

## Chapter Four

**What is Racism?**

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**Introduction**

The costs and the debilitating reality of racism are substantial and pernicious. Readers of this monograph are probably very familiar with the ways in which the socio-economic conditions of people of color as a group—and for different groups within that broad category—are nearly always worse than for white people as a group. For example, Latinos have the lowest rates of high school graduation (between 70 and 75 percent)<sup>1</sup>, African American youth are “overrepresented in 26 out of 29 arrest categories demarcated by the FBI,”<sup>2</sup> and American Indians have the lowest per capita income of any racial or ethnic group in the nation.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, according to researchers at Harvard University, each 1% increase in incidences of racial disrespect (defined as looking down upon, ignoring, underestimating and making assumptions about based on stereotypes) translates to an increase of 350 deaths per 100,000 African Americans.<sup>4</sup> Camara P. Jones, Research Director of the Social Determinants of Health work at the Centers for Disease Control explains: “By the time you get into the 25-44-year-old group, you start to see changes ... There’s a kind of stress, like you’re gunning your cardiovascular engine constantly if you’re Black, that results from dealing with people who are underestimating you, limiting your options. It results from little things like going to a store and if there are two people at the counter—one Black and one white—the white person will be approached first. If you have stress from other sources, like a bad marriage, it’s not something you think about constantly. But the stresses associated with racism are chronic and unrelenting.”<sup>5</sup>

One way to understand racism is to consider the ways in which policies and practices of institutions help to create and maintain these differential outcomes and stresses. Another is to consider why we as a nation allow these kinds of differences to persist. A third is to consider who benefits from things as they are and what have been the consequences for groups and individuals who tried to change the racial status quo. The goal of this chapter is to help community builders deepen our ability to answer these questions.

One way to understand racism is to consider the ways in which policies and practices of institutions help to create and maintain these differential outcomes and stresses. Another is to consider why we as a nation allow these kinds of differences to persist.

<sup>1</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Draft Fact Sheet: Racial Disparities in High School Completion*. Unpublished document (Baltimore, MD: 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Eleanor Hinton Hoytt, Vincent Schiraldi, Brenda V. Smith, Jason Ziedenberg. *Reducing Racial Disparities in Juvenile Detention*. (Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census (2000).

<sup>4</sup> Sid Kirchheimer, “Racism Is Harmful to Health “Antiracism” Initiatives Needed, But Slow to Be Recognized, Say Experts” (<http://my.webmd.com/content/Article/58/66541.htm>, accessed 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Kirchheimer, (<http://my.webmd.com/content/Article/58/66541.htm>).

The chapter explores some of the history and current manifestations of racism in the United States. We hope it elaborates on the idea of racism as prejudice plus power, by talking about the ways racism was developed and continues to operate as a mechanism designed to “deny some people deserved opportunities simply because of their origin, or to accord other people certain undeserved opportunities only because of their origin.”<sup>6</sup> This chapter was not explicitly written just for white people. At the same time, it was written from the assumption that people of color are already very familiar with racism in practice. Many white people are as well, though generally not in the same unrelenting way.

Although much of what is covered in this chapter will not be new, we hope that readers will be challenged by some of its concepts. For example, we find that many people are not aware that the whole idea of classifying people into racial groups was developed as a method to justify treating some groups as less human than others, and that the idea of races is more political than biological. Further, many people are not aware of the extent to which racism is embedded in seemingly neutral policies and practices of many of our most fundamental institutions. This chapter will explore these two concepts, and several others.

