

CFRA Newsletter



“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent
about things that matter.”

— Martin Luther King Jr., *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World*

Reckoning with Racism. A Call to Action

Patty McDonnell, SSJ

For this edition of the Newsletter, the editors were set to have racial disparity in healthcare, in light of Covid-19, be the theme. After discussion and deep thought, we decided this issue of the Newsletter needs to be geared toward facing racism from the privileged white perspective. We cannot look to people of color to “teach us” or “help us understand.”

As white individuals, we need to look within ourselves and ask how we contributed to George Floyd’s death. How has our own white privilege assisted us in being responsible for systemic racism in our

society today? If you are white and thinking, “I haven’t contributed to racism” or “I’m not racist,” you have work to do that helps you realize and accept that racism is a part of all of us – whether giving us privilege because we are white, or experiencing it every day because we are not white.

If, for one week, we took the time to open our eyes and become aware of these subtle influences. If you watch television, how many news reporters are people of color; are people of color in ads that are shown without having a white person also shown; in the shows you watch, are the characters mostly white? If you read the newspaper, how many stories are of white people? If people of color are in stories, are they positive views? If you look through magazines, how many stories and people shown in pictures are white? If people of color are shown at all, is their skin tone “almost white?” If female, is their hair straightened? Is their clothing representative of their culture?

Imagine that all of your teachers, doctors, nurses are black individuals; your church is filled with black people and the priest, minister is black; music on the radio is by predominantly black singers; community events are mostly filled with people of color and ethnic food is served all the time; mannequins in stores are black; news stories are of black individuals getting awards or speaking at events. When the President is holding a meeting, only black individuals are surrounding him; the Senate and House are predominately black. The point is not that this needs to happen. The point is to think of what our reality is currently and how we would feel if everything we saw and experienced was based on blackness rather than whiteness. Spend a week noticing this.

From this awareness, where do we go? This issue of the Newsletter has Action suggestions, reflections and articles about racism. We have to stand up and say that we will do something, *anything*, to stop racism and move toward justice for all.

“To bring about change, you must not be afraid to take the first step. We will fail when we fail to try.” Rosa Parks

RACISM AND THE COSMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Reflection Part 2 by Lorry Villamaire, SSJ

The cosmological principles are usually associated with the evolution of nature. But they are the life source of all that is. Thanks to ecologists Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme who saw the value of applying these principles to every material, spiritual and personal aspect of human life. This behavior is a turning point in human consciousness and development. This short essay applies these principles to racism. Racism is a belief that a particular race or person is superior or inferior to another, or that another person is less than human.

The three cosmological principles are respect for all (identity), acceptance of differences (differentiation) and living equally interdependent among all. (communion).

The first cosmological principle, IDENTITY, is violated when one disrespects the inner identity of someone's value or right. The second principle, DIFFERENTIATION, is ignored when one feels uncomfortable with differences and sees it as a threat rather than a value. The principle, COMMUNION, is transgressed when there is a lack of coming together for the good of the whole. Acting these ways is RACISM in action.

Our personal experiences with racism come from our youth and how we learned to relate to people of color. It is important to tap into these experiences to see how we reacted or still react. In the town where I grew up, there were no people of color. One day while driving in the city with my parents, I exclaimed from the back seat of the car, "Mom, that person is brown." She gently replied, "They are human just like the rest of us." Mom provided an excellent value for my ministry years later when I educated immigrants from all over the world. As I think back, she revered the first cosmological principle.

Just being nice to people of color isn't the answer. Racism is a structure that organizes races into a hierarchy. I am part of the white race that institutionalized and individualized racism. Within this structure, I automatically benefit from a position of privilege. As a white person, I need to be more conscious of the role I play and hold myself accountable for undoing it.

Living the cosmological principle is one way to face racism. When identities interact positively with other identities, both deepen their capacity to relate and strive to strengthen the good of the whole. Racism harms all of us. The health of the whole is essential to the health of each. Healthy individuals are the foundation for the survival of the whole. Everyone contributes positively or negatively to the foundation of society.

“We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.” Sonya Renee Taylor

Questions to ponder:

Where am I in this process?

Where are we in this process?

“In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist.
We must be anti-racist.” Angela Davis

Shared Language

Race: Race is defined as “a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits.” It is important to recognize that the concept of “race” is not grounded in genetics or science. Yet even though “race” has no genetic basis, the social concept of race still shapes human experiences. Racial bias fuels social exclusion, discrimination and violence against people from certain social groups.

