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ABSTRACT

This publication offers a collection of short essays on racism that originally appeared in the newsletter of an organization formed to promote racial justice called Community Change, Inc. The essays are each limited to one to three pages and are grouped by subject area. The opening section, on identifying racism, includes essays on pluralism, awareness of racism, and racism's negative effects on whites. Historical perspectives are explored in the second section, which looks at effects of the 1960s and the source and impact of white fear. A section on racism and language discusses the "color-blind" approach, use of the word "minorities" and other topics. In the next section, on responsibility, two articles discuss the relationship of shame and guilt to responsibility for racism and past failures and present responsibilities in dealing with racism. Next, campus racism is examined in three articles concerning racism in higher education, student experiences, and college recruitment of minorities. A following section contains four open letters to white males. Two articles on affirmative action cover recent attacks on affirmative action and basketball. The last major section offers prescriptions for change that include an argument that multicultural education does not go far enough in confronting and examining racism directly. Two "additional" articles discuss the miseducation of white males and the real effect of diversity efforts. (JB)

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Introduction

In 1968, several individuals, including Horace Seldon, created Community Change, Inc. (CCI). With its mission of working against racism and for racial justice, CCI has focused on institutional manifestations of white racism. CCI's programs and services today include workshops, consultations and audits, courses, publications, a resource library, a drama group, and civil rights internships.

As executive director of CCI for twenty-three years, Horace Seldon has written a number of essays and articles on the many aspects of racism. The essays, or commentaries, were written specifically for the CCI newsletter. In limiting most of the essays to 1-3 pages, the author acted on his assumption that people are more likely to read a brief article--and to pass it on to others. The essays, therefore, are not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to start people thinking. Whether discussing the definition of racism as a "white problem", or the language that is a symptom of racism, or the similarities between basketball and affirmative action, the essays demand attention to issues.

Over the years, CCI has received numerous requests for copies of the essays, and those on the newsletter mailing list look forward to reading Horace's words. This book is an effort to make all of the essays available in one place.

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"White racism victimizes white people." White racism is deeply engrained and embedded in our society, our social systems, our institutions and our values. The root of white racism is an assumption that white people are superior to others. This may show consciously or unconsciously in the ways we act and think and speak and image.

Whites must understand that the system which victimizes blacks also victimizes whites, and this makes a "white problem" as well as a "black problem". For many whites today, the realization that they are victims of their own racism is a strong motivation for dealing with the "white problem".

Here are a few ways in which white racism victimizes white people:

1. White society has built-in blinders on. Many whites see the world as *all* white, and become insensitive to what it means to live as black, red, brown, or yellow in a white society.
2. Internationally, America's white society acts as if it were a majority and many whites feel cut off from the causes and needs of the majority of mankind—which is not white.
3. Whites in their own ghettos have walled themselves off from large numbers of people whose cultural heritage could richly diversify white lives.
4. White society has created and taught values which make it difficult for whites to be in touch with, or to express, their emotions freely.
5. The maintenance of divided societies is an expensive, impractical burden on the resources of our nation.
6. The enslavement to the false assumption of superiority is a neurotic, unhealthy condition.
7. The denial of freedom to any man or group is a reminder that even "white freedom" is limited and tenuous and can be curtailed.

A genuine concern for a culturally pluralistic society is emerging. Numerous commentators on social trends have written asserting that white ethnic groups will increasingly claim and affirm their heritage. School systems are beginning to adopt Evaluation Guidelines for Multiracial, Multicultural Education, and teachers are developing supplementary units stressing an appreciation of diversity. The "melting pot" theory is dead. We at Community Change applaud that death and are eager to move into a multiracial, multicultural world whenever it is an alternative to racism.

The melting pot theory held that America was a place where people become alike, homogenized into one conforming mass. The standards for that homogeneity were white middle class, mostly Anglo-Saxon values. When those values were acted out, the "melting pot" eliminated differences in dress, behavior, language, and traditions. The result was a homogeneity which defined societal acceptability in white terms. The melting pot became racist because people who are not white just cannot "melt" into "whiteness".

At Community Change we believe that all white ethnic groups have benefited from and contributed to the perpetuation of racism. Any failure by white ethnics to deal with their involvement in racism is an obstruction to the goal of cultural pluralism. It is not a question of whether or not white ethnics as individuals or groups "like" Black people, or Chicano, or Native American people ... instead it is a question of the ways in which white ethnics have institutionalized racism, i.e., in trade unions or in urban school systems, such as Boston, where resistance to desegregation is embedded in a white ethnic controlled School Committee.

At Community Change we want to move into cultural pluralism as rapidly as possible. Our anxiety is that the movement into cultural pluralism might become a substitute for dealing with racism. For instance, it would be possible in a school to initiate cultural exchange programs without changing tracking and testing systems which often place racist limitations upon Black students. A business might implement an equal opportunity employment policy intended to recruit a multicultural group of employees, but never change policies which deny access of non-white persons to decision-making positions of power. High school students might be encouraged to celebrate a Mexican festival, while the school continues to deny a bi-lingual program for its Spanish-speaking students. Or it might become fashionable to study Native American customs as if they represented a "dead" culture, and bypass responsibility for a modern-day Wounded Knee.

All of these might be in the name of cultural pluralism, but all fail to deal with racism.

At Community Change we are committed to working "through" racism toward cultural pluralism. That means working to eliminate racist policies, practices, and values as a means of preparing for cultural pluralism. Our focus is on the elimination of racism.

We Have "No Problem" ...Again

April 1983

About twenty years ago whenever the issue of racism was mentioned in the presence of my white suburban friends there was always someone to assure us that "we don't have that problem here". Pursuing that statement usually led to another one that went something like this: "Well, there aren't many black people here" ... so the logic seemed to say ... of course ... "no problem".

I knew then that my friends were wrong for a number of reasons. First, they assumed that the problem of racism existed only when people of color were present. The assumption "located" the problem among black people and other people of color; it failed to see that racism is rooted in white people and in white institutions whether or not there are black people present. Second, I knew that the absence of many black people was itself part of the problem; attitudes and practices by the majority white population limited the choice of blacks who may have wanted to live in the suburbs. Third, the "no problem" argument was an attempt to avoid responsible action; if there is "no problem" or if the problem is somewhere else, then one is absolved from doing anything. Fourth, I knew that a lot of people in the suburbs were there precisely because they wanted to avoid "urban problems", and that many of my friends equated "urban problems" with the presence of racial minority groups. To assert that "we have no problem here" was to distance themselves from the city.

That was some time ago, and while the "no problem" attitude still persists it is argued in slightly different forms now.

One of the "new" statements of the "no problem" syndrome proceeds from an assumption that there is no problem of racism unless there is some overt incident which expresses hatred and bigotry. Recently a high school principal assured me, within minutes of our introduction, that "we have no race problem here". That meant there had been no stabbing, no violence, no racially motivated incident in the school. Before seeing the principal I had already talked with a number of students, both black and white, and a couple of teachers; they had all told me of the presence of racism in a variety of forms in classrooms, corridors, and school activities. But the principal made it his priority to assure me that there was "no problem".

In the "no problem" view, the word "problem" is used almost exclusively to refer to an incident of bigotry; someone calls a name, a racial slur appears in graffiti, an openly discriminatory act occurs. When something like that occurs, people on the site and in the community are quick to respond, ready to condemn it, and hopefully, equipped to administer a just solution. In many instances after that initial response, everyone goes back to "business as usual" as quickly as possible. A collective sigh of relief goes up as everyone says, again, "we have no problem:". It is the underlying, ever-present problem that is seldom addressed. Most white people don't believe it is there, they don't want to have it pointed out, are eager to leave it alone. So the enculturated, institutionalized base of the problem goes untreated. It remains the festering bed of the next incident.

There is a second interesting way in which the "no problem" argument appears. A recent experience on a college campus is an example. I was on campus to conduct discussions about racism with a number of different people. A number of faculty and administrators were concerned that I might "stir up something", and thus create a problem. That response embodies two contrary assumptions. First, it betrays a fear that a placid "no problem" setting will be disturbed. "There is no problem here, so what are you looking for ... why are you here ... any problem will be your creation ... so be careful, and leave as quickly and quietly as possible, please." I had enough time and talked to enough people who did acknowledge the presence of a problem. The statement of "no problem" was then seen as a way of keeping that placid exterior calm. So we are not far from the second and contrary assumption behind the "don't stir up something" pleas. That second assumption is that there is "something" to be stirred up. If there were no problem there would be no need to be concerned about "stirring up" something because the "something" to be "stirred up" would be non-existent. "Don't stir up anything" is a plea to avoid the problem. It may be founded in fear that the problem is in fact more pervasive, more difficult, more present than people want to deal with. "Bury it" ... "it will go away" ... but "don't disturb anybody or anything".

The "no problem" response to racism is usually heard from white people, and usually in institutional settings where there are few people of color. Since I have not yet found an institution where there is no problem, my assumption always is that we have simply to uncover it.

It doesn't take long for most people of color to say there is a problem. If the problem is not identified, and if there are no mechanisms for continually dealing with the problem, it is more likely to erupt in an ugly form at another day and time. As with most problems, it is best to identify it, respond to it and provide support for everyone in the situation while attempting to move beyond racism. To leave the sore unattended is to invite a more serious manifestation later.

People of color can tell you where the problem is, and what its effects are. White people who have been sensitized to racism can also be helpful. The important thing is to put aside fear of the problem, because it is a human problem which can be solved by people of good will.

Our culture is deeply engrained with racism; our institutions are founded on it. As long as we move in this culture and in the institutions of this culture, **assume a problem of racism**. Don't fear it; discover it; uncover it; even stir it up if necessary. Then we can begin to deal with it. If we don't do that, then we'll soon be right back at the same old place ... "we have no problem" ... again!

No Racism Immune System!

December 1989

Recently a phone conversation with a newspaper reporter led me to reflect on an incident in the Boston area in which some highly visible, educated "liberals" were caught publicly with their collective racism showing. The embarrassment became an occasion for shock, much fingerpointing, and "yah-yahing". Lots of people felt better because now they had proof that "liberals are not as great as they think they are". The reporter would have liked me to add fuel to that fire.

I disappointed the reporter. She would have been happier if I had expressed great shock, surprise, and horror, and then proceeded to excoriate the "liberals" in appropriate educated language with a dose of street invective which would have made great copy. I did neither. Our conversation went something like this: "I don't want to comment on the specific incident," I said, "because I am unfamiliar with the exact details. All I know is what I have heard on radio and seen in the papers, and that's not always the best source of truth." (That didn't increase my stature!) On the larger, generic issues I was willing to comment: "That well-known, publicly labelled "liberals" might get involved in racism is not a surprise to me." (Silence on the other end!) I went on: "As a matter of fact those of us who are card-carrying liberals may have a peculiar vulnerability to racism. By definition, we are assumed to be vigorously intolerant of racism, and this often may lead to a very subtle internalized assumption of being 'beyond racism'. When that notion gets acted out, sometimes the 'liberal' is especially vulnerable to getting caught up in doing something which is racist. Then the most common response is a combination of surprise and delight that the 'liberals' have incriminated themselves." The reporter didn't understand, and though I wanted to explore the thought a bit further with her, she was intent on terminating the conversation.

In the United States of America there is **No Racism Immune System!** No one, no group, no class of people is immune to the presence and influence of enculturated racism. (Right now, I don't want to argue whether or not people of color can be racist! As a white person, I am here addressing a conviction that no whites, not even "elite liberals" are immune to racism.) There was a time when I implicitly understood that highly educated "liberals" were, of course not racist. That notion went to an early death when a "liberal" law professor from a very "prestigious" university told me that there never was a civilization in Africa, and when a "liberal" teacher at an equally prestigious high school told me that Native Americans had no culture! Ignorance and racism feeding on each other and in the heart of liberalism!

Those of us who are often called "liberals" encounter some built-in risks which make us peculiarly susceptible to racist behavior:

1. **The fear based on assumptions that power is a negative dynamic, often blinds us to the reality of the power we have.** Recently I heard a group of white people engage in discussion of what "empowerment" means, and I reflected that I had never heard a group with any significant number of people of color engage in such a discussion. I have heard people of color talk about

effective actions for gaining power, but I suspect that discussion of the meaning of empowerment is a peculiar temptation for "liberal" whites, who often don't want to acknowledge that their use of power demonstrates a clear behavioral understanding of what it is.

2. The love of ideas and verbal expression often becomes a propensity to circumlocution. We talk issues to death. In conventions we pass resolutions which are often filled with words that do nothing, that go nowhere. The love of words may be a disease among us.

3. Our desire to hear all sides often leads to indecision. We want to be so "objective", there is always more data to be collected, another point of view to be explored, and sometimes rather than decide "this" or "that" we end up straddling a fence, and our indecision becomes a form of passive racism.

4. Our assumption that knowledge and information will answer every problem often traps us in a cognitive web. Guts, emotion, determination and passion must accompany what the anti-racist knows, and sometimes such displays scare the "liberals" away.

5. There is a dangerous and subtle assumption that we are more progressive, more advanced than most when it comes to many social issues. Racism then becomes something that is "over there", in "that other group", and that "location" of the problem often leads to a failure to examine our own culpability to its presence.

In the United States of America there is **No Racism Immune System!**

No vaccination against racism.
No inoculation against racism.
No anti-racism "shots".
No pills that prevent racism.
No anti-racist corpuscles.
No racism medicine.
No insurance policy against racism.
No cleansing agent that washes racism away.
No militia armed against racism.
No legislation that guarantees protection.
No ideas that all by themselves eliminate racism.
No communication tool devoid of racist tendency.
No place where there is insulation against racism.

There is **No Racism Immune System** in the United States! Not even for "liberals"!

1

Assumptions (Convictions) About Racism in the United States of America

August 1990

Recently a friend who was writing a doctoral dissertation about racism, asked me to share some of my major assumptions about racism, how it functions, and how to work to eliminate it. My response is what you now have in hand.

Soon it became clear that what I have listed here are more accurately described as convictions to which I have come over the past twenty years. It also became clear that I'd never complete the list satisfactorily; and indeed as soon as this is done I am sure that I will think of more to add, or some more adequate way of restating what is here.

It has to stop somewhere! So here is a basic list, in no particular order of priority. If it helps you to define more clearly some of your assumptions about racism, it will have served its purpose.

1. That our nation is founded on a terrible contradiction which on the one hand asserts the equality of people, but on the other hand assumes the superiority of white, propertied males.
2. That the above contradiction was written into the laws and many judicial decisions of the colonies before we were a nation, and then into the Constitution.
3. That beliefs, values, and norms built on assumptions of white superiority have been thoroughly engrained into the cultural milieu which governs the way most whites perceive the world, decide, and act in the world.
4. That racist ways of perceiving, deciding, and acting are often determinative of policies, procedures, and practices in white controlled institutions.
5. That the intersection of separate institutions and vast systems which are controlled by white people frequently result in disparate negative effects for people of color.
6. That racism occurs sometimes by intention and sometimes unintentionally.
7. That racism need not be perpetuated by any conspiracy of intention, but simply becomes a result of the ways in which society, institutions, and cultural norms function.
8. That racism denies to people of color equal access to goods, services, resources, and power.
9. That racism is often internalized with devastating personal results for individual persons of color.
10. That the necessity to cope constantly with a racist environment, creates a burden of stress for people of color and drains energy and time which might otherwise be channelled into academic and vocational goals.

11. That racism must be actively countered.
12. That racism must be addressed directly as racism, and must be named for what it is ... racism.
13. That it is important to learn to use the word "racism" as a descriptive word, rather than as a judgment.
14. That racist assumptions of white superiority are built on and perpetuate white privilege and power.
15. That racism has negative long-range impact on white people.
16. That racism encourages white people to believe a lie about their superiority.
17. That racism results in the undereducation of people of color and the miseducation of white people.
18. That racism can only be fully understood by examining the dimensions of institutional and systemic white power.
19. That racism intersects with sexism, classism, anti-Semitism, and heterosexism, and its relationships to those forms of oppression must be understood in plans to eliminate any of the oppressions.
20. That efforts to eradicate racism must be undertaken by whites and people of color in coalition; each group has distinctive roles to play in that combined effort.
21. That efforts to overcome racism which are initiated by whites must include intentionally built-in mechanisms of feedback from people of color.
22. That the systems which create racism will continue to perpetuate it unless there is an active, intentional effort to stop it.
23. That language is a prominent carrier of cultural values and norms, and will actively contribute to racism unless it is continually reviewed for its racist effects.
24. That guilt is a common and normal response for many whites when they discover their complicity in a racist system; moving beyond guilt into responsible action for the present and future is essential for white liberation.

Racism: Negative Effects on Whites

November 1991

Over the years I have often heard talk about how racism has impacted white people. Usually that discussion comes in the context of an assumption that if whites can see that racism has negative effects on them as a group, that realization will motivate action to eliminate racism. I do not share that assumption; racism is a far more powerful and recalcitrant force than this assumption acknowledges, clinging stubbornly wherever it is lodged. In addition, the loss of benefits, privilege, and power which accrue for whites from racism may simply be a price which not many whites are willing to pay for bringing an end to racism. While few whites would admit, and may not even recognize this dynamic, it is one which I believe functions to keep some whites from active anti-racism. To measure the benefits, privilege and power which make life better for us than for people of color could, in some subliminal process of thought and feeling outweigh the negatives. Peggy McIntosh has written about those privileges with insight and persuasiveness (1). Those of us who are white can "balance" the negative effects of racism with those privileges; there are no "balancing" positives to racism to tempt people of color.

While I am not sanguine that identifying the negative effects will motivate many whites to act against racism, it may still be helpful to probe thought about the subject. So here are some convictions to which I have come about how racism hurts those of us who are white. The generalizations here do not necessarily apply to all whites, they are not in any particular order, they are not expanded or explained, and I am sure that they do not represent all that I will want to include immediately after the list is finished.

Some of the negative effects of racism on whites:

1. Racism has distorted reality for many whites. Teachings about history, the world, the pursuits of thought, expressions of culture, and personal relationships have for most whites been both limited and false.
2. Racism has taught whites that we are members of a race which is superior, and that assumption creates false expectations and warped illusions.
3. Racism, particularly during the period when Africans were enslaved, taught white men that it is all right to rape black women, and also exacerbated the devaluation of white women.
4. Racism has taught whites that we are "entitled" to privilege as a right of birth, undercutting the assumption of achieved merit which is one of the cornerstones of democracy.
5. Racism present at the foundation of our nation, left a country built on a fundamental and terrible contradiction between a belief in equality and a belief in white superiority. That contradiction remains unresolved.
6. Racism has produced in white society a mental health problem: characteristic responses among many whites are dominated by unfounded fear of blacks,

hatred, suspicion, guilt, shame, and jealousy. These words are the language of dis-ease.

7. The cost for whites who want to move beyond racism has been a high one, measured in time, emotion, psychic energy, and sometimes money.

8. Racism, as one of the root causes of poverty, costs our nation huge amounts of money, measured in crime, unemployment and related social ills.

9. Racism has set whites who are made poor in our society into competition with people of color, and has also increased the separation between classes among whites.

10. Racism infecting the minds and hearts of whites who have built the institutions of our society, has led us to create systems which do not produce goods, services, nor allow access to resources for people of color as they do for whites, resulting in injustices which plague our systemic health.

11. Racism has blinded many whites who do not see nor understand when they are offensive to people of other races in thought, word, and act.

12. Racism, practiced as discrimination, frequently denies to white institutions and businesses the talents and experience of people of color.

13. Racism, practiced as housing discrimination, has too often created white ghettos, where white children and adults are isolated from the rich interactions which can come from living with people whose life experience by race has been different.

14. Racism has created a justice system which does not deliver equal justice to whites and people of color, a system which reflects dishonor on white society. (You can expand this into areas of most of our systems, i.e., health care, employment, and others.)

15. Racism has taught us to incorporate into our thinking and speaking negative stereotypes that perpetuate racist ideas.

16. In our relations with other nations racism has led us to actions which prejudice large segments of the world population against us, and complicate our role in the world.

17. Racism has led us to ignore the teachings of native peoples about how to relate to the natural world, contributing to our environmental problems.

Here is where you can start adding your own thoughts to the beginnings above ... keep it going! Above all, find some places where you can redouble your efforts to bring about anti-racist changes.

1. See *White Privilege and Male Privilege*, by Peggy McIntosh, 1988, available from the Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA 02181. For a more thorough analysis, see *Impacts of Racism on White Americans*, edited by Bowser and Hunt, Sage Publications, 1981.

"Left-Over from the Sixties

December 1986

Early in the decade it was said that those of us who were active during the '60s and still continue the same activities today, are "left-overs", "hangers-on", out of touch with present reality, to be pitied more than scorned, because our efforts were futile.

All of that critique was negative stuff to absorb, and then along came Clarence Pendleton to call us "new racists"! Racism does take new forms today, but let's not put all the old activists into a useless category. We don't need any "new" racists, because we've still got plenty of the "old" ones hanging on and around! So I quickly dispensed with that bit of demagoguery.