In looking at racism as prejudice plus power, many people understand how prejudice explicitly operates to benefit some groups and harm others. But adding the word “power” to the definition clarifies one of the ways by which racism reinforces white privilege and how institutions and individuals with privilege are able to maintain racial distinctions. In the United States, people who are allowed to call themselves white<sup>7</sup> have enforced their prejudices through laws, institutions, systems, standards of what is “normal” or “best” and in many other ways. For example, the Constitution of the United States, and laws based on its interpretation, originally defined who was human and who was not and who could own land and who could not. The Constitution and laws based on it then dictated who could use the bathroom in a hotel and who could not. This has continued through today, when the Constitution is being used as the framework against which decisions are being made about whether or not individuals and groups are entitled to redress for the accumulated effects of these past injustices. A group must have power in order to use racism to maintain its privileges. And, simultaneously, groups stay in power most effectively when their accumulated privileges allow them to dominate the institutions that control the distribution of power.

At a recent meeting, Omowalle Satterwaite, President of the National Community Development Institute, cited an analysis of white supremacy by Loretta Ross, Founder of the Center for Human Rights Education. He said,

*“...With a simple explanation, Loretta deepened my understanding of this pervasive phenomenon/problem in all of its insidious dimensions. Loretta*

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<sup>6</sup> Stanley M. Garn, quoted in Theodore W. Allen, *Summary of the Argument of The Invention of the White Race* by its author, Part One (London: Verso, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> The phrase “people who are allowed to call themselves white” refers to the idea that racial categorizations are created by those with the power to do so, and are political, rather than biological ideas—often referred to as a “social construct.” This idea is explored more thoroughly throughout the monograph.

drew a rectangle and wrote the word “white supremacy” in the center of the figure. In the upper left corner, she wrote the term “religious institutions; in the upper right corner, the term “political institutions”; in the lower right corner, the term “social institutions”; and in the lower left corner, the term “educational institutions.” Loretta stated that religious institutions sanitize “white supremacy”...they provide a moral justification. The political institutions legalize “white supremacy”...they codify it into law. The social institutions operationalize “white supremacy”...they inculcate it into the social fabric of our society. The educational institutions proselytize “white supremacy”...they propagandize it from the cradle to the grave.”<sup>8</sup>

We believe this analysis can be applied as directly to racism, as a mechanism for maintaining white privilege, as it can to white supremacy itself.

### ***The Development of the Idea of Race***

Racial identity is often positive. Race can be a political identity (as described by Guinier and Torres in the *Miner’s Canary*<sup>9</sup>), a self-identity, a cultural identity and a source of great personal and group strength. For example, some exploratory research (not yet published) that one of this chapter’s authors (Leiderman) is doing (with Patricia Harbour, of Healing the Heart of Diversity) suggests that people of color often refer to the stories of their ancestors for solutions to contemporary workplace and community challenges, whereas white people very seldom do so.

However, for many people, it comes as a surprise that racial categorization schemes were invented by scientists to support worldviews that viewed some groups of people as superior and some as inferior. There are three important concepts linked to this fact. The first is that race is a made-up social construct, and not an actual biological fact: “Scientific studies conclude that race has no biological meaning or significance. The gene for skin color is linked with no other human trait. The genes that count for intelligence, athletic ability, personality type, and even hair and eye color are independent of the gene for skin color.”<sup>10</sup>

Second, race designations have changed over time. Some groups that are considered “white” in the United States today were considered “non-white” in previous eras. Karen Brodtkin, in her book *How the Jews Became White*,<sup>11</sup> writes about how in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States anti-working class and anti-immigrant notions were tied together, and both were deeply tied to shifts in the need for particular kinds of labor. Before that, Southern and Eastern Europeans and Jews were considered white by law and custom, in contrast to Asian American and Pacific Islanders, Mexicans, Native Americans and African Americans. In the late

<sup>8</sup> Presentation in Oakland, CA, May 5, 2005. Cited by permission of Omowale Satterwaite.

