



# Dismantling Racism Through the Food System: Basic Readings

**Growing Power Inc.**

*"If racism was constructed, it can be  
undone.  
It can be undone if people understand  
when it was constructed,  
why it was constructed,  
how it functions,  
and how it is maintained."*

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**I. Fredrick Douglas “Letter to abolitionist associate” (1849)**

**Source: excerpt from dR Works Workbook**

“Let me give you a word on the philosophy of reform. The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all absorbing, and for the time being putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what people will submit to, and you have found the exact amount of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them; and these will continue until they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. “

## **II. Ilana Shapiro Ph.D., Excerpts from “Training for Racial Equality and Inclusion: a guide to selected programs”**

WHEN WE TALK ABOUT RACE, we don’t mean a biological or genetic category, but rather, a way of interpreting differences between people which creates or reinforces inequalities among them. In other words, “race” is an unequal relationship between social groups, represented by the privileged access to power and resources by one group over another.

Race is socially constructed, created (and recreated) by how people are perceived and treated in the normal actions of everyday life. As such, “race” is never fixed. It is a dynamic, constantly changing relationship.

Some groups which are defined as an “inferior race” within American society at a certain historical moment may successfully escape racialization and become part of the privileged majority, the “whites.”

Other groups, especially those who are descended from African, Latino, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Asian descent, have found the path for group socioeconomic mobility far more difficult.

The unequal boundaries of color have been at times permanent barriers to the economic development, educational and social advancement for millions of Americans, living in what for them was a deeply flawed and often hypocritical democracy.

MANNING MARABLE  
*Structural Racism and American Democracy*  
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*“... effective community change cannot happen unless those who would make change understand how race and racism function as a barrier to community, self determination and self sufficiency.”*

### **III. Elizabeth Martinez, Excerpts from “What is White Supremacy?”**

**White Supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.**

#### **I. What does it mean to say it is a system?**

The most common mistake people make when they talk about racism is to think it is a collection of prejudices and individual acts of discrimination. They do not see that it is a system, a web of interlocking, reinforcing institutions: economic, military, legal, educational, religious, and cultural. As a system, racism affects every aspect of life in a country. By not seeing that racism is systemic (part of a system), people often personalize or individualize racist acts. For example, they will reduce racist police behavior to "a few bad apples" who need to be removed, rather than seeing it exists in police departments all over the country and is basic to the society. This mistake has real consequences: refusing to see police brutality as part of a system, and that the system needs to be changed, means that the brutality will continue.

**The need to recognize racism as being systemic is one reason the term White Supremacy has been more useful than the term racism. They refer to the same problem but:**

- A. The purpose of racism is much clearer when we call it "white supremacy." Some people think of racism as just a matter of prejudice. "Supremacy" defines a power relationship.
- B. Race is an unscientific term. Although racism is a social reality, it is based on a term which has no biological or other scientific reality.
- C. The term racism often leads to dead-end debates about whether a particular remark or action by an individual white person was really racist or not. We will achieve a clearer understanding of racism if we analyze how a certain action relates to the system of White Supremacy.
- D. The term White Supremacy gives white people a clear choice of supporting or opposing a system, rather than getting bogged down in claims to be anti-racist (or not) in their personal behavior.

#### **II. What does it mean to say White Supremacy is historically based?**

Every nation has a creation myth, or origin myth, which is the story people are taught of how the nation came into being. Ours says the United States began with Columbus's so-called "discovery" of America, continued with settlement by

brave Pilgrims, won its independence from England with the American Revolution, and then expanded westward until it became the enormous, rich country you see today.

**That is the origin myth. It omits three key facts about the birth and growth of the United States as a nation. Those facts demonstrate that White Supremacy is fundamental to the existence of this country.**

A. The United States is a nation state created by military conquest in several stages. The first stage was the European seizure of the lands inhabited by indigenous peoples, which they called Turtle Island. Before the European invasion, there were between nine and eighteen million indigenous people in North America. By the end of the Indian Wars, there were about 250,000 in what is now called the United States, and about 123,000 in what is now Canada (source of these population figures from the book "The State of Native America" ed. by M. Annette Jaimes, South End Press, 1992). That process must be called genocide, and it created the land base of this country. The elimination of indigenous peoples and seizure of their land was the first condition for its existence.

B. The United States could not have developed economically as a nation without enslaved African labor. When agriculture and industry began to grow in the colonial period, a tremendous labor shortage existed. Not enough white workers came from Europe and the European invaders could not put indigenous peoples to work in sufficient numbers. It was enslaved Africans who provided the labor force that made the growth of the United States possible. That growth peaked from about 1800 to 1860, the period called the Market Revolution. During this period, the United States changed from being an agricultural/commercial economy to an industrial corporate economy. The development of banks, expansion of the credit system, protective tariffs, and new transportation systems all helped make this possible. But the key to the Market Revolution was the export of cotton, and this was made possible by slave labor.

C. The third major piece in the true story of the formation of the United States as a nation was the take-over of half of Mexico by war-- today's Southwest. This enabled the U.S. to expand to the Pacific, and thus open up huge trade with Asia -- markets for export, goods to import and sell in the U.S. It also opened to the U.S. vast mineral wealth in Arizona, agricultural wealth in California, and vast new sources of cheap labor to build railroads and develop the economy. The United States had already taken over the part of Mexico we call Texas in 1836, then made it a state in 1845. The following year, it invaded Mexico and seized its territory under the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. A few years later, in 1853, the U.S. acquired a final chunk of Arizona from Mexico by threatening to renew the war. This completed the territorial boundaries of what is now the United States.

