

## An Anti-Racist Guidebook

# What More Can I Do?

*Written by Social Justice Sewing Academy Volunteers*

*Curated by: Lauren Black, Executive Director*



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## Foreword

I met Sara Trail, the founder of the Social Justice Sewing Academy (SJSA) in 2012 and have remained a close confidante of hers ever since. In the early days of SJSA, I supported Sara in bringing her brain child to life through writing grants, developing foundational language for the organization, and assisting in navigating the logistics of programming. I took a break for the last three years to focus on my career and complete graduate school, but I returned to SJSA in March of 2020, right as the pandemic was beginning to shut down the country. In that time, I have assumed much of the “behind the scenes” work for the organization and as of December 2020, was appointed Executive Director of SJSA. While 2020 helped to transform my role within the organization, on a much larger and much more significant scale, the year transformed our understanding of humanity.

In 2020, the United States was grappling with the unprecedented and severe effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Simultaneously, in what many considered to be a “dual pandemic”, social media helped to raise awareness of the lives lost due to and highlight the impact of systemic racism. For many, it was the first time they began to truly learn, understand, and take a critical eye to the injustices facing Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and more specifically Black Americans. The civil rights movement that took shape during the summer of 2020 caused individuals to take a step back and ask themselves:

*Do I engage in behaviors that are racist and harmful to BIPOC?*

*Where can I learn more about anti-racism?*

*What steps can I take to become anti-racist?*

*What more can I do to demonstrate my solidarity to BIPOC and their efforts towards racial equity?*

**The Anti-Racist Guidebook was created by the SJSA community, for the SJSA community.**

Questions such as these lead to an increase in exposure for SJSA. The organization was largely focused on developing youth activists through hands-on workshops prior to 2020. SJSA aimed to facilitate intergenerational dialogue between youth and the embroidery and long-arm volunteers who would transform the quilt blocks into community quilts providing a platform for youth concerns while encouraging volunteers in support of the fight against these issues. As youth blocks appeared in social media in 2020, many individuals within the sewing and crafting community turned to SJSA seeking to challenge their own beliefs, solidify their position as an ally, or to begin the journey towards deeper awareness. At SJSA, we found ourselves wondering what more we could offer to our growing base of volunteers. Thus, the idea for the Anti-Racist Guidebook was born.

We discussed that this guidebook should be more than links to online resources or activities. Volunteers should be afforded a more active role in their learning and engagement with these issues. Though many engage through sewing, we wanted to push volunteers to take it a step further. In this guidebook, each chapter is written by an SJSA volunteer. The chapters indicate their own personal journey either with social justice generally or with a specific issue. The volunteers provided research on the topics that is meant to serve as a starting point for readers. Each chapter culminates with a reflective activity encouraging readers to engage with the topic. The Anti-Racist Guidebook was created by the SJSA community, for the SJSA community.

We hope that you find the information in the following pages informative and that it encourages you to confront your own biases, reflect on your current practices, and inspires you to participate in anti-racist work on an ongoing basis.

**Lauren Black**

*Executive Director, SJSA*

**We are truly living in unprecedented times. Yet, so many of the ways that members of our neighborhoods, towns and communities are suffering can be prevented.**

## Introduction

Hello and welcome to the *Anti-Racist Guidebook* for SJSA embroidery volunteers and friends. Thank you for taking the time to engage with this guide.

I began writing the guide's introduction during the 4th month of shelter in place guidelines issued by my city due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I'm writing now in month nine. We are truly living in unprecedented times. Yet, so many of the ways that members of our neighborhoods, towns, and communities are suffering can be prevented. Just like my wearing a mask protects you and your wearing a mask protects me, my individual beliefs and actions as a white woman affect the people of color around me. The poet Claudia Rankine writes, "*because white men can't police their imagination black women and men are dying.*"

Anti-black racism and racial violence are not problems that can be individualized. As you will see in the reflections and activities that follow, the structure of our entire society depends on inequality measured out by race, that is further meted out by all the ways that race overlaps with gender, sexuality, citizenship status, ability, wealth, language, and more. If this is your first time considering inequality in the U.S. and in your life, welcome and thanks for coming! If you have some experience doing this hard work, we hope that you will continue and will bring others along.

George Floyd<sup>1</sup> once told a friend, "I want to touch the world." It's a tragedy that Floyd touched the world through his death. We honor him and others whose lives have been stolen by racial violence. We hope that this guidebook helps to continue the work of creating a world where Black Lives *truly* Matter. In contributing to this guidebook the authors have been motivated by a hope that you will be inspired to challenge yourself, your family, friends, and larger community in ways that create a loving reflection that touches the world and makes it better.

### How To Use This Guidebook

Early in 2017, with President Trump's inauguration, resistance became the rallying cry for many and craft was celebrated as a way to express that resistance. Around that time I published a chapter about the Social Justice Sewing Academy titled, "Craft as a Pedagogy of Hope" (in a book entitled, *Crafting Dissent*) that sought to highlight how craft can help us to dream freedom and cultivate hope. Our path toward justice requires not only reactions to racist, xenophobic, and sexist policies. We must also work toward building the egalitarian, equitable world of our dreams. Craft must be central to that process as a practice of the imagination made material.

In the chapter I asked, what are the possibilities of craft as a means to cultivate critical hope, rather than simply express resistance? You'll find in the activities in this guidebook, and in the work of SJSA as a whole a means to do just that.

As a SJSA embroidery volunteer you may find or have found yourself reflecting on your involvement with the issues raised by the quilt block on which you are working. This guidebook was conceived of by Lauren Black and Sara Trail as a way to offer embroidery volunteers an opportunity to dig deeper, to learn more, and to expand their commitment to social justice work. Each chapter represents a topic selected by the author who highlights their personal connection to the issue. Among them, the dual identities of immigrants, implicit bias and cognitive dissonance, and the racial labor history of cotton. The chapters are theoretical and practical, personal, and relatable. They are meant to involve, invite and implicate you. For that reason, authors have also included a reflective activity for readers. As a SJSA embroidery volunteer, you are already so much more than a passive reader. These exercises invite you to be an even more active participant.

**Suzanne Schmidt**  
*SJSA Education Director*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/10/podcasts/the-daily/george-floyd-protests-funeral.html>

# Code-meshing Instead of Code-switching

By Jessi Johnson

**Code-switching is a form of diversity. But “code-meshing” is anti-racism.**

As a woman of color, I code switch—all day, every day. That means I change my code—way of speaking or presenting myself—depending on who’s around me. With family I present one way, around friends another, with coworkers, something different. It gets to the point that I sometimes forget which codes are the “real” Jessi and which are the performance for whomever I’m with. But I accepted that as part of life. I’ve even been told, “Sometimes you sound white, but sometimes you sound Black”—that’s a super problematic thing to say, but I understand that it was a comment on my code-switching.

When I became a university instructor, I saw that my students were code-switching constantly, too. How they were with me and how they were with their friends required completely different sets of codes. But more concerning was realizing that the code-switching was keeping them from expressing their authentic selves. They thought they had to “talk smart/academic” to get a good grade—which taught them that the way they authentically spoke must be “dumb”, so they had to switch to “smart”. Some students, usually from more privileged backgrounds, made the switch to academic-talk easily because they had been raised to understand it. Others struggled to switch, and it reflected in their work. And I, the teacher, literally assigned value to their ability to switch to “smart” codes: if they sounded like standardized academia, they got an A. If they struggled or didn’t stifle their authentic voice enough, they failed. It implied I didn’t value their other voices—just the ones that fit the standards of academia.

But eventually, it made me question: Who set that standard? Why is that the only valued standard? Why do we punish students who don’t meet that standard? Why do we say their other codes aren’t as valuable? Who taught us that? Why do we still listen?

We say we’re teaching our students to survive in the real world, but who in the real world talks like a white male scholar from the 1700s? Because that is who set the standard. And that’s the standard we use to reward or punish codes.

Something had to change. My students thought they were dumb or less worthy if they didn’t match that standard, which is based in whiteness and racism. Code-switching, it became clear, was a reaction to that racism rather than a solution. So how could my students value and trust their authentic voices within institutions that told them, “Code switch or fail”? What was an anti-racist way to present codes? Enter Code-meshing.

## Understanding Code-Switching

You might be familiar with the term “code switching”—even if you’re not, most people do it every day! (Statistically, BIPOC<sup>2</sup> and LGBTQ<sup>3</sup> peoples do it the most, though.)

Some examples of codes are:

Your vocabulary

Your tone of voice

The way you dress

Your gestures or mannerisms

Now think about this: Do you speak differently around different people? Does your code change based on whom you’re talking to?

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<sup>2</sup> Dunn, A. (2019, September 24 ). Younger, college-educated Black Americans are most likely to feel the need to code-switch. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/24/younger-college-educated-black-americans-are-most-likely-to-feel-need-to-code-switch/>

<sup>3</sup> Holden, M. (2019, August 12). The Exhausting Work of LGBTQ Code-Switching . Vice. [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/evj47w/the-exhausting-work-of-lgbtq-code-switching](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/evj47w/the-exhausting-work-of-lgbtq-code-switching)

**Whom you're talking to, or who's around you, will make you change, even unconsciously. Often, the change is for the benefit of the people around you.**

### **Imagine:**

You're talking to your boss. What kind of vocabulary do you use? How are you dressed? Maybe you have to give a big presentation in front of potential clients. Now how are you talking?

You're having fun with your best friend. Now what's your vocabulary like? What about your gestures or tone of voice? (Maybe your boss is your best friend...even then, your codes might change depending on the situation.)

Many multilingual people switch back and forth between languages—maybe they speak one language with their parents but another language at school.

Even if you don't speak multiple languages, you probably still code-switch just by changing your pattern of speech or behavior or outfits based on the people around you.

Many Black and Latinx folks code-switch all the time. And so do a lot of LGBTQ+ people. In fact, these groups are specifically taught to code switch. It's a very conscious decision.

And for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ people, code-switching can actually be a matter of survival.

### **Imagine:**

You're a Black American woman who has just been pulled over by a white male police officer. How would you speak to the officer in this situation? How would you move? What would you do with your hands? Why?

You're a Queer person, but your parents are uncomfortable with this part of your identity. They tell you "not to act gay" in front of your family. How might that change your behavior? Why?

Code-switching can be trivial, necessary, unconscious—but sometimes it's the only way to be safe or accepted. Some codes are more valued than others. Some ways of speaking are "good" and some ways are "bad"; some are "appropriate" and some are "unprofessional".

### **Imagine:**

How would you describe a "professional" way of speaking? What about "unprofessional"?