<sup>9</sup> Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres. *The Miner’s Canary*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, *Structural Racism and Community Building* (Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, 2004), p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

19<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans were re-classified and subdivided into inferior non-whites (who would be considered working class) and superior whites, starting with the racialization of the Irish. Brodtkin argues that this occurred because people in power in the United States were threatened by a large influx of immigrants. (At that time, immigrants made up 70% of the population of the largest cities in the United States.) One result was that the United States closed immigration from Europe from 1924 through 1927.<sup>12</sup>

Third, the way in which racial categorizations are enforced (the shape of racism) has also changed over time. Keith Lawrence at The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, and an expert in structural racism, often talks about periods of retrenchment following major civil rights victories. Manning Marable, Director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University, similarly talks about different waves of racism. Both of these scholars describe a path of racism for African Americans in the United States that includes slavery in the 1600's (legitimized in the U.S. Constitution), followed by emancipation, then imposition of Jim Crow laws and their increasing power, and then the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's. Racism in its current form includes a major increase in the removal of children of color from their homes via the child welfare system, and the increasing incarceration of children of color through mandatory minimum sentencing policies and other measures that disproportionately affect children and young adults of color.

The racial designation of Asian American and Pacific Islanders (i.e., white or not white) changed four times in the 19th century. Asian American and Pacific Islanders have been used by whites at different times in history to compete with African American labor.

The shape of racism has also been fluid for other groups. For example, Europeans who invaded the American land mass treated indigenous peoples as trading partners, sources of food and shelter. At the same time, these Europeans were murdering the indigenous peoples. Negotiated treaties between Native American sovereign nations and the United States were routinely violated by the federal government. United States policy in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries included taking Native American children from their families and moving them to foster homes and "Indian Schools" to promote their adoption of European languages and cultural norms. Current racism against Native Americans takes many forms, including the idea that the United States federal government has jurisdiction over whether or not to recognize the sovereignty of Native American tribes.

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<sup>12</sup> How have groups that have been allowed to be called white achieved that designation? Mechanisms vary for different groups. Before there were white and non-white designations, Christians (who controlled institutions in the United States) used designations of heathen and Christian. This particularly affected, and continues to affect, the "whiteness" of Jews and other non-Christian groups in the United States. The process of sorting immigrant and refugee groups into white and non-white status occurred by channeling groups into different jobs through various hiring and apprenticeship practices. The largest European immigration coincided with the Industrial Revolution and its class struggles and the de-skilling of many jobs. Dividing people into privileged and non-privileged racial categories is a useful system for keeping competition high and wages low. Many upwardly mobile jobs were closed to large groups based on their white or non-white classification. Brodtkin also notes that "organized racial violence against African Americans" helped claims by Irish people of their whiteness, though they did not become white until those claims were recognized by the political and economic elites. Then and only then were the Irish incorporated into major cities' governing structure.

compete with African American labor.<sup>13</sup> From 1882-1965, “Asian immigration was either illegal or so sharply limited to be virtually nonexistent . . . In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, whites passed more than 600 separate pieces of anti-Asian legislation limiting or excluding persons of Asian ancestry from citizenship.”<sup>14</sup> Though the median income of Asian American and Pacific Islanders is held up as evidence that the racial group is experiencing minimum economic discrimination, there are several reasons that this is false. For example, most Asian American and Pacific Islander immigrants entered the United States under restrictive laws that were skewed toward workers with higher-level skills. Yet, Asian American and Pacific Islander employees have lower status and less income than comparably educated Americans of every other race.<sup>15</sup>

Why is it so important to know that race is both a made-up idea and that racial designations and the shape of racism change over time? There are a number of reasons, some particularly key for people who do community building work:

- Knowing this provides very powerful evidence of the existence of white privilege in the form of one group having the power to impose a particular worldview on other groups—and evidence of how effective the system of white privilege has been at masking its mechanics.
- It means that community builders must look for explanations other than inherent characteristics once explicitly linked to biological “racial” differences—and now sometimes talked about more obliquely as racial “cultures”—to explain persistent and pervasive differences in outcomes among groups of color.<sup>16</sup>
- The patterns of progress and retrenchment in racism, and the fact that groups (except for African Americans) move in and out of “white” and “non-white” status often pit groups against each other in competition for the benefits of whiteness (access to jobs, college admissions, police protection, etc.). These kinds of “divide and conquer” strategies undermine the development of multi-racial efforts. Community builders need to be much more aware of these patterns, and active in anticipating and addressing them.
- What was done can be undone. That is, if race is a made-up classification, then we can unmake it. This is why it is entirely possible to believe that some day people will find it just as amazing that we once believed that race is a biological or inherent characteristic as that we once thought the world is flat.