As far as being called a "left-over" from the sixties, I've decided to claim that title gladly! It reminds me that some very good things did happen in the sixties, and some of those things still need to happen today. It reminds me that we need some "sixty-left-overs" precisely because there is still a lot of racism also "left-over".

The racism that is "left-over" is not only "left-over" from the 1960s, but from the 1860s, the 1760s, and the 1660s at least. So you see the genesis of my thought is much more antique than the name-callers realized. The agenda that is "left-over" for this nation is an historic one. Racism is "left-over" because we've never yet really dealt with it as a nation and as a people.

Racism is "left-over" from the 1960s. There were advances in voting rights, but "left-over" racism means that those advances must be vigorously guarded or they are quickly eroded by administrative or legislative acts. There were advances in employment for people of color, but "left-over" racism has found ways to subvert those advances and to keep a defined place at the top of most everything for whites only. There were advances in access to education, but "left-over" racism means that today decreasing percentages of students of color on our campuses are subjected to verbal, physical, and psychic abuse. There were advances in the sixties in some parts of the criminal justice system, but "left-over" racism today reinstates a death penalty, which by virtue of the way the whole system functions is bound to be discriminatory toward people of color particularly and poor people generally. Myrdal's warning that race was this nation's primary problem predated the sixties, but it remains to remind us that there is a great "left-over" agenda indicating an inability or unwillingness to dig at the roots of the problem: racism.

Racism is "left-over" from the 1860s. Racism was "left-over" in large doses by the failure of the nation to enforce the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments which so rapidly came after the Civil War. Racism was "left-over" when President after President in those late decades of the last century treated the problem primarily as a political one rather than as a moral one, and proceeded with caution rather than conviction. Racism was "left-over" when "states' rights" was given priority over the right of newly freed citizens. "Left-over" racism occurred when we invented new post-Reconstruction ways to control the formerly enslaved Africans. It happened too when we decided as a

nation first to exploit and then later to exclude Asian people. The nation had an opportunity to "Reconstruct" the dream, but it fell flat on its collective white face. Racism was "left-over".

Racism is "left-over" from the 1760s. Racism was a "left-over" after the founding of our nation. It was "left-over" when references to it were deleted from the Declaration of Independence. It was "left-over" when our founders postponed an end of the slave trade in the wording of the Constitution, and also defined the enslaved Africans as each one "three-fifths" of a person. Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and other great leaders of the time knew that we were postponing something which would finally come back to haunt us, but they chose to "leave it over". The 18th century also gave birth to "scientific" studies called phrenology and physiognomy, classifying people by facial angles and skull measurements; even when investigators denied any racial applications for their findings, they were frequently used in the new colonies to buttress assumptions of white superiority. The "left-overs" from those studies became a racist legacy in anthropology for years, and still live in many hearts and minds today.

Racism is "left-over" from the 1660s. By this time in our history slavery was rapidly becoming institutionalized; indentured servanthood was being replaced by a more permanent "arrangement". We had decided that enslaving native peoples was not going to work, so we proceeded on a course of driving them from their land, alternated with various forms of cultural genocide. Africans were better candidates for slavery, so on their backs we built a nation, and the economy of both North and South became dependent upon the "peculiar institution". There were people in the fledgling land who knew then that we were wrong-headed morally and economically, but as a new people we nurtured the evil thing, and racism grew as a cancer in the body politic. It was "left-over".

The "left-overs" are abundant. Every time in our history when we have failed to deal with racism, it has been "left-over". "Left-over" for the next generation to take care of; "left-over" for some laissez-faire doctrine to work out; "left-over" on the assumption that human beneficence would simply allow the ugly monster to wither away and die of its own accord.

Racism does not die by itself. Untreated it will flourish and grow. It will always be "left-over" until the day when we make sure that there is nothing there to be "left-over"!

Because racism is "left-over" from the past, it is good to have some "left-over" and new anti-racist activists on the scene. For one, I am "left-over" from the sixties, and proud! I'm going to keep reminding myself and others that until we determine to uproot racism in some massive and foundational ways, it will continue to be "left-over".

The Roots and Fruits of White Fear

March 1990

Fear has been asserted by many over the years as a dominant dynamic in race relations. It is a truism to say that people often fear what or who they do not know. An attempt to overcome that fear of the unknown is one rationale behind the myriad of programs which are organized to bring people together across racial lines, engaging them in discussion, play and other common pursuits. Getting to know the other person or group is often an important way to overcome the fear which accompanies "not knowing".

There is also evidence that getting to know the personal and group differences does not always eliminate fear; sometimes the process of "getting to know" results in confirming previously held stereotypes; then separation and fear deepen. Whatever the outcome, the experience underlines the fact that fear is a strong motivating factor in racism.

Once several years ago I was reading a book in which a black writer commented that white fear of blacks was the fundamental dynamic of racism. That seemed to me to be an extreme emphasis, and my first impulse was to discard that idea, chalk it up to some sort of oversensitivity. Still, the suggestion began to "burn" in my mind! I knew this writer and had profound respect for his ideas, informed by a life experience dedicated to combatting racism. So, I phoned him. Did he really mean to say quite that baldly that fear was at the very roots of racism, that it was in fact the fundamental dynamic?

My question must have sounded rather stupid. This was a writer whose profession demanded that he use language very carefully, that he craft every sentence to say precisely what he meant! Here I was asking if he really meant what he said!

The answer was an equally clear and concise restatement of his claim. My incredulity seemed to be the only thing in question. A patient phone discussion pushed my thoughts to contemplate my friend's comment, a process continued even now, as I explore the depth of white fear toward people and communities of color.

In Boston, during the late fall and early winter of '89 we saw an incredible example of the fear dynamic. A white suburban couple in their car after leaving a Boston hospital, were robbed, then forced to drive the car to an area close to a predominantly black area, where they were both shot, the pregnant woman fatally, her husband wounded in the stomach. The assailant was said to be a black man. Most of the nation knows that eventually it became clear that the husband himself, now a suicide, is the alleged murderer. Aside from what investigation may eventually prove, the "fear-full" response of much of the city and its metropolitan area is a demonstration of the power of the dynamic of fear.

Hysteria is a word which might easily characterize much of the response to the allegation that this white suburban couple had been attacked in the city by a black male. Government officials, police, electronic and print media responded in shock, horror, and outrage. In offices, on subway cars, in

coffee shops, theatre lines, wherever people met, it was the subject of conversation for weeks. There was for the most part a quick acceptance of the allegation that a black man had perpetrated the heinous act. The fear that both produced and was generated by the accusation moved through the air with electric speed and power. The instant, area-wide fear expressed toward the black community in general, sent my heart wondering.

In a reflective mood, I remember some of the roots of racial fear on the parts of whites, with evidence from my personal experience and from history:

- a. the fear reflected in the eyes of those white "hate stares" during demonstrations of the Civil Rights Movement
- b. the fear which characterized much of the white response to Malcolm X, and to the Black Panthers, both of whom explicitly said they would not *initiate* violence, but would respond to violence with violence
- c. the fear which the "Black Power" emphasis sent into the hearts of much of white America
- d. the fear of having blacks and other people of color move into a "white" neighborhood, expressed in terms of concern for personal safety and/or property values
- e. the fear of school desegregation programs
- f. the fear that Affirmative Action might mean a "lowering of standards" as people of color come into the workplace
- g. the fear of interracial marriages, which in the early part of this century was characterized by the comment among whites, "you wouldn't want your daughter to marry one," which was somehow supposed to terminate any discussion about integration
- h. underlying the white concern about the "black table" in the cafeteria of every college I have visited, is a basic fear that someone might be doing something in secret which cannot be controlled by whites
- i. the fear which many black people report seeing in the eyes of whites they pass on crowded streets, or who close the windows in cars next to them
- j. the consistent fear expressed among suburban whites of going into the "inner city" for meetings; I have seen numerous meetings moved from sites scheduled in the city, because suburban people "just won't come"
- k. the fear of insurrection by enslaved Africans during antebellum days, dominated by slave codes, night patrols, drivers, overseers, supervision of black gatherings for worship, and other organized intimidation

Much of the above is a recollection of things from my personal experience, but the dynamics behind each of those have an origin which can be specifically

traced in our national history. The references to the period of slavery and the fear of insurrection are known to anyone who has done a serious study of that "peculiar institution". Less known probably are the roots of the suburban suspicion of the city.

In his book, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, George L. Mosse traces some of the origins of notions which are contributory to the suburban-urban fear dynamic. Arising from the Pietism of the eighteenth century, sometimes intersecting with ideas from the Enlightenment, was a glorification of the peasant and of rural life. The natural world was thought to symbolize the emotions; plants and animals exemplified legends and myths, and symbols were often related to nature, all of which was seen as the work of God. The rural life, in affinity with the seasonal rhythms of nature gradually became viewed as the more desirable environment for human development. A corollary argument led to a deepening suspicion of city life and thus the city. The historical line from the eighteenth century finds its outcomes in today's generalized fear of the city. Too often that fear is accompanied by assumptions that areas outside of the urban centers are superior places for living and raising a family.

The evidence is easy to see; the fruits of fear are too clear. Tracing some of the roots in the history of our nation helps to illuminate the depth of the enculturated fear that is almost a part of the air we breathe. It helps to explain the extraordinary and immediate mass response to the Stuart case here in Boston. Moving through and beyond that massive cultural dose of fear is the next, harder step. Analysis is the easy step; next come the steps each must take toward community relationships liberated from the bonds of fear.

Perhaps one first step is simply to acknowledge that the fear is there, that it dominates entirely too much of our life and responses to events. Next comes the determination to be free from the forces which create fear and the resulting divisions in our society. That will be a GIANT step, for all humankind.

On Being Color Blind In 1980

August 1980

I felt as if I had stepped into a time machine and been thrust backward at least twenty years! It was early morning, in late July 1980, and I was walking across the Boston public gardens when a black woman friend greeted me, and pushed a local paper into my hands. "How do you respond to this?" she said, and continued, "I feel negative about it!"

The article to which she referred me served as the time machine. I didn't want to believe what I read, but there it was--1960 re-visited! The article was about a new advertising campaign to be launched "to spread the message of racial tolerance" in the city. The campaign was announced by two leading spokespersons for the Boston Covenant Committee, originators of last fall's Covenant for Peace and Harmony, an effort which secured over 250,000 signatures on a petition for harmony and understanding. The advertising campaign is a follow-up on the Covenant signing, and pictures in the newspaper showed large posters saying, "All children are born color blind. Let's keep them that way."

The "color blind" posture which is called for is what took me back to the early sixties at least. That is before the "black is beautiful" movement, before the affirmation of racial identities by many people of color. Shadows of the past enveloped me and I heard all the familiar words of yesteryear. "I don't see color; I see only people." -- "I see all people as humans; that's all." -- "I don't see you as black; I see you as a person." I hadn't heard anyone talking like that for a long time, and my shocked sensitivities sent me reeling into the past.

I'm sorry, but I cannot cooperate with that effort to encourage a return to the "color blind syndrome". I cannot because the reality with which I deal every day is very different in 1980. I cannot cooperate for at least two reasons.

First, I cannot say to my friends who are people of color, that the affirmation of their color is now unimportant. I remember a young black mother telling of the day when her daughter went to school in her first Afro, announcing as she left the house, "I am black and beautiful", and I still thrill with the sense of pride with which that mother told of the incident. Her daughter had never gone out of the house saying that and feeling like that before! It was an important day for that whole family! Pride in color was and still is to that family an important concern. I cannot now say to my friends that I am not going to see that color which they have affirmed so strongly.

I remember a black man in a workshop group responding to a white man who had just told him that he only wanted to see him as a human being, not as a black man. With intensity and conviction the black man said something like this: "O course I am a human being, and I want you to see me as such, but if you really want to see me as the full human being I am I want you to see me as a black. My blackness is an essential part of my humanness, and if you forget that or will not see that then you are not seeing me as the full person I am." I cannot say to that man or any other person of color that I want to be color

blind, or want them to be color blind, or want their children to be color blind. Among the people of color whom I know the vast majority have struggled to proclaim respect for their color, have labored and fought to claim the dignity of their color. Now I cannot turn my back on all of that recent history and say, "Let's be color blind."

Second, I cannot say to my friends who are white that color is no longer important. Whenever I have encountered the "color-blind" emphasis among white people, it has very frequently been a way of denying race, and subsequently of denying racism. If one doesn't have to think about color (race), one doesn't have to think about racism, because obviously if there is no color (race), then there can be no racism. If there is no color there can be only individual acts of wrong-doing, of prejudice; there can be no systematic, historic conscious or unconscious, constant oppression because of color. If we don't have to think about, talk about, and deal with race, then we won't have to think about, talk about and deal with racism! And there are lots of white people in particular who would prefer it that way!

I cannot cooperate because it is important that I and others of my friends are white. I want to affirm whiteness, value it, and call for respect for that too! My whiteness is an important part of who I am. It helps me to understand the history of my people in this country. It puts me in touch with a history and a present fact of white privilege gained at the expense of people of color. Unless I can get in touch with that, feel it, and understand it, then I'll never be able to move beyond it. Unless I can understand that the dominant values, beliefs, and life styles of this country are white, and how that relates to people of color, I will not understand my present situation at all! Unless I can understand that the major institutions and systems of this country have been and are white-controlled, white-dominated and know how that impacts people of color, I can never know how to move out of oppressive modes of community life.

If I deny that there is color, it is to enter a false world. There is color difference, and it is beautiful! There is nothing wrong with differences in color; it is only what we think, believe, and do about that difference that might be wrong. The difference itself is beautiful, exciting, to be affirmed, respected (never merely tolerated), and encouraged as a positive attribute of life! Viva la difference! Don't deny it! Don't blind yourself to it; see it, celebrate it!

My hunch is that most people of color will not buy this ad campaign to become "color-blind". My concern is that lots of white people might flock to its banner. It sounds so "good" if you like the sounds of yesterday, and lots of people do! It sounds so "liberal", so "human", so "nice"; it unclutters a lot of things and tidies up things. Go for it!

Not me, thank you! I cannot cooperate with this one! To be "color-blind" requires me to deny color which is important to me and to hundreds of my friends. To be "color-blind" requires me to ignore a history and a present fact of prejudice, discrimination and racism built on assumptions that white people are superior to people of color. To be ignorant of racism is to assure that we cannot move beyond it. I cannot buy that, any of it! I cannot step into that time machine. I cannot go back to the early sixties. For all that is wrong with 1980, give me the present reality! So says one white man!

When I publish my dictionary, I will leave out the word "minorities". That will not be a popular thing to do, for there are lots of people who like the word and will undoubtedly continue to use it. When I do eliminate the word from my dictionary, I will be in a clear "minority".

I have no say as to what goes into *any* dictionary, and I don't anticipate requests for advice from any publishers, but I can control my own vocabulary usage. I will no longer use the word "minorities" to refer to racial groups in this country. There are several reasons.

First, there are a number of my friends who are offended by a word which has an accumulated meaning which is tainted with images and concepts of inferiority. Here are some examples of that prejudice.

In logic the "minor" premise is the lesser or secondary one.

In sports we designate as "minor" leagues those which are deemed not as good as the "majors"; to call a player a "minor leaguer" is to diminish that player's status.

When we name periods of life, we reserve the term "minor" to apply to those who have not attained a legal age, who are assumed not to be as responsible as persons over the designated age. Minors are still legally treated as children. Add to that the history of ways in which society stripped black people of their adulthood, particularly referring to black men as "boys", and there is a powerful image of deprivation.

In playing cards the "minor" suit is the one which has lesser scoring possibility.

In numbers the "minority" is less than half, the smaller number, and in a society where bigness is valued, that which is smaller is often de-valued.

In music the word is more neutral; even there a "minor" note which is simply a half tone between whole tones might carry for some a meaning of being "half" and therefore not "complete".

The accumulated weight given to the word leaves "minority" heavily burdened with negatives. It is doubtful that many people can apply the word "minority" to racial groups in this country and be free from those deeply enculturated assumptions which accompany the word. The word is often heard as offensive by those whom it labels. Since I don't like to offend people, there goes that word!

A second reason for eliminating the word "minorities" from my vocabulary is that its meaning has diminished as more and more people claim to be "minorities". There was a time when the word was used almost exclusively to

refer to groups which were either small in number and/or oppressed groups; in everyday use here in the United States of America, that most often meant racial groups. After the attention given to "racial minorities" in the Civil Rights movement and in Congressional debates, more and more people began to claim the status of "minorities". Gay people were defined as "minorities" both because of their numbers and their oppression. Women cannot claim to be a "minority" by numbers, but certainly by their oppression they qualify. Handicapped persons, older citizens, and white ethnic groups began to claim "minority" status, and all have a just claim to that word in some sense. Stretching the word to the logical conclusion of its meaning everyone becomes a minority of some sort, and then the word begins to lose meaning. It loses meaning especially as it becomes applied to any group which is oppressed, because it seems to imply that all oppressions are the same.

All groups have not suffered oppression in the same way; racial groups have been especially singled out for harsh forms of oppression in this country:

Not all "minorities" have been enslaved and lynched as have blacks.

Not all "minorities" have had land and rights stolen from them as have Native Americans.

Not all "minorities" have been the object of fluctuating immigration and border rules as have Chinese and Mexican people.

Not all "minorities" have been born as citizens, as have Puerto Ricans, migrated to the mainland and then been treated as foreigners.

Not all "minorities" have been put behind fences as Japanese Americans were during World War II.

Not all "minorities" have been subjected to the consistent and long-standing discrimination of anti-Semitism.

There are distinctions which are blurred when we begin to refer to all groups as "minorities" in the same way in which we refer to racial "minorities". Since I think it crucial to keep those distinctions clear, there goes that word in reference to racial groups!

A third reason for eliminating the word "minority" when referring to racial groups, comes from an expanding world view. The groups to which we in the United States of America have traditionally referred as "racial minorities" clearly represent a majority in the world. Those of us who are white are the numerical minority. Designating people of color as "minorities" obscures this fact. To forget that people of color are a majority in the world and that whites are the minority is to operate in the context of a myth which we can no longer afford. The term "minority" when applied to racial groups in this country contributes to a misunderstanding because it encourages a way of thinking which denies the world reality. the reality is a world made up largely of people of color.

So I have eliminated the word "minority" in referring to racial groups. If you have read carefully you have already understood what I will substitute. I will refer to racial "minorities" as people of color. (And that is not the same as the old term, "colored people"!) I will do so because it more accurately designates what I mean, it avoids a word loaded with negative connotations, it refers to a wide range of racial groups, it includes a recognition of the uniqueness of racial groups, and it avoids the illusion that whites are the majority of people in the world.

"Oh! ... Incidentally ..." You've heard that or said something like it many times. You may have been talking with someone and the conversation suddenly called to your mind another concern about which you had forgotten. You mention it, while you are thinking of it ... "Oh, incidentally ... that reminds me ... I just remembered ..."

What you were reminded of was obviously not foremost in your thoughts, not a major concern, something relegated to a subsidiary notion, obviously not a priority matter, but something you just happened to think of ... "incidentally".

Most of us would agree that, when acts of bigotry and violence are perpetrated, they ought to be viewed as a major social concern, matters of high priority, to which immediate attention should be given. Yet often the beating, the mugging, the stabbing, the robbery, the break-in, the name-calling, the assault is characterized as an "incident". So we soon find ourselves referring to a series of racial "incidents". We can sit in the cool comfort of a cozy chair and talk about "incidents" abstractly.

When we begin to talk about "racial incidents" as a substitute for naming them as what they are, they become trivialized, de-personalized, and both compassion and passion are removed from our response. Maybe that's why we use words such as "racial incidents"; it sounds a lot better than "racial mugging", "racial stabbing", "racial attack". The abstraction reduces the hurts, the anger, and the shame. It also reduces the sense of urgency, that there is something of first importance to be addressed right now, right here!

I'm not referring to the difficulty of determining whether or not a stabbing or an assault for instance, is racially motivated. I focus rather on how we refer to violent behaviors after it has been determined that race is involved. Categorizing such violence as "incidents" may be an attempt to take the sting out of wounds we wish were not there. But they are there; racism exists, and naming its evidence as "incidents" will not make them disappear. The way of health is to name what happened correctly . . . "stabbing", "beating" . . . You may call them "incidents"; I'll be around to remind you that they are not incidental!

It may be that the use of the term "racial incident" arises from the fact that society generally does not view things racial as of first importance. If so then the use of "racial incident" is a way of saying "it's not important" ... "if we think of it tomorrow ... incidentally ... we may do something about it ..." You may lapse into that relaxed state too easily; I'll be around to remind you that racism is not incidental.

