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Expanding the Circle: People Who Care About Ending Racism. We Need Your Help

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Expanding the Circle: People who care about ending racism.

We need your help.

By Ann Curry-Stevens



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Expanding the Circle: People who care about ending racism.

We need your help.

In this booklet, we want to help and encourage more people to work towards ending racism. Most of us would rather avoid this topic. Thank you for opening this booklet!

Many living in Canada think the problem of racism is over. It's true that there is less segregation and fewer of the formal barriers that blocked people of colour from receiving a good education or a good job. . But the sad reality is that people of colour continue to have second-class status in Canada, resulting in lesser quality of life and reduced chances for success. In our post 9-11 world, there is surging discrimination against Arabs and Muslims, as they face the indiscriminate fallout of the "war on terrorism."

You may have experienced discrimination as an Italian, Portuguese or Irish immigrant to Canada. Certainly your parents did if they came to Canada in the early waves of immigration. Serious injustice was done to Eastern European immigrants in their settlement in Canada.

You also may suffer grave injustice through anti-Semitism. Canada had a dismal record of providing refuge for Jews persecuted around the world. Anti-Semitism continues today, with Jews facing hatred that shows up in synagogue defilement, gravestone destruction and even schools have been set on fire.

You might be facing unfair treatment as a woman or from having a disability or having survived child abuse or mistreatment in your family. Maybe you didn't have a family and faced a life of foster homes. All of these life experiences are unfair and unjust. Life generates hardship in many shapes and forms.

Today in Canada, people of colour experience overwhelming hardship. As a group of people, too many people of colour face severe social and economic exclusion. Today, Canada's worst jobs are likely to be filled by people of colour. They face severe barriers to fully participating in this country. Too many live in poverty and too many fail to succeed at school. They face unique barriers in accessing health care and social programs. On average, they die earlier and live more difficult lives, carrying the burden of racism and its stress and anxiety each and every day.

This booklet aims to address the racism and prejudice directed at people of colour today. Because of such racism, those with darker skin face difficulty in terms of wages and jobs, rights and resources. We ask that you open space in your heart and mind to hear about the experiences of people of colour and to think about how we can work to end racism.

Our own unfair treatment can cause us to say, "But what about me?" If you feel that way, pause, take a deep breath and press on. You have within you the basis for understanding the injuries done to others. Unfair treatment can become an incentive to help end injustice for others. We believe that working together to end injustice for one group will benefit us all.

It takes courage to alter the messages we've digested about others. It's hard work to take on racism. But it is important to confront one of the worst social problems of our time. Our goal is to expand the circle of people who care about ending racism.

It may be hard to stick with this booklet. We suggest you put it down when it gets too intense. But come back to it – we believe it will offer you a chance to do great work.

Who is producing this booklet and why?

This booklet is produced by the Centre for Social Justice with the collaboration of the Transformative Learning Centre at OISE/UT, the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, and the Ontario Public Service Employees Union. It has been funded through the Access and Equity Grant Program with the City of Toronto. We are producing this booklet to encourage all of us to build an anti-racist Canada.

We hope you'll pick up two copies of this booklet. Give the second booklet to someone who can support you in your

learning, someone whom you can discuss the issues with and who will support your actions to end racism. Or maybe give it to someone whom you'd like to share this journey with, someone you want to encourage on this path to unlearning racism and taking action to stop racism.

Ordering Copies

This booklet is available free online at www.socialjustice.org. Copies may be ordered through the Centre for Social Justice either online, or locally at 416-927-0777 and toll free at 1-888-803-8881.

Equality slips away from us

We are taught that all human life is valuable. Most of us are taught that no life is more important than another. We learn these lessons from our parents, from our spiritual texts and from our teachers.

Here are some quotations from various spiritual traditions. They speak to the natural connections among all humans.

Buddhism: “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.” (Udana-Varga 5:18)

Christianity: “As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.” (Luke 6:31)

Hinduism: “Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.” (Mahabharata 5:1517)

Islam: “No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.” (Sunnah)

Judaism: “That which is hateful unto you, do not impose on others.” (Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

Sikhism: “As thou deemest thyself, so deem others.” (Kan Ying P’ien)

Confucianism: “Do not do to others what you would not like yourself.” (Analects 12:2)

Taoism: “Regard you neighbour’s gain as your own gain and your neighbour’s loss as yours.” (T’ai Shang).¹

Despite these values, we also very quickly learn about hierarchies. Certain groups of people are valued over others. Here are some of the common ones we learn early in our lives:

- Adults are more important than children.
- Boys are worth more than girls.
- What teachers have to say matters more than students.
- Bosses matter more than workers.
- Those being served are more important than their servers.
- What we own matters more than who we are.
- People of colour are less important than whites.

We drift a long way from our equality-based values, replacing them with hierarchical values of some being better than others. We might wonder why this ordering of life exists. Here’s one answer: when some people matter less than others, it becomes okay to take advantage of them – underpay them, make them work in unsafe environments and keep them in the worst of jobs. Racism is about power and exploitation. History has organized itself to put people of colour on the bottom of the race hierarchy, keeping them (and other groups) as servants and even slaves to others – to earn them more money, more status and more power.

Let’s turn to the history of racism in Canada, and see how people of colour fared in Canada since its beginning.



A history lesson in racism²

The formation of Canada was based in laws and practices that have been racist. Read on to learn about our heritage.

