

¹³ Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, p. 68-69.

times the national average because of their exposure to radiation of uranium mines.”¹⁴

Beyond just this short list of policies, it is also about understanding our inter-generational white social network that has provided us advantages. Joe Feagin and Eileen O’Brien interviewed over 100 powerful, upper-income white men on their views, opinions and perceptions on racial issues. The researchers explain the unjust advantages many whites have gained and the role that plays in their lives and achievements: “Most whites inherit significant social networks that are heavily or exclusively white and that provide access to important social contacts or capital. Once networking is in place, it tends to persist over the generations. Thus, whites’ lives are shaped as much by the racialized system as the lives of those who are oppressed by it.”¹⁵ George Lipsitz, author of *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, reminds us that, “In the U.S. economy, where 86% of available jobs do not appear in classified ads and where personal connections prove the most important factor in securing employment, attacks on affirmative action guarantee that whites will be rewarded for their historical advantage in the labor market rather than for their individual abilities or efforts.”¹⁶

When others bring race to the surface in decision-making processes, we sometimes ignore, or minimize, or accuse them of “playing the race card,” yet we are blind to how the “white race card” is played every day in those same interactions and policy discussions.

Why is it so important to understand these facts? Because they make it clear that white Americans, as a group, have benefited enormously over the years from a web of laws, regulations, policies and practices, some of which name race and some of which do not. Advantages were passed on and in most cases accumulated in each generation of whites while disadvantages were passed on in each generation of people of color. Having an understanding of the historically accumulated privileges of whites can help us see the racial disparities in education, health, housing, economics etc. in a different light. In community building work, most of the time we do ask why white people are faring better and people of color are faring worse on different outcomes. Many times our response is how we can *make it better* for people of color or communities in which many people of color live. But typically our question is *not* about how white privilege plays a significant role in creating these disparities and how we can dismantle it.

Costs of Being White

When others bring race to the surface in decision-making processes, we sometimes ignore, or minimize, or accuse them of “playing the race card,” yet we are blind to how the “white race card” is played every day in those same interactions and policy discussions. We whites don’t have to think about race on a daily basis, don’t have to think about how race is playing into decisions that are being made, and don’t have to think about how our access to institutional services is based on privilege. We are also unaware of what the costs of being white are—everyday. Our blindness or disregard for understanding white privilege is reflected in our actions, and this can do real harm at a structural level (at a minimum) by colluding with policies, practices, and systems that dehumanize

¹⁴ Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, p. 67-68.

¹⁵ Feagin and O’Brien, *White Men on Race*, p.9.

¹⁶ Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, p. 67-68.

and hurt groups of color, and can individually be insensitive, demeaning, aggravating, and discriminating even if it is not our intent.

As we think about what we can do differently in our work to actively address white privilege, many anti-racism educators suggest focusing on three areas: head, heart, and hand.

- *Head*—having knowledge and awareness of the complexities of structural racism and white privilege.
- *Heart*—understanding how racism manifests itself individually and institutionally through hearing stories and building relationships with people who have different racial and ethnic identities, as well as those who are white.
- *Hand*—using our knowledge, awareness, and skills to work to create racial equity and justice in our communities.¹⁷

See the next page for just some of the costs of racism for white people in our society and the reasons why whites need to work for racial equity:

¹⁷ I first learned of this concept from faculty colleagues of the National Conference for Community and Justice-St. Louis region's Dismantling Racism Institute.

Costs of Racism for White People	Why Should Whites Act ...
<p>We are choosing to believe that Blacks or immigrants or other “groups” are taking our jobs away, and not seeing that we are being manipulated to fight with each other. This leads to corporations and institutions not being held accountable for how they conduct business and their human resource decisions.¹⁸ This translates into lower wages and benefits and less job security for all workers, including white wage workers.</p>	<p>We need to raise wages for all workers and not be manipulated by “divide and conquer” ploys created by corporations, which are loyal to their bottom line and not to communities where they operate. We need to be consistently aware of how our white privileged worldviews keep us separate from important allies of color; we can resist and act collectively for ALL workers’ rights.</p>
<p>American whites currently have shorter (4-5 years) and more stressful/less healthy lives than people in more equitable developed countries because of the racially-based inequalities of our society and the stress of the racially-based fears whites live with daily.¹⁹</p> <p>This fear leads to whites becoming easy prey to white criminals, especially those under the veil of legitimacy (e.g., those associated with corporate or religious institutions) or “white collar” criminals.</p>	<p>These racially-based fears come, in part, from lack of experience with difference, and buying into the stereotypical views—reinforced by the media—of who is violent or “criminal” in our communities. We can decrease our anxiety by understanding how media and others misrepresent crime statistics, rationalize racial profiling, and hide the level of white crime (especially drug use). If we ask questions and deal with the facts, and address our stereotypes, we can better invest our dollars to reduce real violence and improve health care and outcomes for <i>all</i> people.</p>
<p>“The education and income level of American workers will decline over the next 15 years if states do not do more to improve the number of college graduates from minority groups.”²⁰</p>	<p>The quality of life for all Americans will continue to erode if the education and income level of American workers declines. We will have fewer technological innovators, fewer breakthroughs in disease prevention, fewer highly qualified educators and fewer highly skilled craftspeople and engineers to repair our aging physical infrastructure. We are already predicting shortages in these areas, in large part because our current educational systems do not prepare all of our students with the skills they need to succeed in the requisite levels of training and education to do these jobs.</p> <p>Inequitable financing of schools, based in large part on</p>

¹⁸ Thank you to Donna Bivens for sharing her wisdom in helping to frame this section.