Look at that word "incident" for a moment. An incident, according to some of the dictionaries I have consulted, is a "natural happening, especially of a subordinate or subsidiary feature" ... it is a "subordinate action or event", an "accidental occurrence", a "slight matter", "something incidental to another". Deriving from "incident" is the "incidental", defined as "casual,

hence minor" or "a chance or undesigned feature". Then we can add "co-incidence", "coincidentally", and with each derivative we are removed farther and farther from the event to which we refer. The heat of the beating, the mugging, the assault is removed, and the passionate anger is removed from our response. Dispassionate reviews are necessary, and I am not calling for blind passion in our response, but our capacity to emote is sometimes dulled by the way we talk about racial "incidents". At times it may be necessary to "distance" ourselves from the pain of violence; I hope we will never allow ourselves to become "distanced" from the anger which demands that violence be stopped.

Acts of violence are not "incidents". Let's not think about them, or feel about them, or talk about them "incidentally".

A "Converted" Racist?

October 1986

Recently, I saw an editorial in the *Boston Globe* (September 21, 1986), in which there was comment on a suggestion which Andrew Young evidently made about choosing a new United States Ambassador to South Africa. The editorial says, "A converted racist would be the ideal person to deal with the bigots in Pretoria."

That idea has some appeal; Herman Talmadge, former Governor and US Senator from Georgia, evidently was Young's choice. Certainly a white person going to South Africa and speaking to white leaders might have a special impact. That suggestion is still very debatable, and were I to dwell on it, there are several arguments I would want to consider.

As I read the editorial I found myself focussing more on the concept of a "converted" racist. I am doubtful that there is such a person! The assumption that a person can change from being a racist into being a "non-racist", and is therefore "converted" from the previous condition to a new one, is a concept which does not match my personal experience or observations.

The analogy with alcoholism is one that more adequately expresses what I think happens in the personal dynamics of racism. The alcoholic who is aware of his/her condition is one who knows very precisely that they are not free from the problem ever, and that they must be constantly on guard to beat down its temptations. It seems to me clear that some similar dynamics occur in whites who are racist. (Here I am writing as a white about my experience, and don't want to engage the debate about the color of racism!)

As one who has worked hard for about twenty years on the racism within myself, in others, and in society, I would be very skeptical about trusting the judgment of anyone who is designated as a "converted" racist. That statement betrays an understanding of the nature of racism which does not recognize that racism, like alcoholism, is not easily sloughed off. It does not recognize either the way in which racism is enculturated so that it almost infects the air we breathe, or the way in which institutional forms of racism sometimes involve white people in its perpetuation unknowingly or even against their will.

The alcoholic knows that alcohol will always be a problem in his/her life, that one is never free from it and must always be on guard against its active emergence into life. So also the person who comes to know what racism is must be aware that it is a presence against which always to be on guard.

I do not intend to imply that my personal experience is either a model for whites or is comparable to what most whites go through. Still, I am convinced that it has enough validity to be shared here. Out of that personal experience I think of myself in a manner which is quite different from that implied in the "converted" racist concept. Rather, I am an intensely anti-racist person and also recognize my continuing tie to racism. So I would call myself a "racist anti-racist". That calls for an explanation of ways in which that is different from the one of being a "converted" racist.

In becoming "anti-racist" I have learned a great deal about how racism functions, and I know that its myths and lies are pervasive in the values, behaviors, norms, and standards of the society in which I have grown up. As a product of that society, it is not surprising that I have had to "un-learn" a great deal; I probably will never be sure that I have "unlearned" it all. As one who continues to live in that same society, I see it evolving in ways which sometimes simply replace old lies with new ones, or with new ways of stating the old ones. I must be continually on the alert to prevent myself from being swept up into these new expressions of racism. The roots of racism are still there and I must be sure that I constantly nurture my anti-racism. It is an on-going struggle, for life! Racism is an ugly presence which may surface itself at any moment, and like the alcoholic I must deal with it as a daily threat in my life.

In becoming "anti-racist" I have also come to understand that I am connected to institutions and systems which continue to function in racist ways. Those institutions are primarily white controlled, and I am enmeshed in them, my life is entwined with them irrevocably, unless I go to the moon, and I can't do that without the help of NASA! So, even if I were to become personally "clean" of racism, I will still die with connections into the systemic nature of white society. In that sense I remain racist.

So I will call myself an "anti-racist racist" (let's put the emphasis where it belongs!), and that has implications for me which I am afraid the "converted racist" might not see. I need constant help from my friends, both white and people of color, to help keep me honest to my anti-racism; I need to be constantly analyzing my connections into institutions, I need to be watching alertly for any signs that the old lies might find a foothold in my life again. I can never be sure that I am "converted" to some new way that completely submerges the old. I know that I am dealing with a personal and cultural force that is a powerful presence. I must constantly be alert to its temptations and manifestations.

As I have come to see the depth and breadth of racism in our society, I have often found myself reaching for analogies which help me to understand how to break the tenacious grip by which racism holds us in bondage. So I begin to wonder what is a first step for breaking out of bonds? I search for other analogies.

In my personal life the analogy which is most helpful for understanding a first step toward the elimination of racism is in the ways I have seen people respond to the illness of cancer. That racism is a cancer in our society has been clear to me for years. That being so, I then began to look for similarities in the way I have heard persons think and talk about the two diseases, seeking clues which may lead to health. One early lesson to be learned is that a necessary step is to "name" the problem; that includes a willingness to say the word, "racism", and to talk openly about it. The pattern I most frequently observe is one in which people do not want to recognize the problem of racism, or to even speak the word "racism". Such avoidance is symptomatic of the problem; it is a failure to take the first step toward health. An antidote for the condition is found in the way many people have learned to think and talk about cancer.

Reflection about the way in which people today speak of cancer in contrast to a few years ago reveals a developing psychic health in the way we name, talk about, and subsequently treat the disease.

When I was a youngster there was a general reluctance to talk about cancer openly. I recall hearing my parents and other adults talking very cautiously about how a neighbor was "very sick". The tone of voice, the facial expressions conveyed an ultimate seriousness that I understood, though nothing had been communicated about the illness itself. The whispering told me that the subject was something we ought not to talk about. Fear and impotence was a clear message; there was nothing anyone could do. Gradually those subdued conversations were emboldened ever so slightly by the occasional still-whispered question, "is it terminal?" That was an attempt to discover exactly how "very sick" someone might be, without saying the dreaded word, "cancer". Often the answer to the question came only by a sadly affirmative nod. Everyone knew what the nod meant, but the careful avoidance of saying a person had cancer put the whole matter in a context of something so powerful that any victim was doomed.

I can remember how astonished I was when I first heard those pioneers who dared to say right out loud in public that "so-and-so" had cancer! A sacred taboo had been violated, but it seemed sensible to me. Then I heard for the first time a person say of his own condition, "I have cancer," and it was clear that a new attitude toward the illness was born. I soon acknowledged the positive nature of that openness. At least now we could talk about what was happening, how we felt, and what to do. If the situation still meant an acceptance of fatality, to that also we could respond in a more healthy way. Today it is common to engage in discussion of cancer and its effects on the patient and loved ones. The "naming" of the disease, the facing of its

presence, the direct address of its effects, reflect a maturity of response which is an instance of greater social "health" in dealing with what is still a terrible condition.

As a society our response to cancer puts us way ahead of our position in response to racism. That is true at both the level of diagnosis and of naming the problem. If we move toward using the word "racism" openly instead of whispering it we will be better off. Naming the disease is an important step in coping with it. Facing it as racism, acknowledging its effects in ourselves, our institutions, our social norms, will be movement toward health.

Here are some suggestions of ways which may be helpful in gaining an increased ability to use the word, "racism", to name the problems as "racism" in a realistic way so that it no longer has to be whispered, but can be spoken about openly, and solutions then be sought.

First, recognize that the word "racist", when applied to individuals does not refer only to the most blatant openly active bigot. Unfortunately, the word "racist" conjures for many people the image of someone who expresses prejudice in a series of overt actions, including name-calling, physical assault, and open announcements of their assumed superiority. Such a person is a bigot, one who holds extreme notions of superiority, and of course no one except possibly the bigot wants to be called by that name. Most of us are not extreme bigots, and some scholars have indicated that probably no more than 10% of the adult population is. So if one thinks of the word "racist" as meaning only that extreme form of bigoted person, few will want to hear the word, and its sound will raise automatic defenses. Use the word differently, as indicating persons who are imbued at any level with assumptions of racial superiority or who act in ways that have racist effects, and many more of us can use the word without defensiveness.

Second, try to unload the word "racism" of as much of its emotional content as possible; try using it descriptively, as a word which points to and describes a particular situation. It will not be easy to say "racism" without an emotional overload, but it can be done. When one begins to think and talk in this way, seeking solutions proceeded with less emotional heat and hopefully with more light.

Third, try using the word "racist" applied to yourself or others without necessarily implying that you or the other is a "bad" person. Certainly, racist behavior is not "good", but it is possible to think of oneself as "racist" in some degree without assuming that one is a "bad" person. Many years of exposure to racist norms and ideas have had an effect on me, and I can therefore readily acknowledge racism in myself but I will stoutly maintain that I am not a bad person. the word, if used descriptively, tells something about me but does not condemn me as a kind of human trash.

Fourth, try using the word in the same way when you describe our society. To say that the United States is a racist society does not necessarily imply that the whole nation is rotten. It simply describes a history and a present fact which mars the nation's fabric fundamentally. Not to acknowledge that history and the presence of racism today is to participate in a lie. It would

be an equal lie to imply that because of racism there is nothing good about our society.

Those are very simple suggestions to make, harder to integrate into a way of thinking about racism. The next time you hear people talking openly about cancer, remember there was a time when we only "whispered" the dreaded name. Now we can approach it openly and honestly and with a greater hope. The same may be true of how we think and talk about racism. Let's not "whisper" the notion; let's say it right out loud where everyone can hear and see it and respond to it openly. That will lead us to a more health milieu for solutions.

The "New" Racism ????????

June 1990

Every once in a while I read about a phenomenon which is described as the "new" racism. That sends my thoughts racing, trying to figure out what is "new" about the action being described. Soon my thoughts go in two contrary directions: one direction tells me that there is no such thing as a "new" racism, and the other acknowledges that maybe there is.

My first thoughts are skeptical about any "new" form of racism, because my reading of history indicates so many forms that have already been given to racism that it is hard to imagine that there can be anything "new". If people think there is a "new" form of racism, that may be a measure of what they do not know about the old forms.

Then my thoughts go in the other direction, affirming the possibility of some "new" forms of racism. The very fact that our society has been so creative and innovative in perpetuating racism, leads me to expect some "new" forms today.

These two sets of contradictory thoughts, led me to list some of the major forms which racism has taken; not surprisingly, it went for several pages of penciled notes. What follows here is a categorizing of things which appeared on my list. There is no particular order, and it certainly isn't exhaustive; every glance at it reminds me of other forms of racism which ought to be added. Read it, and then judge if there is anything "new" about racism today.

1. Racism has consistently offended the personhood of people of color: name-stripping, slurs, jokes, stares, destroying self-respect, creating expectations of limited ability.
2. There has been physical violence in many forms: rape, castration, beatings, lynchings, bombing churches and homes and organizations, shoving dung into the mouths of children, stoning buses in which children ride.
3. Psychological violence to people of color has resulted in internalized oppression taking many devastating forms--words such as "sudden-death syndrome", "survivor guilt", and "post-traumatic stress" remind us of these phenomena.
4. We passed laws to define an "inferior" place for people of color: colonial laws and judicial systems did it before we were a nation; we wrote it into our original founding Constitution, and created legal precedents to give it continuing credence.
5. The denial of rights to vote has been another form racism has taken. Once the right was granted, we subverted it through literacy tests, "grandfather clauses", poll taxes, gerrymandering, controlling places of polling, and other manipulative devices.
6. Our criminal justice system is tilted against people of color and all poor people from the arrest, arraignment, bail, charges, defense, jury selection, all the way through the system and most notably to the death penalty.

7. We created testing procedures in education and job recruitment loaded with cultural and racial bias.
8. We developed segregated facilities early in our history, and then when "separate but equal" became the law, we found ways to make sure "separate" was not "equal".
9. Our art and cultural standards of beauty have been defined by European, white standards, which eliminated people of color and the contributions of their cultures from serious consideration.
10. The movement and mobility of people of color has been regulated to meet governmental or corporate interests--note the frequent relocation of Native peoples, and the 1942 internment of Japanese Americans.
11. Immigration laws and policies have been passed, annulled, revoked, and subverted to the disadvantage of people of color to suit the labor needs of white employers and white laborers.
12. For decades unemployment figures have been approximately twice as high among people of color as among whites. Slavery, sharecropperism, denial of job opportunities, low wages, "last hired, first fired", are all words which point to forms of racism manipulating labor.
13. Restricting interracial marriage has been a form of racism.
14. Medical experimentation has been a sordid part of our racist history; remember the Tuskegee experiment?
15. In education we have developed both formal and informal tracking systems which have served to channel a disproportionate number of students of color away from higher education.
16. Spying, phone tapping, room bugging, infiltration into organizations of color have been ways to co-op, undermine, and divide communities of color for racist ends.
17. Complex systems intersecting housing, job opportunities, tax structures, transportation, and school aid formulas have often created options more limited for people of color than for whites.
18. Our maps have projected a northern hemisphere (largely white) of distorted largeness as compared to the southern hemisphere populated mostly by people of color.
19. Pseudo-sciences such as phrenology and physiognomy have given support to racist views.
20. Sociological studies, psychological theories, understandings of how people learn have been developed without accounting for different methods, styles, and norms among people of color.
21. Systems of communication in radio, TV, movies perpetuate stereotypes and lies about people of color.

So that's a partial list to begin with. . . . I've run out of steam! It displays a remarkable ability on the part of our dominant white society to create almost innumerable forms of racism. Maybe that should make us alert for the "new" racism.

So . . . What is new?

On Being a Non-Entity

August 1990

Frequently I hear someone refer to a person or a group of people as being "nonwhite", and it usually leads me to plead that we identify people by what they are rather than by what they are not. I don't want to be called a "nonfemale", for instance; I have spent a lot of time and energy coming to a positive sense of what it means to be a white male, and want that identity to be for everyone an important part of who I am.

Generally people don't go around talking about "nonfemales". The "non" word is usually used in relation to race, and, while it is sometimes heard in "nonblack", it is most commonly heard in the term "nonwhite". It may be worth some examination as to why that term is offensive and inappropriate to many as well as inaccurate for all.

"Nonwhite" is obviously less than fully accurate; it tells us almost nothing about the person or group to whom the word is applied. Is the person Black, Asian, Native American, or some mixture of colors? The term tells me nothing except what the person is not; beyond that I am left to speculate and choose from a number of possibilities. It communicates little and leaves me with many questions. Who is this person? All I know is that she/he is one among many groups of color, who compose most of the world population. Identity remains obscure.

"Nonwhite" is a term which fails to identify who this person of color is, and therefore runs the risk of failing to acknowledge an identity which may have been won at great price. Just as I have spent time and energy coming to a positive sense of what it means to be both male and white (two oppressor classifications), most individual Blacks in this country, certainly as a group, have won a positive identity through great struggle. To use the term "nonwhite" is to ignore and to minimize the importance of that struggle. It is almost as if the speaker were to say, "It doesn't really matter how hard you have worked to come to a sense of who you are, to me you are simply not white."

"Nonwhite" is offensive to many because it implies a standard by which people are being judged or measured, and clearly the standard is white. Anyone who is not white is just "non", as if nothing! Very few people who use the word would mean that or would even want to imply it, but that is the value and meaning which is carried by the word. Why not identify the person or group by who they are?

So much for now from this nonAfrican, nonAsian, nonSouth American, nonGreek, nonIrish, nonfemale, nonentity, who has written this on a "nontypewriter".

Recently I saw an old article written by a white man who had gone through an experience in which he had found relief from the sense of guilt he felt because of racism. For him relief from guilt came from a direct experience in which a black person forgave him. His life since then has led him to significant change and involvement in the struggle against racism. Other white people have had similar experiences, often within the context of a religious setting. Those experiences, when accompanied by active change in lives, are valid, and I do not want to argue with them. However, I do have quarrels with some people who assume that these experiences dictate the way all whites must find relief from guilt. I have heard it declared as the route which whites must take. That route for the remedy for white guilt also defines a role for blacks; whites have had a historic propensity to define roles for blacks, and we have had enough of that.

I have two other objections to the insistence that whites must seek forgiveness from black people in their involvement in racism. First, it places the burden for the whole matter back on black people, asking them to take the role of savior. The oppressor takes a foot off the back of the oppressed and says, "What I have done is terrible ... I feel guilty ... now forgive me!" Second, this approach misses the fact that demographically there are not enough black people to do the forgiving for the many more whites, and most black people have better things to do than run around forgiving whites.

Guilt is a common human response which many white people experience when they are confronted with the facts of how white racism exploits people of color. Guilt is felt, guilt is given verbal expression, and when it is "acted out", it takes numerous forms. Guilt can warp responses, or it can give direction to them. Guilt can motivate action or it can become a substitute for action. Guilt can contribute to understanding, or it can cloud realities between people. Guilt can manipulate or it can be manipulated.

Most often when I hear white people talk about guilt in relationship to race relations and racism, there is an attempt to deny it. "I don't feel guilt" ... "don't blame me for slavery" ... "I never owned slaves" ... Or sometimes the expression of guilt by one white person is met with an "Oh, you shouldn't feel guilty; that will do no one any good!" In each case there is an attempt to deny the feeling of guilt.

Since the issue of guilt does come to the fore frequently, here are several observations about guilt which I hope will be helpful.

1. Guilt is a predictable human reaction when one sees another person or group oppressed. It is probably a peculiarly human reaction; not to feel guilt under such circumstances would be a measure of inhumanity. One who is incapable of feeling or expressing guilt may be on less healthy psychological ground than the one who does feel and express guilt. So let's not deny the guilt feelings when they come; guilt is a real human emotion.

2. Guilt is a feeling which we can acknowledge, work through, and then move beyond, to take a positive action to correct the situation about which we feel

guilty. A major danger is that we become flagellants, delighting in the wringing of hands and endless verbalization of remorse. Then guilt becomes a swamp of inaction. The trick is to avoid getting trapped in guilt, but rather to use that emotion to generate activity which counteracts racism. Doing this is much harder than saying it, but the goal is to move beyond guilt over the past into responsible action for the present.

3. Religious expressions have often led people into guilt feelings, and some will argue that religion has created more guilt than it has alleviated. Religion at its best provides a way for many people to deal with guilt, and from that perspective guilt should hold no horror at all. The Christian churches and their members should have no fear of guilt. In its theology and forms the church has ways of responding to guilt, for leading people through guilt to positive action. Some of the words which remind us of those forms are: confession, forgiveness, repentance, new witness. Similarly Judaism and other forms of religious expression have ways of acknowledging guilt and responding to it, with positive results in the lives of adherents to the particular faith.

4. People often argue that they cannot feel guilty about the past, for things that happened before they were born, or for events in which they were not actors. This is usually the argument that white folks make when they say, "Don't blame me ... I didn't own slaves!" Yet those same people are quick to invoke an opposite emotion and to express pride over things in the nation's past to which they did not contribute. No one I know who so proudly celebrated our Bicentennial fought in the Revolutionary War or helped to write the Constitution! Every fourth of July we glow in the pride of our history, and shout about events to which we did not contribute! Maybe the complainer did not own slaves, but slavery was a national system, and it is an appropriate response to feel some sense of guilt about slavery, if one is a part of the dominant society. Similarly in the present, one may not contribute directly to housing discrimination, but still feel a sense of shame for a society in which housing discrimination functions to make it measurably more difficult for a person of color to obtain housing than for a white person.

5. There is a corporate nature of life which often finds us in situations where we carry out a responsibility assumed by someone else or some other group with whom we are identified. I am part of a corporate group which is obliged to make a regular mortgage payment, necessary because forebears fifty years ago borrowed money with which to erect the building we still enjoy. Most of us who now are responsible for raising and paying the mortgage were not around when the obligation was incurred. If we were to go to the bank and announce that we were not going to make more payments because "we did not incur the debt," we would be told clearly and forcefully (with law behind the statement) that the corporate nature of our relationship to the original debtors does indeed make us responsible for their past decisions.

Another aspect of the corporate nature of life carries extra-legal obligations for national, religious, racial, and other groups. The Old Testament knew of that corporate nature when it spoke of grandparents eating sour grapes and setting "on edge" the children's teeth. The history of racism, the constant oppression of people of color are a part of that corporate life which white people in the United States share. Though not

personally responsible for that past, we bear a part of the corporate responsibility. If society's "teeth are on edge" because of the past sourness, we are wiser to acknowledge the responsibility and to do something about it than to shrug it off with an "I never owned slaves ... don't blame me!"