Those were the three foundation stones of the United States as a nation. One more key step was taken in 1898, with the takeover of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam and Cuba by means of the Spanish-American War. Since then, all but Cuba have remained U.S. colonies or neo-colonies, providing new sources of wealth and military power for the United States. The 1898 take-over completed the phase of direct conquest and colonization, which had begun with the murderous theft of Native American lands five centuries before.

Many people in the United States hate to recognize these truths. They prefer the established origin myth. They could be called the Premise Keepers.

### **III. What does it mean to say that White Supremacy is a system of exploitation?**

The roots of U.S. racism or White Supremacy lie in establishing economic exploitation by the theft of resources and human labor, then justifying that exploitation by institutionalizing the inferiority of its victims. The first application of White Supremacy or racism by the EuroAmericans who control U.S. society was against indigenous peoples. Then came Blacks, originally as slaves and later as exploited waged labor. They were followed by Mexicans, who lost their means of survival when they lost their landholdings, and also became wage-slaves. Mexican labor built the Southwest, along with Chinese, Filipino, Japanese and other workers.

In short, White Supremacy and economic power were born together. The United States is the first nation in the world to be born racist (South Africa came later) and also the first to be born capitalist. That is not a coincidence. In this country, as history shows, capitalism and racism go hand in hand.

### **IV. Origins of Whiteness and White Supremacy as Concepts**

The first European settlers called themselves English, Irish, German, French, Dutch, etc. -- not white. Over half of those who came in the early colonial period were servants. By 1760 the population reached about two million, of whom 400,000 were enslaved Africans. An elite of planters developed in the southern colonies. In Virginia, for example, 50 rich white families held the reins of power but were vastly outnumbered by non-whites. In the Carolinas, 25,000 whites faced 40,000 Black slaves and 60,000 indigenous peoples in the area. Class lines hardened as the distinction between rich and poor became sharper. The problem of control loomed large and fear of revolt from below grew.

There had been slave revolts from the beginning but elite whites feared even more that discontented whites -- servants, tenant farmers, the urban poor, the property-less, soldiers and sailors -- would join Black slaves to overthrow the existing order. As early as 1663, indentured white servants and Black slaves in Virginia had formed a conspiracy to rebel and gain their freedom. In 1676 came Bacon's Rebellion by white frontiersmen and servants alongside Black slaves.

The rebellion shook up Virginia's planter elite. Many other rebellions followed, from South Carolina to New York. The main fear of elite whites everywhere was a class fear.

Their solution: divide and control. Certain privileges were given to white indentured servants. They were allowed to join militias, carry guns, acquire land, and have other legal rights not allowed to slaves. With these privileges they were legally declared white on the basis of skin color and continental origin. That made them "superior" to Blacks (and Indians). Thus whiteness was born as a racist concept to prevent lower-class whites from joining people of color, especially Blacks, against their class enemies. The concept of whiteness became a source of unity and strength for the vastly outnumbered Euroamericans -- as in South Africa, another settler nation. Today, unity across color lines remains the biggest threat in the eyes of a white ruling class.

## **V. White Supremacy**

In the mid-1800s, new historical developments served to strengthen the concept of whiteness and institutionalize White Supremacy. The doctrine of Manifest Destiny, born at a time of aggressive western expansion, said that the United States was destined by God to take over other peoples and lands. The term was first used in 1845 by the editor of a popular journal, who affirmed "the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole continent which providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government."

Since the time of Jefferson, the United States had had its eye on expanding to the Pacific Ocean and establishing trade with Asia. Others in the ruling class came to want more slave states, for reasons of political power, and this also required westward expansion. Both goals pointed to taking over part of Mexico. The first step was Texas, which was acquired for the United States by filling the territory with Anglos who then declared a revolution from Mexico in 1836. After failing to purchase more Mexican territory, President James Polk created a pretext for starting a war with the declared goal of expansion. The notoriously brutal, two-year war was justified in the name of Manifest Destiny.

Manifest Destiny is a profoundly racist concept. For example, a major force of opposition to gobbling up Mexico at the time came from politicians saying "the degraded Mexican-Spanish" were unfit to become part of the United States; they were "a wretched people . . . mongrels." In a similar way, some influential whites who opposed slavery in those years said Blacks should be removed from U.S. soil, to avoid "contamination" by an inferior people (source of all this information is the book "Manifest Destiny" by Anders Stephanson, Hill & Wang, 1995).



Earlier, Native Americans had been the target of white supremacist beliefs which not only said they were dirty, heathen "savages," but fundamentally inferior in their values. For example, they did not see land as profitable real estate but as Our Mother.

The doctrine of Manifest Destiny facilitated the geographic extension and economic development of the United States while confirming racist policies and practices. It established White Supremacy more firmly than ever as central to the U.S. definition of itself. The arrogance of asserting that God gave white people (primarily men) the right to dominate everything around them still haunts our society and sustains its racist oppression.

#### **IV. Peggy McIntosh, Excerpt from “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” (1989)**

"I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group"

....I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools , and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable... I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us."

##### **Daily effects of white privilege**

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and time of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.

5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
6. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
7. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
10. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.
11. I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another person's voice in a group in which s/he is the only member of his/her race.
12. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
13. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
14. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.
16. I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others' attitudes toward their race.
18. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty or the illiteracy of my race.
20. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
21. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

22. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

24. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the "person in charge", I will be facing a person of my race.

25. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.

26. I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

27. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance or feared.

28. I can be pretty sure that an argument with a colleague of another race is more likely to jeopardize her/his chances for advancement than to jeopardize mine.