What's a "professional" way to look or dress? What about "unprofessional"?

What kind of people do you see when you imagine a "professional" person? How do they sound? What are they wearing? What is their hair like?

Code-switching has its place. It's a survival mechanism. It can protect you. It can make you blend in. It can make feel accepted, understood, or valuable. It's diversity!

### **Here's the problem with code-switching:**

Code-switching teaches people that there are good and bad ways to talk. That creates hierarchies. There's "correct grammar" and then there's "broken English"—the good and the bad. When you switch, you're reinforcing which is the *good one* and which is the *bad one*. If you talk like this, then you sound smart. But when you talk like that, you sound dumb.

A lot of the time, the punished codes—the "bad" or "unprofessional"—are associated with Black, Latinx, and Indigenous peoples. The rewarded codes—"professional" or "correct"—are associated with whiteness. That is white supremacy in action.

Don't get me wrong: Code-switching is helpful in certain situations! You might need to completely switch to another code to get through something! The problem is believing that some codes are better than others. The problem is valuing and rewarding some codes more than others. You switch between correct and incorrect because you believe there is correct and incorrect; and that "incorrect" should be punished.

**The other problem is that we are taught to associate some codes with specific people groups.**

**Code-Meshing is using your authentic identities and languages to express yourself in speaking, writing, or presenting.**

## Here's Something New to Try: Code-meshing

“To mesh” means to connect or weave together. To “code-mesh” is to weave together your codes instead of switching completely<sup>4</sup>.

Take your codes—vocabulary, tone, behavior, dress, etc.—mix and match them depending on the occasion. Maybe use all your languages in one conversation or stay in your most natural tone of voice instead of changing it for the audience.

Meshing your codes teaches you to equally value them. It's not that one code is “smart” and the other is “dumb”—they're all equal. One code isn't more correct than another. Weave them together because they have equal value and purpose.

This is anti-racism. It's deeper than “being yourself”—it's celebrating yourself.

### Imagine:

You speak Mandarin and English. You're writing an essay in English...and there's an idiom in Mandarin that would explain your feelings perfectly. But you can't put a Mandarin phrase in an English essay; you have to code switch...right? Why?

You have naturally curly hair and you love it. Sometimes you braid it, sometimes you tease the curls to make them fuller. Then you get a corporate job in a very professional setting. You really want to do well. You straighten your hair and wear it in a bun. You have to code switch. That's more professional, right? Why?

When you mesh, you can:

Speak to a wider variety of audiences

Bring in multiple perspectives, backgrounds, cultures, etc.

Teach audiences things they wouldn't have known if you used only one code

Create a broader view of language or behavior

Show mastery of multiple languages or presentations

Use your identity as a tool to deepen meaning or heighten understanding

Nurture your authenticity

Bring together different parts of you instead of switching between the “good” and “bad” parts.

### Imagine:

You're in college and the teacher tells you to write an analytical paper. And you're allowed to write the way you speak. You won't be graded on grammar—just on analysis. If you write the way you speak, without worrying about consequences, would you be more comfortable? Could you express yourself more easily? Which languages, grammar, vocabulary would you bring in?

The paper you're writing is about Mexican Americans who speak “Mixtec”, an Indigenous language from Oaxaca, Mexico. Would it make sense to use some Mixtec in the paper, even though it's not “academic English”?

You are actually Mexican American. You grew up speaking Mixtec at home. You decide to bring in a personal story about growing up in Oaxacan culture. You write casually when you talk about your family and more formally when you're analyzing. You use some Mixtec phrases alongside the English. You even throw in some family photos.

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<sup>4</sup>Young, V. A., Barret, B., Young-Rivera, Y., & Lovejoy, K.B. (2014). *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy*. Teacher's College Press.



Now, the paper is a mix of English, Mixtec, analysis, pictures, and a personal story—a mesh of codes. How might that impact the reader? How did meshing this way deepen the paper topic? How might using multiple authentic codes make you feel? (Maybe insert your own codes into the story!)

Next, the professor asks you to give a formal presentation about your paper topic in front of the class. On the day of your presentation, you wear traditional Oaxacan attire while giving your speech about Mixtec. How did bringing in that code (way of dressing) add to the paper topic? How might it impact the audience, who are learning about Mexican Americans and Mixtec from you?

### **Now Imagine:**

You have to write an analytical paper but you have to write it in standard western English (SWE): formal, academic, and professional. After all, a college is a scholarly setting, right? So you have to write like a scholar. You can't write using Mixtec, except as an example or two, even though that's the paper topic. You have to code-switch completely to academic SWE. Why would using SWE in this context get a good grade but using Mixtec get a bad grade?

On the day of your presentation, you wear a business suit. You want to get a good grade. Did using Mixtec or wearing Oaxacan attire change the understanding of the paper topic? What about not utilizing those things?

### **Ask Yourself:**

Who decided which codes were the “standard” and why?

When has code-switching been good for you? When has it been problematic?

Would you try code-meshing? Would you be worried or excited?

If you code-mesh instead of code-switch, what could be the benefits?

What makes code-meshing a tool for anti-racism?

# Better Together: Transforming Ourselves to Confront Racial Inequity

By Jill Slipper Scholtz

**Being “colorblind” had prevented me from seeing the full identities of people of color.**

I am a 55 year old, white Christian female who grew up in the midwest in predominantly white environments. I remember being taught that being “colorblind” was proper in elementary school. I went to law school in the late 80’s and was a lover of our “founding father” Thomas Jefferson, author of the *Declaration of Independence*.

Well into my 30’s I was elected to my local school board and began learning about racial disparities. After months of disaggregating data, attending workshops on racial equity and listening to the experiences of students of color my eyes began to open. I realized that my education had been whitewashed.

For example, Thomas Jefferson was not someone who actually lived up to my idyllic image (Wiencek, 2012). Also, being “colorblind” had prevented me from seeing the full identities of people of color. In my practice of law, I had been confronted with race and racism, but was ill equipped to deal with it in a helpful way. As someone who always loved learning, I felt like the foundation was slipping underneath me. This realization was a slow process over several years of discovery; much of which I sought out by reading about race, attending workshops and listening to colleagues of color speak about their experiences. I questioned everything. What else did I not know? What has been hidden from me? How can I be a smart professional if I don’t know what I don’t know! I was very angry.

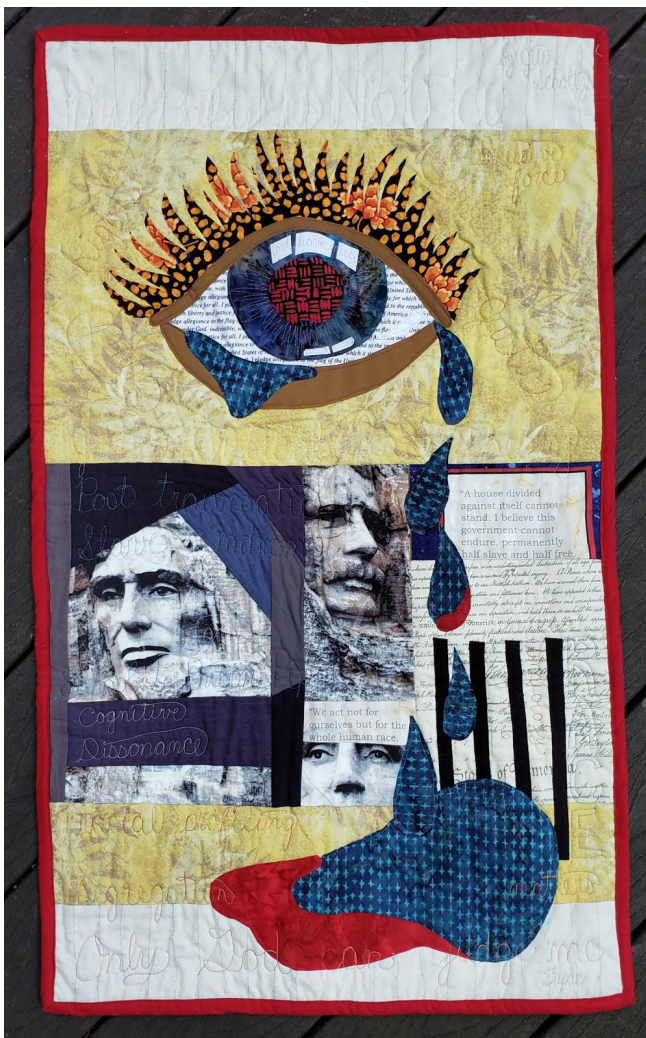
I am also a quilter. I have sewn all my life. My grandmother taught me how to sew beginning when I was just old enough to hold a needle and thread. Something prompted me to make a quilt. A catharsis happened as I dug into my collection of patriotic fabric. My mind raced as I sewed. I quilted and I cried. The quilt I created is shown here and it is the first of many.

I felt guilty and sad, lost and inadequate. I didn’t know what to do with myself. And then I went to a workshop on student achievement. During a small group conversation, we discussed racial disparities in student achievement, and I mentioned my recent educational crisis and how guilty I felt about what I didn’t know.

A young Black educator was sitting next to me. He handed me a 3 x 5 card with a simple algebraic equation on it and asked if I could solve it. I said “yes.” Then he asked if I could have solved it when I was in 6th grade. I said “no.” His reply was, “Do you feel guilty about that?”

Since then, the following quote has continued to resonate with me. Maya Angelou says: *I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better.*<sup>1</sup>

White guilt has no place in racial equity work. Neither does perfection. It’s been almost 20 years since my “crisis”, and I have made mistakes. But my life has never felt more full and human. Racial equity work is necessary work for all of us. Racism and white supremacy is not healthy for our souls. That may seem like an obvious statement, but there was a time when I did not understand my role in perpetuating white supremacy. I did not understand that there are systems and structures set up to perpetuate racial inequities (structural and systemic racism)<sup>2</sup>.



<sup>1</sup><http://www.oprah.com/oprahs-lifeclass/the-powerful-lesson-maya-angelou-taught-oprah-video>



As I chose to confront my own blindness around race, I made a surprising discovery. I realized that turning a blind eye to all of the trauma experienced by people of color was silently limiting my humanity. That is not how I want to live.

## Theoretical Context

In my experience with law, dispute resolution and mediation, I have learned a lot about how the brain functions in conflict. Many of those learnings also apply to how the brain responds when confronted with matters of race. Understanding our own racial identity, along with our natural tendencies for brain function has given me much insight.