(Source: **Race and Ethnicity, National Geographic**

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/topics/reference/race-ethnicity/>)

Systemic Racism: The act of “othering” certain groups of people by using race in a way that negatively impacts their ability to have equal access to goods and services and to fully develop their human potential and their civil rights. This becomes normalized over the years and impacts all areas of life including distribution of resources, power, and opportunity in society and benefits thereby increasing access by white people to the exclusion of people of color. As time passes the racist action and behavior often become “unconscious” action, practice and policy application so that that is no longer being noticed by those who are benefitting from it. (Definition compiled from various sources by T. Foley)

Institutional Racism: Practices, policies and behavior within any institution which negatively impacts the ability of people of color to fully access and participate in that system; including but not limited to health services, educational services, housing, recreational opportunities, political parties and governmental and religious institutions and economic opportunity. (Definition compiled from various sources by T. Foley)

Anti- Racist: To change how you understand what it is to be racist and then to act on it by changing beliefs, actions, behavior and working toward policy and system change. Because if you change your understanding and don't do anything different, then you are colluding. (Definition compiled from various sources by T. Foley)

Racial Disparities: The impacts of inequity in access to goods, services, health care, education, social benefits, employment opportunities, food, criminal justice and fair policing, political power, and supportive infrastructures because of race. (Definition compiled from various sources by T. Foley)

White Fragility: A phrase used by Robin DiAngelo in her book titled *White Fragility*. It explores why and how white people have such great difficulty in talking about and engaging in reparative action about the privileges and advantages they have because of institutional and systemic racism.
<https://robindiangelo.com/publications>

“Ultimately, work on self is inseparable from work in the world. Each mirrors the other; each is a vehicle for the other. When we change ourselves, our values and actions change as well.” Charles Eisenstein.

Resources

Note: You can link to all articles, videos, and podcasts directly from the newsletter. They can also be accessed from the CFRA website at centerforreflectiveaction.com

Websites, Articles, and Blogs

The assumptions of white privilege and what we can do about it.

A powerful essay by Fr. Bryan N. Massingale.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/assumptions-white-privilege-and-what-we-can-do-about-it>

Some excerpts from the essay for reflection:

“First, *understand the difference between being uncomfortable and being threatened.* There is no way to tell the truth about race in this country without white people becoming uncomfortable. Because the plain truth is that if it were up to people of color, racism would have been resolved, over and done, a long time ago. *The only reason for racism's persistence is that white people continue to benefit from it.*”

“But avoiding and sugarcoating this truth is killing people of color. Silence for the sake of making white people comfortable is a luxury we can no longer afford.”

“Stay in the discomfort, the anxiety, the guilt, the shame, the anger. Because only when a critical mass of white folks are outraged, grieved and pained over the status quo — only when white people become upset enough to declare, "This cannot and will not be!" — only then will real change begin to become a possibility.”

“Third, *admit your ignorance and do something about it.* Understand that there is a lot about our history and about life that we're going to have to unlearn. And learn over. Malcolm X said that the two factors responsible for American racism are greed and skillful miseducation. We have all been taught a sanitized version of America that masks our terrible racial history.”

My White Friend Asked Me on Facebook to Explain White Privilege. I Decided to Be Honest. An essay by Lori Lakin, editor-in-chief at **Good Black News**

<https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2017/09/08/my-white-friend-asked-me-on-facebook-to-explain-white-privilege-i-decided-to-be-honest/>

Global Sisters Report <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/>

National Catholic Reporter <https://www.ncronline.org/>

Videos and Podcasts

George Floyd, the Language of Riots, and My Own Struggle with Racism.

A high school history teacher shares a US history lesson that many have never heard before.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-AoPV195ul&feature=youtu.be>

White Fragility author Dr. Robin DiAngelo reads from her book “White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism”. In this YouTube video she explains the phenomenon, and discusses how white people can develop their capacity to engage more constructively across race. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45ey4jgoxeU>

From Freddie Gray To George Floyd: Wes Moore Says It's Time To 'Change The Systems'

Terry Gross' interview with Wes Moore as aired on Fresh Air June 3,2020

<https://www.npr.org/2020/06/03/868565590/from-freddie-gray-to-george-floyd-wes-moore-says-its-time-to-change-the-systems>

Agencies and Organizations

Healing Racism Institute of Pioneer Valley: Envisioning a Racism Free Pioneer Valley

<https://www.healingracismpv.org/>

YWCA: Eliminating Racism, Empowering Women

National Website: <https://www.ywca.org/ywca-and-racial-justice/>

YWCA of Western MA: <https://www.ywworks.org>

YWCA of RI: <https://www.ywcari.org/>

Cultural Bridges to Justice: Training and resources for building just communities.

<https://culturalbridgestojustice.org/>

Tolerance.Org. Teaching about Race, Racism, and Police Violence.