29. I can be pretty sure that if I argue for the promotion of a person of another race, or a program centering on race, this is not likely to cost me heavily within my present setting, even if my colleagues disagree with me.

30. If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn't a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.

32. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.

33. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing or body odor will be taken as a reflection on my race.

34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.

35. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.

36. If my day, week or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it had racial overtones.

38. I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.

39. I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.

41. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.

42. I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.

43. If I have low credibility as a leader I can be sure that my race is not the problem.

44. I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.

45. I can expect figurative language and imagery in all of the arts to testify to experiences of my race.

46. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.

47. I can travel alone or with my spouse without expecting embarrassment or hostility in those who deal with us.

48. I have no difficulty finding neighborhoods where people approve of our household.

49. My children are given texts and classes which implicitly support our kind of family unit and do not turn them against my choice of domestic partnership.

50. I will feel welcomed and "normal" in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social.

### **Elusive and fugitive**

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience that I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these perquisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely

differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant, and destructive.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a pattern of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turn, and I was among those who could control the turf. My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make. I could think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color.

For this reason, the word "privilege" now seems to me misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work systematically to over empower certain groups. Such privilege simply confers dominance because of one's race or sex.

### **Conclusion**

....Disapproving of the system won't be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitude. But a "white" skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subject taboo. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to me now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that systems of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Although systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and, I imagine, for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light-skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.

## V. "The City Hates Community Gardening" a Skit with an Unknown Author

I definitely vote for "improving communication efficiency amongst and between all groups is the key to developing and then implementing the best mix of solutions." The following is a little skit that a friend from another listserv posted awhile back. I got the permission to post it far and wide! :-) It was written to address the social determinants of diabetes. However, I think it is appropriate for any topics. I just love it! So, here it is.

\*\*\*\*\*

Bob: "It isn't an epidemic of diabetes?"

Jane: "Nope"

Bob: "Then what is it?"

Jane: "It's the system. It's the poverty - not just the coin in the pocket - I'm talking about the poverty in spirit, community, relationships ya know. Gotta change the system. It doesn't help the poor people, the vulnerable little guy, the average joe like you or me. It's like the system's forgotten us all. Well maybe it's just a runaway train that's squishing everything."

Bob: "So what do we do about it?"

Jane: "Sometimes you just can't be the bull running up against the wall all the time. Sometimes you gotta find the window, door in the wall or the crack. The thing that'll let you sneak into the minds of people."

Bob: "What the hell are you talking about?"

Jane: "Never heard of that? The guys in the know called it "cutting at the edges" or "finding the chink in the armour". You never run into the wall, ya know? You probe it, search it, look for the cracks 'always' keeping in mind your main goal. You do it strategically - you going to ram the wall, don't - ram the crack. Always bring things back to the goal. Sometimes you got to like water, you flow around, you wear it down, you find da cracks, weak spots, wear down the mortar."

Bob: "Let me guess - all to fix the system right?"

Jane: "Yeah. Knowledge ain't going to do it alone - got to get to the emotional side behind the wall. Got to play the game, use every card right and bring down the house, build it up again."

Bob: "So where's one of the cracks? What's one of da 'symbols'?"

Jane: "Food. Diabetes. Obesity. Malnutrition. Environment. Climate change. Agriculture. Things like that. Gotta adapt, sooner or later the situation shifts, the wall changes - seize the advantage while you got it. Poverty, inequities - got to bring it in after you make a breach - then make it big".

Bob: "I get ya. Pressure's building eh?"

Jane: "Yeah. Gotta remember there's a lot of other people who are looking for cracks. The wall's big, if we all work together we could breach the wall, bring it down... We got to be a big wedge & hammer ya see or a tidal wave of wind or sand. The wall's all unified so we have to too. Every grain counts."

Bob: "So then it's down to whose got da bigger, well run group..."

Jane: (laughs) Yeah, the dice are rolling now... I think we've all got the guts to pull this off.



Bob: "Yeah, I think so!"

Jane: "What do we got to lose..."

## **VI. Catherine Jones “The Work Is Not The Workshop Talking and Doing, Visibility and Accountability in the White Anti-Racist Community”**

Ok, white folks. I think it's time for us to focus. We know a whole lot, y'all, but I don't see us putting our knowledge to real use out there. I mean there's a whole big movement going on in this world!! Where are all the white folks? Where are we?

This is what I mean. Here's what happened in my community last week. When I say "my community" I'm not talking about the city I live in but the people I know.

1) Two hundred Palestinian-American residents of New Orleans found out that the lands their families have owned and farmed for generations, the lands many of their family members still live on, are about to be destroyed by the Apartheid Wall that Israel is building to imprison the Palestinian people.

2) My friend teaches at an all-African-American high school that lost a soccer game two nights ago to an all-white school. The (white) referee falsely called fouls on the all-black team and never made any calls against the white team. After the game, some of the players on the white school's team, together with their friends and parents (!), taunted the African-American players with racist slurs. Some of the African-American students fought back and are now facing lawsuits, expulsion from school, and criminal charges. The white students are not being punished at all.

3) My friend's boyfriend got out of jail after having spent a year imprisoned under false charges of killing a cop. The only reason he got out of jail at all was because folks in the activist community were able to raise thousands of dollars so he could get a decent lawyer. Hundreds of thousands of low-income African Americans just like my friend are in jails across the country, imprisoned on outrageous or false charges, without basic rights to privacy, healthcare, or good counsel.

Last week, y'all! To folks I know! We gotta get our shit together!