The tendency to categorize people and experiences with a broad brush is a social cognition that helps our brains log information<sup>3</sup>. We look for things that are familiar, and that are comfortable to us. If we grew up in an all white environment, then we tend to interpret things familiar to whiteness as “normal”. What we know is relative to our perspective. For example, a fish doesn’t recognize the water that surrounds it. As a white person living in a society created and dominated by white supremacy culture, I didn’t see the ‘water’ I was swimming in. Once I realized it, my perspective changed dramatically. And when my perspective changed, so did my knowledge and understanding.

## Implicit Bias

One example of a social cognition that limits our perspective is known as *implicit bias*; a collection of associations that are held deep in our unconscious<sup>4</sup>. As Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald explain in their book *Blindspot: The Hidden Biases of Good People* (2016) we all carry implicit biases that may not be consistent with reality, or our conscious belief system. Thus, we are often “blind” to the associations that guide our words and actions. There exists a wealth of research on how our brains make judgments and sort information based on prejudice, stereotyping, implicit bias, assimilation/contrast, and in-group favoritism<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, our judgment is limited and not always inclusive of all perspectives; particularly those of cultures or races that we have little experience with.

If we do not have personal experiences with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), we may fill in information with negative (and inaccurate) stereotypes we have learned over time. The result is that false conclusions are drawn without evidence. The false conclusions are frequently hidden from our consciousness and separate from our intent. You can examine your own implicit bias by completing one or more of the simple tests found here:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/user/agg/blindspot/indexrk.htm>

Simply being aware of our own implicit bias is not enough. Increasing experiences with people who are different than ourselves builds awareness of how we may carry false assumptions. It is also helpful to confront the tendency to make false assumptions by checking our first thought by using data and logic to question our immediate reactions.

If we see a Black man is struggling with police, our first thought might be that he did something wrong. But as we learn about the number of times Black men have been confronted by police without any criminal activity, we can check that assumption and hold open our understanding for other possibilities. If we have experiences with Black men in our lives, we will have personal information to create a fuller picture of what a Black man is apart from stereotypes.

We may also know their stories of being stopped for “driving while Black” or unfairly questioned while shopping in a store. That information confronts implicit bias and creates more accurate assumptions based on the reality of experiences had by Black men. This is one way that we can move to a more racially conscious perspective.

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<sup>2</sup>Osta & Vasquez, 2019, <sup>3</sup>Allport, 1979,<sup>4</sup>Understanding Implicit Bias, n.d., <sup>5</sup>Plous, 2003, <sup>6</sup>Garcia, 2020,

**Changing laws and policies is simply not enough. We need to transform ourselves.**

**Implicit bias: a collection of associations that are held deep in our unconscious.<sup>4</sup>**

**Cognitive dissonance is another brain function that sheds light on how we respond to matters of race.**

## Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance is the discomfort that we feel when our brains are holding two competing concepts at once. To relieve the discomfort, our brain will rationalize an excuse for the inconsistency. For example, a woman clutches her purse and crosses the street as she sees a group of young black men walking in front of her. Then she notices that they all have backpacks and are talking about school. The discomfort that arises in realizing that she may have acted fearfully in response to their race is cognitive dissonance.

At that moment she may tell herself that she is not racist and she needed to cross the street eventually to get to where she was going. You can watch a brief description of the concept here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Y17YaZRRvY>

One thing that is very important in understanding cognitive dissonance is how it relates to one's identity. For example, if a person identifies as a healthy person, yet they are a smoker, they may rationalize the inconsistency in their behavior by saying things like "well, I don't smoke very often." Similarly, a person who believes they are not racist, may rationalize an incident of racist behavior by finding another excuse for it such as: "I was just joking," "I'm not racist, I have a Black friend!")

Dr. Amanda Kemp is a racial justice author and healer who speaks to the importance of building resiliency for effective dialogues about race. Building resilience to face our own faults means sitting with the discomfort of cognitive dissonance and listening and reflecting deeply on what is challenging us. Listening from the heart by being quiet and pausing without interjecting is a way to decenter ourselves and become more connected and authentic in our relationships. Robin DeAngelo calls the inability of white people to do this "white fragility". Therapist Resmaa Menakim says we have to practice feeling the discomfort before we can transform and grow.

**Once our eyes are open to racial injustice, we cannot unsee what we have seen. We cannot simply walk away.**

Listening and sitting with discomfort sound difficult, and they are. As white people our privilege allows us to turn away and go on with our lives. Turning away means nothing changes. Immersing myself in the work of racial identity awareness and learning about the history of racial inequity in this country has given me a perspective upon which to understand and connect with others who are different from myself. It's been a journey of almost 20 years. Now I feel more grounded in love and compassion. I have learned and received grace in levels that I had not imagined. My relationships are deeper and more meaningful, and I feel more authentically human.

**Allowing myself to let go of rules or assumptions in one area of my life helps me be open to new understandings or viewpoints that I never would have experienced otherwise.**

## Self Reflection Activity

I find improvisational piecing to be an invigorating experience when quilting. For me, it's like letting go of implicit bias and opening my perspective to other racial experiences. I think that one exercise is good for the other because it is all good for expanding our brain. Try this improv experiment with pairing colors in making a quilt.

- › Take an assortment of scrap solids or prints and cut them into 2.5" x 4.5" strips. Choose random strips that you would otherwise not put together and lay them next to each other.

Do they compliment each other?

Does one make the other stand out?

Do they merge into an interesting blend? Try to suspend judgment that is limited by what your preferences have been in the past.

Sew together sets of 2 strips to make 4.5" blocks. Place your blocks up on a design wall and stand back or place it on the floor at the bottom of a stairway and look at it from the top of the stairs. The idea is to gain a wider perspective and take in new combinations and see how they interrelate. So often we are stuck in assumptions about what fabrics should go together.

Find new combinations of color, scale and rhythm by pushing your comfort zone. Once you have a number of blocks placed, sew them together, quilt, and bind. Consider what you have learned from making this sampler and dare to use new combinations in future projects!

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# Racial Segregation and Wealth Inequality

By Shani Evans

You've probably noticed that neighborhoods don't all look the same. Some neighborhoods seem "nice" or "fancy" while others appear "bad" or "ghetto." Often, it is white people who live in the "nicest" neighborhoods. Sometimes, people assume that "nice" neighborhoods exist because "nice" and responsible people live there. And "bad" neighborhoods exist because some people are irresponsible and do not care enough to take care of their homes and neighborhoods. These are false and harmful myths!

Racism has had a great impact on the conditions of neighborhoods today. When I was young, I knew nothing about the connection between racism, housing, and neighborhoods. It is a topic we never talked about in school. I thought that people just lived in the places where they could afford. While this is not entirely false, it is only part of the story.

I have always been interested in understanding inequality. I knew that some people had a lot of money and resources—more than they needed—while other people struggled to meet their basic needs. Eventually, I went to graduate school and became a sociology professor who studies inequality. My work as a teacher and researcher is motivated by my commitment to disrupting systems of social domination and oppression. By teaching my students about the processes that reproduce inequality and injustice, I aim to foster and facilitate social change.

In this chapter, I will introduce several interrelated topics about housing, neighborhoods, and inequality. I will conclude by giving you some ideas about how you might dig deeper into these national histories and learn how they might connect to your own story.

## Segregation

Some people think that neighborhoods are segregated because people just want to live with people who are like them (sociologists call this *homophily*). However, residential segregation is the result of a long history of racist policy and practice.

In the 1950s many Americans decided to leave the city and move to the suburbs. Suburban residences were newer and had more space than urban properties. For young adults, many of whom had returned to the US after World War II, the suburbs looked like a very pleasant place to raise a family. Federal legislation called the GI Bill provided veterans with mortgages to buy new homes and pay for them over a thirty year period. However, states decided how to implement the bill and many made it nearly impossible for Black veterans to access GI Bill benefits. In addition, many suburban communities across the country—not just the South—had a whites-only policy. Black families who tried to buy suburban homes were turned away and told that they could not live in the newly built communities.

White homeowners and realtors also contributed to the exclusion of Black families from white neighborhoods. Many neighborhoods used restrictive covenants to keep their neighborhood segregated. In some white neighborhoods, residents would work together to intimidate and threaten Black and other non-white families who tried to move in.

Realtors also contributed to racial segregation by refusing to show homes in white neighborhoods to Black families. Realtors also assumed that no white family would want to live in a neighborhood with a large Black population. In many states, local real estate associations required that realtors promise to not make home sales that would contribute to the integration of white neighborhoods.

**Residential neighborhoods in the United States are highly segregated by race.**

**Restricted covenants were legally binding agreements in property deeds that stated that homeowners in a particular neighborhood would only sell their house to other whites.**

**Redlining is the illegal practice of refusing to provide financial services to consumers based on the area where they live.**

## Redlining

Without access to the new homes that were being built in the suburbs in 1950s and 1960s, many Black families, particularly those in the city had to remain in overcrowded neighborhoods where housing was scarce. Moreover, through a process called *redlining*, the federal government promoted white homeownership and deterred Black homeownership.

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) promoted homeownership in the United States by insuring mortgages. If a home buyer was unable to pay their monthly bill, the federal government would pay lenders part of what they were owed. With this protection, lenders were willing to provide more mortgage loans to more people.

However, Black families were largely excluded from FHA backed loans because the FHA determined that insured mortgages should not be provided to people who live in majority Black neighborhoods. The FHA claimed that houses in majority Black, or increasingly Black, neighborhoods were likely to decrease in value and were therefore not a good investment. As a result of FHA policies, many Black families were unable to buy homes in the suburbs or the cities.

## Problems Continue

Today, it is illegal to intentionally discriminate based on race, yet housing discrimination persists. Real estate agents continue to direct Black families to black neighborhoods and white families to white neighborhoods through a process called *steering*. This problem seems to be slowly getting better, but it has not gone away.

In addition, many banks discriminate against Black home buyers by offering loans with less favorable conditions compared to whites. As a result, white home buyers tend to pay lower interest rates and lower fees compared to similar Black home buyers. This is part of the reason that the 2008 recession had such a negative impact on Black families.

Banks have also withheld home improvement loans from majority Black communities. As a result, Black families may struggle to pay for expensive home improvement projects, such as a new roof or fresh coat of paint.

## How Does Segregation Harm Black people?

Segregation is harmful because it separates Black people from many of the resources that are available in white neighborhoods, including better funded schools, more grocery stores, parks, and other amenities. Also, because Black families have often had to live in older neighborhoods, have had limited access to loans, and are seen by many whites as undesirable neighbors, homes in Black neighborhoods are much less valuable than houses in white neighborhoods. Therefore, white families can use the value of their house to accumulate financial wealth in ways that are largely unavailable to Black families in majority Black neighborhoods.