- 1497 & on – Europeans land in North America and begin theft of First Nations land.
- 1600s – Native and African people enslaved for 200 years.
- 1797 – Slavery legally abolished in Canada, but continued until outlawed across the British Empire in 1832.
- 1857 – Gradual Civilization Act provides land and money to aboriginal men who give up their heritage; nothing provided to other aboriginals. In 1933, federal government gains right to force this assimilation without aboriginal consent.
- 1867 – Canada is born. Government gives 10 acres of land to whites and 1 to black citizens.
- 1876 – Indian Act introduced... all aspects of Native life under control of Canadian government. Aboriginal spirituality and ceremonies outlawed.
- 1876 to 1985 – An aboriginal woman and her children lose status when she marries a non-aboriginal man.
- 1867 to 1948 – People of colour denied access to immigrate to Canada, unless Canada needs their labour.
- 1879 to 1996 – Over 100 years of residential school system. Native children seized and force to assimilate. Abuse rampant. Names changed. Languages denied. Aboriginal children have needles stuck in their tongues if they speak their native language.
- 1885 – Chinese labourers brought in to build the railroad. Paid 1/4 the wages of white workers.
- 1902 – Royal Commission describes all Asians as “unfit for full citizenship... obnoxious to a free community and dangerous to the state.”
- 1908 – Immigration status denied to people considered to be of “any race deemed unsuitable to the requirements of Canada.”
- 1939 – Racism finally deemed illegal by Canada’s highest court, overturning prior judgments.
- 1941 – Japanese Canadians imprisoned in concentration camps during World War II. Property seized. No compensation provided.
- 1948 – Asian Canadians gain the right to vote.
- 1951 – Canadian government re-allows aboriginal religious practices.
- 1960 – Native people gain the right to vote.
- 1964 – Ontario schools finally prohibit segregation of black students in public schools.
- 1965 – Last racially segregated school in Ontario is closed.
- 1967 – Race is formally withdrawn as a criteria immigrants seeking admission into Canada.
- 1990 – First black cabinet minister appointed in Ontario.
- 1996 – Last residential school for aboriginal children and youth in Canada is closed.

When we uncover Canada’s history, we find quite horrible roots. The settlement process depended upon the theft of land, the enslavement of aboriginals and Africans, the colonization of pre-existing cultures, the exploitation of labourers, many of whom were brought to Canada for that purpose, and the overwhelming preference and favoured treatment of European settlers. This helps explain the mixed feelings that many people of colour have towards Canadian patriotism.

There have been many investigations into racism in the last dozen years. The findings uncover significant and harmful oppression embedded in the following systems: criminal justice (1994), education (1992 and 1999), immigration (2000), public service (2000), housing (1994 and 1999) and employment (1984 and 1992).³

What does 21st century racism look like?

- 23% of those living in Canada incorrectly believe that some races are genetically smarter than others.⁴
- According to a survey, 15% of Toronto residents can be classified as non-racist, another 15% are openly racist; the remainder show various degrees of racial tolerance.⁵

Today, in Canada, we live unequal lives.

Circle your answer to each question. The correct answers are on page 23.

1. People of colour earn _____ less than whites.⁶
8% 18% 28%

2. People of colour live in poverty _____ more frequently than whites.⁷
50% 75% 100%

3. Child poverty for children of colour is _____ while the rate for all children is 26%.⁸
35% 45% 55%

4. Those experiencing racism are _____ more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general public.⁹
50% 75% 100%

5. Aboriginal people are about _____ times more likely to commit suicide than the general population.¹⁰
2 3 4

6. Aboriginal youth suicide rates are about _____ times higher than the general population.¹¹
3 4 6

7. You probably don't often think about being white. How many blacks think about their race at least once a day?¹²
25% 50% 75%

8. In Toronto, whites get _____ job offers for every 1 offered to a black (when resumes and backgrounds are similar).¹³
Same number two three



9. People of colour are less likely to have high paid, high status and unionized jobs. They are more likely to work in cleaning, food service and harvesting. Given their numbers, they should hold 11% of the jobs in law, education, police, fire fighting, airline pilots and controllers, carpentry and electrical trades, but in fact they hold _____% of such jobs.¹⁴

8% 5% 2%

10. Despite employment equity in the federal public service, people of colour occupy only _____ of the jobs at the management level in the public service.¹⁵

2% 4% 6%

Ending racism is the right thing to do.

Talking about whiteness

We need to have a difficult conversation. We need to talk about ourselves as white people – as people who benefit from racism. As white people, we benefit from racism whether we want to or not.

Is this booklet for anyone other than white people? It is designed for people who have been advantaged by racism – historically and presently. But it can also be useful for those who have lighter skins or less marked racial features, especially those who society does not target as heavily as those with darker skin. It may prove useful for those of mixed race heritage, who face the difficult position of embodying both races within one skin.

The problem with racism, and with any form of exploitive hierarchy, is that there are winners and losers in the system. Whenever people get downtrodden, there are winners at the top who benefit from more rewards, resources, status and incomes. In this situation, people of colour end up on the bottom and white people end up on the top.

How does racism work? We can fairly easily see the unfairness of what happens to those at the bottom of the ladder. But the advantages for those at the top usually remain invisible to white people. These advantages are not invisible to people of colour – for when you are denied and excluded, it is easy to see those who are included and valued. But being on the privileged end of racism is surprisingly hard to see. This booklet aims to put whiteness firmly into the dynamic of racism – it is time to put the spotlight on whiteness as the engine that drives racism.

Thinking of ourselves as white people can make us a bit defensive. Thoughts may go through our mind like, “but I’m a woman, so I am discriminated against too,” or “but I don’t have much money, so how can I be seen as privileged?” These are real, and we don’t want to make any assumptions about the rest of your life. It may have been very hard – you may have faced discrimination and real barriers to having a decent life. Try to set aside these feelings for now. We have a huge task before us. If we can unlearn racism, we’ll also learn something important about how to undo other forms of discrimination.