I think it might be time for the white anti-racist community to take a critical look at ourselves. I think of myself as a part of this community and I'm saying what I'm saying out of a need I feel to hold myself accountable for the actions (and inaction) of my community. Everything I've written I've taken from my experience and direct observation of white anti-racist culture. I take responsibility for any incorrect representation of my community. I'm also writing out of love for the countless fierce and dedicated white anti-racists I know, and because I've been feeling this sense of urgency more and more lately. Maybe it's 'cause I moved back to the South, where the brutality of racism doesn't only stare you in the face every day; it picks you up while you're walking on the sidewalk, smashes your head against the concrete, and tosses you into oncoming traffic. Things are bad

here. Maybe, though, it's also 'cause I know that we, white folks, have not only the obligation but the potential--we really do--to make a real-live, genuine, accountable contribution to the struggle for racial justice that is happening in our world, right now. But I don't see us out there. I want us to get started. White folks really are out there, fighting for justice. But sometimes I think that those of us who are fighting are not nearly as effective as we can be.

I'm beginning to think a large explanation for this situation lies in some fundamental aspects of white anti-racist culture. The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond says that any time white folks get together, we re-create the structures of racism whether we're conscious about it or not. Looking at white anti-racist culture, I believe it more and more. Even if we're getting together to strategize about fighting racism, I'm not sure that we're as aware as we need to be about how even our anti-racism can uphold the system of white supremacy. I'm speaking of three specific aspects of white anti-racist culture: our preoccupation with perfection, specifically as it relates to behavior; our focus on thinking about and analyzing, rather than actually doing, the work; and our skewed system of honor and recognition.

Before I used the term "white anti-racist activist" to describe myself, I spent a lot of time doing racial justice work without thinking about larger issues like imperialism, global economic injustice or even institutionalized racism. I knew racism was a bad thing, I did what I could to fight against it, and that was that. Once I began moving in more established (and, interestingly, more white) activist circles, I began drawing connections between, say, a seemingly isolated incident of racist violence and the global structures of oppression that allow such acts of violence to happen regularly in our society. And, because it was San Francisco and they were available, I went to a ton of workshops. I am boundlessly grateful for all I was able to gain from participating in so many anti-racist trainings. Interestingly, though, even though I had a more sophisticated analysis of racism and my role in the white supremacist system that we all live in, my work wasn't initially that much more effective because of all this knowledge I'd acquired. Ironically, because I was spending so much time first participating in and then giving workshops about racism, I had a lot less time to fight it.

Tema Okun says that perfectionism is one of the hallmarks of white supremacy culture. I think one of the unfortunate ways in which white anti-racist culture mimics white supremacy culture is our tireless dedication to "figuring out" how to be the perfect anti-racist. While we are congratulating ourselves 'cause we're getting closer to understanding what accountability really means; while we debate whether it's more effective to say X or Y thing at the people-of-color-led meeting, the world is broiling outside! People are dying out there, y'all! I guess if I have one overarching thing to say to white anti-racist activists it's this: Think less. Do more. How we do stuff is important. It really is. But it's not so important that we need to figure out all the intricacies of how to do the work before we dig in and start rolling up our sleeves.

And why is it, anyway, that we spend so much time talking about things like What To Say At The Meeting, or When To Go To The Meeting, or Taking Up Too Much Space? I do think it's useful and important for white anti-racists to be conscious of our behavior in multiracial settings so that people of color don't have to deal with our shit. But at the point when discussing behavior in an anti-racist setting stops being about useful political strategy and begins to be about how not to get embarrassed 'cause you said the wrong thing at the meeting, we got issues.

Like I said, I really do think it's supremely important to have consciousness about what we do as activists and organizers, especially when it comes to standing in solidarity with people of color. I just think it's more ok for us to make mistakes than we may have trained ourselves into thinking. And while I think that certain aspects of anti-racist etiquette are integral to establishing good relationships (e.g., Don't Talk Too Much At The Meeting), I think that if we spend too much time focusing on these things it can end up guiding the white anti-racist movement into the direction it's in danger of heading right now: equating anti-racism with interpersonal behavior instead of with true radical change, which takes on the entire system of white supremacy. And white supremacy will only go away if we organize, not 'cause some white guy finally held his tongue at a meeting.

But the organizing part- hopefully the real reason white folks are taking the time to learn so much about anti-racism in the first place- can often be a point of paralysis in white anti-racist culture. Because we spend so much time discussing why, for example, it's not always appropriate to go to meetings or join groups that are primarily for people of color (and this is true and important), it can often be hard for a white person to figure out exactly, then, where it is ok to go. Sometimes I think white folks can get really hung up on the What Is My Role question. This is a big question, and it's worth figuring out. But I wonder sometimes if our workshop-heavy culture has obscured it more than necessary. Look around, is what I finally realized. There are as many, if not more, ways for white anti-racists to plug into the struggle for racial justice as there are white anti-racists.

After I started going to lots of anti-racist workshops, I spent a lot of time pondering where exactly it was that I fit into the whole anti-racist picture. At the same time a whole bunch of low-income women of color weren't even able to get to their meeting a few blocks away 'cause no one was around to watch their kids. A few friends and I decided to start a group that provides childcare for meetings and events held by people-of-color-led organizations in our city. We showed up consistently and we took considerable direction from the moms around the tone, goals and rules of the childcare. At the same time, we also spent a lot of time as a group developing our own principles- around childcare, our group structure, strategies for leadership development, and standards around which groups we would support and why. I learned a lot from that experience about taking leadership from people of color, and developing my own anti-racist principles and

sticking to them, and about the variety of ways in which white folks can be in legitimate solidarity with people of color who are fighting for liberation.