## Wealth

Wealth refers to the resources that we own that are worth money, including savings, investments, properties. Wealth is important because it protects people from unexpected financial hardships. If someone with wealth is laid off or gets an unexpected bill, they can likely still pay their rent and take care of their basic needs while looking for a job. On the other hand, when someone without wealth is laid off they might quickly lose their home and struggle to feed themselves.

With wealth, people can pass on advantages to their children and grandchildren. Parents with wealth can pay for extra opportunities for their children like academic tutoring, summer camp, or college. Families with wealth are more able to take vacations, pay for health-related expenses, deal with an unexpected car repair, and invest for retirement. Older parents with wealth can help their adult children buy a house, pay for expensive private school (for their grandchildren), or survive a lay-off.

**Wealth is different from income, which is the money you earn (and may spend) each month.**



**The average white person has ten times the wealth of the average Black person.**

**Eminent Domain is the right of a government or its agent to expropriate private property for public use, with payment of compensation.**

Although more Black people are earning middle class incomes, wealth disparities between whites and Blacks are about the same as they were in 1968. One major reason that this is true is that the segregation and discrimination of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s still affect us today.

Property is the primary way that Americans acquire wealth. Black families have never had equal opportunities to buy and maintain property. As a result, Black families have always had fewer opportunities to acquire wealth. Racial discrimination in housing is still a problem, but much of the inequality we observe in the neighborhoods today can be attributed to racist policies and practices in the mid-1900s.

While 1955 might seem like a very long time ago, many people who were able to buy new houses at that time—most of whom were white—were able to increase their wealth and pass that wealth on to their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. These families were more able to pay for college, buy more property, and invest in the stock market. At the same time, Black families have had far fewer opportunities to pass economic advantages on to their children and grandchildren.

### **Black Placemaking**

Segregation hurts Black families by reducing the opportunity to accumulate wealth and limiting access to neighborhood amenities like well-resourced schools. On the other hand, segregated, majority Black, neighborhoods often fostered tight knit and caring communities. In many cities, segregated neighborhoods became lively cultural centers among Black residents. Segregated neighborhoods could also serve as safe spaces where Black residents were protected from racist interactions from whites. Thus, while segregation hurt the economic standing of Black Americans, Black people created communities under segregation.

### **Urban Renewal**

Many of the Black neighborhoods that once thrived no longer exist. They were destroyed through a process called *urban renewal*, famously called “Negro removal” by author, James Baldwin.

With urban renewal, federal, state, and local governments sought to revitalize cities by tearing down old homes and other buildings to create areas for new office buildings, highways, and city parks. To do this, government officials took over the parts of the city with older buildings that they determined to be “blighted” or “slums” through a process called “*eminent domain*.”

Many residents insisted that their homes were not blighted and fought to stave off the destruction of their neighborhoods. Still, in cities across the United States, Black neighborhoods located near downtown were demolished and replaced with urban amenities like stadiums and shopping centers. City leaders wanted to ensure that suburban residents would come to the city to work and shop, so neighborhoods were cleared to build highways that connected the suburbs to the cities. Urban renewal further reduced Black wealth by displacing residents from their home communities and disrupting Black-owned businesses.

## Self-Reflection Activity: How Does This History Relate to You?

Regardless of your race, if your family is from the United States, the information that I share in this chapter likely relates to you and your background in some way. In order to better understand your own connection to racial segregation, housing, and wealth inequality, you could talk to your family or you could do some online research about your home community.

- › Where have your parents, grandparents and great-grand-parents, and great grandparents lived?
  - What factors determined where they lived?
  - What was it like there?
- › Have any of your family members owned homes? If yes, what was their experience buying a home like?
  - How did they decide where to look?
  - What role, if any, did the racial makeup of the community place in their choices?
  - How was their experience with a realtor?
  - What was it like going to the bank and getting a mortgage?
  - Did they feel like they were treated fairly?
  - Do you think that homeownership has benefited the family? How?
- › If no, did they ever want to own a home?
  - What challenges to homeownership have they experienced?
- › Are there historically Black neighborhoods in your town or city?
  - Do they continue to exist?
- › Were there urban renewal projects in your town or city?
  - How did urban renewal change the city?
  - Which residents were affected? How?

## Relevant Reading

*Chocolate Cities: The Black Map of American Life* by Marcus Anthony Hunter and Zandria Robinson. (2018) University of California Press

*How Racism Takes Place* by George Lipsitz, (2011) Temple University Press

*The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* by Richard Rothstein. (2017) W. W. Norton

# Metamorphosis: How Transformative Justice Took Me from Activist to Abolitionist

By Adrienne Diaz

If you're reading this chapter, you may already have some knowledge of what justice is or at least be familiar with the various social movements for justice throughout history, both in and outside the United States. You may be trying to learn more about how to work towards justice, but have no place to start. Or you may have experience as an activist fighting for issues in your own community.

Whatever the case may be, you probably came upon this chapter not knowing much about Transformative Justice. You may be familiar with terms such as Restorative Justice and Environmental Justice, and terms for other frameworks of social change—and that is a great place to start. Transformative Justice, when applied to society as a whole, can encompass all the topics you are already familiar with.

**All my frustrations and basic understandings of bias and privilege were uplifted into the realization that society is a system of power imbalances.**

As a young community organizer, I worked under the umbrella of Reproductive Justice, a form of justice that exists only when “all people having the social, political, and economic power and resources to make healthy decisions about their gender, bodies, sexuality, and families for themselves and their communities”<sup>1</sup>. At the time of my personal awakening to organizing, the concept of Reproductive Justice made so much sense. It fulfilled my needs as a woman, as a multiracial millennial, as someone who had just moved into a rural area lacking resources, and as a student struggling to finish her two degrees. All my frustrations and basic understandings of bias and privilege were uplifted into the realization that society is a system of power imbalances. What I thought were my shortcomings might actually be an accumulation of my circumstances.

Within a few years of being introduced to this work through volunteering at a Reproductive Justice organization, I had graduated from its leadership academy, held a fellowship with the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California, and been hired as staff at the Reproductive Justice organization to lead campaigns and facilitate the leadership academy. The campaign was in 2 parts. We went door to door, gathering support in the community for the establishment of sanctuary schools after the Tulare County Board of Supervisors refused to abide by state law that established California as a sanctuary state. We were also phone-banking to mobilize young voters for the 2018 primaries and midterm election around establishing sanctuary schools across Tulare County.

In the leadership academy, we taught local youth about Reproductive Justice and empowered them to become leaders that would be advocates for Reproductive Justice. Even though I was following the career path I wanted and could dream of justice through this framework, I was not happy. I was sick and I didn't know why. My two jobs and school were becoming a burden. And I was finding myself more and more restless, as I was recognizing the patterns of injustice that I had learned about as a young organizer. I just couldn't put my feelings into words at the time.

## Changing Perspective

Then several things happened that changed my life and perspective. In spring 2018, I was the lead organizer for the March for Our Lives sister event in Visalia, California. After the event, we used leftover funding to implement a temporary program over summer to continue the conversation around gun violence. I specifically made the choice to focus on awareness, but also on healing from trauma. So much of the national discourse at the time was about providing mental health resources, but it didn't seem that anyone really intended to back

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<sup>1</sup>Forward Together, 2019

up those ideas. In creating the program curriculum, I came across the website for Generation Five, an organization developing Transformative Justice as an approach to end the sexual abuse of children within five generations. also on healing from trauma. So much of the national discourse at the time was about providing mental health resources, but it didn't seem that anyone really intended to back up those ideas. In creating the program curriculum, I came across the website for Generation Five, an organization developing Transformative Justice as an approach to end the sexual abuse of children within five generations.

There was a spark, then flames, and a wildfire of curiosity took hold. I read everything I could find on Transformative Justice. In light of this information, I switched the focus of the program to healing and mental health. After the program finished, I continued the conversations as part of curriculum planning for the leadership academy. And then I was diagnosed with lymphoma.

If it had happened at any other time, I could not tell you how much different my life would be now. As is the case for most newly diagnosed cancer patients, my world was seemingly turned upside down. For some more context, I had been struggling with symptoms for over 3 years and had been dismissed by several doctors. My cancer was in my salivary glands, and it took my face being swollen like a chipmunk's to be taken seriously. My diagnosis came at a time when I was supposed to be finishing my degrees, transferring to a 4-year university, planning my wedding, and completing my work contract. I spent a lot of time crying, as I had to give up so much to focus on my care. I dropped out of my last semester at community college. I canceled my wedding. I left my job without being offered an extension. I moved 50 miles away to be closer to my doctors in Fresno and to my partner's job.

Halfway through my cancer treatment, I received a phone call from a friend and former coworker who was still working at the Reproductive Justice organization. She needed to vent about her experiences with racism and ableism in the office, as well as the trauma associated with them. I held space for her and listened. But it got my brain working. I was thinking and thinking about all the words she said, but I couldn't understand why I felt so upset. It took me about a day to realize that I had also experienced those things while working there. Not on the same scale, but they were there. I started really analyzing the past 3 years of my life as an activist. And then my whole life. I had experienced and was currently going through a significant amount of harm. And harm is the word I want you to remember. This is when I came around again to Transformative Justice.

## **What is Transformative Justice?**

In a blog post for Transform Harm, Mia Mingus describes Transformative Justice (TJ) as:

...a political framework and approach for responding to violence, harm and abuse. TJ can be thought of as a way of "making things right," getting in "right relation," or creating justice together.

Transformative justice responses and interventions 1) do not rely on the state (e.g. police, prisons, the criminal legal system, I.C.E., foster care system (though some TJ responses do rely on or incorporate social services like counseling); 2) do not reinforce or perpetuate violence such as oppressive norms or vigilantism; and most importantly, 3) actively cultivate the things we know prevent violence such as healing, accountability, resilience, and safety for all involved.

At first, these ideas can sound a bit overwhelming and outside our realms of understanding of how a society can exist without criminalization and policing. We have been socialized to believe that every wrong needs to be punished in order to bring justice to the victim and to teach the perpetrator not to do it again. But rates of recidivism and rehabilitation show that incarcerated people are highly likely to re-offend if they aren't given the resources to work towards upward social mobility.

This then begs the questions: what even causes crime, and why do we treat some actions more harshly than others? The answers really are different based on your culture and where you grew up. But, generally, we criminalize actions associated with people whom we deem

**At its most basic, Transformative Justice seeks to respond to violence without creating more violence and/or engaging in harm reduction to lessen the violence.**

undesirable or disposable. It should come as no surprise to someone reading this chapter that arrest rates are disproportionately higher for BIPOC, poor people, rural communities, immigrants, disabled and chronically ill people, queer and trans folx, and everyone that exists along the intersections of those identities.