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice* (Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2002), p.141.

<sup>14</sup> Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*, p. 142.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Chin, “A Brief History of the ‘Model Minority’ Stereotype” (<http://www.modelminority.com/article72.html>, accessed 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Though race is a social construct, the impact of assigning people to “race” categories has of course been very powerful. Accumulated white privilege affects the outcomes of every group, so that in almost every measure of community well-being (health, education, income, wealth accumulation, access to living wage employment, results of involvement with the criminal justice system) groups of color fare worse than whites observed as a group. This will be discussed in an upcoming chapter.

One of the ongoing discussions about the fluid shape of racism has to do with the different experiences of different cultural, political, immigrant and refugee groups described above. The debate is about many things, but it is partly about framing racism in terms of the experience of Africans and African Americans and whites. Our thought is that if racism is a mechanism to hold white privilege in place, then the black and white paradigm will always exist, for to have whiteness you must have an oppositional identity: blackness. In *The Miner's Canary*, Guinier and Torres describe this dynamic: "By offering this option of whiteness over time to selected non-black non-whites, the racial binary of black and white is preserved and race in the United States is made more manageable for those seeking to hold onto zero-sum power."<sup>17</sup>

However, we recognize that many other groups not currently allowed to be called white identify and think about racism differently. Guinier and Torres once again provide some context:

"Because Latinos are neither a uniform "race" nor a uniform ethnic group but still occupy a non-white political space in this country, they necessarily complicate the task of racial management for those in power. ... While no Latin American country has escaped the use of racial categories to manage and discipline various populations, the techniques employed contrast sharply with those of the United States. Unlike the pressure to reduce race to either black or white, the dominant ideological response within Latin America has been to celebrate, to a lesser or greater extent depending on the country, the idea of *mestizaje*."<sup>18 19</sup>

Our own sense is that privilege defines racism in terms of a continuum. Groups move along this continuum, being provided a "racial bribe" (again, a term used by Guinier and Torres). They note that this strategy has four goals: "To defuse the previously marginalized group's oppositional agenda; to offer incentives that discourage the group from affiliating with Black people, to secure high status for individual group members within existing hierarchies and to make the social position of 'whiteness' appear more racially or ethnically diverse."<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, Omi and Winant's discussion of the limitations of the black/white paradigm (as it is often called) highlights some of the advantages of making sure community builders bring a multi-racial lens, rather than solely a black-white one, to our work. They point out that policies such as affirmative action, immigration, welfare, bilingual education, and community economic development have different consequences for different racially defined minority groups.<sup>21</sup> Further, they note that policies and politics that are framed from a

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<sup>17</sup> Guinier and Torres, *The Miner's Canary*, p.227.

<sup>18</sup> *Mestizaje* is a Spanish word that refers to mixed races, which are common in Latin America.

<sup>19</sup> Guinier and Torres. *The Miner's Canary*, p. 227-228.

<sup>20</sup> Guinier and Torres. *The Miner's Canary*, p. 225.