This marks an addition to anti-racism work. Most solutions have focused on helping people of colour take power – through protest and activism or through community development. Sometimes we have focused on those who commit hate crimes or those who have failed to change discriminatory

policy. But the roots of the problem are the racist attitudes, behaviours and institutions of whites that serve to tolerate and allow racism to continue. That is why it is so important for those of us who are white to discuss our privilege, and how we have created unfair advantage for ourselves. We call this process “unlearning” racism and white privilege. And we can’t stop at unlearning – our new awareness must translate into action to end racism.

We are not the creators of this system – racism dates back to the days of slavery, of colonization, of the formation of Canada. Yet we perpetuate white privilege when we fail to get involved. We become responsible for racism when we don’t do anything to stop it. So while we didn’t cause it, we continue it. And while we won’t be able to stop it on our own, we must not turn away from taking action to end racism. We can make a difference. We can confront racism wherever we see it, on our own and as allies with people of colour.

If whites continue to ignore racism, or pretend that it doesn’t concern them, we won’t ever be able to create a society that leaves no one behind. So, hold onto your feelings and find a space to consider what it means to be white. Don’t let your difficult emotions become a reason for not doing anything. Be prepared to address white privilege, even though it might be painful and uncomfortable.

Racism is so insidious that we can’t help but absorb it. Society has set us up to be either on the receiving end of racism or the delivering end. We are conditioned to fit into these roles and it’s easiest to follow these expectations. But when we dare to think beyond what’s considered normal, a world of options opens up.

We have to consider the likelihood that we (as individuals reading this book) might contribute to racism – for it is the outcome of racism that matters, not our intentions. Even if we don’t mean to hurt people of colour in what we do, what matters is whether or not they get hurt or have their lives narrowed by our behaviours.

When we believe that white people should be in charge, we are saying that we are more competent and more intelligent. Think of all the ways that this perspective is embedded in our society – who should be the high school class president, who should be the boss in our workplace, and who should be the prime minister. What does this imply about people of colour? That they are not as capable as we are and, like the colonial days, they need whites to make decisions for them. The paradox is that we, as white people, have a pretty terrible record in using power responsibly.

Whiteness lets us reap benefits like keeping the better jobs, becoming the supervisor or even the boss, and keeping our authority unchallenged. We get the benefits of better incomes and better status – we are more secure, less vulnerable and more powerful than others. A curious thinking pattern is part of this dynamic – we, as privileged whites, feel that people of colour are not as good as we are. And we feel better when we feel more important than people of colour. We feel more powerful when we see others as being less than (less capable, less intelligent) ourselves.

We call this white superiority – the times when we feel better through making or believing someone else to be less than ourselves. It is a bit like a drug, a shot of adrenaline, to keep us apart from others who are put down so that we might be more successful, richer or more secure. Our whiteness has served us in many ways, to our own advantage.

But this is a totally manufactured and false sense of superiority. We know, deep in our hearts, that all human life has equal value. The challenge that is thus before us is how to create our lives so as to live with a cleaner conscience – to end this “one up – one down” way of ordering our worlds.

The task before us is about finding our way back to wholeness and integrity. It can be an immensely spiritual task, with significant challenges. While there is no single path for how to move forward, the only failure will be in not starting the journey. Before us is a healing path, toward peace and justice. We can't lose.

This journey is a hard one. As one educator¹⁶ writes, “There is no cheering from the sidelines, often the opposite. Seldom is anyone going to pat us on the back for doing it. Our friends and family may question us or be threatened by what we are saying or doing. Why do it then? We must stop participating in... a system that is destroying our country, wounding the next generation of leaders, taking the heart out of many of us and affecting our very soul.”



White privilege - the other side of racism

We can all admit that racism hurts people of colour, but few of us turn the attention to ourselves. Review this checklist¹⁷ and note which privileges you were already aware of and which are new.

- My skin colour is that of the heroes in history books.
- The actions of my ancestors who settled this country are portrayed as noble and peaceful.
- My ancestors came to this country of their own free will and have never had to relocate unwillingly once here.
- It is possible that my ancestors owned slaves.
- I can find role models of my race in my desired occupation.
- I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.
- I feel like I belong in my workplace and in community meetings and do not feel isolated, out-of-place, out-numbered, unheard, held at a distance or feared.
- When I am pulled over by police, I can be sure it is not because of my colour.
- If my children are punished by their teacher, I can be sure it is not because of their skin colour.
- My skin colour is connected to good attributes such as “pure,” “innocent” and “virtuous.”
- My God has the same colour skin as I have, even though s/he is likely to have been a person of colour.
- I can let my teenage children out at night and be sure they won't be harassed by police officers.
- I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
- If I ask to speak to the person in charge, I can be pretty sure I will be speaking to someone of my race.
- I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
- When people of my race are in the papers, it is not usually because they did something criminally wrong.

- Most people believe I am telling the truth when I talk about my immigration situation.
- People of my race hold positions of power across this country.
- My cultural celebrations are holidays that are recognized by the government.
- My ancestors received land from the federal government.
- I was encouraged to go to university by teachers and guidance counselors.
- I can always vote for candidates who reflect my race.
- I live in a neighbourhood that is safer and has better services than where people of colour live.
- I live free from the chronic stress of having to deal with racism everyday, stress that can lead to depression and heart disease.
- I can complain about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.
- People rarely underestimate what I am capable of.

Today, people of colour both here and around the world provide cheap labour and often work in unsafe conditions because of our thirst for cheap goods. In Canada, people of colour work outside of the protection of labour laws as migrant workers and nannies. Our lives are easier because people of colour grow, pick, can, pack and prepare the food we eat. We are safer from disease because people of colour wash our toilets, clean our floors and clean up after us when we go out. We are able to balance our checkbooks because people of colour work cheaply and unsafely to make what we buy – clothes, toys, electronic equipment and computers. Whether we like it or not, people of colour continue to serve us, and we continue to depend on their low wages and unsafe working conditions. It keeps up our standard of living. We depend on others to exploit them, even if we don't do it ourselves.