Interestingly, when I was working with the childcare collective, one of the biggest challenges we faced as an organization was around getting a group of high profile mostly male white anti-racists to take childcare seriously. Even though in larger anti-racist circles childcare had come to be recognized as legitimate political work, we ran into consistent issues with people who had committed to do childcare regularly but who were "too busy" when we actually called them. One person even told me he thought he had moved "beyond" doing childcare; that childcare was a good introductory activity for people getting to know more about anti-racism, but that he had surpassed that level. This opened up a whole lot of questions to me about where the priorities lie in the white anti-racist community.

Lots of white anti-racists talk about how doing anti-racist work means often taking on the tasks that are "not sexy." Yet our same community, which advises doing the unsexy work, continues to reward the work that is more high-profile and glamorous. We probably know at least a little bit about the work of folks who put on workshops and travel around the country speaking about racism. This is important work. But what do we hear about the tons of people who even now are driving the family members of a prisoner to visit their incarcerated relative, or making phone calls to housing project residents to let them know when the next community meeting is, or providing translation at an organizing meeting so that recent immigrants can participate in a cross-race struggle for workers' rights?

That white anti-racist culture places such strong rewards on high-visibility work, like conducting workshops or speaking and writing about racism, while it ignores other aspects of anti-racist work, is dangerous for a variety of reasons. Most obviously, this dynamic contributes to an overall sentiment that if we talk about or think about being anti-racist we are in fact being anti-racist. This idea, in turn, can help to create an anti-racist culture that puts more importance on talking and learning about the work than on actually doing it. An overwhelming critique from organizers of color who work alongside white folks in struggle is that white folks talk too much and do too little.

If we are to be truly accountable to revolutionaries of color we need to create a culture that prizes the doing, as much as we prize our abilities to educate each other. Both are crucial if we want to build an effective movement.

Even more disturbing to me, though, is that our workshop culture may have gotten to the point where it is more committed to supporting workshops than supporting the actual work. I can't count the number of times I've talked to anti-racist white folks with incredible energy and commitment who take an anti-racist workshop and then think the only way for them to do real-live anti-racist work is to become an anti-racist trainer. This is not to say that being an anti-racist trainer isn't an important way to do anti-racist work, but it is by no means the only one. It

is, however, the most visible, and this is the part that's problematic. The What Is My Role question, already a source of at least temporary paralysis for a good number of emerging white anti-racists, becomes even more obscured if newer anti-racist white folks don't have any role models to look toward except the people putting on the workshops. The problem, of course, is not that these other role models don't exist but that we, as an anti-racist community, don't celebrate them as much as they deserve.

Finally, if the white anti-racist community is saying that white folks should do the less sexy, less visible work while at the same time we devote our energy to raising up the very work in our own community that is the most sexy, most visible work, we are sending mixed messages to everyone our community affects.

Perhaps most importantly, we're sending the message to organizers of color that white folks don't practice what we preach. Again, if our movement is to be truly accountable to communities of color and to our goals of racial justice, we need to actually act on our principles.

In addition, this dual message can have a confusing effect on other white folks. In essence the white anti-racist movement is saying "it's not ok for white folks in general to do this, but it is ok for this white person to do this." This dynamic can create distinctions among white folks that will not help our movement. If I've learned anything from my experiences doing anti-racist work in the Bay Area and now, struggling to be effective here in the South, it's that the white supremacist strategy of divide-and-conquer doesn't only succeed famously in keeping oppressed folks apart, it also works like a charm by creating these false distinctions in the white anti-racist movement.

If we're serious about creating an anti-racist praxis that legitimately challenges the visibility white folks have enjoyed at the expense of legacies of hard, uncelebrated work of people of color, we need to be able to look critically at where the visibility lies in our own community. What does it mean, in a movement whose very mantra is Don't Talk Too Much, that our own celebrities are folks who do a lot of talking? Does it mean that these folks are so special that they don't need to abide by the standards we as a movement have set for ourselves? Does it mean that maybe one day, if I'm special too, I can kinda bend our principles in the name of doing the work? I am not at all saying that anti-racist trainers are bending the principles of anti-racism by doing the incredible and necessary work they do. I am saying that this has the potential to be dangerous territory, and that all of us need to be aware and responsible with the positions we hold.

I should take the time to stress here that I am specifically not aiming my criticism toward white anti-racist trainers themselves. I, like many white anti-racists, owe a huge amount of my political development to incredible anti-racist trainers like Sharon Martinas, Clare Bayard, Chris Crass, and others. Instead, I am offering feedback to the larger white anti-racist community, of which I consider myself a

part. More than the acts of any anti-racist trainers, who, again, are doing good work in our community, it's the culture of our community, which prizes things like perfectionism, talking instead of doing, and the creation of Famous Anti Racists, that is actually hindering our progress toward achieving true racial justice.

This being said, however, I would like to point out that white anti-racist trainers, because of the amount of visibility they do have, are in a unique position to guide our movement toward greater accountability and effectiveness. I think one of the useful ways for trainers to begin to do this is to challenge their own visibility by giving props to the many white anti-racists working behind the scenes in communities across the country. Take the time to find out who these folks are.

Mention them by name in trainings, essays and speaking engagements. Talk about the work they're doing. Emerging white anti-racists need a variety of role models, and the white anti-racist spending most of her free time Xeroxing, phonebanking, or taking care of a revolutionary mother's kids can probably use the support of her fellow white anti-racists, in addition to the reassurance that her work really is important and necessary.

Additionally, I would like to ask white anti-racist trainers to be respectful and responsible with their position and with the language they use. These two examples may seem picky, but I think resolving them can contribute toward making our movement more accountable to our goals of true racial justice.