<sup>21</sup> This point is particularly relevant for community builders. For example, communities that work on intentional integration (e.g., Oak Park, Illinois and South Orange and Maplewood, New Jersey) often use enforcement of zoning laws as one of their community building strategies. These strategies often impact African American homeowners in these neighborhoods very differently from recent immigrants, many of whom are Asian American

black/white viewpoint miss possibilities of conflict or accommodation among different racial minority groups. Policies framed in this way also encourage racial scapegoating of particular minorities who are seen as somehow responsible for U.S. cultural and economic decline. For example, they point to “rising anti-immigrant sentiment directed particularly toward Asians and Latinos. ... Bipolar racial discourse tends at best to marginalize and at worst to eliminate other positions and voices in the ongoing dialogue about race in U.S.”<sup>22</sup>

### ***Relationship of Racism and Class***

One of the issues that comes up in community building is how to think about the powerful connection between race and class. Cultural racism, defined below, plays off of and reinforces stereotypes such that many people in the United States believe that most poor people are people of color, for example, or that every person of color is poor. Coalitions and organizing efforts often run into difficulties trying to separate racism from classism, and many people in this work find it more difficult to work across lines of class than across racial lines.<sup>23</sup> In addition, we find that a lot of research about ‘promising practices’ in community building work mixes issues of race and class. For example, we often do not know whether a practice is based on knowledge about Latino/a children, or Latino/a children who are also poor. Thus, there is a lack of precision on which we base a lot of our ideas about how to support better outcomes for children and families.

Further, as a political and organizing matter, Michael Omi and Howard Winant note that: “Historically speaking, the call for ‘class’ unity across racial lines has amounted in practice to an argument that non-whites give up their racially based demands in favor of “class” unity on white terms. This will not be achieved by appeals to “class unity” or by reliance on ‘bargaining power theory,’ which merely offer an abstraction to minorities confronted by racial inequities in the workplace.”<sup>24</sup>

For these reasons, we believe it is critically important for community builders to be fully aware of both racism and classism and to develop analyses of the ways in which these forces interact to create disparate outcomes for groups of color and for poor people. Our work to understand both of these forces, and their relationships, is important to drilling down to strategies strong enough to make a difference. However, it is also at a level of complexity beyond the scope of this monograph.

As community builders, we need to work hard to identify and address our own class issues. We also need to avoid being drawn into protracted discussions about whether race or class is the more powerful force, as these discussions can

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and Pacific Islander or Latino/a, who are renting and who are sharing space with more people than the zoning laws permit.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 154.

<sup>23</sup> *On the Ground: Struggles from Project Change*, Mark Patrick George, et.al., (working draft).

<sup>24</sup> Omi and Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. p. 31.

distract us from the hard work of identifying institutional, structural and cultural racism and taking steps to eliminate them and their consequences. So, at this point, we share just the very brief insight offered by Theodore Allen in his summary of *The Invention of the White Race*. This insight was helpful to us in thinking about race and class, in terms of their relationship to racism in particular. Allen writes:

*“Racial oppression, gender oppression, and national oppression, all present basic lines of social distinction other than economic ones. Though inherently contradictory to class distinctions, these forms of social oppression, nevertheless, under normal conditions, serve to reinforce the ascendancy of the ruling class. Students of political science, and “world changers,” need to understand both the unique nature of each of these forms as well as the ways in which they differ, and the ways in which they interrelate with each other and with class oppression ... **the hallmark, the informing principle, of racial oppression in its colonial origins and as it has persisted in subsequent historical contexts, is the reduction of all members of the oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, beneath that of any member of the oppressor group** (emphasis by the author).<sup>25</sup>*

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### **Structural, Institutional, Cultural and Individual Manifestations of Racism**

If we are to address white privilege and racism comprehensively, we need to understand not just what racism looks like for different groups, but its various forms. This section focuses on three forms of structural racism: institutional, cultural and individual. While we discuss them separately, please remember that they are interdependent; one would not exist without the others. It is the relationship and behavior of these interdependent elements that has allowed racism to recreate itself generation after generation so that it is now self-perpetuating.