Racism also hurts white people

We often think of ending racism as the right thing to do. It is, but there is even more to it. It is also in our best interests to end racism. Listed below is a set of costs that white people have paid from living with racism.¹⁸

- Being fearful of people of colour. Paying for self-defense classes, security alarms and locks for our doors.
- Believing that people of colour are not as good as we are, yet knowing deep down that this can't really be true.
- Being isolated from people of colour – losing friendships or never starting them.
- Losing spiritual well-being due to this disconnection from other human beings.
- Being afraid to say or do the wrong thing – wanting to help but not knowing what to do.
- Diminished hope for the future – watching our children get sucked into racist beliefs.
- Loss of human capital – dealing with prejudice means both groups are less creative and productive. If we keep excluding others, our intellectual mix is minimized.
- Diminished economic growth – as people of colour are excluded from decent jobs, buying power is down. When businesses and organizations are inaccessible, discriminatory or unfriendly, they lose customers and supporters. The under-use of immigrant skills has been estimated to cost the Canadian economy \$2.4 billion every year.¹⁷
- Wasted resources to pay for our fears – policing, security, immigration and the justice system.
- Higher costs for health, education and social programs to respond to the harms that racism does to people of colour.
- Living with a sense of failure – missed chances to take action against racism.
- Racism limits our lives. Living in a world where the contribution of people of colour is invisible seriously restricts our lives.

Take a moment and list the harms that racism has brought to your life. Think of things like your happiness and well-being, spiritual completeness, pride and sense of self, monies lost on wasted expenses, and our collective well-being as communities and societies.

What do you think about this statement?

“Racism will only end when white people get angry about the losses they have suffered through racism.”

But haven't we made gains? Aren't things getting better?

Sure things have gotten better. But we still have so far to go. Our question needs to be:

What is getting in the way of further action to end racism?

To answer this, we can notice lots of racism in our institutions and systems, such as hiring practices, recognition of foreign education or work experience, "old-fashioned" history books and glass ceilings preventing people of colour getting access to the best jobs.

But let's start with you and me. Are we hanging onto racist beliefs and practices? Look at this list of beliefs,²⁰ check off those that you have used in the past, and get ready to move on, past these defenses.

1. "That all happened a long time ago – don't blame me."

We believe that since we did not cause racism to start, we cannot be held accountable for it continuing. But in reality, we keep getting benefits from racism. And racism continues in Canada.

2. "I'm not racist."

It is hard to accept that white people, simply by being white, uphold systems of domination. Our denial really just wastes valuable time that we could spend working to end racism.

3. "I'm a good person – I've never done anything nasty to a person of colour. So don't blame me."

If this is true, great. It's time to say, "how can I be an ally with people of colour to end racism?"

4. "I have friends who are people of colour."

Does having friends of colour get us off the hook for doing our own inner work? Be careful that we don't use our friends as a passport that gets us out of the work we need to do. Taking one step towards inclusion doesn't mean that enough has been done.

5. "I don't see people as black or white; I see them all as part of the human race."

This is one that many of us have used in the past. Somehow we think that if we don't see people as having a race, then we can rise above the messy work of racism. But while it is true that race accounts for a minor part of our genetic make-up, race still defines much of our life experiences. To overlook this is a disservice to people of colour and will be a barrier to

taking action against racism. It's like telling a woman that, "I didn't notice that you were female." This undervalues who she is and sets you up to ignore her social realities.

As our defenses lower, and we get ready to tackle racism, our body still encounters lots of strong emotions that can get in our way. What are some of the feelings that block you from taking action to fight racism?

Feelings that can block action:

- Being sad
- Angry
- Overwhelmed
- Confused
- Frustrated
- Numb
- Uncomfortable
- Lonely
- Tired
- Anxious
- Afraid
- Embarrassed

Check off those that are familiar to you. Get inside these feelings, and uncover the details about how and why you feel this way. Sometimes these intense feelings serve as a defense system against having to take risks, facing our fears or unsettling our lives. What purpose do they serve for you? For each one, develop an argument that will encourage you to move beyond this feeling and into action. Once we can name it and understand it, the barrier will get smaller. Our resistance will be a place that we visit sometimes, instead of a place where we live. Now we can climb over the emotional blocks we face.

Imagine...

What might it be like to be a parent whose children are of colour. Imagine Mr. and Mrs. Watkins having to explain to their son, Evan, why white kids aren't friendly. Why white kids don't invite him to birthday parties. Or why the history books ignore his heritage. Or why the TV shows he loves never have people of colour in them.

Imagine wondering if the teacher (and her/his preference for white students) is the cause of his poor school grades. Imagine that Mr. and Mrs. Watkins go to the school to raise the issue, only to be patronized by the (white) principal and told, "Don't worry, Evan is doing fine." Imagine your worry, your doubts, your self-doubt, and your simmering anger.

Imagine getting angry, not only for Evan's troubles but also for your own, when you get paid less than you deserve. Imagine having to tell Evan that yes, this discrimination exists but that he has to keep his anger in check. Imagine needing to tell him that he has to continue to work with the teachers, with the history texts, with the neighbours and with employers, even though they might be very wrong. Imagine worrying when he is older, wondering when the police will harass him.

Imagine what the net cost of this racism would be. Your loss of hope. Your concern for the future of your child. How discouraged you might be. How angry you might become. And the stress and anxiety that would build in your body from carrying this around through your lifetime.

A step further - looking inward

Living in a racist society means that we have adopted racist attitudes. No point in denying it, or spending energy minimizing the harms done. Instead, let's understand what form white privilege takes for us, and bring some understanding to our experiences as white people.

1. Do you know what role your family played in exploiting people of colour? How can you find the answers to this question?