6. Some have noted a distinction made in Japanese culture between shame and guilt which may be instructive for us. Shame, felt as a societal phenomenon in Japanese culture, does not carry with it the intense form of personal guilt which is often associated with guilt in the United States. This is not to assume that patterns in Japan can easily be transferred to the United States of America. Other peoples have developed different ways of responding to the sense of guilt; maybe we can learn from them. In this nation we often appropriate guilt in a personal way ... "I am guilty" ... "I am diminished" ... "I am not what I ought to be." Guilt of that sort is not something many want to accept, especially when dealing with corporate and societal forms of racism. It is easier to push it away, and say, "I am not guilty." Perhaps we can learn from other cultures a more healthy way of assuming responsibility without personal incrimination.

There is obviously much more to be said about guilt and racism. Each of the above observations might be a first sentence of a separate article. Maybe this will start the discussion for you and your friends. If you feel guilt at some point, don't be surprised; please don't become captive to your guilt. If you don't feel guilty, then please don't start feeling guilty because you don't feel guilty! There is enough genuine guilt around without creating more.

Racism: Past Failures, Present Responsibilities

December 1991

Often I have heard discussions about the legacy of the period in the history of our nation when African people were enslaved. In those discussions I find few white people who evidence much concept of the ways in which the grandchildren and great grandchildren of those who were enslaved may still bear the scars of that terrible institution. Some seem not willing to even hear about that legacy. It may be too threatening, taking them too close to a reality of the past which is easier to dismiss than to accept. Whatever the motive for the denial, the argument is frequently made that what was done in the past is not something for which those of us who live in the present have any responsibility. When it revolves around "slavery", the argument usually comes as, "I never owned slaves... don't hold me accountable for that!"

Of course it is true that today there is no one alive who is accountable for the period of enslavement in our history. Valid as that point of view may be, it becomes too quickly a way to deny any responsibility for the consequences of enslavement. A response that I and others have often made is to remind friends that while we cannot be held accountable for what others did in the past, we must accept responsibility for what we do in the present. That response raises for me another dimension of the discussion which I want to explore here.

To say that we who live in the 1990's are not responsible for the actions of our forebears, or to argue that the past has little lasting effect in the present, is a denial of the fundamentally corporate nature of life. Just as we are bound together in the present, so are we in the present bound to those who have lived before us, sometimes bound to act in accordance with or as a legacy of their actions. To understand that intimate relation of past and present helps me at least to struggle with my responsibilities as a person who lives in a present which is in some ways defined by the past.

Here are some of the ways in which we are bonded to the past.

1. Theologically, there is a tradition which acknowledges that the "sins of the fathers set the childrens' teeth on edge". Many can identify some ways in their own lives in which that understanding makes sense. The genocide of native peoples in this land is a very present instance of my teeth "on edge", a sour taste in the mouth. I am not accountable for what past generations have done to native people, but the patterns they set in motion are a part of the present which I would like to change.
2. The national debt is clearly an example of the ways in which our present is circumscribed by decisions we have not made, but were often made long before we were in positions of influence. We try to ignore it, but it threatens our national economic health.
3. Some of us are beneficiaries of funds accumulated by forebears whose decisions and actions still provide us with money which expands our options today. Conversely, some find options limited because those who went before either did not or could not save.

4. Often treaties made in another day, are still binding upon us in the present. That we sometimes trample them, instanced often in our treatment of Native Americans, is a testimony to their force upon us.

5. I have belonged to churches where previous mortgages contracted for reasons I thought were not very good, still bound our members in the present. Bank officials simply would not buy any argument that we disagreed with the reasons for the mortgage, and therefore should not be held accountable to pay. In such a case the past climbs into my pocketbook, very present indeed.

6. The Constitution is a document which I did not write, but its principles affect me daily. Judicial decisions of decades ago frequently define what I can and cannot do. The Constitution can be changed and judicial decisions can be overturned, but until changed they are binding upon me, reaching from the past into my present.

7. Any psychiatrist will remind us that the past represented by many who have been close to us, forms and sometimes deforms the reality in which we live presently.

8. National pride based in our heritage illustrates our bondedness to the past. I am very proud of the American Revolution, bringing a new form of freedom to the world, but I had nothing to do with it. I am daily grateful for that bonding.

9. The Declaration of Independence was not of my writing, and I was not around even to be consulted when it was written. I certainly cannot claim any responsibility for it, but I live every day grateful for its proclamation of self-evident truths, including the equality of all persons, and unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.(1) I look upon it still as a kind of "mission statement" for our nation, one which some generation will see fulfilled. From Jefferson, to my colleagues, to those next generations the corporate nature of our bonding is self-evident.

So the illustrations pile up, showing the connections of the present with the past. What was someone else's present, we think of as "past"; yet the way they lived, the decisions they made affect us, sometimes blessing our lives, sometimes invading them with an unwelcome reality. The point is clear: we are inextricably bound to the past.

The past lives in us in myriad ways. We must learn from it, must appropriate the good it brings to us, must correct the evil it bequeaths us. The body politic today is an extension of what it was yesteryear, warp and woof woven together in a pattern of beauty or ugliness. To deny the corporate nature of life is to miss an important truth. Let's not forget that as we work together to discard the racism of the past and to provide a present that will build a future without racism.

Note

1. I know well the terrible contradiction in Jefferson's life, which shows clearly that behaviorally he did not exhibit a belief in the equality which he espoused. I will not excuse that failure, but do still want to acknowledge a profound sense of gratitude for the principle he held out for us to strive towards.

In recent years I have talked with people from over thirty colleges, mostly in the New England area. These people include students, administrators, and faculty whose points of view in regard to racism differ considerably. From what I have experienced, seen, or heard about, here I share anecdotal data which will illustrate some of the forms racism takes in those college settings.

A black male student on what would generally be called a "prestigious" campus, described his three-year experience on that campus in words something like this: "Racism is very subtle here. I haven't experienced any blatant form of racism, but I encounter it almost everywhere I turn; it is all-pervasive. The sum total of all that subtle racism is blatant."

Here are some instances of racism, both subtle and blatant.

A black woman student enters a classroom on the first day of classes in a new semester. The class is small and she is the only person of color enrolled. The professor speaks to her quietly, saying that he is not accustomed to having minority students in his classes and he hopes that he will not say anything to offend her at any time. Then the class begins and the professor spends a considerable amount of time going over the syllabus and describing the course requirements. At several points during this process he turns to the black student and pointedly asks, "Do you understand?" She wants to take the course, but at this point she feels like hiding or running away.

In the lobby of a graduate school, there is a bulletin board, and one section of that board has been used as a place where people can post pictures under which they invite others to write captions, often evoking humorous responses. Reading the responses provides a pleasant pause in the daily round of academic pursuits. Someone posted on the board a picture of a KKK rally, and invited people to give it a caption. The first comment to appear was a boldly written, "This isn't funny!" Both that comment and the picture were quickly removed and the issue was dropped.

A woman student who was proud of her Native American heritage but whose physical appearance does not fit the stereotype, told me that whenever she rolls a scarf into a small band and wears it to keep her hair in place, she gets stares and comments which indicate that the stereotype is not dead. What she wears is not remotely like an Indian head band, but it evokes a behavior toward her which is different from the way she is treated when she does not wear the scarf.

A white male professor announces what I assume to be an honest hope that the student body at the college where he teaches might be more racially diverse than it is at present. In almost the next sentence he says, "There is not a single urban high school in the northeastern part of the United States which can graduate a student qualified to attend our college." This professor also sits on the Admissions committee which in part functions to set up a budget and a plan for recruiting prospective students.

A white student who frequently associates with the few black students on her campus, is walking across the college quadrangle in company with four black students. The words, "Nigger lover!" are yelled at her several times from an anonymous dormitory window.

An Academic Dean meets with me and three professors. We make plans for a faculty meeting which is to be devoted to a discussion of issues of curriculum and race. We even set the date on which the Dean will call for the faculty meeting to discuss this topic. The Dean is preoccupied with insuring a process which will make it appear as though our decision really rose out of the faculty itself. He engages in a discussion in which it is agreed that someone will bring up this matter at the next faculty meeting, that a committee will be appointed to look into the matter, that a report would be made to a subsequent faculty meeting, and then finally a decision to do that for which we had already set a date! After our meeting ended, the process outlined began. With many convoluted manipulations the plan finally fades away and is lost in the ether of words and process. Nothing ever happens.

Both male and female athletes, black and white, from six different sports, report that they have seen or experienced discriminatory practices on the part of coaches in the athletic department of their college. Black players do not get the playing times they feel they deserve, systems for ranking people through challenge matches are manipulated, and positions on teams are often not awarded on the basis of ability. The reports are consistent enough to indicate that there should be some response at least to the perceptions expressed. When these complaints are brought to the attention of college officials, they dismiss them as unfounded because "the Director of Athletics is such a nice man".

In a class examining recent United States history, the name of Dr. Martin Luther King comes up and someone makes a critical remark about him. All heads turn immediately to the one black student in the class, begging for a response.

Two black women students in Boston get on a subway car and take seats beside each other in the front section of the car, where all seats are then occupied. The section at the back of the car has several vacant seats. A middle-aged white woman gets on at the next stop; she is carrying numerous bundles, is obviously hurried and harried, and eager for a seat. She stands over the two black women, looks down at them and says, "I need a seat. Don't you know you folks are supposed to be up back?"

A white woman student has become friendly with a black male student at a Boston area college. They go on a date together at an apartment in downtown Boston. The evening slips away quickly and, when they leave the apartment, the subway is no longer running to their campus. They don't have enough money for a cab, so they decide to hitch hike, assuming that the many students returning to campus will include someone willing to offer a ride. Cars go by; none stop. Then a car full of several white students goes slowly past them; one student leans out of the car window and yells at the girl, "You'll never get a ride as long as you're with that thing!"

No one of these anecdotes is fiction! Each has happened in the 1980s! No one of them is to be dismissed lightly, because each one hurts. Collectively they are just the tip of a frigid iceberg. There are still lots of places where one can get a "higher education" about/in racism.

For several years I have taught an undergraduate course at Boston College, titled *The History and Development of Racism in the United States of America*. Teaching is always a mutual exchange, so it is no surprise that each semester students teach me about racism. The lessons are seldom new, but each time they come with a freshness defined by the particular personalities of the persons involved in the class. Here are some of the things I have learned, each of which carries for me the images of particular students, and are therefore recalled with the affection I feel for them, my mentors.

Each semester I am reminded that many white students are products of homogeneous white environments, and their understanding of racism and of racial dynamics is very limited. When students of color begin telling of personal encounters with racism on an every-day basis, many whites are shocked into a new sensitivity which opens to them an ugly world they have not seen before. That ugly world has a history, and so we begin to trace the origins of racism in our national life. That history reveals a nation founded on two contradictory convictions, one of equality, and the other affirming white superiority. Students begin for the first time to understand the complex dimensions of our national problem. Problems encountered today are rooted in a history which lives in us.

White students, with a new sensitivity, begin to report an awareness of racial prejudice and discrimination taking place all around them. They tell me that it is "like having blinders suddenly removed from my eyes," ... "it is not facts being drilled into my head to be memorized; it is human beings, it's our world, and it's life." Much of this new awareness reveals a social reality which becomes particularly tough when students begin to see the results of racism in their own beliefs, attitudes, and actions.

White students very often find themselves in danger of being trapped in guilt. Seeing what whites have done and continue to do to people of color, both personally and through institutions, guilt becomes a common response. Feelings of guilt cause some white students to become fearful of expressing themselves in class. So we have to work together to accept a kind of societal guilt without personalizing it, and to move beyond guilt over the past to a sense of responsibility for the present. That is often a painful period for white students, but it is a period which poses the student on the threshold of liberation and growth.

Students of color find it very hard to believe that some of the white students have no idea of how present, pervasive, and harsh racism is. When their own experience of racism is so continuous, it is hard at first to accept at face value that many whites simply have no idea about the reality of racism today. Privately, students of color often express their conviction that some of the white students are not being truthful.

Across this gulf of "knowing" and "not-knowing", there is need for a lot of patient and empathic listening, on the part of both whites and people of color.

Most students I encounter in this class are open and eager to learn. They discover negative racist feelings within themselves, and they plead for help in "un-learning" those feelings. Students see T.V. programs and commercials from a perspective which critiques them for racial stereotypes. Campus life and relationships offer new opportunities for exploring issues of racism. Laughing at racist jokes is no longer fun for them, and they begin to experiment with the most effective ways of countering their friends who still engage in those jokes. They report lengthy discussions with roommates after each of our weekly classes, and after semester "break" comes serious reflection on how to deal with racist attitudes they may now recognize in their parents and best friends at home. A frequent question is, "How can I share my new insight and concerns without judging my parents or losing a life-long friend?"

Each semester I am taught once again that racist behavior may be intentional or it may be unintentional. It is tough for students of color to accept as unintentional those things which are so hurtful to them. We read a history which shows us a massive amount of racist laws passed, racist judicial decisions announced, racist constitutional provisions enacted, all of which were clearly intended. In that light it is easy to assume that present acts are also intentionally racist. For white students, who may not know of the racist effect of their actions, it is hard to realize that sometimes their actions produce an effect contrary to what they intend. When they discover that dynamic, we then explore the power they have to change their actions. What is needed next is the will to make those changes. Students discover themselves at decision points which are similar to those experienced by many other people in the past; history teaches us the reality that only a few in each class will make the harder decisions necessary to change. In those few I rejoice and from them I gain strength.

Students do not easily see the institutional dimensions of racism. That is also true of most people whom I know. Becoming aware of the one-on-one dynamics of personal encounters between people of different races is relatively easy, but the institutional aspects are harder to see. Many simply do not think in institutional terms, do not have understandings which equip them to see the ways in which institutional policies, procedures, and practices may have racist effects. Without this understanding the picture of racism will always be incomplete, so we have to begin to provide some of the tools for this new exploration. I am reminded once again of the importance of educating people to identify the impact of individual institutions, and of the intersection of systems of institutions which may be racist.

What students have taught me most of all is not something I can summarize as a "learning" or an insight into racism, or even as an understanding. **Mainly what they teach me is an attitude toward the future. They give me that great gift of hope ...**

A student who describes how he has confronted a bank teller who uses racist language, gives me hope.

A student who says that every evening after our class is filled with discussions with her roommates, gives me hope.

A student who seeks supervision in a field placement in a civil rights organization, gives me hope.

A student who says, "I have begun to change my behaviors, convictions, and outlook on life and people," gives me hope.

A student who writes, "I have a long way to go in overcoming my prejudices ... my goal this semester is to accept people for what they are, not for what I think they should be ...," gives me hope.

A student who goes to graduate school and returns to seek help with a major paper on institutional forms of racism, gives me hope.

Hope in this long struggle against racism is the essence of sustaining power. What a magnificent gift I am given each semester! I share that gift now, with you.

Several friends were discussing with me the many recent "incidents" which news media have reported as a resurgence of racism on predominantly white campuses. All the discussants are people who are familiar with the experience of students of color on such campuses. None of them was surprised by the reports in the media. All agreed that such "incidents" are not a "resurgence of racism", but rather the evidence of an on-going phenomenon which every student of color knows to be a part of the daily struggle in a white environment. These are simply stark instances which command public attention; if it could be proved that no one of them happened, the reality of enculturated racism is still present.

One of the concerns in our discussion was the trend in recent years which records a decreasing percentage of students of color at many colleges and universities. Inevitably, some of those who were present began to suggest how colleges could recruit more students of color. That part of the discussion was interrupted by a black person who said he finds it increasingly difficult to justify recommending to any young black friend that he/she go to a predominantly white institution of higher education. Black colleges, he claimed, show a much better record of educating black students. In the traditionally black colleges retention rates are better, graduation is more sure, and performance after graduation is better by measurable standards.(1) So why, he asked, should he urge a black student to go to a predominantly white school? When he raised this question, my friend was not trying to be a "wise guy"; he was asking a question which for him is a very real moral dilemma.

My assumption is that the question my friend poses is one which might apply for any student of color, not simply blacks. Why should we urge anyone to go into an environment which may condone a hostile or unfriendly atmosphere, and to struggle for the survival of self-respect for four years in that environment? The question becomes especially pertinent when consideration is given to alternatives present in traditionally black colleges.

Let's declare a moratorium on the recruitment of students of color in predominantly white colleges and universities! Let those institutions give primary attention to bringing about **some foundational changes** which will assure that they will be more hospitable places in which students of color can learn, without the debilitating and constant struggle against blatant or subtle forms of racism. Until those changes are institutionalized, annual recruitment budgets could be set aside, and then when the college is ready, a **vigorous recruitment effort** could begin. The moratorium would in effect say: "Don't recruit more students of color until certain conditions of change are met."

Here are some of the changes which might be required before the moratorium is lifted:

1. Demonstrate that racism and racial prejudice is a serious offense, and that racist behavior will not be tolerated, but will be punished. Put into use enforcement mechanisms that work.

2. Secure good representation of persons of color on the Board of Trustees.
3. Recruit faculty of color, and provide all necessary supports that move them toward tenure.
4. Recruit administrators of color in major positions.
5. Integrate into the curriculum multi-racial, multi-cultural concerns.
6. Provide training of faculty and of staff (security forces, resident staff, others) in the skills of authentic multi-racial relationships.
7. Introduce into the curriculum courses which examine the history and present-day functioning of racism in our society. (This is different from what is commonly called "prejudice reduction".)
8. Revise admissions standards to include criteria which are as predictive of academic performance for students of color as present criteria are for white students.(2)
9. Put into place support mechanisms which will signify an institutional intent to retain students for graduation.

Some will say that the suggestion of a moratorium is unrealistic and it is naive to expect any such stance will be adopted by any college or university. Well, I don't expect the moratorium to get serious consideration in many college presidents' offices; it will not be on the agenda for the next meeting of the trustees at your favorite college! Still, it is a good idea. It reminds us of the need for a sense of urgency about the changes suggested, a sense I find missing when the issue of racism is raised in predominantly white settings. So, while the moratorium may never happen, it "ought" to happen! At the very least the idea may get the donkey's attention!

Notes::

1 See *The Traditionally Black Institutions of Higher Education*, from the National Center of Education Statistics, March 1985, and read *Blacks in College*, by Jacqueline Fleming, Bass, 1984.

2 See *The Use of Nontraditional Predictors for Admission to the University of Maryland, College Park*, by William E. Sedlacek, Counseling Center, University of Maryland.

An Open Letter to White Males

January 1991

Long ago a Black Puerto Rican man said to me that the organizations and institutions which are run by whites will go on just as they are with little change so long as the decision makers continue to believe, perceive, decide, and act as they have always believed, perceived, decided, and acted. That conversation illumined for me an important connection between individual and institutional change.

Since it is most often white males, like myself, who are in positions of organizational decision-making, we are going to have to decide whether or not we want to contribute to or block the implementation of change. As we move into the twenty-first century, if there are not significant changes in the way our institutions operate, many will eventually become anomalies, outmoded, left behind in the flux of increasing diversity. That diversity, molded in the population of the future, makes change both certain and necessary. The demographic diversity may come faster than change will be accelerated, but the choice about the speed of change is partly up to us. A "train" is coming down the track; our major decision is whether to board it or to watch it go by.

The changes that will be needed are both institutional and personal. There are some changes coming in me and in the institutions where I have a voice. I can control to a large extent my own openness to change; for the institutions it will be more difficult. Institutions can last a long time without change, but like white or male-only clubs, they eventually become extinct. More motivating than the threat of extinction, beckoning us somewhere "beyond" the change is an enriched life for individuals and for our institutions. The remarkably diverse century into which we are moving will require me to change my ways of perceiving, believing, deciding, and acting. As I and other perceivers, believers, deciders, and actors work together, we will develop new institutions the nature of which we cannot even envision today.

Recently I had an experience which "signified" for me some of the blocks to the changes which I believe will come. I was working with an African-American woman in a series of workshop sessions for a staff which had identified some internal problems as race-related. At one point I presented a theory about a particular form of communications, which participants were asked to practice in a skill-building exercise. After I had presented the theory, a black man said, "I'm not sure I understand all of that, and the parts that I understand, I'm not sure I agree with; it's not my way of puttin' information out there." Nevertheless, he was willing to participate, and he proceeded to do so, quite helpfully.

After the session was over, I had to do some searching in my head and heart. I had used a theory with which I felt comfortable; it came from a context of a white, male, and middle class view about how to communicate. I still think the theory is a good one, and it has proved helpful to many people of different races and cultures. Nonetheless I now found myself asking why I had implicitly assumed that the way of communicating on which it is based is necessarily the best or most helpful one for all people. Clearly, my black

friend had not found it so. He grew up in an environment of street survival for the early part of his life, and had learned a whole different way of communicating, of "puttin' information out". How can I assume that his way is inferior to mine? Might it not be possible, if he and I were to be on the same staff together, that I might profit much from learning his way of communicating? Projecting myself into an imagined staff relationship with him over a period of time, it is probable that he and I might develop some new ways of communicating which neither of us can articulate now because we don't know what they will be. Given a staff of people of greater diversity than the two of us represent, many different ways of believing, perceiving, deciding, and acting would evolve out of a willingness to learn from each other and to let develop what as a group or staff we found most helpful. It might mean that at different times and in varied situations we would exercise very different styles of making decisions or relating around staff responsibilities.