Structural racism includes the aspects of our history and culture that have allowed the privilege associated with ‘whiteness’ and the disadvantage of ‘color’ to endure and adapt over time. It points out the ways in which public policies and institutional practices contribute to inequitable racial outcomes. It lays out assumptions and stereotypes that are embedded in our culture that, in effect, legitimize racial disparities, and it illuminates the ways in which progress toward racial equity is undermined.<sup>26</sup> The Aspen Institute’s newest publication, *Structural Racism and Community Building*, shares how we can use a structural racism lens in our work:

<sup>25</sup> Theodore W. Allen, *Summary of the Argument of the Invention of the White Race* (Part 1), (London: Verso, 1997). p. 2-3.

<sup>26</sup> Karen Fulbright-Anderson, Keith Lawrence, Stacey Sutton, Gretchen Susi, and Anne Kubisch. *Structural Racism and Youth Development Issues, Challenges, and Implications*, Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change Working Paper Series. (New York: The Aspen Institute, 2004).

*“The structural racism lens allows us to see that, as a society, we more or less take for granted a context of white leadership, dominance, and privilege. This dominant consensus on race is the frame that shapes our attitudes and judgments about social issues. It has come about as a result of the way that historically accumulated white privilege, national values, and contemporary culture have interacted so as to preserve the gaps between white Americans and Americans of color.”<sup>27</sup>*

For example, we can see structural racism in the many institutional, cultural and structural factors that contribute to lower life expectancy for African American and Native American men, compared to white men. These include higher exposure to environmental toxins, dangerous jobs and unhealthy housing stock, higher exposure to and more lethal consequences for reacting to violence, stress and racism, lower rates of health care coverage, access and quality of care and systematic refusal by the nation to fix these things.

### Institutional Racism

Institutional racism refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as non-white.

*Examples:*

- Government policies that explicitly restricted the ability of people to get loans to buy or improve their homes in neighborhoods with high concentrations of African Americans (also known as “red-lining”).
- City sanitation department policies that concentrate trash transfer stations and other environmental hazards disproportionately in communities of color.
- The creation of Historically Black Colleges as a way to make sure that talented African American students would not attend other universities and colleges that were predominantly white. In that instance, the institutional racism created a venue for the development of several generations of black leaders. At the same time, the schools were set up in such a way that they are chronically under-funded, in part because they were not included in the systems by which federally funded research supported the development of other higher education institutions.

### Cultural Racism

Cultural racism refers to the behaviors that reflect a worldview that overtly and covertly attributes value and normality to white people and whiteness, and devalues, stereotypes, and labels People of Color as “other,” different, less than,

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<sup>27</sup> Keith Lawrence , Stacey Sutton, Anne Kubisch, Gretchen Susi, and Karen Fulbright-Anderson. *Structural Racism and Community Building*, Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. (Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, 2004), p. 12.

or render them invisible.<sup>28</sup> Many of the behaviors of institutions and individuals that we call “patronizing” are in fact forms of cultural racism. The culture of a people determines the culture, language, and value systems of the institutions they create. For example, much of the culture and language used in foundations replicates the culture, language and value system of the dominant culture of this society. Barbara Major (one of the authors of this chapter and a long-time community activist) points out that “for those of us in the community participating in community building efforts, our work often reflects chaos and confusion because white privilege requires us to create solutions for our community in the midst of opposing worldviews of the community and the foundations that partner with us. In this struggle we are the ones who are perceived as not knowing what we are doing.”

*Examples:*

- Making English the official language of the United States, and defining some dialects as “standard” English;
- Considering standardized data collected from large numbers of people as more accurate, relevant or rigorous knowledge sources than stories;
- Seeing land as property to be owned and capitalized, rather than as a resource for collective responsibility or stewardship.

### **Individual Racism**

Individual racism, as we use it, refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism. Individual racism can be deliberate, or the individual may act to perpetuate or support racism without knowing that is what he or she is doing.<sup>29</sup>

*Examples:*

- Telling a racist joke, using a racial epithet, or believing in the inherent superiority of whites over other groups;
- Avoiding people of color whom you do not know personally, but not whites whom you do not know personally (e.g., white people crossing the street to avoid a group of Latino/a young people; locking their doors when they see African American families sitting on their doorsteps in a city neighborhood; or not hiring a person of color because “something doesn’t feel right”);
- Accepting things as they are (a form of collusion).