First of all, on more than a few occasions, I have heard white anti-racist trainers refer to the work they do as "organizing." While the work of white anti-racist trainers is valuable, it is not organizing in the historic sense of the word. Equating the two obscures the vibrant legacy of grassroots organizing in communities of color, which allowed oppressed people to come together, gain a sense of their collective power, and build strategies that allowed them to win important victories in struggles for liberation.

Secondly, because a significant amount of anti-racist training is devoted (necessarily) to anti-racist behavior, I would argue that it's crucial for anti-racist trainers to make the distinction between anti-racist work and anti-racist group dynamics. The white guy who's not dominating the meeting is definitely behaving nicely, but simply by holding his tongue he is not doing anti racist work. Thinking about doing the work, and behaving well within the scope of the work, are not the same thing as actually doing the work.

Maybe more than anything else, white anti-racist trainers can make a concerted effort to guide their training participants toward specific, accountable, and necessary anti-racist work in their own communities. San Francisco's challenging white supremacy workshop now requires its participants to spend 6-8 hours a week working with a racial justice organization during the 15 weeks of its training program. While such a requirement may be logistically impossible for many anti-

racist training programs, especially those that don't have long-term relationships with their participants, there may be ways for training programs to work with participants on developing tools to identify and plug into specific racial justice struggles in their own communities. It's been my experience that short-term anti-racist workshops for white folks include a lot of material on how to act once you start doing the work, but not a whole lot on how to actually start doing the work. How do anti-racists find out about racial justice struggles occurring in their communities? How do they figure out appropriate roles for white folks once they know what's going on? What are some specific steps that primarily white social justice organizations can take once they decide to take on an anti-racist agenda and build relationships with organizations of color? These questions, and the many hopefully concrete answers that can come from them, may be a good starting place for white anti-racist trainers who want to guide their work toward supporting more pragmatic anti-racist practices.

Finally, I would like to suggest that white anti-racist trainers are not exempt from doing behind-the-scenes practical anti-racist work in their own communities. In fact, because these folks are in many ways the mouthpieces of the white anti-racist movement, I would think that white anti-racist trainers have more of an obligation to be connected and accountable to the struggles that are happening in their local communities. What does it mean if an anti-racist trainer is "too busy" giving trainings to get involved in even a little bit of on-the-ground work in her own community? Again, training white folks around anti-racism is vital to our work. Many white anti-racists speak about their participation in anti-racism workshops as experiences that changed their lives and deepened their commitments to work for racial justice. This is amazing! But I do think that anti-racist training programs, especially now that we live in a time where there are so many of them, have a responsibility to be knowledgeable about and accountable to the liberation struggles happening among people of color in their own communities. This is vital if anti-racist workshops want to achieve their goal of supporting white folks on their way to becoming active fighters for racial justice.

Like I said, there's a whole big movement out there that needs us. And there are also a whole lot of dedicated anti-racist white folks trying to figure out legitimate ways to participate in the struggle. I would like to challenge all of us in the white anti-racist community to spend a bit of time looking outward, instead of inward. To find out about the specific places that really do exist in the struggle where we can put our fierce and beautiful energy to use, even if it means we're a little less sure of ourselves, even if it means we may make more mistakes, even if it means challenging our abilities to be comfortable in this work. To challenge fame and visibility in our community, whether it's our own or that which we help create. And, finally, to raise each other up for the really unsexy, unrewarded work so many among us take on, out of nothing less than their fierce commitment to build a better world.



I'm saying what I'm saying because I believe in us. And because, for me, the white anti-racist community has not only been a source of sharp political analysis, but also a source of strength, courage, and astounding inspiration.

And because I am in awe, not only of the work that we need to do, but of the incredible potential we have to do it. And because at this point I can't think of any greater act of love that I can give to this community, other than to hold us accountable to the principles we have an obligation to live by.

Revolutionary love is not only about standing together and supporting each other through even the darkest parts of our political process. It's also about challenging each other, compassionately, to be the most fierce, committed, kick-ass fighters for justice we can be. Because our movement requires nothing less.

*Rants, comments, and boisterous criticism can be addressed to Catherine Jones at [cjones14@tulane.edu](mailto:cjones14@tulane.edu)*

## VII. Institute for Recovery from Racisms “Racial Sobriety” (2002-2007)

What is Racial Sobriety®?

Racial Sobriety® is witnessing to ourselves and others that our thinking, feeling and acting reflects our commitment to seeing each person as a member of the same human family. Racial Sobriety requires a self awareness that examines our prejudices in regard to another's racial caste in society. Racial Sobriety is achieved by ridding ourselves of the "stinking thinking" of racism, which in turns frees us from racial dysfunction in our interactions with others in the human family.

Racial sobriety from what?

To begin the journey to racial sobriety there is a need to know where we are in order to know where we are going. The goal of racial sobriety is to free ourselves of **racial dysfunction**. The term racial dysfunction describes the negative thinking, feeling and acting on the false beliefs of racial prejudice. In other words, it is **dysfunctional** to see a person or group as anything other than human beings regardless of their race; whether "race" is a matter of color, culture, creed, or class. The word, **dysfunction**, means an improper relationship. Racial dysfunction is an improper relationship with members of the same human family. In this approach, racism is viewed as a family dysfunction, with society being the "family." For example, persons who have a dysfunctional relationship with alcohol and drugs suffer from their improper relationship with these substances. Likewise, persons who have an improper relationship with food, work, sex or gambling need for treatment programs for their dysfunctional lifestyle. In the same manner, an improper relationship with one's "race" needs a treatment program. Racial sobriety provides a healing process for coping with the social illness of racial dysfunction. The endless racial incidents, reported and unreported, in the American family demonstrate the pandemic scope of racial dysfunction. Our personal racial dysfunction and that of others in our American family needs an intervention on our shared family dysfunction of racism.