The kind of change I am suggesting here will be threatening to some, because it will necessitate new learning and in some cases whole new ways of doing things. If we begin with an assumption that all people from all cultures have something to contribute to our multicultural style, then what emerges on the "other side" of change will be more productive than what we know now. The process of getting to that new place will be difficult at times, but learning to believe, decide, perceive, and act in new ways adaptive to a multicultural world can be exciting and fun. Learning is always stimulating; by its nature "to learn" implies growth and growth is better than stagnation.

What can I learn from this experience about the future of working in an increasingly multicultural setting? First I need to understand the huge cultural gap represented in the theory I had presented, which originated in a white, male, middle-class way of dealing with information exchange between people, and the way in which the young black male had learned to "put information out" from his long experience of street survival. Across that gap, there was no reason for me to assume that the way I had learned to exchange information was better than or more helpful than his way. Second, I need to begin to listen to the "other" person's way, and as we work together over the months, some new and very different ways of "sharing information" may emerge.

When we enter into collegial relationships with a spectrum of people whose patterns of perceiving, believing, deciding, and acting are defined in part by significant cultural differences, it is my prediction that some very new ways of doing any of these things will emerge. The same will be true of learning theories by which educators plan, of ways of managing, of doing research, indeed of practically any human endeavor. The possibility of change will be constant, and that brings both threat and excitement.

The "blocks" to changes are several, but are primarily in the heads and hearts and habits of the decision-makers. Since that group is primarily white males, I address this letter to my friends in that category.

Recently I had a brief phone conversation which exposed a stereotype about how the "old boys club" works. The background for understanding this experience clusters around a proposal which we at Community Change had submitted to a foundation, seeking funding for a specific project. The proposal had been submitted many weeks ago, and, since we had been told that it was unlikely to be funded, I had put it out of my everyday consciousness. Suddenly the phone rang, and on the other end was a man whose name identified him as a primary decision-maker for the foundation to which we had made application. So I dove for the file with a copy of our proposal, ready to answer questions about it. What happened then was the surprise!

The first question which came was, "*What was your background before you came to Community Change?*" I was so astounded, that at first I could hardly remember who I was! Somewhere my alterego was screaming, "What the does that have to do with the proposal?" I was tempted to tell the inquisitor that his question was irrelevant and inappropriate, but I succumbed to the hope that maybe the "club" would give us some money, and I obediently answered the dumb question.

While I was still reeling from that question, came the next one: "*When did I first meet you?*" followed quickly by "*Who were you with when we met?*" At first I could not remember, so my questioner proceeded to assure me that he thought it was at the home of a man who was a well-known executive for a prestigious social service agency. Since I had never been in that home, I could not affirm his memory, but did finally share my recollection that we had first met years ago, in the funder's office, in regard to yet another proposal.

Then there was the second part of that question, about who I was with when we first met. (Obviously my questioner wanted to connect me to the person in whose home he thought we had met!) The best I could do was to identify the person who accompanied me when we had talked about that other proposal.

Then came the question, "*How long have you been at Community Change?*" The answer was quick. "Twenty-three years", I said, waiting now for some questions about the proposal. Indeed there was one question about the sources of our income, an unnecessary question, since the financial statement submitted with the proposal already answered that one! At least he was getting "warm", so I prepared to clarify any questions about why we wanted the money, and how it would be used.

Almost as abruptly as the phone had interrupted me, the interview was ended, with a casual, "We'll see what the Board says....." My receiver now back on its caddy, I sat in semi-shock, wondering if what I had heard was a nightmare.

"What is your background?" ...
"Where did I first meet you?" ...
"Who were you with when we first met?"

Those three questions were the "guts" of this man's inquiry about our proposal, and must have become at least a part of the basis on which he was to make a recommendation to his Board about whether or not to fund our request!

There is an almost perfect example of the stereotypical white male club in operation! There it is right out in plain view for all to see; nothing hidden about it. We can hope that kind of thinking does not prevail often, but unfortunately it probably does. While in this case the consequences could have affected only the outcome of a modest grant request, that style of making decisions when projected into other places where major decisions are being made, is frightening.

It is frightening to imagine how the thinking illustrated in this instance might affect the patterns of decision-making in institutions. Those patterns become a part of the way institutions function, and an institution governed by white males who think, act and decide as my caller did easily become racist, sexist, and classist. Project the style depicted in this experience into a situation where someone is hired or promoted on the basis of judgments about "back-ground" and who knows who, when, under what circumstances, and the consequences become serious for those who do not "fit" the mold. Ultimately there is also the threat that institutions governed by these standards will become outmoded and obsolete, left behind in the changing tides of demographic shifts.

Even more frightening for me is to recognize that the man who called me probably has no sense that his inquiries were so irrational. When such behavior becomes simply "the way things are done", without thought of the consequences or effects either for the persons involved or for the institutions, my uneasiness gives way to fear for the future. The patterns of the stereotypical white male club need changing if the future is going to look different from the past.

White males of the world, we can do lots better.

Let's change the stereotype; we can do that by changing our ways of thinking, perceiving, deciding, and behaving.

During a panel at a recent conference I heard an African American woman direct an important question. She directed it specifically to white males, and that is what prompted me to think about some response. Since she is a person for whom I have great affection, I am also eager to respond. Sharing some thoughts may prompt further discussion. The question asked was, "How do white males 'move over' and then deal with their sense of loss of control?" While the context of my friend's question cannot be fully available right now, she was wondering about how to get white males who are in positions of power to move out of the way so that others can take control.

Imagine a man in a position of decision-maker, exercising a considerable amount of control in an organization or institution. Assume next that he has come to see that it is important for him to enable a process by which others, white women, men and women of color, will increasingly become involved in making decisions which up until the moment have been primarily his domain. Our hypothetical white male understands that such a goal is desirable, and that the operation he currently supervises will be enriched when others become involved in the decision-making process. He is intellectually at least, committed to the idea that he must "move over". The question asks, "how" do white men do that?

My friend's question has two parts to it: first, the question of "how", and then the question about dealing with the sense of loss which comes after one has "moved over". The two are so connected in the one act of "moving over" that it is hard to treat them separately. Here are some "opening thoughts" on both parts of the question.

How Might White Males "Move Over"?

1. A first step is to practice listening, especially to those who are not white males. The claim that we white men do not attend as closely to women, to people of color, as to our white male colleagues finds easy evidence. "Listen" and you will hear the stories abundantly amplified. Before we start defending our behavior, before we start assuring ourselves and everyone else that we do listen, we will be better off if we simply start at the point of criticism, and listen. That requires setting aside our defenses, and hearing with our heads and our hearts both what is being said about our behavior, and how it causes pain for those who are not white males.

The "listening" will include observing our own behavior, watching exchanges which other men have with those who are not white and male, asking for feedback about ourselves. That includes understanding how we as white males may have been taught through much of our lives to behave in ways which are built on assumptions that white and male intelligence, wisdom, and experience is superior. All of this "listening" will not be easy, but if we want to function in an enriched and more productive way with colleagues who are not white and male, it is an important step to take.

2. We need to learn to accept roles which are not principal roles, up-front roles, with high visibility. This will mean accepting roles in which

we sometimes simply do the "legwork", the gathering of data, the calling of meetings, the detail preparation which facilitates someone else doing the thinking, directing, and performing in the more visible roles. It will mean that we will make ourselves available to women, women's groups, groups run by people of color, offering simply to serve them and help make things happen for them. One key to making this work is to find a goal which is commonly shared, important both to ourselves and to the others for whom we do the work. The reward, the sense of achievement then comes from seeing the common objective accomplished, rather than from any sense of personal acclaim.

3. We will need to think through for ourselves distinctions between "moving over" and "stepping down". A brief exchange with two white women elicited both the assurance that the first does not necessarily mean the second, and the comment that they might very well be the same, and both are necessary. Their comments raise some important questions for our hearts to ponder:

Is it possible for us to "move over", or "step aside", without "stepping down"?

Is it perhaps necessary at times for us to intend a "stepping down"?

A "yes" is my immediate answer to both of the above questions. In actual behavior my "answer" may be quite different; the route from head to habit may be full of emotional and status pitfalls, for which my training and experience as a white male have not prepared me. The months and years ahead will hold my real answer.

4. We will need to distinguish between the question originally posed in the panel, "how" do we move over, and the question, of "why" we should do so. This takes us into an exploration of the connections between the "how" and the "why". If we can identify some of reasons "why" we should move over, and some of the benefits of that action, it may help us deal with any sense of loss which may attend the "moving over". While that distinction is probably important, exploring the "why" is not the focus of these brief notes. Still, delineating the reasons why it is important to "move over" will be an essential step; hopefully, if we can be clear about motives there will be greater congruity between intent and action.

5. Perhaps the most important need is to confront a history which traps us into assumptions that to be "in control" is a major part of our identity. Here I take my friend's question to a different level of contemplation. "Moving over" and "losing control" were the focus of her question. Now I want to suggest that the loss of control is not the major threat to white men. The greater fear rests in the threat which "losing control" presents to the image and identity of white men. The fear of losing control may operate at a subliminal level to threaten the identity of what it means to be a white male.

In our history, written mostly by white men, we have been defined as those who are in control. History very clearly tells us that white men of property are in control; losing control therefore may threaten both our self-image and identity at a very powerful subconscious level. The record of white male control is vividly present in our world, described particularly by white women and by most people of color, as they experience us. A couple of instances will remind you of how that works.

For instance, a black friend of mine manages a clothing store, and often has people coming in to sell a new line of goods. When a white salesman comes into the store, asking to see the manager, he is greeted by my friend, who identifies himself as the manager. Often unable to accept the fact that he is addressing other than a clerk, the salesman will ask who is in charge, that's who he wants to see, he'll say. He is quite unable to accept the fact that he is talking already to that person!--In much the same way a white parent seeks to see the coach of her son's football team, and cannot believe it is the black man to whom she is introduced; clumsily she asks to see the "head coach".--Those anecdotes are current, and represent a still-common phenomenon, one that "innocent" whites often want to deny, but cannot easily shake off.

James Baldwin, writing to his nephew, in *The Fire Next Time*, speaks to this issue of white male identity. Referring to white people, he says: "They are trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men. Many of them, indeed know better, but, as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know.

To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identity. ... Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's own reality. Well, the black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations."

"Moving over", "losing control", for many white men becomes a threat to their sense of who they are. To see a woman, or a person of color take the "place" of control and power, may be a threat which becomes a block to any attempt to "move over". Baldwin's insight provides a clue for rescuing white men who are willing to "understand" the history of white, male supremacy. History creates much of our present, surely, but we do not have to let the history trap us into its falsehoods. So a step toward liberation for many white males is to enter into and "understand" the history which has formed our nation, and many of us as individual persons, but then to repudiate its lies and distortions. We can understand how history has created "places" for whites, for males, for people of color, but we can also learn how the places and roles limit all of us. At that point we need then to say a loud "no" to history's pretension to define our roles.

Baldwin comes to our aid again! We need not be trapped into the past. It is important to acknowledge that history does live in us, and does in many ways shape our present reality. It is also important to assert that history does not rule us nor completely define us today. We can release ourselves from it, once we understand it, and decide to will a different way of relating to male colleagues, to women, and to people of color.

So there are some thoughts in response to my friend's question, asked during the panel presentation. They are at least a starting point. Pick it up wherever this leaves you, and let's continue the discussion.

Frequently over the years I have been in conversation with other white men who share a commitment to bringing about change in the status quo which supports racism. One of the issues of concern is how best to motivate white men to want to work for change. That discussion elicits a sharing of our own motivations. At that point I usually find myself in a somewhat different "place" than most of the others with whom I speak. The discussion often comes to a quick consensus that the best (and the implication seems often to be, the "only") way to motivate white men is through an appeal to their self-interest.

When that conversation ends, I usually end up clear about my own motivation, challenged by everyone else, and with a two-pronged approach to the process. In this brief essay I want to explore some of those issues, and invite more extended thought from others.

I begin with the part that seems to trouble many of my most respected white friends .. my personal motivation, which I claim to be rooted in an imperative to seek justice. In my life that imperative is grounded in a spirituality which I used to express in theological terms now difficult for me to use with integrity. The words to express the motivation are not the same as they used to be, but they point to specific events in my life which are daily, powerful influences toward justice. An old pamphlet in the early days of school desegregation spoke of "simple justice"; that is really what I live for in the struggle against racism. I HATE injustice, and I seek the power to intervene wherever I see it. If government and other institutions, governed by white men, pretend to "re-present" me, then they had better be just!

All of that "justice" troubles many, and probably turns some away. It is old-fashioned "liberalism" warmed over. Like a twice-baked soufflé, it is not appetizing to many. The appeal to "simple justice" has had a bum rap, and many do not trust it. So those who speak with me will most commonly say, "we need to appeal to the self-interest of white men to work for change ... that is the most sure way to gain a sustained commitment." With that there is sometimes an insistence that I must see my motivations in those self-interest terms or somehow it is not quite valid. The conviction expresses confidence that only if one is motivated because there is an identifiable advantage for himself, can he be trusted.

It is a kind of self-evident truth that at some level people are moved by that which affects themselves. There is both theory and practical evidence to support the appeal to self-interest, and I do not argue that. I do want to argue that the appeal to self-interest has its own slippery slope, for me raising a doubt about it as the only motivating power.

I am aware that my life would be more fulfilled if there was no racism or other form of oppression in society. There are clear ways in which the long-run of life propels an interest in anti-racism simply because things will be better for me. After consistent, full-time work in the struggle for years, my life is clearly more focussed, more fulfilled and enriched in ways which I would never give up. The benefits are clear every night when my pillowed head reviews the day and gives thanks for the richness I have known. My work in the

struggle, meager as its results have been, has clearly brought to me a liberation from many things to which I was previously in servitude. There is not a single moment of doubt about the clarity of that self-interest.

BUT ...

There is evidence for arguing that self-interest is a risky motivation by itself. It would be easy for me to argue that in many ways the status quo works just fine for me as a white male. I can demonstrate in my own life that there has been a significant cost in time, energy, and money for engaging in the struggle against racism; it has been my choice to accept that cost, I do not regret it, and when measured over against the cost of not engaging in the struggle, I would make the same choice again today, as I make that choice everyday. That could become an argument for my self-interest motivation. On the other hand, there are benefits for me which make it very easy to live in the world without change. I would not need to even resist change, but simply not abet it, and the system would go right on providing those benefits. Measuring some of the costs of engaging in the struggle for change might easily lead back into that comfortable place provided for me simply because I am white, male, and middle class. I have seen many white men in a variety of institutional settings, in family, marital and other relationships, for whom the temptation of the status quo overcomes an initial appeal to change, because the self-interest is in preserving things as they are. It may have been that the self-interest in changing was not clearly enough articulated for them, and that becomes an argument for making that self-interest more compelling.

The matter boils down to a fundamental distrust of long-lasting white motivation for change; that in turn comes from a frightening conviction of the power of racism in the heads, hearts, and habits of whites. I am left with an uncomfortable feeling that the self-interest approach leaves many white men on a very slippery slope indeed. So I want to buoy that motivation with an appeal to justice also. Friends will then point out that my concern for justice is in the long-run a matter of self-interest. That is true, but I shall resist strenuously attempts to turn a concern for justice into simply "self-interest".

All of this just proves that I am "old-fashioned"! I am that, and proud! I'll continue to work for justice, and want to join other white men, no matter what is their personal motivation, who will do the same. A prophet once called for justice to roll down like a mighty stream. I'm for that. How about you?

A Context for Understanding the Current Attack on Affirmative Action

April 1985

We have heard in recent months a number of calls to rethink and to redefine Affirmative Action. They have come from a variety of sources, including editorial writers, political leaders, government agency heads, professors, economists, and corporate executives. Whites and people of color, men and women have joined a small but vocal chorus.

The questions about Affirmative Action come while political conservatism sweeps across the nation, and that observation leads me to speculate about a larger historical context for what is happening. That larger context seeks to understand present trends in regard to race relations as representing a movement similar to what happened during the Post Reconstruction period of the last century. Many have drawn the parallels between the two centuries in the late years of each. The 1980s are similar to the 1880s, each characterized by a retrenchment from moves which had been made toward equality of the races in mid-century. It will be well to look at what happened in the last century to see what might be in store for us if the present trends continue.

Joel Williamson has characterized what happened to race relations in the South during the period after Emancipation and through the present. (1) He has collected a great deal of data to support his finding that Southerners could be divided into roughly three groups, each representing a distinctively different "mentality" in regard to race relations. The smallest number of people were those whom Williamson groups under what he calls the Liberal mentality. These were the people who were most hopeful about the future, who believed that the newly freed Negro people, if given proper support, could become productive citizens in a unified South. Liberalism believed "that the capacity of Negroes to absorb white culture in America had not yet been fairly tested, and it refused to close them out brusquely and across the board somewhere far below the white man." (2)

At the other end of Williamson's spectrum was the group whom he calls Radicals. This group "envisioned a 'new' Negro, freed from the necessarily very tight bonds of slavery and retrogressing rapidly toward his natural state of savagery and bestiality." (3) This group claimed that there was no place for the Negro in the future of this society, and in fact looked forward to the disappearance of the black race. Out of this mentality sprang waves of direct violence and brutality.

In the middle, between the Liberals and Radicals, stood the group who espoused the Conservative mentality on race. These were clear in a belief that Negroes were inferior, but as distinguished from the Radical racists, Conservatives were willing to allow a "place" for Negroes, so long as it was clearly an inferior "place", and that the "place" was defined and controlled by whites. As long as the Negro populace stayed in that defined "place" it was assumed that things would be all right and the South would persevere.

While the Liberal mentality never gained a great following, there was a time particularly from 1897 to 1907 when the Radical racists gained

ascendancy, but eventually the Conservatives won out and became dominant. By the second decade of the twentieth century the Conservative mentality gave firm and clear direction to the South.

Certainly the three views of the race issue which Williamson applies to the South might also categorize Northern attitudes. While Williamson focuses on the South, he acknowledges that something very similar was also happening in the North; the North was simply later than the South in discovering its prejudices. The thin veneer of Northern liberalism cracked under pressure and it gave way with little struggle to the Conservative mentality.

As the Radical and Conservative mentalities struggled for the mind of the nation in those closing years of the nineteenth century, the Supreme Court decision in Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) gave impetus to the Conservative point of view. That decision said that it was constitutionally all right for the state to provide separate railway carriages for whites and blacks. In its decision the Court said that laws permitting or even requiring the separation of the races "where they are liable to be brought into contact do not necessarily imply the inferiority of either race to the other". Thus issued the famous "separate but equal" doctrine of law. The Court was careful to say that there is a fallacy in the argument which assumes that the "enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority." "If this be so," the court said, "it is solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it."

The Court denial aside, we know that it was the white mentality which gave birth to the concept of black inferiority; it was no mere "construction" of the "colored mind"! The history of the nation clearly proves a foundation in assumption of white superiority. Embarrassed by that history and its discontinuity with lip service to egalitarian principles, now the Court saw a way to affirm "equality" while defining a clear place for the former enslaved people, separated from white society.

Society seized upon the idea quickly. "Separate but equal" became the mode for the first part of the twentieth century. It was easy for the dominant whites to claim and pretend that the separate facilities, the separate schools, the separate services were "equal". It also became clear that the ability of dominant whites to designate a "place" or the "place" for the minority groups of society was in itself a denial of those principles of American faith which assert that a person's place is a matter of achievement and not of fixed definition by any group or person. The nation and the Supreme Court learned that "separate" is not "equal". That learning was announced in the Brown decision in 1954, when the Court made it clear that "separate" is inherently unequal. The Court also understood the power dimensions of our society; so long as access to power (money, control, status) is unequal then separate institutions and services will not be equal.

In our century Affirmative Action has been one thrust which came out of the Civil Rights Movement and the "new" Reconstruction efforts to rebuild a society based on equality. Affirmative Action has been a method of providing members of groups who have been victims of discrimination at least some better opportunity to gain access to education and jobs, a simple one-step attempt to redress the injustices of over three hundred years.

There has been much debate about whether or not Affirmative Action has worked for the protected groups it has defined. Richard B. Freeman, an economist from Harvard University and the National Bureau of Economic Research, concludes that "Affirmative Action and equal employment opportunity have helped the nation reduce discrimination in the job market and improve the economic position of minorities and women." (5) He concedes that Affirmative Action has not been a panacea and that huge problems remain. Freeman quotes the findings of Jonathan Leonard in some of the most conclusive statistical studies which have been done to measure the effectiveness of Affirmative Action. (6) Leonard has charted changes in the relative earnings and occupational attainment of full-time black and female workers relative to white male workers, and the ratios of the same groups in professional managerial occupations from 1964 to 1982. These studies show conclusive evidence which, with other data, lead Freeman to say that Affirmative Action has "raised employment for protected groups" . . . has "raised the overall employment and employment in better occupations for protected groups", and has "raised the demand for labor in companies subject to Affirmative Action pressure, and thus contributed to the economic progress of minorities and women." (7) Freeman and Leonard point us to some hard facts which show that Affirmative Action has worked.