### **Self-Reflection Activity**

Take some time to get comfy, whether that's lying down, sitting up, closing your eyes, or lighting a candle. Make yourself feel safe in whatever space you are in and take a few deep breaths. Now ask yourself these questions:

- › In what ways have others harmed you?
- › How were those actions directly tied to your race or ethnicity, gender or sexuality, socioeconomic status, body size, nationality, religion, or ability/disability?
- › How did power and authority come into play?
- › Were you supported? What sources of support were from institutions or the state? How many came from the community?
- › Think of people who did not offer you support. Do you think it was because they were unable to understand or acknowledge that you experienced harm?
- › In what ways has your own privilege protected you from harm or afforded you support in response to harm?
- › What form of accountability, if any, did the harm-doer face?

### **Waking Up**

It is a moment of abrupt awakening to realize either that systems weren't created to benefit you or that they were. No one likes to be awoken violently from sweet sleep. I have no doubt that the vast majority of people who read this have faced harm and had no institutional means to seek healing, justice, or accountability from their harm-doers. Our discomfort with this situation does not last forever though, and it is what we do with these feelings that truly matters. My hope is that the activity above helps you, the reader, to understand that all harm is directly tied to systems of oppression and therefore fully preventable through justice, equity and changing cultural beliefs. And that takes time. But don't be discouraged; that doesn't mean we won't see change. Even in my own short life, I have seen huge strides towards social justice. We continue to build on the work of generations before us. My hope is that before we become ancestors, we see the fruits of our labor through transformational leadership and justice.

My inability to concisely articulate my experience in a way that those more learned than me might do does not negate or invalidate my experiences or those of the people I have encountered. They still existed and happened. A friend once told me of a quote from prison abolitionist, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, describing Abolition as being about not absence but presence. In a New York Times Magazine feature, author Rachel Kushner details how Gilmore describes Prison Abolition not just as the absence of a carceral system but as the "presence, instead, of vital systems of support that many communities lack"<sup>2</sup>.

The article gives a great context to how prisons themselves were introduced as an alternative/reform to harsh punishments for fairly trivial crimes. It also touches on how even the argument against prisons focuses more on the privatization of the prison industry than on its full abolition and on the re-funding of social services that would actually eradicate crime. It is widely understood that crime arises from the absence of opportunity and resources. And in a capitalist society, we all operate on a model of scarcity, when in fact there is an abundance being hoarded by a privileged few.

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<sup>2</sup>Kushner, 2019



Gilmore also states something that is so key to understanding this type of framework. In trying to teach a group of students about the necessity of Abolition, she describes the way in which Spain handles the sentencing of someone who commits murder. Kushner writes:

[Gilmore] told them that in Spain, where it's really quite rare for one person to kill another, the average time you might serve for murdering someone is seven years. "What? Seven years!" The kids were in such disbelief about a seven-year sentence for murder that they relaxed a little bit. They could be outraged about that, instead of about Gilmore's ideas. Gilmore told them that in the unusual event that someone in Spain thinks he is going to solve a problem by killing another person, the response is that the person loses seven years of his life to think about what he has done, and to figure out how to live when released. "What this policy tells me," she said, "is that where life is precious, life is precious." . . . [I]n Spain people have decided that life has enough value that they are not going to behave in a punitive and violent and life-annihilating way toward people who hurt people. "And what this demonstrates is that for people trying to solve their everyday problems, behaving in a violent and life-annihilating way is not a solution."

This excerpt really speaks to the vision of Abolition. As it stands, the systems we have in place are alienating, life-annihilating, and inaccessible. Life is not precious. Transformative Justice acknowledges that the State does not believe that life is precious and, in fact, has done and actively does more harm than good. It and Abolition say that life is precious. And the presence of those vital social services mentioned before also means the presence of each other, and the presence of community.

**Abolitionist: a person who favors the abolition (the act of officially ending or stopping) any law or practice deemed harmful to society.**

And this is what has brought me to Abolition and wanting to be an Abolitionist. I actually am still not yet comfortable calling myself an Abolitionist. Despite systemic barriers, I still have a great amount of privilege, and I am still learning more every day from those who have fought before me. I consider myself a student of Abolition. Certain barriers limit my access to academic literature and spaces, so the language and jargon of social justice elitism does not come easy to me. But that is why I believe so wholeheartedly in Transformative Justice and Abolition. I can still participate in my community and believe the things preached by the greats. I too can preach the words of Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Malcolm X, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and make their ideas accessible to those who have also been locked out of the gates of academia and pushed away from achieving upward social mobility.

So, what next? Now that I have introduced you to Transformative Justice, what steps will you take to be better?

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# How Racism Affects Public Health Outcomes

By Jenny Brooks

Growing up in Southeast Idaho, race, politics, and money, were not topics my family or anyone in my community really talked about. The area was predominantly white, Christian, and politically conservative. I could count the number of Black people I knew in the city of 50,000+ on two hands and for much of my life most everyone I was close to looked, acted, and viewed the world like me and my family—white, Christian, conservative, and middle-class. At best, I was raised to be colorblind, to not acknowledge skin color or any advantages/disadvantages that it brings. Any racial disparities were to be pitied, but the lesson taught through omission was that the real fight for racial justice was won with the Civil Rights Act of 1965.

**Though I realize I had been taught to fear Black people, when I found myself in neighborhoods where I was the only non-Black person, I understood I was the safest person there.**

My perspective shifted dramatically when I moved to Baltimore, Maryland, in 2015 to attend graduate school. Though I had already challenged religious and political beliefs from my upbringing, I was not prepared for this America. A few months prior to our move, Freddie Gray had been killed in Baltimore, and we drove through his neighborhood on our way into the city. Though I realize I had been taught to fear Black people, when I found myself in neighborhoods where I was the only non-Black person, I understood I was the safest person there. If anything happened to me while I was there, as a straight, white woman, I could anticipate justice. And if nothing happened, I was better off, through no merit of my own, and would go home to a nice apartment where I had fresh and healthy food to eat, clean water, electricity, internet access, and financial security.

In Baltimore, I first learned about systematic and institutional racism, from redlining to the erasure of Black communities surrounding my alma mater, Johns Hopkins. In 2016, Trump secured the election, and I was reminded of where I was from, and the tensions of the worlds I inhabited. Through organizations like Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) and Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle (LBS), I started the lifelong work of learning about what it means to be white in America, and how the systems of white supremacy were ingrained in everything around me.

## The Gardener's Tale

Now in 2020, COVID-19 has changed life as we know it. If all things were equal, or equitable, public health professionals and governments would report that all race/ethnic groups had similar rates of the disease. We know this is not true, and in the United States, COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous, and other Communities of Color. The rate of COVID-19 is five times higher in Black and Indigenous people than white people (CDC 2020). It is not that these groups are more likely to contract COVID-19 for an innate biological reason; the culprit of these disparities is racism.

To help understand health outcomes and racism, *The Gardener's Tale* by Dr. Camara Phyllis Jones<sup>1</sup> is a useful theoretical framework and allegory. It defines three levels of racism:

1. Institutionalized racism,
2. Personally-mediated racism, and
3. Internalized racism.

Dr. Jones defines these three levels in the following way: “Institutionalized racism manifests itself both in material conditions and in access to power...Personally mediated racism is defined as prejudice and discrimination... (and) internalized racism is defined as acceptance by members of the stigmatized races of negative messages about their own abilities and intrinsic worth.”

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<sup>1</sup>Jones 2000, Jones 2014

Imagine a gardener with two garden boxes. One is freshly filled with fertile, rich potting soil, and the other is full of old, nutritionally-depleted dirt. The gardener has seeds of the same plant which will produce different colored flowers—red or pink—for each box. The gardener prefers red flowers and these seeds go into the box with nutrient rich soil. The other seeds, with pink flowers, go into the other box with old, depleted soil.

As the seasons continue, the flowers go to seed and the red flowers continue to thrive, while the pink flowers struggle. Seeing this play out over time, the gardener feels justified that they prefer the obviously superior red flowers.

This illustrates *institutional racism*, and the harm was committed in two ways. First, the initial choice to plant the pink flowers where they did not have enough resources to thrive. Second, the gardener did not address this harm in the subsequent seasons.

Occasionally, a pink flower seed will land in the red flower box and take root. Personally mediated racism is illustrated when the gardener plucks the pink flower out of the red flower box. Or, she doesn't even let the pink flowers in their box go to seed.

After all this, the pink flowers believe themselves to be inferior to the red flowers, who have grown and thrived while they have struggled and remained weak. A bee visits, and the pink flowers insist that the bee instead pollinate the superior red flowers instead. The pink flowers' beliefs illustrate *internalized racism*.

Regardless of the pink flowers' beliefs or the gardener's removal of the pink flowers, the foundation for the disparities is in the soil. Who is the gardener who takes responsibility for this outcome? In the United States, the government is the Gardener, and has historically oppressed and disinvested in Black communities. Real change cannot happen without addressing the environmental factors that influence health outcomes.

## Social Determinants of Health

In public health, the environmental factors that influence health are sometimes called the *social determinants of health*; they are “the conditions in which [we] live, learn, work and age. (APHA)” As was illustrated in *The Gardener's Tale*, the context or backdrop in which individuals and their communities live impact health and wellbeing.

Some common examples of social determinants of health include housing, education, and access to healthcare. These aspects of life impact the resources people have in their neighborhoods. For some, it might mean that there are sidewalks they can walk on to reach the CDC's recommended 150 minutes of physical activity a week<sup>2</sup>. Or it might mean it is really hard to get all the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables because there is not a grocery store within a reasonable distance of home. Institutional racism produces health disparities and creates a world where everyone does not have access to the resources they need to achieve and maintain a healthy life.

## Self-Reflection Activity

- › Think about the physical, mental, and behavioral health in your community. What are the environmental factors that support you in maintaining and sustaining health and wellbeing? What are the environmental factors that make it difficult?
- › Think about another group of people in your community who have a different race/ethnicity than you and your community. How is this group's health affected—positively or negatively—by environmental factors?
- › What institutions, groups, and/or organizations in your area have the power to influence these environmental factors?
- › What is your relationship to these systems of power, and how can you and your community address that power?