Racial sobriety is a commitment to rid one's self of the "stinking thinking," toxic feelings and hurtful actions that are part of membership in American family life. A personal commitment to Racial Sobriety is a desire to be free of racial dysfunction in order to become a fully functioning human being. A social commitment to racial sobriety is a desire to see everyone live in a culture of racial sobriety where each person is seen as a member of the same human family.

How does One become racially sober?

Racial sobriety is a healing journey which begins with stages of Recovery from Racisms®. These stages are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The stages of recovery from racisms focus our attention on the

negative behavior of racism. The focus of racial sobriety involves three stages beyond recovery: re-engagement, forgiveness and witness. Re-engagement is a stage in which a commitment is made to sober thinking and acting. Lifestyle changes begin within oneself and one's relationship with others. Since racial sobriety affects every aspect of one's life, each person will re-engage their lives from different points of view. It is in the re-engagement stage that self awareness intervenes in thoughts and feelings so as to sustain racial sobriety.

To maintain racial sobriety amid a world of racial dysfunction, the exercise of forgiveness builds strength for the journey. The first step is to forgive ourselves for "going along to get along" in a racialized culture. Most people live a life of accommodation to the white supremacy culture. As we forgive ourselves we become more understanding of others and the power that racial dysfunction has over their lives. This sense of compassion assists us in forgiving others. Each act of forgiveness takes the toxic power of anger, resentment and hostility and transforms it into new energy that supports our journey to racial sobriety.

Witness is the ultimate goal of racial sobriety. In the act of witnessing we pass on our sobriety to others. Our personal sobriety is a benefit to our mental health, social enjoyment and spiritual renewal. Everyone around us is benefited by our racial sobriety whether it is known or not. Racially sober people witness to themselves that, in the midst of the racial dysfunction around them, they have the power to make a difference on their own behalf and others. They do not feel powerless to change the world, because they have begun to change their interaction with the world around them. The racially sober person becomes a collaborator for change.

Witness also will have a public face that demonstrates to others that racial dysfunction hurts everyone in the human family, not just the Nonwhites who are victimized by it. Racism takes something away from every person on the planet everyday. It is through witnessing, personally and publicly, that we come to sustain our own racial sobriety and pass the benefits to a racially dysfunctional culture so much in need of it.

Racial sobriety involves visiting the three stages of re-engagement, forgiveness and witness often in order to grow in strength, wisdom and freedom in regards to the racial dysfunctions in our lives. As each person embraces racial sobriety, their presence is felt as a new member in the New Family Formation process. New Family Formation means that as each person embraces racial sobriety they leave behind their racial caste allegiance to join the human family in which each person is seen as my brother or sister.

**VIII. “Diversity or Inclusion? Addressing culture, race and class in community food systems work” CFSC conference, 10/05 Track: Race, Power, and Justice in the Food System *Presenters:* Erika Allen, Hank Herrera, Ian Marvey, Akiko Minami, Anna Viertel *Moderator:* Jim Hanna**

TOOL KIT GENERATED IN WORKSHOP BY PARTICIPANTS

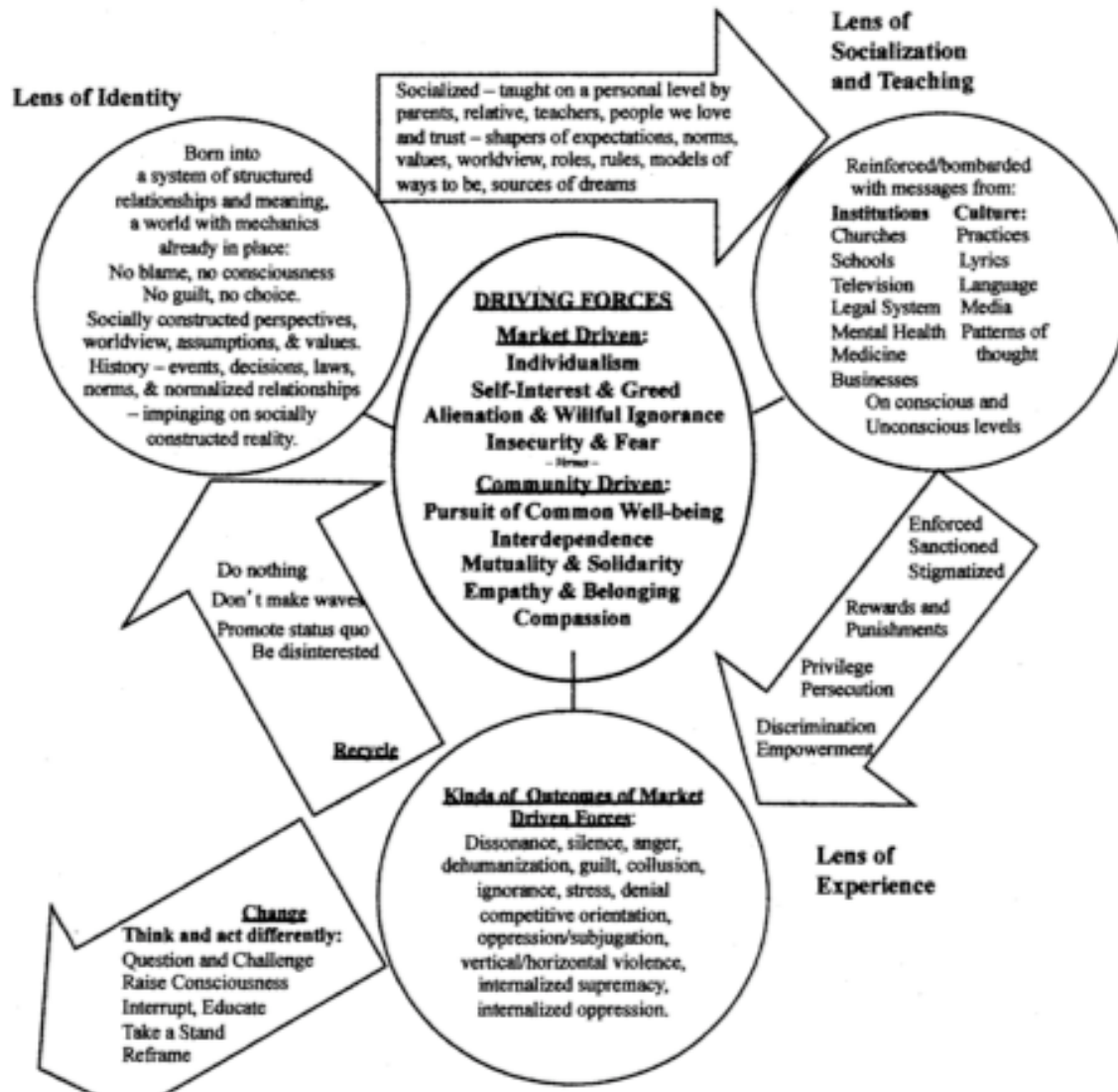
**I. Strategies That Have Been SUCCESSFUL cultivating diversity and inclusion:**