<https://www.tolerance.org/>

National Equity Project: <https://nationalequityproject.org/resources/featured-resources>

Books

Recitatif by Toni Morrison

The story begins in the 1950s when two young girls, Twyla and Roberta, meet at an orphanage although both of their mothers are still alive. Morrison challenges conventional understandings of race and racism by presenting Mary and Twyla's racism in a nonspecific way. The reader cannot be sure if they are prejudiced toward white people or black people, a fact that points to the arbitrary social construction of race and racism in the first place. This in turn forces the reader to confront their own assumptions and prejudices about race.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/34842610-recitatif>

THE MINER'S CANARY: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy by Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres.

Like the canaries that alerted miners to a poisonous atmosphere, issues of race point to underlying problems in society that ultimately affect everyone, not just minorities. Addressing these issues is essential. Ignoring racial differences--race blindness--has failed. Focusing on individual achievement has diverted us from tackling pervasive inequalities. A powerful and challenging book, Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres propose a radical new way to confront race in the twenty-first century.

This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color by Cherríe L. Moraga (Editor), Gloria E. Anzaldúa (Editor), Toni Cade Bambara (Foreword).

Originally released in 1981, This Bridge Called My Back is a testimony to women of color feminism as it emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Through personal essays, criticism, interviews, testimonials, poetry, and visual art, the collection explores, as co editor Cherríe Moraga writes, "the complex confluence of identities—race, class, gender, and sexuality—systemic to women of color oppression and liberation." edition contains an extensive new introduction by Moraga, along with a previously unpublished statement by Gloria Anzaldúa. The new edition also includes visual artists whose work was produced during the same period as Bridge, including Betye Saar, Ana Mendieta, and Yolanda López, as well as current contributor biographies. Bridge continues to reflect an evolving definition of feminism, one that can effectively adapt to, and help inform an understanding of the changing economic and social conditions of women of color in the United States and throughout the world.

Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism by bell hooks.

Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism is a 1981 book by bell hooks titled after Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech. Hooks examines the effect of racism and sexism on black women, the civil rights movement, and feminist movements from suffrage to the 1970s. She argues that the convergence of sexism and racism during slavery contributed to black women having the lowest

status and worst conditions of any group in American society. White female abolitionists and suffragists were often more comfortable with black male abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass, while southern segregationists and stereotypes of black female promiscuity and immorality caused protests whenever black women spoke. Hooks points out that these white female reformers were more concerned with white morality than the conditions these morals caused black Americans.

The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin

A national bestseller when it first appeared in 1963, *The Fire Next Time* galvanized the nation and gave a passionate voice to the emerging civil rights movement. At once a powerful evocation of James Baldwin's early life in Harlem and a disturbing examination of the consequences of racial injustice, the book is an intensely personal and provocative document.

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

by Michelle Alexander

The book discusses race-related issues specific to African-American males and mass incarceration in the United States, but Alexander noted that the discrimination faced by African-American males is prevalent among other minorities and socio-economically disadvantaged populations. Alexander's central premise, from which the book derives its title, is that "mass incarceration is, metaphorically, the New Jim Crow".

The Invention of Wings by Sue Monk Kidd

Sue Monk Kidd's latest novel, *The Invention of Wings*, offers just that with detailed depictions of the South and North during the early 19th century. Find out who would like this novel and why it is a worthwhile read with the help of this companion review. Kidd has selected two real women from America's history and fictionalized them as protagonists in her third novel. (Review from Goodreads <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/20557345-the-invention-of-wings>)

But Some of Us Are Brave: All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men: Black Women's Studies by Akasha Gloria Hull (Editor), Patricia Bell-Scott (Editor), Barbara Smith (Editor)

This ground-breaking collection provides hours of enjoyment for the general reader and a wealth of materials needed to develop course units on black women; political theory, literary essays on major writers, guidelines for consciousness-raising about racism, and surveys of black women's contributions to the blues. "Important and innovative."--*Feminist Bookstore News*

An insightful exercise to do on your own or in a group:

Anti-Racism Action Chart				
Share stories about how racism has affected me.	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.
Celebrate diversity in my physical environment (for example, office decorations, photographs in written materials, my clothing and jewelry).	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.
If in a position to influence hiring practices, board of directors or committee membership actively work toward recruiting a diversity of cultures.	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.
Take anti-oppression, anti-racism training.	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.
Ask myself some hard questions about what I really believe compared to what I want to believe.	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.
Walk toward, not away discussions on race...especially if racist opinion is being shared.	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.
Do a multicultural review of policies and practices within my organization especially my parish or faith community to identify and remedy institutionalized racism.	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.
Do a multicultural review of legislation that I sponsor/support to identify and remedy institutionalized racism.	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.
Organize a public meeting to discuss a problem I'm working on with people who represent a racial or ethnic perspective I don't usually hear.	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.
Say something in response to a racial joke or comment.	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.
Set some goals of your own:				
	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.
	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.
	I can't do this.	I'll think about it.	I'll do it.	My top priority.