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<sup>2</sup>CDC, 2020, <sup>3</sup>Dutko 2012

**To build an environment where everybody can thrive, we all need to reflect honestly about our relationships with racist systems and act collectively to bring change.**

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# Raising Our Voices through Creative Writing and the Arts

## *Ash & Feather: A Bird/Girl and Her Father's Cancer*

By Sharon Frances, PhD, Director of Well Beings Studio

**I have suffered from a lifetime of depression and anxiety and, post-cancer, from chronic pain and fatigue from endocrine therapy. Creativity helped me heal.**

In 2017, I was 44 years old with an 11-year-old daughter when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Three days later, my dad died of brain cancer. It was his second cancer. The first happened when I was seven, and the radiation treatment damaged his heart, leading to a heart transplant and almost 20 years of immunosuppressant drugs. Using my voice helped me see myself as more than my illness.

Here is one of my poems written during cancer treatment:

We didn't have much in common  
father and daughter  
I went left, you went right  
I opened and you closed  
I listened while you talked  
I was young, you were old  
I was healthy and you were sick  
I was a blank slate while you knew everything  
I wore blades, you wore quads  
I watched and you stole the show  
Then you had cancer. Now I do too.  
I will survive mine, yours finished you.  
I wish I could have told you.  
You would have understood.  
Your eyes expressed sorrow and love.  
Mine do too.  
I wish you could have told me  
All that you knew.  
Maybe there is more, not less.  
I am not the little girl you once knew.  
Because you had cancer and now I do too.

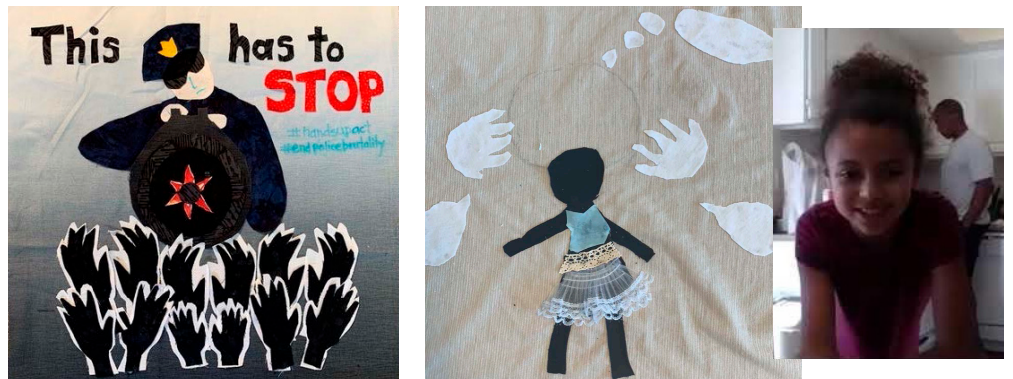
I created a podcast called *Ash & Feather: A Bird/Girl and Her Father's Cancer* as a person with cancer and a child of a parent with cancer. I wanted to explore my relationship with my daughter, as she watched me fight for my life, and to imagine a better relationship with my father, who had lost his life to cancer. I wanted to represent a family struggling with something that can be quite hidden: the pain of going through cancer and emotional turmoil and grief. Personally, I have always succeeded in hiding my disabilities because they were internal: cancer, pain, fatigue, sadness, panic. People often don't know when I am struggling with one of these invisible conditions. I wanted *Ash & Feather* to celebrate the joys and struggles of a family experiencing often invisible medical struggles and a range of emotions.



## Our Voices Matter: Social Justice Sewing Academy

During the release week of the podcast, I partnered with the Social Justice Sewing Academy to facilitate a social justice arts workshop. Director Sara Trail taught the participants about the relationship between text and art, and how we can use hashtags or phrases to help communicate our ideas about topics that matter to us personally. I explored a drawing of myself with a teardrop, cancer cells and panic lines inside the body's outline. I added the words "Not Every Disability is Visible." We used fabric scraps to create our illustrations, phrases and hashtags.

Here are some participants' art, including Charlize's piece, "They Keep Touching My Hair." The last image is a video in which Charlize talks about kids touching her hair, and why it matters to her to use her voice through art about this issue.



SJSA has led hands-on workshops in schools, prisons and community centers across the country in which young people create quilt blocks. The textile art is a vehicle for personal transformation and community cohesion; the youth become agents of social change, making art about what matters to them and learning the impact their voices have when we create spaces for them to be heard. Here is *Transcendence*, one of the youth community quilts.



## **“Racism is a public health emergency.”**

— Minneapolis City Council Vice President Andrea Jenkins after the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020

## **Black LGBTQ Lives Matter**

It was at the moment of George Floyd’s death that I knew Ash & Feather would be about a Black, queer family going through cancer. I couldn’t rest until I broke my white silence about racism as a public health emergency. Speaking out about the weaponizing of the police against Black families and racism in our healthcare system is integral to all of our emotional well-being. Black and Brown people have been disproportionately infected and killed by the coronavirus and related conditions. And Black and Brown people are more likely to develop and die of cancer and less likely to receive preventative screening.

*“Why have white people been killing us since slavery? And they are still killing us.”*  
— A junior high school boy in West Baltimore on April 29, 2015<sup>1</sup>

This country and this world have been shaped by racism for centuries. Racism causes trauma ; it is a public health emergency that requires massive systemic change as well as personal change. I have deteriorating faith in the police system to protect all lives. I have deteriorating faith in the justice system

### **What can I do but rage and create?**

They grow the cancer  
Plunder the land  
Hit the child  
Deny jobs  
Press a knee to his neck  
Rape her body  
Heat the ovens  
Tie the rope  
Turn a profit  
Spray the food  
Spill the oil  
Scrub las bocas  
Grow the cancer  
How can we rid our bodies of this poison?  
How can we bind its stretching tendrils?  
How can we laugh when we cannot breathe?  
What happens when  
listening and looking  
testifying and advocating  
kissing and hugging  
bending down and picking up  
yelling, “He’s not even moving.”  
What happens when none of it works?  
When he tucks a hand in his pocket  
And chokes the world with his white power?

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<sup>1</sup>Code Switch

## What can I do but teach and heal?

Created from a child's breath  
Blown from a wand of any shape  
A perfect sphere  
Surface tension holds strong as it  
Spins alongside the others  
Reflecting iridescent colors in sunlight  
To catch them, my daughter reaches through her whole body  
Fingertips almost touching their strong yet fragile whole  
Personal space is a bubble  
Built from invisible energy.  
I burst it once—when I was four,  
prancing around another child at preschool  
chanting his name, foreign on my tongue  
While he cried under the blanket  
we wrapped him in,  
It bobbed on the fingers we pointed at his skin.  
Pop  
A school burst it once—the bubble  
so delicately and intentionally blown  
through the coos of parent to baby,  
her name in whispers—the many I love yous,  
heard in languages unspoken at school  
Those words kept her bubble whole  
Until one day in kindergarten  
It bobbed onto a pencil tip that wrote some other name for her.  
Her American name.  
Pop  
I wonder about the blowing and bursting of bubbles  
Who gets to dip into the sticky substance of life's self worth?

Who gets to hold the wand and blow?  
Who gets to burst? And what follows—  
a squeal of excitement, a tear of loss  
a gasp of breath,  
some other quiet death.  
Pop  
How can I be a mother now,  
based on what I wished I had known as a girl,  
About the fragility of belonging?  
About living in safety, being our actual selves  
Whose differences we hold in stark relief  
from the cookie cutter body,  
the news anchor accent,  
the invisible power of whiteness.  
Pop  
How can I attend to the not-saying and not-hearing,  
the broken streets and buildings on fire?  
Pop pop pop  
What if everyone in charge says there is no time or space  
to work, to include, to fix, to heal?  
Pop pop pop pop pop  
I am too old to be young, too young to forget  
But my daughter is just right when it comes to  
questioning the logic of this world:  
“People shouldn't value me more than anyone else, Mommy.”  
Our bodies stretch to the open sky,  
her fingertips touch  
what is possible.  
We have bubbles to burst,  
and so many new ones to blow.

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**Find the Ash & Feather  
Podcast at:**  
[https://anchor.fm/  
ashandfeather](https://anchor.fm/ashandfeather)

### Self-Reflection Activity

- I encourage you to listen to my podcast, Ash and Feather, and consider these questions.
- The author includes references to colors in Ash and Feather . Pick one color from the podcast. What does the color mean to you? What does the color mean in the story?
  - What is normal? Is there any one normal? Why do people say that after something major happens (like cancer), we live in a “new normal”? Do you agree or disagree?
  - What would Phoenix's hashtag be? Why did you pick this for her?
  - Why does it matter that Ash and Feather features a Black family? Does it matter that the author is white? How do race and racism enter into your thoughts about the podcast, poems and art?

## What Can I Do, But Listen, Learn, and Act?

Here are resources I recommend for people, especially parents, interested in pursuing anti-racist work:

*Guidelines for Being Strong White Allies* by Paul Kivel (See link below.)

*How White Parents Can Use Media to Raise Anti-Racist Kids*. Common Sense Media. By Sierra Filucci (See link below.)

*How Racism Complicates Black Parenting*. The Conversation.

<https://theconversation.com/how-racism-complicates-black-parenting-140782>

*Anti-Racist Reading List*. Chicago Public Library Staff.

<https://chipublib.bibliocommons.com/list/share/1213296867/1442377017>

*How to be Anti-Racist* by Ibram X. Kendi. Penguin Random House (2019)

*75 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice* by Connie Shutack.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFdTMP8KESk>

*Until We Are All Free: Racial Justice Art and Story Sessions*.

<http://www.untilweareallfree.com/>

Social Justice Sewing Academy. Visit <http://www.sjsacademy.org/>

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*Transcendence: A SJSA Community Quilt | Workshop Participants, 2020*. Social Justice Sewing Academy. (2020) <http://www.sjsacademy.org/transcendence--a-sjsa-community.html>

*Racial Justice Art and Story Sessions*. Until We Are All Free. (2016).

<http://www.untilweareallfree.com/#art-culture-resources>



# A People's History of Cotton

By Cheryl Arkison

**As a quilter, I take for granted what a constant cotton is in my life. I wear it, sleep in it, and use it for creative pursuits. I never thought much about where the cotton came from or how the fabric was produced until recently.**

To me, cotton was a finished product, not a plant. The first and only time I ever saw cotton fields was on a road trip—a quilters' pilgrimage—to Gees Bend, Alabama. The full, white bolls dotted the landscape and fueled a desire to know more about how cotton gets from the field to my cutting table.