2. What did you learn from your family about the differences between whites and people of colour? Was race discussed? Was white privilege ever identified?

3. Could you start a discussion about racism during a family get-together? With your neighbours? What aspect of racism could you discuss with your friends? What has been stopping you?

4. Looking at yourself, what happens to your body when you believe that people of colour are less important than you are? What might you be afraid to admit? How do you undervalue people of colour? Why?

5. How do you hold onto white privilege? How can you start to let go?

6. What can you do to share power with people of colour?

Listening to people of colour - what they want from white people

When we think about taking action, we often want to know if it will be welcomed by people of colour. One educator²¹ asked this very question of people of colour. Here's what they said they wanted from white people:

- Respect us
- Find out about us
- Don't take over
- Provide information
- Resources
- Take risks
- Don't take it personally
- Understanding
- Teach your children about racism
- Speak up
- Don't be scared by my anger
- Listen to us
- Don't make assumptions
- Stand by my side
- Don't assume you know what is best for me
- Money
- Make mistakes
- Honesty
- Talk to other white people
- Don't ask me to speak for my people
- Support
- Your body on the line



What can I do?²²

1. Assume racism is everywhere, everyday. Just as economics influences everything we do, just as our gender and gender politics influences everything we do, assume that racism is affecting whatever is going on. We assume this because it's true and because one of the privileges of being white is not having to see or deal with racism all the time. We have to learn to see the effect that racism has. Notice who speaks, what is said, how things are done and described. Notice who isn't present. Notice code words for race, and the implications of the policies, patterns, and comments that are being expressed. You already notice the skin colour of everyone you interact with – now notice what difference it makes.

2. Notice who is the centre of attention and who is the centre of power. Racism works by directing violence and blame toward people of colour and consolidating power and privilege for white people.

3. Notice how racism is denied, minimized and justified. Notice it in yourself. Notice it in others.

4. Notice how white privilege is normalized. Over time, we have all internalized messages about the superiority of whites. This started historically but continues today. Whites are seen to be better than others, smarter, more deserving, and presumed to work harder, smarter and more efficiently than others.

5. Understand and learn from the history of whiteness and racism. Notice how racism has changed over time and how it has subverted or resisted challenges. Study the tactics that have worked effectively against it.

6. Understand the connections between racism, economic issues, sexism and other forms of injustice.

7. Take a stand against injustice. Take risks. It is scary, difficult, and may bring up feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-confidence, indecision, or fear of making mistakes, but ultimately it is the healthy and right thing to do.

8. Step in purposively. Intervene when you see racism in action. When you step in, you want to do three things:

- Educate them about racism and let them know how the action is harmful. Give people the benefit of the doubt by believing that they want to do the right thing.
- Let them know you won't tolerate this behaviour.
- Support the person of colour.

9. Be strategic. Decide what is important to challenge and what's not. Think about strategy in particular situations. Attack the source of power, not the people who have little power.

10. Don't confuse the battle with the war. Behind particular incidents and interactions are larger patterns. Racism is flexible and adaptable. There will be gains and losses in the struggle for justice and equality.

11. Support the struggles of people of colour. Join organizing efforts of those in your community who are fighting racism

12. Support the leadership of people of colour. Do this consistently, but not uncritically.

13. Learn something about the history of white people who have worked for racial justice. There is a long history of white people who have fought for racial justice. Their stories can inspire and sustain you.

14. Don't do it alone. You will not end racism by yourself. We can do it if we work together. Build support, establish networks, and work with already established groups. Find one person who will support your learning and actions. Have conversations about racism and whiteness. Discuss things that motivate you to take action and those that block your actions.

15. Accept the "onion theory." You will continue to peel away layers of your own racism and white privilege for the rest of your life.

16. Talk with your children and other young people about racism. Racism begins with the young. Break the cycle as soon as you can.

17. Educate others. Let others know about your commitment and why you are taking such actions. You can help others learn about racism.

18. Remember it is in your interests to end racism. Your spirit, your money, your health and your well-being depends on it. It is also the right thing to do.

Anti-Racist Activists and Allies

The path of courage begins long ago...

Harriet Tubman

From her home in St. Catherines, Ontario, Harriet Tubman founded the Underground Railroad. She was responsible for bringing more than 300 escaped slaves from the USA to Canada and personally made 19 trips on the Railroad risking death on many occasions.

Josiah Henson

Josiah Henson was a slave in Maryland, USA, was cheated from buying his freedom by his slave-owner. He escaped with his family and then returned to the USA to help lead hundreds of escaped slaves to Ontario where he created the Dawn Settlement, which later became Dresden.

Harry Gairey

Instigator for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Harry Gairey successfully organized against fear, and fought for better wages, more respect and improved working conditions for porters across the country.

Viola Desmond

Viola Desmond fought racial segregation in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, by refusing to abide by segregation orders in a movie theatre. For choosing to sit in the house seats instead of the balcony, Viola was carried away, jailed overnight and sentenced to 30 days in jail. Viola Desmond's defiance preceded that of Rosa Parks by nine years.

Carrie Best

Carrie Best was the publisher of Canada's first newspaper for people of colour. She took Viola Desmond's story to the public, and then organized and successfully lobbied to end Nova Scotia's segregation laws in 1954.

Jeannette Vivian Corbiere Lavell

Jeanette experienced loss of Indian status following her marriage to a non-native man. She challenged the Indian Act for its discriminatory nature and took the case through lower levels and ultimately to the Supreme Court of Canada. The law was only overturned in 1985 after public embarrassment at the United Nations International Human Rights Commission.



Today, there are white people who add their voices to anti-racism struggles. Here we profile four of them – each of whom can lend us courage when we face the challenges before us. Knowing that there have been white people who have made bold steps in becoming anti-racist allies can help illuminate our own paths to action.