¹⁹ Richard Wilkinson, *The Impact of Inequality*. (New York: The New Press, 2005). Richard Wilkinson is a professor of social epidemiology and an expert in public health. He sees the world in terms of its physical and psychological well-being, surveying great sweeps of health statistics through sociological eyes. He has assembled a mountain of irrefutable evidence from all over the world that shows the damage done by extreme inequality. However rich a country is, it will still be more dysfunctional, violent, sick and sad if the gap between social classes grows too wide. Poorer countries with fairer wealth distribution are healthier and happier than richer, more unequal nations (www.iacglobal.org/spotlight.htm, accessed October, 2005).

²⁰ Anne K. Walters, “Standing of American Workers will Decline Unless Minority Education Becomes a Priority, Report Says,” (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 9, 2005).

Costs of Racism for White People	Why Should Whites Act ...
	<p>historic patterns of residential segregation and racist lending patterns (e.g., redlining), have resulted in unequal resources across schools. In addition, there is increasing evidence that many educators at all levels have lower expectations for students of color than for white students. These, and many other issues affecting the likelihood that students of color will succeed in school, need to be addressed.</p>
<p>By our lack of understanding of racism and white privilege and how they operate, we choose leadership that goes against own best interests and deepest values.</p>	<p>By understanding the role of racism we can better lay claim to and demand leaders to be accountable to <i>all</i> of their constituents (not just shareholders, but residents, consumers, and workers) and demand that our basic values—fairness, justice, empathy and integrity—be the foundation for all policy-making discussions and decisions.</p>
<p>We have inadequate communication skills and mediocre skills to work with people who are different, due to lack of cross-racial experiences. We have limited ability to respond to being “one of a few” when participating in racially diverse classrooms, social engagements, or workplaces and to figure out cultural practices when confronted with a new situation. This leads to loss of potential relationships, as well as limits our ability to succeed in the global economy.</p>	<p>We can improve our cross-cultural communication skills—which can lead to deeper relationships with people of color, being more successful in our interactions in the workplace, and being role models for our children—by teaching them to not be afraid of difference but to embrace it. On a larger scale, by promoting multi-racial and multicultural relationships and learning different languages, we can be more open about other countries’ cultures, norms and practices and promote diplomatic alternatives to international conflicts through the use of collaborative approaches.</p>
<p>By being ethnocentric we have limited cultural understanding, insight about, and acceptance of others. Due to our limited experiences, we typically do not know how cultures of people of color could be offering solutions to our basic human problems. We are also limited due to having a distorted, inadequate and inaccurate sense of history in which the contributions of people of color are diminished, and white people’s roles are magnified when positive and hidden and/or modified²¹ when negative.</p>	<p>By increasing our contact with people of color and of different ethnicities and investing in learning about different cultures, we can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase our knowledge and awareness; • Use different rituals, and skills when solving problems; and • Learn about our rich history, which can lead to increased understanding and less repetition of mistakes. <p>We have a limited history of re-examining our white-based solutions, but we do have a few ways in which other cultures have been ‘mainstreamed.’ For example, Native Americans believe it is important to be respectful to the earth and have been important advocates for</p>

²¹ Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*. (Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2002), p. 36.

Costs of Racism for White People	Why Should Whites Act ...
	environmental causes. This has led some companies and communities to adopt environmental practices that are making them better stewards of the earth. Also, western (white-based) medicine was skeptical of Asian American and Native American health practices. Now these practices (acupuncture, use of herbs) are more mainstreamed and some practices are even being reimbursed by health insurance companies.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The following are reflection questions to help whites explore what it means to be white and to wrestle with the concept of privilege. We encourage you to discuss these questions with others.

Learning To Be White

- When was the first time you *intellectually* realized you were white?
- When was the first time you realized you might be treated differently because you have white skin? When was the first time you realized people of other racial identity groups are treated differently?
- What were the messages you heard growing up about white people? African Americans? Latinos/as? Native Americans? Asian American and Pacific Islanders?
- Look at your friends, family, colleagues, key service people (doctor, dentist, counselor, handyman, etc.)—what are their racial identities? How and why did you choose to know or work with these people? Which racial groups do the people you socialize with regularly belong to?

Accumulated Advantages

- When you hear the phrase by a person of color, “I have to work twice as hard to be half as good,” what are the norms, policies and practices in your organization that could make a person of color believe that this is her/his reality?
- If you identify as white, are any of the following statements true for you and your family? Think about other advantages your family received for being white.
 - Your ancestors were immigrants who took jobs (in the early part of 20th century) in streetcars, construction, shipbuilding, wagon and coach driving, house painting, tailoring, longshore work, brick laying, table waiting, working in the mills, working as a furrier, dressmaking or any other trade or occupation where people of color were driven out or excluded.
 - You live in a school district or metropolitan area where more money is spent on the schools that white children go to than on those that children of color attend.
 - You live in a neighborhood that has better police protection, municipal services and is safer than those where people of color live.²²

Costs of Being White

- Based on the list of costs in this chapter, what are some other costs you have experienced from being white? What are ways that you can act to address these costs?
- Think about a specific experience you had of (individual, cultural or institutional) preferential treatment, or white privilege. What did you do?²³ Do you wish you acted differently?
- In the past month what are some ways you challenged, pushed or supported other whites in dealing with racism? White privilege? What could you have done? How have you supported other whites who are working to address white privilege? How can you work collectively with other whites?

²² Kivel, *Uprooting Racism*, p. 32.

²³ From Challenging White Supremacy literature, (www.cwsworkshop.org/, accessed June, 2005).