Theodore Cross, in his most recent study, discusses the contention that Blacks have actually suffered as a result of Affirmative Action policies. He says, "This thesis goes against all evidence. Wherever we do find gains by blacks, there is a close connection between these gains and the presence of strong affirmative action. For example, during the late 1970s, Census figures show that black men in managerial positions dramatically increased from 2.8 to 6.9 percent of the total, a 146 percent increase. Clearly this is due in part to the fact that affirmative action had been particularly strong in business school admissions and in admissions to management posts in large corporations. Gains in these fields were much less dramatic during the 1960s (1.6 percent to 2.8 percent), a period usually characterized as the pre-affirmative action era." (8) Cross goes on to assert that the increase during the 1970s of blacks in government posts, in higher education and in some cases in police forces, is attributable to affirmative action policies. Progress in the blue collar trades, traditionally closed to minority persons is directly attributable to affirmative action pressures. The number of black judges, Cross reminds us, tripled during the years 1977-1980 as a consequence of expressly race-conscious judicial appointments. Cross also points us to a Labor Department Study during the Reagan administration, which examined hiring practices at 77,098 businesses between 1974 and 1980, and found that minority employment grew by 20.1 percent in companies covered by affirmative action requirements, but only 12.3 percent in companies with no government contracts or other special hiring obligations. (9)

These statistics do show progress. That progress came because we adopted Affirmative Action policies knowing that equality was not going to be made simply by declarations of "openness" or "equal opportunity"; race prejudice and racism are recalcitrant and will not given in to the ebb and flow of a simple open market. The problem we face is so deeply embedded, so systematically woven into the fabric of economic, political, and social life,

that it demands more than just "nondiscrimination". We must act "affirmatively" to overcome the separations. That is what history taught us and that is the reason for the progression from plans of nondiscrimination to affirmative action.

There are some parallels to be drawn between the gains under Affirmative Action in this century and similar gains during the Reconstruction period of the last century. In each case there was some progress made toward the ideal of actual equality of access to power and resources in society; in each case there were people who were pleased at whatever progress they saw, and there were some who were pleased but unsatisfied, and others who saw what happened and were threatened.

In our day those who are not happy with what they see in Affirmative Action join the "conservative mentality" of the time and seek to undermine the effort. They claim that Affirmative Action does not work as intended, that it puts an onerous burden of stigma on the protected groups. The studies suggested above indicate that Affirmative Action has worked, and certainly few of the so-called "protected groups" are voicing a concern that they are stigmatized! That "construction" of stigma seems to be placed upon the situation primarily by white males!

Perhaps it is the effectiveness of Affirmative Action which troubles those of the conservative mentality who want to "shoot it down". Certainly they would not be concerned about Affirmative Action if it were not working at all! The expressed concern for what they call equality does not ring with much authority, since the racially conservative mentality has a poor track record on that issue historically.

The conservative mentality is in reality frightened because Affirmative Action is working, has worked too well, and blacks and other people of color are too frequently moving out of their "places". Even the thought they might have a better opportunity to escape the assigned "place" is a threat to the conservative mentality. So the strategy calls for getting rid of Affirmative Action, or to "redefine" it. The nation is supposed to be committed to equality; therefore, any anti-Affirmative Action strategy must not fly too blatantly in the face of that concept. So we hear talk about equality, but it is an "equality" which carefully protects the "place" of those in power. That means assuring that people of color stay in their "places". Enter again, "separate but equal"!

We must not fall into that trap again! Separate is not equal! Separate is not equal because access to power, resources, money, control is not equal in this nation. Those who make the major policy decisions which affect large numbers of people are white, and they make those decisions in the long run with a white bias. Those who control the major sources of financial revenue are white, and the distribution of those resources is made to stabilize the existing relations of economic power.

If the current move to redefine Affirmative Action is successful, one of the results will be to move our society back into the "separate but equal" mode of the early century. In this case "separate" will mean that the conservative mentality will define the "place" for people of color in

education and employment. That "place" will be one that constricts access to power. In higher education that will mean a declining enrollment of people of color, and restrictions of students of color to vocationally oriented schools, and community colleges which are not close to the center of power. In employment the "place" will be defined largely as service jobs: people of color will serve hamburgers, sweep streets, wait on others in stores, banks, restaurants and airplanes, drive the cabs and serve the drinks. Employment will be largely limited to low-level entry jobs with limited upward mobility or access to power. As we move rapidly into automated production many jobs in some of those categories will become insecure, and the prospects of an even increased ratio of unemployment among people of color looms! Blacks and other people of color will be kept "separate" and in the "place". For many that will mean no "place" at all!

The rush to redefine Affirmative Action may in fact take us back to "separate but equal". History has taught us that is a false choice. Separate "places" are not equal and will not be equal until there is a foundational change in the relationships of power. "Separate but equal" is a strategy designed precisely to avoid such change. History warns us that we may be headed backwards. We must maintain the forward momentum of Affirmative Action!

Notes

1 Williamson, Joel, *The Crucible of Race Relations: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*, Oxford University Press, 1984

2 Ibid., page 5, Introduction

3 Ibid., page 6, Introduction

4 Blaustein & Zangardo, *Civil Rights and the American Negro: A Documentary History*, Trident Press, 1968, pages 304-311

5 Freeman, Richard B., *Affirmative Action: Good, Bad, or Irrelevant?* *New Perspectives*, Fall 1984, page 26

6 Ibid., page 25. Leonard's study analyzes employment patterns in 68,000 establishments. *Splitting Blacks: "Affirmative Action and Earnings Inequality Within and Across Races"*, Working Paper No. 1327, National Bureau of Economic Research, April 1984

7 Ibid.

8 Cross, Theodore. *The Black Power Imperative: Racial Inequality and the Politics of Nonviolence*, Faulkner, New York, 1984, page 488

9 Ibid., page 492

A Parable: Basketball and Affirmative Action

January 1991

The game was a close one, being played with intensity between well-matched teams, likely to go into overtime. The winners would then be at the top of their college league, at least until another game. Five thousand seats screamed with passionate joy or dismay at every play. Players moved up and down the court, banging under the boards, tangling on the floor. The referees called "foul", and were deluged with the crowd's disapproval or acclaim, depending on whether the call went against the home team or the visitors.

The woman next to me, obviously a "real" fan, followed every move on the court with exquisite knowledge of players, rules, and referees. Quickly realizing that I knew little, she turned to me during a time-out right after a particularly close play had been called a foul against one of "our" players. With rapid tongue and hands she explained, "This is really bad ... sure that was a close play ... it could have been called either way ... but why do they call all of 'em against our team! ... Don't the other guys do anything wrong! ... Give us a break!" Then she screamed something like that in the direction of the floor. All around us the chorus was the same; a noisy demand that the calls were going unfairly to the advantage of the visiting team.

I learned a lot about basketball that evening, especially about the crowd's response to "foul" calls. I learned that the crowd seemed to be looking primarily for fairness from the referees. With the exception of a few rabid fans, most accepted the fairness of a call when it was against an obvious foul even by a home team member. The great majority of calls were not easy ones to make, and could have gone for or against either team. The crowd knew that, and watched to see if the referees were going to balance those close calls between the two teams. If too many of those close calls went against the home team, the crowd would explode, clearly expecting that fairness demanded some of those calls go against the visitors. When the referees began to call fouls in a way which balanced the cumulative effect of all the calls, the crowd became quieter, accepting that fairness was prevailing. That seemed to be the key ... as long as there was some fair balance given in those close "judgment calls" it was okay.

Long after the game was recorded in the standings of the league, I thought about how the crowd expectations for fairness might instruct me in thinking about fairness and Affirmative Action.

In a basketball game spectators watch the entire game, except for those few who come in late or leave early. The whole game lasts a couple of hours, and actual playing time in a regulation game is only forty-eight minutes. The spectators see it all unfold before their eyes; it is easy to make a judgment whether calls are being made fairly or unfairly, and the test for fairness seems to be that fouls are balanced between the two teams.

While it is relatively easy to see fairness develop in a short game, making a judgment about the fairness of Affirmative Action requires a view from a historical perspective. The "game" in this case is centuries long, and the people involved at any given point see only a short period of action. Few "spectators" have a historical perspective, and therefore make judgments from a very time-limited view.

A historical view sees certain groups of people affected in negative ways, not simply as individuals, but as members of a group:

- Denied access to goods, services, resources, and power.
- Psychologically diminished as members of the group.
- Limited by enculturated and institutionalized prejudice.
- Objects of both intentional and unintentional disempowerment.

Fairness demands action to affirmatively ensure that history becomes balanced, that the "calls" do not go for too long against any group. Because we see only that part of history in which we participate, some of us see Affirmative Action as simply preference of the moment; it's like seeing only a few minutes of the basketball game.

Compare viewing a basketball game to that historical view of Affirmative Action. The regulation game lasts for forty-eight minutes and most spectators see the whole thing. The "game" of history in the United States is over three hundred years; dating it from the time when the institution of slavery was in place, the "game" is about three hundred and forty years old.

Affirmative Action as public policy is hardly thirty years old, and that span of time is less than one-tenth of the years of our national history. One of the goals of Affirmative Action is to create a climate of fairness in which some of the "calls" will balance the preference given to white propertied males since even before the Constitution, and to make opportunities possible for groups which have been left out. The time so far given to that effort has been brief. Compared to watching the forty-eight minutes basketball game, it is like being a spectator for less than four minutes. If during four minutes of a basketball game we saw a lot of calls being made in favor of one team over another, we would get upset at the unfairness of the system. It might take a whole quarter of the game before we were satisfied that calls were being fairly balanced. A full quarter of our national history would necessitate at least one hundred years of Affirmative Action, in order to redress the balance.

Most of us do not have that historical view of Affirmative Action; that vision can be corrected. We can expand that view. To do so it is necessary to understand history, to take a long view of what is happening before our eyes, to understand that Affirmative Action is a part of the "balancing" which is necessary to implement fairness.

Fairness in the basketball game is not simply to balance the calls between individual players; it is the intent to balance the calls between the teams on which the individuals play. Fairness adjusted between individual players would satisfy only a part of the quest for justice. It does nothing for the tough calls between teams.

So, when I hear people, usually white males, complain that Affirmative Action has outlived its usefulness, that all the adjustments that fairness requires have been made, I remember that basketball game. Then I look at the persistent history of discrimination against people simply because they have been members of groups ("minorities", women, gays, the disabled), and I know that it may take a lot longer than a few "minutes" of history to balance things fairly.

Antidote for Dread Diseases Fatal for Advocates of Racial Justice

November 1980

Recently, I have noted two dreadful diseases which have attacked with devastating regularity a number of people who have said they want to work toward the elimination of racism from themselves, their institutions, and society. In every case these diseases result in an inability to act, and the victims enter into a kind of catatonic posture, unable to move. With a hope to alleviate the causes and release the victims from these dread diseases, I have conducted a completely scientific and highly verifiable study.

The two diseases are called **Dontknow** and **Cantdo**. I will describe them so that if you ever feel yourself succumbing to them, you can run for the antidote quickly!

DONTKNOW attacked some good friends of mine the other day. These are highly educated people, who, for several months, have been gathered in a group which has a stated intention to mount a concerted attack on institutional racism in their city. They are mostly white males; among the group of twenty-five or so people, they hold at least forty degrees. They are highly trained people, who can marshal informed arguments on a wide variety of subjects and issues. Ask them about anything and you will hear knowledge spout forth. If your question is in a field where they have little direct knowledge, they do know how to go about gaining the information they need so that in a short time they will be prepared to respond to your question intelligently. These are well-educated people with a high degree of knowledge.

Given the composition of this group, you can imagine my dismay to hear them say that, when it comes to institutional racism, they just **DONTKNOW** what to do about it!!!! **DONTKNOW** strikes; the group is in disarray and, in sadness, they disband. Fortunately, the **DONTKNOW** syndrome does not seem to affect their ability to perform in other areas of their professional lives. They **DONTKNOW** what to do only when it comes to institutional racism.

Then there is **CANTDO**! It is equally dangerous in its consequences, devastating to the work of racial justice. **CANTDO** went to work among some other people I know who are all members of the same institution. If I were to describe the institution and the positions these people hold in it, you would agree that they are in places of power and influence, that, in fact, they are prime decision-makers. They were wondering what they could do to implement a stated commitment to work against racism. It was exciting because these were people who really could move things within their sphere of influence! But then a terrible thing happened, and it was the **CANTDO** germ!

You have already guessed the result. These friends, all white males, decided that they really couldn't do anything! They had no influence! They were devoid of power! Their institutional muscles were nothing but flabby fat! In desperation I poured out suggestions of a wide variety of things they might do, but, to my amazement, my friends were completely impotent. Job descriptions of their positions notwithstanding, they really had no power to act! **CANTDO** had taken over! Again, the disease does not seem to have affected their ability to continue to perform impressively in other areas of concern which have nothing to do with racism.

Now these two diseases bear watching, because they can demobilize people who have the best of intentions. DONTKNOW seems to attack most those who are highly educated; there is some indication that the more degrees one has received the more one must be on guard against DONTKNOW. CANTDO, as you might have surmised, seems to root and flourish most readily among people who are in "high" positions in the organizational chart.

When people who are highly educated are also in positions of great influence and combine both knowledge and power, there is a frightening susceptibility among them to a combination of DONTKNOW and CANTDO!!!! When the two diseases strike the same people, the prognosis is seldom good for racism.

I noted in the two situations I described that most of the people who suffered the attack of DONTKNOW and CANTDO were white males. This does not mean that others need not worry about the diseases, but controlled observations do indicate a higher degree of susceptibility among white males. That susceptibility may not be generic in white males; there is some indication that the cause of the susceptibility of white males to DONTKNOW and CANTDO is simply environmental, due to the fact that white males generally have received more degrees and have found their way to positions of influence more frequently than other categories of human beings. There is evidence to indicate that white males who are highly educated and in positions of influence had better be on guard against DONTKNOW and CANTDO!!!!

Fortunately there is an antidote which, if taken upon the appearance of the very first symptoms, may overcome the affects of DONTKNOW and CANTDO. The antidote is the same generally for both diseases, though in some cases dosage may vary. If you feel yourself being overtaken by an attack of either DONTKNOW or CANTDO, please rush immediately to make contact with some of the victims of institutional racism. Don't be put off by the fact that some of the victims may not be highly educated; they will KNOW what you could do! As a matter of fact, you might go out on the street and just ask some of the victims, found most often among Black Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic, or Asian Americans. They have a remarkable ability to KNOW what others don't know about racism, how it functions, and how to dismantle it! In most cases, careful listening will help overcome DONTKNOW!

The same antidote is often helpful in cases of CANTDO. Contact with victims of racism is what is needed. Again, don't be put off by the fact that they may not carry cards which list their names and organizational positions. They will help you with the CANTDO's, because often you will find them doing a lot of things you might either replicate or complement at your level of influence. Try it; it might work! It is better than giving in to the dreaded disease.

The key is to act at the very first symptoms of the diseases. If either progresses too long, it becomes predictably fatal to anti-racism intentions. These diseases are powerful, so beware! I know personally their treacherous nature, and must constantly be on guard. So the advice I offer is directed to myself also. The very first time you hear yourself say, "I don't know what to do about racism," check it out; you are susceptible to DONTKNOW! The very first time you hear yourself say, "I can't do anything about racism," check it out; you may be invaded by the dread disease of CANTDO! Move quickly or you may be "a-goner" to the cause of racial justice.

To Friends at the YWCA

November 1981

[Editor's note: In 1970, the YWCA of the USA adopted as its "One Imperative" the elimination of racism "wherever it exists" and "by any means necessary". Community Change was present when the Imperative was adopted and later trained national staff and board members. Each local YWCA was charged with implementing the Imperative in its work. To some individuals, however, the phrase "by any means necessary" seemed to go too far. Did the YWCA leadership really mean that members should participate in *any* activity opposed to racism--including violence? The following essay is a response to those concerns.]

For several years I have heard discussion about the phrase in the YWCA One Imperative which states an intention to eliminate racism "by any means necessary". That phrase often gets a reaction which seems to rise out of a fearful vision of YW members across the country plotting incendiary and revolutionary activity. "Any means necessary" seems to imply a "no holds barred" permit for illicit action which chills the blood of traditional "Y" people. As one who has been close to the YWCA at many levels as it has developed its Imperative, and yet as one who speaks from "outside", I offer some comments on this storm-centered phrase, "by any means necessary".

I like the phrase. I get a bit frightened that sometimes "any means necessary" becomes an excuse for people to talk about it rather than do something to implement the Imperative. Parlor discussions about meanings and definitions often become exercises which are substituted for more concrete action. In some cases the phrase may even become an excuse for people to "drop out" of the effort to eliminate racism, because they claim a disagreement with the intent of that phrase. Whenever we lose any of that collective power I am concerned.

What is the thrust of the phrase, "by any means necessary"? What is the practical importance of the phrase? Here is one person's view.

First, I like the phrase "by any means necessary" because it has led me to look at the means of combatting racism which the YWCA has used historically. In doing so I have found a wide range of possibilities which have characterized the YWCA efforts. Here are some of the "means" which the YWCA has used to combat racism in the past:

The YWCA has:

- Established orphanages and homes for black children.
- Organized branches in areas to serve black people.
- Integrated Associations and staffs.
- Organized interracial conferences.
- Provided recreational services to segregated troops.
- Demanded equal treatment of attendees at conferences.
- Taken stands on public policy issues.
- Provided programs to influence public opinions against lynchings and violence.
- Monitored court trials to assure justice.

Conducted internal audits of interracial practices.
Testified at legislative hearings.
Published and distributed articles and pamphlets.
Worked for outlawing fraternities and sororities with
discriminatory clauses.
Affirmed support for the non-violent civil rights movements.
Desegregated its own public dining facilities.
Established study programs.
Supported voter registration programs.
Investigated the racial justice impact of its investments.
Supported boycotts.
Utilized its purchasing power to support minority firms.
Adopted Affirmative Action plans.
Worked toward curriculum changes.

Reading the "by any means necessary" phrase in the light of that YWCA history gives substance to a discussion about what "means" we can expect the YWCA to use today as it addresses racism. There is a firm tradition of a wide variety of "means", all of which fall safely within the range of legal and democratic action. I like the sense of being rooted in history, and this particular bit of history ought to give some clues for what to do in the present.

Second, I like the phrase "by any means necessary" because it prods me to look for new ways to combat this systemic social cancer called racism. "By any means necessary" stretches my imagination and leads toward the possibility of greater creativity in response to racism. I look at what has been done in the past, I identify the function of racism in the present, and then with "any means necessary" in mind and heart, I begin to look for new answers. New approaches, new "means" are always important to discover, and, if the phrase "by any means necessary" sets me searching for them, that is a plus.

Third, I like the phrase "by any means necessary" because it agitates me. It makes me uncomfortable. It prods me to be discontent with whatever I am doing. It makes me dissatisfied with any amount of progress short of the complete elimination of racism. There is a temptation to "settle in" too quickly with small signs of progress. Small victories may be all that I will see in my lifetime, and I am convinced that fundamental social change comes from a long series of "small victories". However, contentment with minor changes is dangerous if it becomes a stance toward the future. The post-reconstruction periods of both the 19th and our present century are reminders that gains can be quickly swept aside until all that remains is an illusion of progress. When I am tempted to contentment with minor changes, the Imperative reminds me that the goal is still out there ahead of us somewhere in time. "By any means necessary" agitates me and makes me uncomfortable, and if I am uncomfortable enough, I am more likely to change. "By any means necessary" moves me forward toward the final goal: the elimination of racism.

So to the YWCA a "thank you" for that phrase "by any means necessary". Keep it there, and wave it at me often.

Blatant racism continues to grow in strength during this twentieth century "Post-Reconstruction" period. The KKK conducts training for a race war, unhindered by our government. Four hundred whites in Philadelphia chant "We want them out," when they see blacks moving into "their" neighborhood. In a Boston subway, two black college women are told by a white passenger that they should "sit in the back". Cambodian children are accosted by whites who push dog shit into their faces. A police department attorney in a hearing about excessive force used by a white officer toward a Chinese man is allowed to use openly racist stereotypes and innuendo. Anti-Semitic acts are reported on college campuses and in neighborhoods. And in an affluent Boston suburb a black woman is confronted by police after leaving a boutique where she has done nothing more harmful than looking at clothing.