In school, in the United States and Canada, what we learn about the Industrial Revolution focuses on how the cotton gin turned the crop into a cash cow, enabling the mass production of fabrics in England and around the world. We don't learn that the increased demand for cotton also increased the demand for slave labor. We don't learn that cotton and the enslavement of people were, and in many ways still are, inextricably linked. Today, the simple cotton we take for granted has wide-reaching social and environmental impacts.

## From the Field to the Cutting Table

Cotton is a natural fiber. It starts as a seed in the field before it fills our quilts, covers our bodies, keeps us cool in bed, or covers our faces. Cotton grows best in the world's tropic and subtropic regions because it requires a long frost-free period and plenty of sun. Planted in the spring, cotton grows like any other plant—with water, sun and attention (and, depending on the farm), with fertilizer and pesticides. What we know as cotton comes from the boll, the white fluffy part of the plant that remains when the bloom falls off. The cotton plant is used for more than just fiber production. Cottonseed is used in oils for cooking and food production. The leftover meal is used as livestock feed and a portion of the seed is reserved for reseeded.

Cotton is harvested by machine or by hand, depending where in the world it is grown. After the boll is stripped from the plant and the fibers from the boll, the fibers must be separated from the seed and any leaves or other materials. This is where the cotton gin comes in. The cotton gin produces compressed bundles of clean cotton fibers ready for the next step: blowing. Blowing is the final step in the cleaning process, removing any stray plant materials other than the fluffy cotton fibers.

The pure cotton fibers are then ready for spinning. The carding and drawing process stretches the cotton fibers together. At the beginning of the process, the fibers come together in a long, thick coils through combing. As the fibers are drawn more, the coils get thinner and finer. Eventually this produces roving, which is a much thinner, twisted yarn. This is then spun to the desired thickness and wound into fibers that will be woven into cotton fabric.

Most cotton yarn becomes fabric through machine weaving. Weaving has existed for millennia, but machines make faster, more affordable, and custom work possible. Warp threads span the length of the fabric, while weft threads are woven transversely, over and under the warp threads. Cotton fibers can also be used to make knit material products and be blended with other materials.

Fabric can be made with dyed yarns. Many modern quilting and sewing fabrics are dyed or printed after weaving via screen printing, digital printing or various techniques. Then the finished cotton is ready for clothing or product manufacturing. Fabric on the bolt might be shipped from production facilities via regional distributors before landing in retail stores.

## Types of Cotton

There are four main varieties of cotton grown commercially worldwide, all native to different areas. There are long- and short-strand cottons, depending on the type of plant cultivated for use. The most commonly grown cotton worldwide is called *Gossypium hirsutum*, also known as upland cotton. In the past few decades the prevalence of a genetically modified (GM) cotton increased. The product, called Bt cotton, was designed to reduce the use of pesticides. Unfortunately, cotton attracts quite a few natural pests, and most production relies on pesticide use. The Bt cotton is the predominant cotton grown in India. GM cotton increased yields across the world, while also reducing pesticide use.

Organic cotton is not genetically modified and is grown without the use of pesticides or herbicides. Organic cotton production is rising worldwide, particularly for the garment sector.

## Cotton Production Around the World

Cotton grows best in a hot, tropical or subtropical climate. The use of irrigation, however, is expanding the cotton-growing region further north. World cotton production topped 25.9 million tons in the 2019-2020 growing season.

In the U.S., 17 states produce cotton. Known as the Cotton Belt, these states range from California across to Florida and as far north as Missouri and Kansas. Texas is the largest producer of cotton fiber, followed by Georgia. In India, China, and Pakistan the vast majority of cotton is hand-harvested. That means people are walking the fields, handpicking cotton bolls and fibers. In Brazil and in the U.S., cotton is mostly machine-picked.

Not all cotton is converted into fabric where it is grown. The U.S., produces more cotton than domestic mills use, making it a net exporter—the world’s largest exporter of cotton. India is a major producer of cotton fabric and a net importer, despite being the world’s top cotton grower. Much quilting and home sewing fabric is produced by mills in India, South Korea and Japan.

## History of Cotton in the U.S.

It’s impossible to explain the origins of today’s global cotton industry without addressing the history of cotton production and slavery in the United States.

While the cotton plant was indigenous to the southern U.S., it was only grown on a small scale until the late 1700s. After the American Revolution, the region’s main crops shifted away from indigo, tobacco and rice towards cotton and sugar.

Three major events turned cotton into a high demand product.

One, Eli Whitney’s invention of the cotton gin allowed for larger-scale production of the indigenous upland cotton.

Two, as weaving technology developed in mills in the United Kingdom, the demand for cotton from the U.S. grew. (At one point, 80 percent of British fabric was created with slave-produced U.S. cotton.)

Three, a successful slave rebellion on the French colony of Saint-Dominigue (now Haiti), which had been a major source of cotton for Europe, increased the labor and skill for cotton grown in the US.

The increased capacity for cotton production drove demand for enslaved labor. Cotton and slavery expanded together, all the way to the Civil War. The cotton produced in the South supplied the textile mills in the North and England. With the economic value of cotton intrinsically tied to slavery, the enormity of the actions and success of the abolitionists is striking.

The end of slavery, however, did not end the exploitation of Black workers in cotton and in general. While some freed people, having been denied education and lacking other opportunities, went back to their former enslavers to work as wage laborers, others became sharecroppers. Landowners rented their land to farmers, to be paid with a share of the resulting crop. Landowners and merchants would also rent equipment and supplies to the farmers; high interest rates and unpredictable harvests kept tenant farmers indebted. The sharecropping system is considered by some historians to be slavery by another name.

While the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution did make chattel slavery illegal, it made an exception for forced labor as a punishment for crime. Shortly after the Civil War, conviction rates for Black people rose, and a system of “convict leasing” began, with prisons sending out inmates to work for commercial enterprises at extremely low wages. U.S. prisons to this day can force inmates to work for low wages. Louisiana and Texas are two states that still use prison labor to work cotton plantations.

## The top producers of cotton globally\*

India: 23.1%

China: 22.4%

USA: 16.9%

Brazil: 10.6%

Pakistan: 5.2%

Turkey: 3.1%

Uzbekistan: 2.5%

Mexico: 1.4%

Rest of the world: 14.7%

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*\*Bremen Cotton Exchange, a German trade group tracking cotton production globally*



## Social Impact Worldwide

Forced labor is found in the production of cotton in many countries. Over 80 percent of China's cotton production comes from the Xinjiang region, which is known for its forced labor camps. At least one million Uighurs and other Muslim minorities are forced to work in these labor camps that produce cotton for export to major international brands.

The governments of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan force citizens to pick cotton to prop up their exports. This has led the U.S. to block the import of Uzbek cotton altogether. In India, a large portion of cotton production comes from small farms that use manual labor. The use of pesticides and other chemicals can result in illness for these cotton farmers and pollution to the surrounding environment.

## Environmental Impact

Cotton is the largest non-food cash crop worldwide, requiring water, pesticides, insecticides and herbicides. Farming cotton with machines requires a lot of fuel, and turning cotton fibers into fabric requires a tremendous amount of energy and water. Creating finished fabric—with dyes and printing—also uses vast quantities of water, chemicals and energy.

This means the key environmental concerns related to cotton production are either about resource use (water, fuel and energy) or chemical use (pesticides, herbicides and insecticides, as well as printing processes). All of these impact the environment through wastewater, greenhouse gas emissions and pollution. Getting fabric from the field to factories to our work tables also requires a global distribution system with a large carbon footprint.

As mentioned previously, a significant portion of the global cotton yield comes from a genetically modified strain. While this strain was created to reduce a reliance on pesticides, the long-term impacts of using GM products are unknown. In the short term, it has increased yields and reduced pesticide use.

Lastly, do not forget the waste of end material. What is the smallest scrap you keep? What about the scraps or seconds from mills or garment/product manufacture?

## Questions for Reflection

- › Does knowing where cotton comes from change anything for the average crafter? Cotton supply chains remain frustratingly opaque. Some U.S. sewing fabric companies share information about the mills they use to print the fabric, but I could not find complete evidence from any on the full supply chain.
- › Where is the cotton fiber from? Was the person who picked it paid a living wage? Some American-made quilting brands such as Clothworks claim all of their cotton is grown, milled and woven in the United States. But more specific details about their supply chain are also not readily available. This all makes it difficult to make an ethical and environmentally correct choice for your cotton purchases. It may be that there is no right choice. We need to keep asking questions. Write letters, make calls, and talk to your friends about these issues.
- › In the sewing industry, choosing where to spend your money exerts a small amount of power. You can choose to buy from companies that are transparent about their cotton supply chain and manufacturing—or at least more transparent than average. You can also choose to use upcycled materials such as scraps, thrifted clothing, and factory seconds to minimize your environmental impact. Racial and social injustice has been present in the global cotton industry since its inception. It continues today.

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# A Testament to Resilience

By Carleen Carey

In Iris Young's 1988 article *The Five Faces of Oppression*, intersecting persecutions form a predictable pattern. The experiences of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence are threaded through the lives of people pushed to the margins of American society. The distinct differences in each of these threads obscure their real impact. Each on its own is formidable, but taken together, they seem insurmountable as people struggle to survive all five at one time. Yet survive we have! Just as our ancestors made something from nothing, our historical traditions, including the handicrafts passed down from one generation to the next, tell the story of how our own families not only survived but found time to love on one another in tangible ways.

Exploitation is often understood as the act of/intention of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit most from their work. For my family and community, this often meant being hired as farm hands to bring in a harvest in rural Virginia, but instead of being paid in cash, being paid in wine. Instead of the work of their hands benefitting my ancestors, it often fed a cycle of alcoholism in the community. More importantly, it prevented the accumulation of cash that could be used to purchase homes and lands of their own to farm for themselves and pass wealth to future generations. By keeping these black and brown people working for someone else's benefit, systems like share cropping maintained a perpetual underclass of people whose labor benefited the white population far more than the workers themselves.

## Marginalization in Action

Marginalization can be explained as the treatment of a person, group, or concept as insignificant or peripheral, but it is most often experienced as not being heard or seen. Black and brown communities like mine have experienced this personally through being told that there are no resources for us (salaried jobs, apartments/homes in safe locations, funding for schools), even after all taxes have been paid to fund those resources in other communities. Systematically, the Three Fifths Compromise was a way to concretely build the concept of the insignificance of Black and Brown communities into the foundation of America.

A lack of power, ability, or influence is a hallmark of powerlessness. Even in the face of a national Black maternity crisis, Black and brown people are told that our physical pain has no medical cause. The paths to recourse for medical malpractice are prohibitively expensive for many if not most people in my community, even as highly-regarded medical schools such as Johns Hopkins use whiteness as a risk factor for conditions such as endometriosis. The result is that Black and brown women get under-diagnosed with endometriosis and spend years in pain.