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<sup>28</sup> Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, editors. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 93.

<sup>29</sup> Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, editors. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*, p. 89.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What do you notice about how racism looks in the early 21st Century? How is it the same or different from the racism you grew up with?
2. What are some of your own biases or assumptions about groups other than your own? When someone acts in a way that is privileged or racist, how do you try to respond?
3. Recall a time in your work experience involving people of different races in which a negative outcome occurred. How did your behavior contribute to the situation? What assumptions did you bring to the situation? Examine your thought processes. How would you like to replay the situation to bring about a positive outcome?
4. Why does it matter whether or not “race” is a biological characteristic or a political one? How would you explain the difference to someone who is thinking about this idea for the first time?
5. Think about your community: What are the values, assumptions and standards used to decide what is good parenting? Good citizenship? Neighborliness? Use of public spaces? What is public money spent on? What public policies do people talk about and come out to vote on? What areas are segregated and what areas are integrated? How are these areas described?
6. Consider one institution with which you are very familiar. Was there anything in this chapter that suggested new examples of institutional racism in that arena? For example, thinking about public schools:
  - How are resources allocated across schools? How are those resource allocations explained or justified? How do they impact the schools and the students, regardless of how they are justified or explained?
  - How is the history of privilege and oppression in the United States taught in the schools? How is the staff prepared to teach about race, ethnicity and racism? Does the teaching allow students to know their own groups’ histories from their own worldviews?
  - What is the racial breakdown of students who are expelled or suspended? Who are in advanced placement classes? What are all of the alternative explanations that you can think of for why the proportions are as they are? Where might cultural or institutional racism be reflected in any of these explanations?
  - What are examples of “race-neutral policies” that create different outcomes for different racially categorized groups of students? What would have to be different for every group of students to do better?<sup>30</sup>

The following are a couple of specific reflection questions primarily for white people about other racial identity communities, from *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*, by Paul Kivel:

### Native Americans

- Are there schools, universities, or companies in your vicinity that use Native American names or figures as mascots, slogans, or product or team names?
- Do textbooks in your local schools accurately and truthfully describe what white settlers and government troops did to Native Americans? Do any romanticize them? Do any speak of a generic Indian? Is the full story of Columbus’s and the colonists’ practices and policies told?<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Adapted from the teachers’ material of “From Racism to Pluralism, CIBC, 1975.

<sup>31</sup> Kivel, Paul, *Uprooting Racism: How White People can Work for Racial Justice*. Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2002. p. 128-129.

### **African Americans**

- What are the contemporary national problems that are blamed predominantly on African Americans? What national policies are being discussed to blame and punish African Americans for these problems?
- What are the specific institutional practices that contribute to de facto segregation in your community (for example, red lining, real estate covenants, school district borders, suburban incorporation). Action step: Think about which one you are going to work with others to change.<sup>32</sup>

### **Asian American and Pacific Islanders**

- What are some of the “positive” stereotypes that you hear about Asian American and Pacific Islanders? What complexities and problems do these stereotypes cover up? What can you learn about white self-images from these stereotypes?
- How has our relationship with particular Asian countries affected the immigration of Asians to the United States and their treatment once here?<sup>33</sup>

### **Latino/a Americans**

- Which groups of Latino/a people provide labor or services on which you personally or the economy are dependent (e.g., farmworkers, low-wage manufacturing workers, or workers in factories near the Mexican border)?
- How has the history of U.S. involvement with Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and El Salvador influenced the status and position of the immigrant communities that arrived here from those countries?<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Kivel. *Uprooting Racism*, p. 138-139.

<sup>33</sup> Kivel. *Uprooting Racism*, p. 146.

<sup>34</sup> Kivel. *Uprooting Racism*, p. 152.