While overt brands of racism are on the upsurge, "legitimated" by the politically conservative climate, I want to focus here on a more subtle racism, one germane to centers of white liberal strength. My observations grow out of extensive anti-racist work in more than forty school systems, thirty colleges and universities, sixty religious groups, fifty private social service agencies, community groups, government agencies, and work in a variety of Boston-based coalitions. Most of these groups are predominantly white in both participants and leadership. Here are patterns of behavior which characterize how those groups fall short of stated intentions to work against racism. They are offered both as critique and as diagnostic tools.

1. There is a frequent inability to see that there is a "problem" internal to white structures, and/or to recognize that the problem is fundamental rather than a temporary aberration. Despite all the discussion about racism, and even while mouthing a recognition of the need for white institutions to change, most white leaders do not have a "gut" understanding that there is a very basic problem at hand. Any acknowledged problem is seen as simply something that "went a bit wrong along the way", able to be corrected with a couple of workshops, seminars, or personal confrontations. This becomes a wonderful way to avoid the problem and thus contributes to the racism at whatever level it exists.

2. There is a reluctance to see the institutional and systemic nature of racism. It is much easier to think of racism as a phenomenon which affects personal relationships and one-to-one working situations instead of moving to an examination of institutional policies, decision-making, staffing, programming, and all the complex factors of systemic interaction. Again, it is easy for those of us who are middle-class whites to intellectually agree on the definition of an institutional problem. Efforts to act on those problems are usually only sporadic at best. By conforming to the present arrangements of our own institutions, we allow the racist forces to perpetuate themselves.

3. Another problem is the failure to address racism DIRECTLY. Often in recent years when I have asked leaders of white social change groups what their anti-racism program is, I've been told it comes under some category other than "racism". It may come under "human rights" or "equity" or "race relations" or, lately, "economic justice". I can probably argue as persuasively

as any of these leaders the case for a connection of racism to any of these issues. Still, I want to insist that in most cases subsuming racism under any other programmatic category usually becomes a way of burying it. A focus on racism is a focus on racism is a focus on racism! Anything else becomes another chapter in a long history of devices white people in the US have adopted to avoid dealing with racism. My conviction is to say over and over again that we must address racism directly.

4. The budget seldom reflects a major concern with work against racism.

Budget is the bottom line. Budget reflects the real priorities; it is a fact of institutional life that most things cost money. Time, energy, and people talents often can lead to significant results with little money, but don't let that divert you from the less pleasant fact that funding is necessary for most substantial programmatic efforts. Recently someone came to me asking for ideas on how to implement a program to attack racism, a priority now adopted by her school. The budget she had to work with for one year was less than \$500. I proceeded to work hard with her to look at things that could be done without money, but it doesn't take long under those circumstances to realize that a real institutional commitment was not there. Commitment is measured in two places--in the hearts of the people, and in the budget; we'd better get those two into some congruent relationship.

5. Another consistent pattern is the failure to ACT. We like to talk about racism. It is a fascinating parlor discussion, even good at coffee breaks on the job. We hold endless discussions about whether or not being "color blind" is an appropriate stance, whether or not "now" is the right time for our institution to address racism, how we should name what we're doing, how to define the problem. I happen to think that all these discussions are crucial, but so often the discussion blocks action, or discussion becomes the action. Uninformed discussion is also a danger, but the more serious danger for most white institutions is that the discussion so often goes nowhere near action. We must begin to do something about racism.

6. Another typical pattern is to look for places other than in our own institution where we think people ought to bring about anti-racist change.

It is, for instance, easier to organize support for anti-apartheid actions than for attention to racism here in the USA. Don't for one second think that I would urge those college students rallying against apartheid to stop what they're doing. But try to get the same numbers to commit the same time and energy to change campus practices and policies which are also racist, and you'll see what I mean. Very few people are willing to make commitments to long-range "backyard" change. Right now we have an opportunity to channel, but not divert, some of the anti-apartheid energy toward action against racism here at home as well.

My observations have been cast in negative language--"inability", "reluctance", "failure to address", "seldom reflects", "failure to act". Those negatives can be turned into positive more easily than one might think. To my white friends I say, let's get working together at the positives.

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[Editor's Note: This series of articles was written for *PACE*, a journal for Roman Catholic educators. The third article in the series is specific to the Roman Catholic Church and therefore not included here.]

What Needs to be Changed?

As was pointed out in the November *PACE*-setter, racism is not a high-priority issue among white people generally--even among *PACE* subscribers. If you are a white person, living in a predominantly white community, moving in religious and other environments that are predominantly white, the issue of racism may seldom come to your attention. television invades your living room with news of some racist "incident", an occasional homily may remind you that racism is still alive and well, and once in a great while something may happen or someone in your immediate presence may say or do something that reveals a racial prejudice, and for a short time you have to think about it.

Generally speaking, in a white setting racism may be viewed as something that happens someplace else or that existed at some distant time in the past. If you are in such a white setting, you may hear people say, "I never owned slaves," "I never hurt anyone," and so on. Such statements help to form a basic attitude in your environment, one that dismisses the subject of racism quickly. For most white people, racism has no important impact on their daily lives. That is not a criticism of white readers and their white surroundings; it is simply a statement of fact.

Why, then, should *PACE* readers be asked to examine a subject that may be of such little immediate interest? For me, the answer is a simple one, I hope not a simplistic one. (Three statements summarize it:

- 1) God loves all persons and groups.
- 2) Justice is one way of showing love.
- 3) Racism is a phenomenon that frustrates justice for many individuals and groups.

It follows rather quickly from these statements that for the Christian, there is no choice but to work for the elimination of racism in any and all of its forms. This article is the first of three offering suggestions for carrying out this obligation. It begins the series by distinguishing different levels of racism in order to choose the appropriate strategy to cope with each. The second article will propose changes that white people can make to eliminate racism; the third will discuss what the institutional Church might change to the same end.

Let us plunge into the life of the world where racism is a fact of individual and group relationships to try to develop some clarity about what the phenomenon is; how it functions; and where, when, and how we might work for its elimination.

What follows are five brief descriptions of hypothetical situations in which language is used and/or action is taken. Following each description is

a discussion section. Individuals, classes, or parish groups could consider each situation with this question in mind: Is that an example of racism?

Situation 1

Description

You are riding in a car driven by an acquaintance who is not a close friend. The operator of a car in front of you makes a sudden right turn, crossing your line of traffic without any directional signal. Your driver slams on the brakes and comes to an abrupt stop, just missing the turning car, and screams, "A woman driver!"

Discussion

Score one for yourself if you agree that this is *not* an example of racism! It is clearly an example of *sexism* of a personal, attitudinal nature. The driver of your car has some ideas and feelings about women and the way they drive; those judgments are stereotypically applied to all women, and thus anger is directed here not just toward the one woman who has violated a good driving code but toward women drivers generally.

What your driver says and feels is not based on race in any sense and is therefore not an instance of racism per se. It is stupid, irrational, and sexist--but not racist. Surprisingly, though, people often lump all forms of prejudice and oppression under the one category *racism*. You may need to clarify this early in your discussion. For any feeling, thought, or action to be racist, it must be based on some perception of race.

Situation 2

Description

A white family--husband, wife, and two children--are relaxing in their suburban backyard. The house next door is up for sale, and they have seen prospective buyers come to look at it. A black couple has just left the property after spending considerable time there, and it appears that they might be interested in buying. Contemplating who their new neighbors might be, the wife turns to the husband and says, "I sure don't want any niggers living next door!"

Discussion

Clearly this is an example of a *prejudice based on race*. (This is easy so far!) In our logical minds, we know that the idea of making judgments based on race is one that does not make sense. But unfortunately, in the mind and heart of the speaker in this instance, some powerful ideas and feelings are operating.

Presumably the speaker knows nothing about the people she has seen except the visibly identifiable color of their skin. On that basis alone, she has made a *pre-judgment* about the desirability of knowing the observed couple.

That is enough for her; she has already decided that she does not want *them* or anyone like *them* as neighbors. Skin color here becomes the operative definition of who the observed couple is. This is an example of personal racial prejudice, or pre-judgment.

Situation 3

Description

A white couple whose home is for sale is conferring with the real estate agent who has been showing their house to prospective buyers. An offer that is within the owners' desirable price range has been made by a black couple. The husband in the white couple makes it clear to the real estate agent that they have decided not to sell to blacks, and in fact says to the agent, "We will not consider any offer from blacks."

Discussion

Clearly again, a racial prejudice is expressed, but there is an additional element. The couple has acted on their prejudice to deny to any black person or persons an opportunity to bid on the house. Added to the prejudice is a discriminatory action. It goes beyond the simple expression of racial prejudice, which could hurt the black couple if communicated to them, but whose impact would be limited to a psychological level. The discriminatory act additionally denies to the black couple something they want and for which they are prepared to pay the price being sought.

This is an example of *racial discrimination*, as distinct from prejudice. Prejudice is a matter of thought, feeling, and belief. It becomes discrimination when the prejudice is acted upon in a manner that denies to persons in the group against which the prejudice is held something desirable to them. Since the discriminatory act here is based on race as defined by skin color, it is racial discrimination, a form of racism.

Situation 4

Description

Developers have recently opened for rental a large number of housing units in a metropolitan area's urban center, where the lack of housing is a major crisis. The developers have decided that in this market they can be selective about tenants, seeking only people to whom they want to rent. They have decided that one way to limit the prospective clientele is to restrict rentals to people who have no children. that becomes a clear and openly stated policy. The developers have been renting for about six months, and in every case where a family with children has expressed interest, they have made their policy of no children clear.

A local Hispanic agency has now challenged the developers, claiming that the policy is discriminatory. A large number of Hispanic people in the area are in need of housing; among them, a very high percentage are families with children. the developers' policy automatically cuts out a disproportionate number of Hispanic families and black families as well. The policy is therefore discriminatory, the Hispanic agency claims.

Discussion

This situation is a bit more complicated than the first three. Several questions need to be answered: Does the policy really have anything to do with race? In enacting the policy, did the developers *intend* to keep blacks and Hispanics out? Does the policy, in fact, have the effect of keeping blacks and Hispanics from the housing?

A court case like this can keep lawyers busy and rich for years! Some lawyers will gather statistics to show conclusively that a very high percentage of black and Hispanic families are barred from this housing by the policy, and that in contrast a much lower percentage of white families in the area are limited. They will argue that the policy itself, aside from any intention to discriminate, does in fact discriminate.

Other lawyers will argue that in order to claim discrimination, it must be proved that discrimination against black and Hispanic families is *intended*. Still others may claim that the policy discriminates against all families with children, but not on the basis of race.

Intention to discriminate is very difficult to prove. To do so in a court of law, one must have specific evidence of that intention in the written or spoken words and expressed opinions of the creators of the policy. If, for instance, one could produce a witness who claims to have heard a developer of the property say that he did not want blacks or Hispanics renting his property, presumably that would help to establish intent to discriminate.

The problem with insisting that one must prove intent to discriminate is that, historically, many times people have set in operation management policies that cover the discriminatory intent. In this case the policy functions very neatly to keep at least many blacks and Hispanics out of the housing units. The effect of the policy is the same as if the intent were there. In a sense, the intent is irrelevant; the result is what matters.

The particular case on which this situation is based is in the courts at this writing, and we will let the courts decide the issue for themselves. For our discussion this example points us to another form that racism sometimes takes. In the above situation, an institutional policy does the racist work, whether the racism is intentional or not. The concept of *institutional racism* is a complex one and needs much greater explication than is possible here.

Situation 5

Description

Several hundred small cities and towns surround an urban center; the population of this metropolitan area is three million. The whole area has grown in population over the past twenty years, with a significant increase in the percentage of people of color. Most of the increase in the number of people of color has been in the urban center, while the suburban towns have shown little change in the percentage of residents who are people of color.

A study of the metropolitan area shows three significant patterns developing:

- 1) Housing opportunities for people of color have not opened up in the suburbs.
- 2) The number of manufacturing and engineering jobs has increased in the suburbs; the urban center has shown an increase in service-related jobs, which generally pay less.
- 3) Transportation systems are designed primarily to get people from the suburbs to jobs and entertainment in the city; they do not function to get large numbers of people from the city to jobs in the suburbs.

The converging effect of these three major patterns results in a limitation of job and housing choices for people of color, in contrast to the choices available to whites.

Discussion

Now it is really getting harder to see how racism functions! In this situation we observe three massive systems intersecting with a result that is racist because the combined effect of these systems limits choices for people of color.

Situation 4 illustrates how institutional racism might function through a policy decision. But situation 5 necessitates an understanding of how institutions function in systems, which in turn have cumulative effects on the institutions of society.

The distinction can be illustrated readily by thinking about schools. One particular school is an institution, but that single institution is also part of a school system, made up of several of many schools. That particular school system is also part of a complex of other educational systems, including colleges, universities, and other huge categories of units with an educational purpose.

In situation 5, we see the three immense systems of employment, housing, and transportation--each of which is composed of many institutions. These systems function both independently and interdependently to serve people (sometimes we might wonder about the extent to which these systems actually serve, but that surely is their intention.) This illustration shows how racism may function through *systems* and the interaction of systems.

Clarity About Action

Gaining clarity about the different ways in which racism functions becomes especially important when adopting plans for action. It is important to be clear about what you are trying to change. You probably are trying to change or eliminate one of the following:

- a personal prejudice
- a discriminatory act or pattern of acts
- an institutional policy, procedure, or practice
- an injustice at a systemic level

The goal that is chosen--the object of change--will determine strategies, the choice of resources to use, and which groups of people will need to work together to achieve the goal.

Here is a simple illustration of how the choice of a goal affects decisions about action. If you are a teacher in a school and have determined that you want to work to create a classroom environment in which prejudices can be confronted and overcome, you know immediately that you have a great deal of control over the situation. You are the person who is responsible for what happens in that learning setting. You will need to gather material resources--books, films, class exercises, and so on. You will profit from consulting other trusted teachers and parents. But in the final analysis you can act pretty much on your own as you work toward your objective.

If, however, you decide to try to eliminate what you feel is a discriminatory behavior that you have observed in the principal's office, your strategic choices become very different. You have to be very accurate about keeping records. You will need to work closely with other people. At some point, you will probably have to work through some legal or quasi-judicial agency to process your complaint. With this goal in mind you will move into very different strategies than you would have if your goal had been to affect classroom environment.

Should you subsequently decide to work to change a school board policy that you believe has a racist effect, or should you want to change certification procedures for teachers at the state level, once again you move into realms where strategic choices are very different. In these actions you will need to coalesce with others, you will be dependent upon group functions, and you will need to come to grips with issues of institutional and systemic power.

Most people that I have known over the years who have been concerned about racism choose to work on bringing about change at the personal, attitudinal, and behavioral level. Such efforts are always to be applauded and supported. However, the analysis I have suggested here leads to a conviction that if we do not also work at the level of institutional and systemic change, institutions and systems will operate as they always have--namely, in patterns that are racist more often than not.

No plan or conspiracy has to exist in order for institutions and systems to be racist, though of course, such plans may be made when extreme bigots get together. Most of us are not in touch with such persons on a daily basis. Simply stated, if those of us who are white continue to believe, perceive, analyze, and act the way we always have, then the result will be racism in the institutions we control or influence. To change those patterns requires intentional plans, implemented consistently over a long period of time. The knowledge of how to bring about change is available to us; the major question is one of will. Do we really want to see change?

For those of us who are Christian, the question of will is not confined to a statement of what we want. We are not here to fulfill our wills alone; we must also ask what God's will is for all people, whom God has created. Let us pray to seek congruence between what we want to see happen and what God wills.

Who Needs to Change?

For those of us who are white, once we have come to recognize the presence of racism in our midst in its many forms, that inevitable "moment" comes when we must decide whether or not to make those personal and institutional changes that are necessary if we are to become active in the struggle against racism.

Most often when whites decide to work against racism, they concentrate on ways in which black society, black people, or other people of color might change. That happened in 1968 after the Kerner Commission reported that white institutions were deeply implicated in the creation of what it called two separate, unequal societies. Unfortunately, most of the programmatic efforts that followed upon that report were designed to bring about changes in communities of color, with little done to suggest how white people and white-controlled institutions might change. What we need now is a major commission that begins where Kerner left off--with the assumption that much of the cause of racism lies among whites--and then proceeds to make recommendations for white change.

On the conviction that no such commission will be appointed, I will proceed to make my own suggestions, based on more than twenty years of focusing on what whites can do to work for the elimination of racism. Some things need to be done to bring about change in white persons, and some things need to aim at changes in institutions that are controlled by white people.

Gaining a New View of History and the World

Most of us who are white have been taught a distorted view of history and of the world; we need to make a conscious effort to compensate for that miseducation.

The history we have been taught and the view of the world we have learned have been from a European, American, and white perspective. Only recently have there been modest attempts to include a wider perspective.

A simple test about the histories of nations and peoples on the African continent, of native peoples in North America, of Hispanics in Central and North America, or of Asians who migrated to the United States would illustrate how little most of us who are white really know. Even educated white people often express incredibly ignorant views. Consider, for instance, the law professor who said to me that there never were any civilizations in Africa, or the high school teacher in a prestigious Boston school who asserted that there is no such thing as "culture" among native peoples!

Again, the contributions of people of color to our own national history are largely unknown among whites because they were not included in what we were taught as children. The title of Bill Cosby's film, *Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strayed?* conveys the point. The contributions of blacks and other people of color were simply ignored in the history books; as a result, we have widespread ignorance of those contributions. Even the traditional geographical projection of the continents has been challenged as white and European based. The old Mercator Map expanded the image of the size of land masses in the Northern Hemisphere which was inhabited mostly by white people.

The more recently developed Peter's Projection Map, which more accurately reflects the size of land masses, shows us a very different view, with greater size emphasis on areas occupied mostly by people of color. New geographic perspectives and history taught from a multiracial point of view will give us a whole new picture of what the world is like.

Compensating for the distorted view of history and geography that we grew up with will take some effort on the part of whites. We will have to read many new things and reinterpret much of history; we may even have to learn a new language. We will have to seek out the resources from which we can learn: individuals, museums, ethnic centers, magazines, newspapers, TV shows, every communication medium known. The effort will be a conscious, deliberate one, and with it will come a new world of excitement as learning opens our minds and hearts to new possibilities of understanding.

To prepare ourselves to assimilate new information, we will need a new sensitivity to accept and receive the new insights, perspectives, and learnings. Habits of the mind will probably need to change, and they will change as new information is absorbed. We will need to check out constantly the ways in which our willingness to receive the new information can be sharpened. That will not always be easy, but it is sure to be an exciting learning venture.

Overcoming Lies

Most of us who are white have been exposed to generations of lies about people of color; these lies have conveyed to us in both blatant and subtle ways that people of color are inferior. We need to consciously overcome these lies.

The major communication systems of this century--radio, movie, and television--have been filled with lies about people of color. The Cosby film referred to previously, which pieces together clips from old movies, newsreels, and TV shows, is a quick history of how those lies were propelled into the culture. The dominant message of those lies is that blacks are nothing, people from whom no good should be expected. I saw the old movies as a child, you probably saw them, and many of today's college students tell me that they saw the questionable old TV shows in their own childhood on Saturday morning TV reruns.

Unfortunately, today's movies and TV shows sometimes repeat the same lies and often add new stereotypes. For many whites, those stereotypes generally are accepted and unchallenged features of the belief system that shapes their view of people who are not white. Every stereotype, every lie, has a demonstrable history, and many of these damaging notions were in the hearts and minds of the founders of our nation, built into the laws and structures of our society. These lies continue to be a part of the cultural air we breathe today.

Obviously, stereotypes about lazy, crap-shooting, lying, cheating, stealing, good-for-nothing blacks (expand or adapt the list for any group you choose) hurt those persons about whom the lies are taught. But at this point,

I hope you will *consider how those racial lies also affect those of us who are white*. We ought to be concerned enough to purge any trace of those lies from our hearts and minds because they are poison and dangerous to our health.

Examining Assumptions of White Superiority

Equally dangerous to us as moral beings are the subtle ways in which we have been led to believe that whites are superior to blacks and others of color. We need to examine how we have been convinced that the needs and the priorities of whites are more important than those of people of color.

Here I am not concerned with the blatant and overt forms that this sense of superiority takes, for instance as expressed by members of the Ku Klux Klan or allied groups. Most whites have not succumbed to that sort of stupidity or bigotry. Consider instead the ways in which assumptions of white superiority may be operative at many institutional levels of our society.

Consider, for example, the public reaction to unemployment statistics. Pick any year out of the last thirty, and look up the unemployment statistics for the nation, your state, and your city; get the statistics broken down by race. You will find a consistent pattern in which unemployment figures among blacks are almost always twice as great or more as unemployment figures among whites; furthermore, the disparity between black and white youth is much greater.

Now imagine those figures reversed over a period of years. Imagine white unemployment being twice that of blacks, or simply imagine unemployment across the board being at the level that it has frequently been for blacks. Let your imagination suggest what the public response to such facts might be. Floods of protest would result. Political rhetoric would demand immediate change. A lot of citizens would be in the streets protesting if whites were unemployed at the rate of blacks. We would not stand for it!