Stephen Lewis

Currently, Stephen Lewis is the UN's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa. Building on his reputation as a fierce advocate for children of colour in the developing world, he has drawn increased political, donor, civil society and media attention to Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis. Following his successful leadership of Ontario's New Democratic Party from 1971 to 1978, Stephen Lewis was asked to investigate the status of racism in Ontario, in the aftermath of Ontario's race riots in 1992. His forceful words set the stage for Premier Bob Rae to introduce Employment Equity legislation:

“First, what we are dealing with, at root, and fundamentally, is anti-black racism. While it is obviously true that every visible minority community experiences the indignities and wounds of systemic discrimination throughout Southern Ontario, it is the black community which is the focus. It is the blacks who are being shot, it is the black youth that is unemployed in excessive numbers, it is black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools, it is black kids who are disproportionately dropping-out, it is housing communities with large concentrations of black residents where the sense of vulnerability and disadvantage is most acute, it is black employees, professional and non-professional, on whom the doors of upward equity slam shut. Just as the soothing balm of ‘multiculturalism’ cannot mask racism, so racism cannot mask its primary target... as one member of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations said: ‘The blacks are out front, and we [other people of colour] are all lined up behind.’”

Michele Landsberg

Her extraordinary column in the Toronto Star continually brought issues of all forms of injustice to us. Using the power of the media, Michele Landsberg wrote to inspire us to action. She won two National Newspaper Awards and was among the top-read columnists. In an article on white privilege, she writes:

“If we... take a close, honest look at our unearned assets, we may... have to give up the self-flattering myth of meritocracy and recognize how many doors silently swing open for us because of our skin colour. We may suddenly understand how much fear, anxiety and painful marginalization we've escaped just by being born white in a white-dominant society. And if we're honest, we'll see that unearned advantage, like hereditary wealth, can also be soul-searching and character-deforming.”

John Cartwright

As President of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, John Cartwright leads the most diverse central labour body in Canada. He has worked hard to promote workers of colour into positions of power within the 190,000 member organization. The Labour Council held its first Workers of Colour/Aboriginal Workers conference in 2003, the first of its kind in Canada. They upheld their commitment with a second such conference in 2004.

Judy Rebick

Judy is best known as the former President of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. For years women of colour had insisted that NAC was failing to represent all women, and was in fact biased towards the needs of white women. They pointed to many forms of racism within the organization. Judy opened the door and listened to these voices. She facilitated working alliances with women of colour. From her perspective, her most important contribution was to step forward and support communities in their struggles against racism. She believes this is the most significant feature of anti-racist solidarity – supporting the struggles of people of colour as they define them.

These anti-racist allies took their lead from people of colour who advised, pushed and prodded them to take action on these issues. Without the leadership of people of colour, action would likely have been resisted for even longer.

Sometimes having role models who have taken action on injustice can inspire us. Be careful though, because sometimes we can get stuck in not taking action. When others seem to be so much more courageous than we are, and seem to take on bigger and more important pieces of the work, we may see ourselves as either insignificant or overwhelmed by larger tasks. So, if it helps to have role models, use them. If you tend to get overwhelmed by them, remember that everyone can make a difference.²³

Furthering our own learning - looking at language

Uncovering our use of the terms black and white can help guide us to the subtle ways we place different values on the races. Here are some suggestions for helping to surface these perspectives:²⁴

1. Look up the meanings for “black” and “white” in a dictionary. Compare the two.

2. Write down different expressions that use the terms white and black, such as “blacklist” and “whitewash.” Consider the meanings of these two sets of expressions.

3. How have you given different meanings to the terms that use white and black?

4. In our history books, we often see expressions such as “slaves were brought to North America” or “the west was conquered” or “the national railroad was built.” Such passive language hides who was responsible for these actions – such as who brought the slaves to North America, who conquered the aboriginals, and who built the railroad. Look through books and magazines for examples of language that hides who was (and perhaps still is) responsible for injustice.

5. Listen to those around you, looking for use of language that hides responsibility for racism. What examples do you find? What can you do to interrupt this hiding? What can you say to those using this language?



Interrupting Racism and White Privilege

Until we gain confidence stepping in and confronting racism and white privilege, it can be helpful to have suggestions on how to confront others through gentle yet serious challenges of racism. It is important to stay compassionate and engaged, rather than feeling superior and self-righteous because “I’m not racist.” Here are some ways to interrupt racism when you hear it spoken:

- “Why did you say that?”
- “Why do you say such stereotyped and negative things about people of colour?”
- “I’ve known you a long time and I know you’re not as mean-spirited as that comment makes you sound.”
- “I love you a lot, but I can’t let these things you do around people of colour go unchallenged.”
- “You may know a great deal about... But when it comes to talking about this issue, you’re wrong, misinformed, inaccurate, not looking at the whole picture, etc.”
- “I’ve been told by people of colour that when you use that word, it is very offensive. Are you trying to hurt people?”²⁵

Often there are unspoken expressions of racism that we see in our daily lives. These might include various ways to avoid close contact with people of colour. These are often actions that expose our fears and our uncertainty about this contact. Remember that these actions are noticed by people of colour – and although seemingly quite minimal actions, they hurt for they accuse the person of colour of being dangerous and threatening to whites. Remember the reality is that whites have been a much more dangerous presence to people of colour.

So, what do you do when you see other white people:

- Change sides of the street?
- Cut in line in front of people of colour?
- Clutch their handbag tightly when in an elevator with people of colour?
- Choose another cashier?
- Expect to get service first, even though they were not first?
- Lock their car doors when in neighbourhoods that are predominantly non-white?
- Ignore service staff such as receptionists, serving staff and cleaning staff?