1. Good facilitation techniques to ensure equal time speaking for all participating members.
2. Acknowledge privilege!
3. Hire from your community/target group; hire w/ equity & power sharing in mind; engage/develop leadership from under-represented groups.
4. Offer assistance – don’t make people ask
5. Open facilities & resources up to the community
6. Encourage dialogue about personal backgrounds
7. Use/acknowledge non-written forms of communication
8. Make/allow for connections on an emotional level
9. Cultivate the desire to seek out difference – in SELF as well as in others
10. Bring issues of power to the forefront of the conversation
11. Celebrate difference; engage in culture sharing (especially through food & arts!)
12. Share power in decision making – include the community you “serve” high up in the decision making process (develop diversity on board and at all levels)
13. Be empathetic – cultivate empathy
14. Listen!
15. Have an internal organizational affirmation of historically oppressed people
16. Have patience
17. Make sure there is non-verbal task sharing
18. Pay living wages/equal wages & pay everyone who participates – appreciate participants
19. Recognize limitations in SELF – deal with self first, then others (and their limitations)
20. Practice intentional recruiting
21. Provide resources to remove economic barriers to board inclusion
22. Never assume
23. Ask questions
24. Don’t be afraid to HEAR
25. Integrate these values and ideas into organizational mission/board policy
26. Honor elders, children, & spirituality
27. Create a safe environment for rocking the boat/instigating change
28. Empowerment through knowledge-sharing

## **II. CHALLENGES to cultivating inclusion**

1. Fear
2. Assimilation and isolation
3. Stereotyping outsiders
4. Tokenism
5. Confronting the difficulty of sharing power that was hard won (for newly empowered groups, like white women)
6. Internal oppression/blockages within your SELF
7. Paternalism (do-gooders)
8. The perceived primacy of expert knowledge vs. local knowledge – trusting experts who come from an outside group more than selves or participants. Giving more power to perceived experts than selves or participants.
9. True inclusivity creates a slower process often – society values speed over thoroughness sometimes.
10. Getting past family/historical myths
11. Overcoming the “white funder problem”
12. Avoidance of conflict
13. Creating a safe environment for rocking the boat/instigating change
14. Finding energy for the long haul
15. Combating the blinding effects of privilege – the privileged do not see that they CAN NOT fully represent others
16. Information sharing vs. information banking.
17. Urban vs. rural dilemma/debate
18. How do we cultivate real economic inclusion?
19. How to have the poor participate equally?

## IX. Cycle of Socialization Graphic



## **X. Suggested Readings**

*Leading Diverse Communities* by Brown Massa

*Teaching/Learning Anti-Racism: A Developmental Approach* by Lisa Delpit

*White Like Me* by Tim Wise

*An African Prayer Book* by Desmond Tutu

*"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?"* by Beverly Daniel Patum Ph.D

*Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*

*Dreams of my Father* by Barak Obama

*Hateful Triangle* by Noam Chomsky

*Being Arab* by Samir Kassir

*Islam Explained* by Ben Jelloun

*Dwell in my Love: A Pastoral Letter on Racism* by Francis Cardinal George

*Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice* by Paul Kivel,

*Race Matters* by Cornel West

*Killing Rage: Ending Racism* by Bell Hooks

*Malign Neglect: Race, Crime and Punishment in America* by Michael Tonry,

*Compelled to Crime* by Beth Richie, Routledge

*Thieves of Paradise* by Yousef Komunyakaa

*Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America* by Joseph Barndt

*Black Wealth, White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* by Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro

*How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* by Manning Marable

*Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock Central High School* by Melba Patillo Beals

*Beyond Heros and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racism, Multi-Cultural Education and Staff Development* by Enid Lee

*For Whites Only* by Robert W. Terry

*Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* by Joy Degruy Leary

*Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* by Frank Hu

*Colonize This!: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism* edited by Daisy Hernandez and Bushra Rehman

*Racism in Indian Country* by Dean Chavers