The *reality*, however, is that only sporadically is there anything like a public outcry, then usually from black leaders. White society as a whole shows little concern that blacks are consistently suffering unemployment at a level twice that of whites. Often the statistics are not reported by race, and the disparity between races is hidden and thus easily ignored. The inequality is accepted as a fact of life; it is simply the way things work. The failure by society as a whole to respond with anger is an illustration of an assumption that black unemployment is less of a concern and less of a problem than white unemployment. The implicit, unstated assumption is that blacks are less important than whites. You and I as individuals may not believe that; we may in fact find that assumption abhorrent. But the facts speak loudly about our society's values.

Other statistics in numerous areas of social and economic life indicate a similar assumption of white superiority. Statistics on health care services, infant mortality, school dropouts, and the death penalty, for example, indicate that blacks suffer disproportionately high negative effects as compared to whites in the delivery of health services, the distribution of high-quality education, and the adjudication of justice.

Again, individual whites may find that fact repulsive, but the consistency with which these statistics pile up over the years indicates that society as a whole simply is not motivated to change these dynamics of inequality. If whites were as poorly served as blacks in cases such as these, we would be close to insurrection. The prevailing attitude seems to be that it is okay to tolerate vastly unequal treatment of racial groups in our society. Until we can turn that attitude around, the gap between the stated belief in racial equality and the societal behavior of inequality favors the continuance of the implicit assumption of white superiority. Measured by this standard, blacks, black life, black prosperity, and black rights simply are not valued as highly as whites, white life, white prosperity, and white rights.

Much work lies ahead for those of us who are white and who want to change the way we believe, understand, perceive, and act so as to diminish the racism in our personal lives. But the implications for institutional change as well are enormous.

Working for Institutional Change

We need to work at changing those institutions that have had such a racist effect on our personal lives.

The communications media, which have and sometimes still do perpetuate racist stereotypes, lies, and misinformation, are white-controlled. Likewise, the institutions that produce and distribute goods, services, and resources in this nation are white-controlled. Whites control the finances; whites manage; whites make the decisions. Very few exceptions disturb this picture of white control. Those of us who are white must think long and hard about the ways in which we can use the power we have in those institutions to bring about the changes that will at least minimize racist effects.

Where shall we begin to work for institutional change? The answer is easier to say than to do. Begin in the institutions where you are. If you are in a business, begin there. If you are in a government agency, begin there. If you teach, begin in your school or college. If you are not employed in a particular institution, consider the ways in which you consume services, and identify the ways in which you may have some influence in those situations. Few of us are without influence or power of some sort in some institution.

The one institution that readers of PACE share membership in is the Church. Because of its belief in the inherent dignity of all persons, that institution ought to be better than others in regard to racism. Experience teaches us that, in fact, the Church is neither better nor worse than other institutions when measured in terms of racism. The Church does provide us with a common place in which we can carry on our work against racism.

Multicultural/Diversity Emphases ... Not Enough!!!!

June 1989

Many places I turn today I see, hear, read about an emphasis on multicultural studies, intercultural relationships, and "managing diversity". Both my head and my files bulge with the concepts those words represent. Most of what I have heard about, read, and seen has been good; I applaud those who engage multicultural and diversity issues as major foci for the emerging century.

BUT ...multicultural/diversity emphases are not enough! Not enough if we are to address the serious national problem of racism. There is one focus for learning about racism and how to combat it: that focus is racism ... racism ... racism! That focus will not be popular. No encounter with that reality will be easy, or comfortable. Still, I shall continue to say that racism is the only focus for dealing with racism; that must be done directly, and not by an circuitous routes, for they usually turn out to be roads of avoidance. A direct focus on racism may be threatening, but, like the surgeon's knife or the psychiatrist's probing, is necessary for a society in need of restored health. Racism was/is present in the foundations of our society, and will not be removed by anything less than addressing it directly.

A study of racism probes the reasons for the problems which make multicultural/diversity studies necessary. Multicultural relationships would not be difficult for so many people were it not for racism. Studies of the contributions of races of people of color would not have to be encouraged if they had not been excluded by racist assumptions that all good proceeded only from Europe. Norms of what is beautiful in human form or art were dictated by racist aesthetics which ignored cultures which were "different". The same ethnocentric, racist judgments prevailed in regard to language, sexual relationships, music, governance, and most every aspect of life; our nation was founded on a view which assumed the "rightness of whiteness", and anything different was regarded as deviant and/or inferior. It is demonstrable that racism is a major root of the problem we face as we respond to an increasingly diverse population trend.

As one who has chosen to keep the focus on racism, I am often suspicious that the multicultural/diversity emphasis is popular precisely because it frequently avoids the issue of racism. A school can put great emphasis into a multicultural celebration of differences, but fail to alter an informal system which "tracks" students by race either toward college or not. Managing diversity can be a legitimate pride for a Human Resources team in a corporate setting, but an Asian employee may still suffer isolation felt from colleagues who have not resolved attitudes they learned about "Japs", and which they apply to all Asians. A college may feature Native American studies, but a young Native woman enrolled at that college may experienced prejudiced treatment when she wears a band on her head which reminds people of her culture. In a hospital emergency room where personnel have been taught to respect diversity, tough racist stereotypes may quickly emerge as a Black male attendant works with a white woman on a rape case in which the rapist has been identified as Black. In a state agency with a clear intent to diversify in

employment practices, an Hispanic employee who wants to transfer to a department which offers a better chance at promotion, may encounter strong resistance rooted in convictions about his "inferior" language.

The point is made: multicultural diversity introduced into a setting which is racist will not work, unless at some point the racism is acknowledged and responded to as racism. Institutional settings are predominantly white, and those often present a psychological minefield for employees of color. Most white managers and other employees are oblivious to, and are not eager to hear about such facts. Until they come to understand how racism functions in our society and its institutions, most will remain unable to respond in any corrective way. It is not enough to address multicultural diversity and not address racism. In order to understand and eliminate racism, there must be an emphasis on the study of racism, because racism is racism!

To study racism means to trace history particularly in England, because the United States was founded intentionally as a white, Anglo nation. That history lives in our present. Such a study will discover ideas, values, beliefs, customs, ways of perceiving, and doing which are based on racism. To understand racism means to know the consequences of a national foundation built on a terrible contradiction between a thrilling belief in equality and a degrading belief in white superiority. It is to discover that literature, art forms, history, philosophy, religion, medicine, and most of the disciplines which are supposed to serve humankind, are infused with a racism which means they cannot possibly serve all people justly. A study of racism will lead one to know that institutions which are the carriers of culture communicate racism along with all the goodness they represent. It is to understand that media are racist, and that when the medium becomes the message, both are racist in their effect. It is to know that the interaction of institutions and systems in social planning often are shaped by assumptions of white superiority which are buried and appear only in unintentionally racist effects.

To study racism as it impacts the white psyche will reveal manifestations in attitudes and behaviors, each alternately affecting the other. It will reveal that ways of thinking, of formulating problems and solutions, of putting thought into word and feeling into act are fused with racism. It will lead one to understand that how people relate across racial lines is frequently shaped by racism, that expectations, often molded by racism, are powerful determinants of encounters between people and ideas. A focus on racism will illustrate that all people suffer from its cancerous nature. People of color are its targets, but white people are damaged because it also diminishes their humanity. The slow disease undermines the foundations of a society all must share.

An emphasis on the multicultural and diversity aspects of our society is important, and when done in a context which addresses cultural and institutional racism, can be a powerful tool for change. Seldom, however, have I heard the word or concept of racism used in written or spoken descriptions of multicultural education, training or concerns for diversity.

So here is a call for keeping the focus where it must be if we want to address the causative problem. Let's learn to identify, and detect racism wherever it is, and then let's turn to the task of becoming anti-racist individuals, anti-racist institutions, an anti-racist society.

Over the years there have been attempts to get athletic teams to change names which are often offensive to Native Americans. That movement has gained new momentum in the last year, responsive to the advent of the "tomahawk chop", the appearance of fans in fake Indian headdress, painted faces and behavior which mimics stereotypes of native people. Press reports of "savagery" offenses on the field have characterized teams which carry names such as "Braves", "Redskins", "Indians", and "Chiefs".

During this year when people are involved in alternative ways of viewing the official "celebrations" of the 1492 Quincentenary, there is an increased awareness of the ways in which native peoples experience the names of these teams and the accompanying antics of their fans. Rick Reilly, in *Sports Illustrated*, has described the offense by asking us to imagine a team called the Chicago Jews defeating the Astros, while their fans wave yarmulkes and chant "Hava Nagila". This simply would not happen, and if it did would occasion a prompt, massive and proper response demanding both names and the offensive practice to change.

The demands for change in regard to Redskins, Braves, Indians, Sachems, etc., are getting responses which encourage hope that some people in decision-making positions are hearing the message of hurt, and are willing to assist thoughtful change. Recently, the *Oregonian* has adopted a policy indicating that it will no longer use those offensive names in its sports reporting. The "Redskins" will be reported as the Washington team, or it will be said that Atlanta and Cleveland have agreed to exchange players in an inter-league deal. Now the radio station WTOP, in Washington, has indicated that it will be guided by a similar policy which will apply in reporting and all phases of the station's work.

While the leadership of such pioneers for change among publishers and production managers is encouraging, there is less optimism that either fans or team owners will move quickly to follow suit. The allegiance of fans is so strong, and the frenzy of team loyalty so gripping that it is clear that fans will not give up favored images easily. For the same reasons players will find it hard to relinquish the identifications with symbols they have come to love; for instance, a few years ago, when Dartmouth College was insisting that the "Indian" was not an official college symbol, some of their hockey players had the symbol tattooed on their butts, surely resistance brought to an illogical end!

When team owners are told that the names of their teams are offensive to Native Americans, the typical response is similar to one we have heard many other times. The use of the names is not intended to offend, they will say, but ought rather to be seen as complimentary. The association with highly regarded sports, the identification with a winning spirit, the engagement with clean, managed competition, ought to be seen as a positive connection, they will reason. Indeed, some have even indicated that the use of names such as "Redskins" is an attempt to accent the positive attributes of native groups. Unfortunately, the "positive attributes" are lost to many native people. Fans who invent "the chop" are unconcerned about the negative stereotypes their

actions feed. Even a moment of rational thought would observe that a winning spirit, dedication, and team pride seem to work just as well with teams named for stockings and identical siblings; the offensive stereotypes are simply obsolete and unnecessary.

A common response to those who claim the names to be offensive is to appeal to intent. We meant no harm to anyone ... our intentions are good ... " That usually gets translated into, "No one should be offended because we meant no offense." That's somewhat like telling the person you have just bumped into and knocked down a flight of stairs accidentally that he should not be upset that his arm is broken. You may not have intended that the arm be broken, but it is broken. Knowing that you did not intend that result will make the hurt person at least feel better about you, but his arm is still in a cast, and will have limited use for a time.

Owners and namers of sports teams have an opportunity to address the feelings of those who are offended, both by apologizing, indicating that they did not mean to offend, and by proving that they do not want to offend, by changing the offending name. Simply expecting an acknowledgement of good intent to satisfy the feelings of those offended will not work. The hurt is there, remains, and will be gored every time the name is read in papers, or heard from announcers. The wound is salted every time some fan holds up a sign with an "Indian" slogan, or when the crowd joins in unthinking chants.

To ask for this change is not to ask for much. It is a simple case of politeness. The request assumes that there are few who want to offend whole groups of people. It assumes that once a person is told that a name is offensive, respect for the offended will prompt change. He has already said that he has no intention to offend; the next step is logical and quite simple . . . stop using the offensive name.

The change in names and an explanation of the reason will become an opportunity to educate the general public which can learn just as quickly to do a harmless "wave" and have fun with it, as to do the "chop", accompanied by a grotesque imitation of a native chant.

This is one of the easiest changes that can be requested. It will not hurt nor deprive anyone. So let's ask our local papers, our schools, our sports executives and owners to do the right thing right now.

Notes from a Mis-Educated White Man

January 1992

I am an educated man.
I went twelve years to schools and graduated from high school.
I am an educated man.
I went to college for two years, before going to World War II.
I am an educated man.
I went to college for three years, and graduated, after World War II.
I am an educated man.
I went to graduate school for four years, and graduated.
I am an educated man.

In all that "education" I was told little about African Americans, most of it wrong.

In all that "education" no one ever asked me to read a book by an African American author.

The most I learned about enslaved African people during those years was that they were "happy", passive, and loved their masters, (a la Samuel Eliot Morrison).

I was not taught that our national economy was built on the backs of enslaved African men and women.

I was not taught that the religion I loved condoned and at times inspired the enslavement of blacks.

I was not told that it was absurd and arrogant for the Pope and the Kings of Spain and Portugal to assume that they had the right to divide the world between the two countries.

I was not told that many years before Columbus African people had come to this hemisphere.

I was not taught that the coming of Columbus to these shores was the beginning of genocide for Arawaks, other native people, and slavery for African people in this hemisphere.

I was not taught that for thousands of years before Columbus there were flourishing societies, with elaborate ways of relating, governing, living, and surviving in this hemisphere.

No one explained to me the existence and growth in Europe of anti-black attitudes, prior to the explorations into this part of the world.

No one described to me how those old European attitudes got translated into the decisions to enslave African people here.

No one told me of the heroic and steady resistance by African people to their enslavement.

No one told me of the ways in which countless laws in our colonies denied the value of African lives.

No one told me that most of our admired Founding Fathers believed African people to be inferior to whites.

I was not taught that the original Constitution of the United States had written into it assumptions of white superiority.

I was not taught that most white Abolitionists believed in white superiority.

I was not taught about the continuing discrimination practiced legally against African people for three centuries, continued in more subtle forms today.

I was not taught about the amazing tenacity with which African peoples struggled to maintain their culture in spite of enslavement.

I was not taught about the ways in which "my" government was involved in the willful neglect of black health, for instance, in the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, nor how that neglect continues today in policies which watch black infants die at a rate far greater than whites.

I was not taught that the unemployment rate of blacks has for years been almost double that of whites, and no one seems much concerned to correct that institutionalized discrepancy.

No one told me about the campaigns of some branches of "my" government to undermine black leadership, instanced by the the FBI's conspiracy against Dr.King, or by alleged continued harassment of black elected officials today.

No one in all those years of "education" told me about the persistent ways in which many of the systems of my society are infected with both personal prejudice and institutional "tilts" which deny African American equal access to goods, services, and resources.

No one explained how sometimes subtle but pervasive anti-Black prejudice often drains the energies of African American people into simply coping, thus diminishing their abilities to perform in the academic or professional world.

No one told me that I, as a white male, had some obligation and ought to take a role in amending the wrongs of the past, and in creating a present-future which is more racially just.

No one told me that often times what is "wrong" is not in the Black community, or in Black individuals, but in the heads, hearts, and habits of white people.

No one told me of the differences between prejudice, discrimination, and systemic racism, nor did they explain how those differences affect the ways I work for racial justice.

Am I an educated man?

I am trying to become such; every correction of the untruths suggested above, every empty space filled, has had to come from personal effort, from reading, from observing, from conversation with trusted friends. The educational systems methodically mis-educated me! That process of mis-education applies equally to my ignorance about other groups of people of color, and indeed of many white ethnic groups other than my own. Correcting that will be an on-going process for the rest of my life; the cost of time, energy and emotion I cannot measure.

So I have watched through the years as the emphasis on African American history has expanded in our schools and other institutions, and I give thanks for it. African-American History Month is just one opportunity to educate people more fully, more honestly. That is a good "think" for us all.

Diversity Diversion

June 1992

In the last three or four years there has been a rapid growth in stated concerns for issues of "diversity" in many areas of society. Partly in response to demographic projections for the early twenty-first century there is an almost hectic move to "diversify" Boards and staffs of innumerable organizations. In the corporate world, in higher education, and among social service agencies "diversity initiatives" have spawned a growing number of trainers who guide the "diversifying" process, and prepare both individuals and the organizational climate for "diversity".

My response to the "diversity" emphasis is much like that which was mine when the "multicultural" emphasis first became the rage a few years back. I want to affirm both, but also to point out that both very frequently fail to deal with racism. Racism in my little corner of the world still is the foundational issue. The problem with "diversity" is that it may not, and often does not touch the underlying problem, the root of racism. I want to explore some of the ways that an emphasis on "diversity" too often works to "divert" attention away from racism.

The idea of "diversity" is itself based on a puzzling view of human life. I have always assumed that all people are "diverse", that any two people are in fact quite different. This conviction is based on assumptions about the uniqueness of human personality; "no one else is like you", I was always taught. With that assumption in mind, then I see "diversity" everywhere when even two or three people gather. That phenomenon is obviously not what the "diversity initiative" is about. That initiative is focussed on "difference" which is identifiable by appearance, as in race or color, sometimes physical impairments, or by stated conditions, such as sexual orientation. Then I begin to get a clue as to how "diversity" is determined. The intent is to bring together people who bring to any combined effort a richness of "difference" which has too often been ignored and frequently avoided. That goal is one which I enthusiastically affirm, a promise of a creative and exciting future.

"Diversity" is basically an idea which is measured against an often unstated norm, which becomes clear as I hear people talk about the subject. It is common for me to receive phone calls or in-person inquiries from people who seek help in "diversifying" an aspect of an organization in which they have some measure of decision-making influence. In my experience the people making those inquiries are almost always speaking about organizations which are predominantly white. I have never had a person of color call to ask about "diversifying" an organization composed mostly of people of color. That is an interesting phenomenon, rooted in an assumption about who is "diverse". Obviously it is not white people who are regarded by these inquirers as "diverse". The unstated assumption is that the organization will become "diverse" only when some "diverse" people are added! That is a rather perverse idea, because it does not credit whites with any uniqueness at all. Even more seriously, it is based on an assumption that "difference", "diversity" is measured against a white norm. Therein lies a potential problem... the norm is white.

(Or the norm is male, middle class, heterosexual, "abled", etc; here I want to focus issue of race.) On the rock of that white norm many a "diversity" program can be scuttled.

That the norm remains white could be the source of much unintentional, hard-to-identify racism. In subtle ways that norm works to undermine the intention to become "diverse". The people who are "different", who "diverge" from the norm are the "diverse" ones. Sometimes a subtle assumption works to affirm those who constitute the norm as being in some ways superior; that is in fact the practical function of a norm. The norm establishes what is "normal", and it is often tough to divorce that idea of "normal" from an idea of what is best.

There is a danger that "diversity" may become an unintentional "diversion" from facing the subtle working of racism. When whiteness is the norm there is a racist assumption at the ground level of every program, every attempt to "diversify". So the racism works at a subliminal level like carpenter ants, weakening the whole structure. A few examples may give an indication of how this dynamic sometimes occurs.

A social service agency, with a predominantly white staff, engages its staff in "diversity" training, with one of its stated objectives being to make the staff more alert to the possibilities of racism affecting its delivery of services to an increasingly diverse racial clientele. The agency is proud to point to the increased sensitivities it engenders among the staff. While the training sessions are proceeding, over the course of several months, three staff changes are made, with a net gain of two whites on staff. Hardly the way to "diversify"! The failure to implement a change in staff undercuts the most obvious way that the agency could reach its stated "diversity" objective. Attention in the meantime has been "diverted" to the "diversity" training.

A business is concerned that there are unintentional racist effects in the way it conducts itself, and so it undertakes a strong affirmative action program. The result is a rapid diversification of its personnel by race, and the corporation soon develops a reputation for seriousness in its "diversity" program, and it enjoys calling public attention to that record. It proclaims "diversity" as one of its priority objectives. That becomes a cover for the fact that most of its employees of color are at low-level entry wages, with insecure positions, and there is no plan implemented to change that pattern. The newly "diverse" staff does not reach the levels where major decisions are made. So the same old patterns of determining decisions, of setting policies, continues because the same decision-makers are still guiding the process. The employment figures show increased "diversity", but nothing very substantial has changed, and the racist effects of policies about which the company was concerned in the first place are likely to continue.

A school does a reasonably good job of "diversifying" its teaching staff, but control over its curriculum does not allow for anything but "cosmetic" changes, and the instructional methodology is not questioned. The complexion of the staff is more "diverse", but little else has changed. An increasing number of students of color, whose primary language is not English, find little help in a curriculum which does not change, in theories of learning which do not reflect a sensitivity to the new population, and it soon becomes clear that the newly "diversified" faculty will not demonstrate any substantially improved ability to educate linguistic minorities. The appearance of "diversity" obscures the more basic problem.

Diversity initiatives need not work this way, and sometimes do actually bring about significant changes in what may have been the patterns of racism. I have seen that happen also, and when it does it is a moment for celebration. Enthusiasm for those moments is tempered by another reality which often sees simply one more way of "diverting" America's attention from the problems of racism.

When that happens I like to call it the "Perversity of Diversity".