Here are some suggestions about how you might respond:

- “It looks like you are afraid of him. What makes you afraid?”
- “Do you know that you were acting afraid when you held your bag like you were afraid it was going to get stolen? Are you really afraid or is it just habit?”
- “Let’s do things differently today. Let’s go to the cashier we never use. This is the twenty-first century after all!”
- “Do you know that you say ‘hello’ to all your colleagues but never to the cleaning staff?”
- “I seem to be the only one who remembers the name of our serving staff. How did it happen that they introduced themselves to us, but then became invisible to you?”

Above all, we can set the tone for interrupting racism and white privilege by making sure we reject these beliefs in white superiority. If our behaviour is anti-racist, we can influence those around us, particularly our children and family members, to follow suit.

“It’s only a joke!”

You know the situation... Someone starts a joke and you start to cringe that it is likely to be racist. Or sexist or homophobic. Most of us have tried to say something only to be accused of being “too serious,” “too sensitive” or “too politically correct.”

Interrupting these jokes says you won’t tolerate such behaviour. And it does more than that – it makes it less safe to harass and discriminate, and more safe for people of colour. Doing nothing serves as approval about the abuse. There is no such thing as just being an observer when this happens. Either we interrupt it or we stay silent and effectively approve of such jokes. No one stays on the fence in this situation.

If you leave it to people of colour to speak up, they carry the risk of retaliation. They are often discounted even more than you are. If they do speak up, support them by saying why you think they are doing the right thing in challenging the person who told the joke.

Here are some things to say:

“It may be ‘only’ a joke, but it was at someone’s expense. Poking fun at someone puts them down, and this attitude continues long after the ‘joke’ has ended.”

“I’m sure you didn’t mean any harm. But you should understand that harm results even if you didn’t mean it.”

“I’m not the ‘pc’ police. But I am not willing to put up with jokes that are hurtful – it is an attack and attacks hurt. Let’s get with the program and create fun that isn’t based on putting someone down.

“You say you heard this joke from a member of that group? Even if they make fun of themselves, it’s not okay for us to continue this type of putdown. It means something different and more harmful when we take it on.”

Scenarios

Practice usually helps us prepare to take action. Here are a few scenarios that come from our own life experiences. How can you assess what is going on? What questions would you ask yourself? How might you intervene? Suggested actions are on page 23.

- a. Your five-year old daughter says, “I don’t like people with dark skin.”

- b. You see a customer mistake an Asian store clerk for another who works in a different part of the store. Once this is pointed out, the customer says, “Well it is an easy mistake to make. You know how all Asians look alike.”

- c. Your supervisor won’t hire any workers with thick accents, not wanting to put accented workers into contact with his customers.

- d. You start to notice that almost all of the low paid workers and behind-the-scene support workers are people of colour, such as nannies, dishwashers, gardeners, janitors and salespeople.

- e. You are at a board meeting where a white member complains about the people of colour and says, “When we brought *these people* on board...” A board member who is a person of colour then objects to being called one of “these people” and the white board member replies, “You know I didn’t mean it like that.”

Your actions might not feel like enough. Be assured that they will make a difference. The more we take action, the more it becomes a part of our daily living. As more whites become intolerant of racism, we have the power to change the culture that allows racism to exist.

Changing more than our hearts and minds

Listed below are some anti-racist actions that you can do. Circle those that you can do immediately. Place a checkmark beside those that you aim to do in the next year.

Within your family & neighbourhood

- Scan the toys and books for your children. Make sure they are diverse. Take special care to discuss materials that are racist – explain why you find them racist and involve your child in deciding what to do about it.
- Support and encourage cross-racial friendships for your children (and for yourself). Such relationships have been found to be a key factor in deterring racist attitudes.
- Examine how you spend your money. Do your best to support fair trade and union labour. These alternatives are less likely to exploit workers of colour and more likely to pay them fair wages.
- Volunteer for an organization that reflects your values and does anti-racist work.
- Donate to organizations that are either trying to remedy the harm done through racism or trying to undo racist systems.
- Support those around you who are becoming anti-racist.
- Make a promise to yourself that you will step in when you see racism in action.
- Step in when you see others being racist. This includes putdowns, jokes and white-centric actions (such as assuming everyone is treated fairly by the police). It is most important to model this for your children.
- Take on your Uncle Fred when he says something racist, even if it is “just” an off-colour joke, and even if it is at the holiday table.
- It’s time to make your home multicultural – in your music, TV, art, film and literature consumption.
- If you live in a white neighbourhood, promote multicultural values and work hard to support people of colour who move in. Neighbourhoods stay white because they continue to be non-inclusive of people of colour.
- Never pay anyone less than the minimum wage. No one cleaning our homes, caring for our children or taking away our garbage must earn inadequate wages. Wherever possible, pay enough to live above the poverty line, which is typically accepted to be \$10/hour.

- Take seriously the suggestion that you find a partner in working through white privilege and becoming anti-racist. Having someone to ground you in the struggle will help when the going gets tough.

At work²⁶

- Join the anti-racism or diversity committee. If one doesn’t exist, start one.
- Do a scan of your organization, looking for the following things: an anti-racism policy, a complaints policy, processes that ensure the policies are working well, a workforce that reflects your region’s population (at all levels of the organization), hiring practices that do not limit the hiring of people of colour, programs and services that are accessible to all that the organization intends to serve, satisfied staff with low turnover, and an organizational climate that is frank, clear, supportive, open and cooperative. If this is not how your organization operates, it may be time to initiate an anti-racism organizational review. Books such as Barb Thomas’ *Multiculturalism at Work: A guide to organizational change* can help you in this process.
- Make noise in your organization when you see racism in action. First, confront it yourself. Second, take the issue up the ladder. Third, take the issue to the top management. Organizations place themselves at risk if they create a poisoned work environment and fail to take action.



Changing racist systems

- Plug in. Join an email network that will bring issues of injustice into your awareness. One good example is the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group that is housed at the Canadian Council of International Cooperation. Join by emailing rocht@iclmg.ca. E-left, run by the Metro Network for Social Justice can be joined by emailing e-left@mnsj.org. Another is Colours of Resistance that covers anti-racism work in both Canada and the USA. Join through their website at <http://lists.mutualaid.org/mailman/listinfo/colours>. Another suggestion is to join the Social Justice News monthly email letter about an array of social justice events. It is operated by the Centre for Social Justice. Sign up by emailing justice@socialjustice.org.
- Start small. If joining in large actions is too tough, chose instead to wear a button and take your messages everywhere you go. Notice when you feel comfortable leaving it on and when you want to take it off. Stretch yourself and leave it on in difficult situations.
- Complain to the person in charge when you see racism in action.
- Put your money behind your beliefs – stop spending money in stores or on products that contribute to racism. Let the stores know about your decisions. Let your friends know about your practices.
- Bring a friend to a public forum or a demonstration.
- Go talk to your politicians, either in person or on the phone. Let them know you expect them to get serious about working to end racism.
- Join an anti-racist organization or coalition that is working to undo racism at its roots. If you can, donate to organizations doing anti-racism work.
- Chose an issue and get involved. It is easier to join a group already in existence than trying to start your own. If you don't like the group, chose another one. Don't give up – often action groups are not so friendly to new people. That doesn't mean they don't want you – it's usually because they are too tied up in their work to pay attention to hospitality. Bring a friend with you.



Final thoughts

The journey to end racism is a powerful one. It offers us the hope for healing the world. This booklet has helped initiate your journey. If you've gotten this far, you have a strong foundation. You've been through a hard self-examination, and uncovered work that still remains to be done. You've built some commitments and made some plans, equipped with some tools and suggestions for how to be an ally in the struggle to end racism. And you've mapped out a plan for action, taking you further along the path to living your anti-racist commitments.

We applaud your courage to move through this booklet. We know it is risky to open yourself to such disruptive new information. It can bring on self-doubt and guilt. If these feelings are evoked, take a deep breath and move on. Many of us experience guilt – but it doesn't have to derail our progress. The path may be difficult. Facing the blocks and resistance within us takes great energy and commitment. If there were an easier path, we'd share it with you! But there isn't.

We hope that your journey has achievements, and that it is seldom derailed. We hope you find it within yourself to get back on the journey if you happen to be sidelined. The journey can be an emotional roller coaster. We can assure you that there are benefits to be reaped. Our ability to stand in solidarity with people of colour and resist racism is a critical contribution to bettering the world. As we build our ability to take action on ending racism, we will surely advance our ability to take action on other forms of injustice..

We close with words of encouragement from a writer who has traveled this path.

Once on the road to liberation, we see that the journey stretches out far ahead. Because we live in a racist society, we are seduced into looking the other way, losing our attention and slipping back into business as usual. But there is no such thing as a passive anti-racist. Business as usual, or quietly complying with the status quo, means colluding with a racist society. I was told once that the single most important thing I could do was to help whites understand that the key to dismantling racism is to 'keep paying attention.' It is so tempting for white people to pay attention for a while, to attend a workshop, and to think, 'working on dismantling racism? I *did* that.' We must remember our charge: to keep paying attention, and then say instead: "Work on dismantling racism? I *do* that."²⁷

Together we are making a difference. We are expanding the circle of people who are committed to ending racism.

Answers – Page 6

1. 28%
2. 100% (twice as frequently – at a rate of 35.6% compared with 17.6% for whites.)
3. 45%
4. 100% (twice as frequently)
5. 3 times
6. 6 times
7. 50%
8. 3 job offers
9. 5% (or less) of these jobs
10. 4%

Scenario Suggestions – Page 19

- a. School age children and even pre-school children begin to learn racist attitudes as they observe the practices of others. It is important to discuss this with her. Do it when you have time and energy to be clear and direct, and responsive to her. One suggestion is to say, “Good for you for recognizing that people have different skin colours. We have coloured skin too. I think yours is an orange peach colour. What made you decide you didn’t like people with dark skin?” Then will come an important conversation where you can help her unlearn the bias that she is starting to develop. If she places responsibility with a teacher, it will be important to follow up and let the teacher (and perhaps principal) know you expect her to remedy the situation. It is also time to examine your own biases around race and make sure you are modeling inclusion and anti-racist behaviours.
- b. It is important to step in and let the customer know that you do not agree that they look alike. It is much more significant for you to do this than the clerk, whose supervisor might even reprimand her for confronting the customer. When the customer leaves, it is important to be sympathetic to the clerk and affirm that her treatment was inappropriate. If she is upset, confirm that such reaction is appropriate. Average white people need to stand up when they see racism in operation. This can change the culture of our communities. You might decide to name this as racism but it may increase the defensiveness of the customer and make it impossible for her to hear you.
- c. You might chose to quit but this won’t change the discrimination going on. Taking action is important. There are two options – talking to your manager or taking the issue to a legal clinic, which might suggest making a human rights complaint. Not only are his actions denying people employment, they are creating a racist environment for you to work in.
- d. This is modern racism, where few notice how the lives of white people are supported by people of colour employed in low pay service work, helping our lives remain easier and cheaper. Time to speak out when you see it. Bring it to the attention of others – in circles of friends and elsewhere in your daily life. Let employers know that you, as a customer, want to see everyone paid decently, or you will take your business elsewhere.
- e. Time to talk with the white board member. Do it privately so as to minimize their defensiveness and embarrassment. You may also want to let the board chair know that you are going to take this action. Underlying is likely an issue of power and the white fear of control being lost when people of colour join the table. Take time to reframe the issue as one of power sharing, since sharing power will strengthen the organization.

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