Activists for Black women's health have taken to social media to spread information on how to advocate for yourself and loved ones at the doctor's office, navigate the medical system with confidence, and hold institutions accountable publicly. Cultural imperialism is the practice of promoting and imposing the single culture of a politically powerful community over a less powerful community. In my community, this sounds like Black and brown folk making fun of each other for mispronouncing 'white' words. In practice, this looks like the National Museum of African American History and Culture publishing an infographic on white culture to their website, only to have whitelash from conservatives call it 'racist' and force them to issue an apology before removing it.

The real resistance to naming and identifying white culture is that doing so renders the invisible visible, unveils 'normal' as constructed and contrived, and so opens it to questioning in a new way. This aspect of cultural imperialism is stealthy and can have subconscious impacts before folks are even aware that it's guiding how everyone in the nation, whether in the dominant culture or not, thinks and moves in the world.

Violence is not only behavior involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something, but has interpersonal, institutional, and structural aspects. In my

**The Three Fifths Compromise was a Compromise agreement between northern and southern states at the Constitutional Convention that three-fifths of the slave population would be counted for determining direct taxation and representation in the House of Representatives.**

family, stories of being called the ‘n-word’ are as common as eggs at Easter. Structurally, violence takes on a generational impact as underfunded schools fail to teach students to read in grade level, year after year. The falling property values in these neighborhoods are then used as reason to disinvest in improvements, which would bring jobs to the community. As the cycle grinds on, this invisible violence creates less and less resources for those who need it most.

### **Self-Reflection Activity**

- › Spend 10 minutes finding materials around your home that could be used to make a patchwork quilt.

What would each square say about your family history? About your lived experience during the George Floyd uprisings?

Alternately, if each square had to represent one face of oppression, which would it be and why?

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## Our Own Divided Selves

*By Kossoma Kernem*

**The more efforts I put into blending in, integrating, assimilating, the more I realized it would never be enough.**

One time, I applied for a job in Cambodia. It was for a French company, so I told them I was French-Cambodian to maximize my application chances, to alleviate their fears of culture shock living there since my parents are Cambodian. It made total sense in my head: I am French born and raised, a child of Cambodian war refugees, and thus the perfect candidate. But for French people, talking about heritage or race is so foreign (not to say rude in public places). I realized later that when I said I was French-Cambodian, they thought I was talking about my citizenship, that I had two passports. Why would you talk about your heritage when talking about your papers is more efficient?

Someone told me a few weeks ago that French people don't use hyphens. I was a little bit puzzled, but they continued and said "In the US, people are African-American, Asian-American etc... In France, you are all French." That really hit home.

I grew up (and probably was groomed/educated into) with the fantasy that we are all equals in chance—that our skin color does not matter for future education, jobs, or opportunities in general. But in reality, even though I was born in France, spoke without an accent; did not speak my mother tongue; excelled at school and at work, loved butter, wine and cheese; I always benefited or suffered from the idea white people had of me because of my appearance. I was told I worked "better than French people." I was mocked for eating "weird foods" at home, and was asked if I had a French name they could use instead of my first name...among countless other ignorant remarks.

I was never going to be white; I was never going to be incognito. I am brown (yellow?) and everybody can see it, so why can't I say that I am Asian-French? Why do my French friends think I am calling them names when I call them white?

When I went to study in the US as a foreign exchange student, I discovered numerous culturally specific student associations. There was the "Vietnamese Student Association" (VSA), the "Chinese Student Association", the "Pakistani Student Association", and many others. I had not seen this in my university in France. In France, white people would tell me that "we" all "group together", that "we" don't make any "efforts to integrate". But in the US, I loved visiting with each unique group, including going to the VSA on Pho Nights or going to the Russian Student Organization to taste beetroot-onion soup for the first time.

I felt I could talk about my brown-ness and relate about some similar things that we children of immigrants have to face on a daily basis. Even if it was not entirely my community, I had a community. I felt home, whereas in France, I always felt alone. My friends were very different from me, my parents were very different from me. Because we are all French, we don't talk about our differences, we don't talk about microaggressions.

I never saw anyone like me on the media, I never read about anyone with the same struggles I had in novels. If people like me existed, they didn't talk about it on the Internet. There was no blog post about suffering from casual racism as a child of South-East Asian immigrants in France. It was just a lonely childhood.

### **Nation States and Immigrant Societies: The Case of France**

In 1789, France was torn apart by the French Revolution, a necessary, violent event to separate from the Ancien Régime and divide Church from State. After that, being French was a political stand, to identify as part of the Republic and a citizen of this new Nation-State. The Revolutionaries aimed to free individuals from old communities, give them education and rights so they could fulfill their civic duties (which at some point, made school compulsory, non-religious and free across the country). Individuals now identified as French because they believed in this Republic, not, as they had, because of common history. Any member of minority communities was expected to be French citizen first and only observe their cultural practices in private.

After the Revolution, all citizens would benefit from the same privileges and be subject to the same laws. Immigrants and minorities at the time (some regions have strong ties to different cultures and dialects), learnt French, committed to the Republic, sent their children to public schools, celebrated Bastille Day, and assimilated to be called French citizens. They aimed to be viewed as individuals and not minorities groups. It was most likely a choice of self-defense, as they aspired to “toleration, civil rights, a place in the sun”.

At the time, and for several decades after that, France had colonies all around the world. And as much as people were French citizens in Metropolitan (continental) France with the Nation State regime (where one majority tolerates many small minorities), colonies were treated with the Multinational Empire regime; where France was governing, from far, the countries/people/minorities as groups not individuals. Members of these colonies would practice their own unique culture, and would enforce their own set of laws. Therefore, they were free to practice their religions, culture in the open.

The problem arises when, in the 20th century, the majority of colonies claimed their independence (most of them violently), resulting in waves of immigrants to France. In France, these immigrants realized they could no longer practice their own culture and religion in the open, as France allowed in their former countries, and that they were required to surrender their children to state schools devoted to “Frenchification”.

The Revolution shaped how immigrants would be perceived and treated for decades, and even now. The main message is “Assimilate or Leave!” which is a characteristic of Nation States (which most Western Europe countries are). A few political parties actually used the phrase “France, love it or leave it” in the past 20 years.

To this day, l’Observatoire de la Laïcité (the French secularism organization) states that laïcité means:

Equality of all in front of the law, no matter people’s beliefs

Separation of public institutions and religious organizations, as the State does not depend nor finance any cult/ religion

Freedom of beliefs and their practice as long as they do not disturb the public order

The last point sounds problematic, because who determines what disturbs the public order?

## **The Case of the United States**

In his essay *On Toleration*, Michael Walzer presents the US as an immigrant society, where theoretically people arrive in waves, rather than an organized group, but not in a colonialist way where they would plan to “transplant their native culture to a new place”.

The immigrant society is described as a perfect world where there is no permanent majority (minorities evolve all the time as well). In the US, due to this panel of different cultures, everyone has to “tolerate” everyone else for society to work, whereas in France the State/the (privileged) majority tolerates minorities.

Funnily enough, Michael Walzer studies the case of Canada: an immigrant society with original settlers and aboriginals, but he doesn’t mention this for the States.

The hyphenated or dual identity I was referring to in the introduction is widely used in an immigrant society. It represents one political part (here American, for example) and one cultural part (Asian, for example). The cultural part is expressed in private and might be quite different than its expression in the home country, and the political one is expressed in public and might be quite different from the stereotype of the host country. It is not a sign of neutrality as “American” could mean “English Protestant,” but it is cultural embrace to admire and celebrate diversity.

The fact that people from very different cultures celebrate Memorial Day or the Fourth of July is not contradictory with having a hyphenated identity; it demonstrates the coexistence of two cultures or two systems of belief. It shows us that our differences are only partial. The hyphen



perfectly expresses how someone is part of two different cultures but creates a third one tailored to themselves.

One characteristic of an Immigrant society is that there is a large number of minorities and none of them have a strong connection with the land they inhabit. It seems too easy to talk about the US as an immigrant society that treats Native Americans and Black population as exceptions.

Aboriginals cannot be treated as immigrants because they never accepted the cultural risks and losses that come with immigrant status. Because immigrants are the “majority” of an immigrant society, the lower classes of this society are usually composed of conquered indigenous people and imported groups, such as enslaved Black people in America. Under this new structure, they could never (in most cases) keep or own land, could never organize their own communities, could never follow the steps an immigrant would take in this regime. The result is political weakness, poverty, racial stigma, and the eventual formation of “...an anomalous caste at the very bottom of the class system”.

Because they could never create strongly based or well-funded institutions and associations, they are less visible, socially exposed and vulnerable. And since, to this day, they are not evenly represented in all social classes, cultural difference between them and the majority is less likely to be accepted.

The US is described as an immigrant society, with no majority, where all people are individuals and everyone has to tolerate each other. But in reality, even if US society is an amalgamation of different immigrant groups (Polish, Irish, Italian, German, etc.) most of them were European. Their cultures were fairly similar. They would all go to “church”, if not the same, it was still a Christian institution.

Regarding education, the US has tried to adapt to its diverse communities and create “multicultural schools” to make its education cover diverse cultures, and added some as more cultures came to join. But the truth is, the Western curriculum dominates everywhere. As for everything, education and mentalities are slower than the economy when the world changes.

An immigrant society aims to create a new identity, but its identity is usually shaped in the mold of its early settlers. Because of slavery, the incorporation of African culture was never encouraged and suppressed in favor of existing eurocentric ideals. The 20th century shook this weak regime and shined a light on this issue with the third great immigration, composed mostly of non-European. This great country, built on the ideals of a melting pot, looks more and more like European Nation States, where the majority, white people, is permanent. “Perhaps every immigrant society is a nation state in the making” said Michael Walzer 20 years ago.

## **To Sum Up**

It seems that being American is being liberal, being aware of cultural differences between people, not being quiet about them, even being able to choose your own path from/to/among these communities. It is very individualistic. Whereas being French means to be republican, to learn about French history and French culture, to allow all individuals to participate into this society. Liberalism, being less demanding than republicanism on a personal standpoint, allows for more room in private life and cultural diversity.

But now cultural differences are more than belonging to a community and tolerating (or being tolerated by) the others. Now that so many people assimilated, so many people changed classes, so many people intermarried, tolerance goes beyond how we interact with others in society. As Walzer noted, “[n]ow tolerance begins at home where we often have to make ethnic, religious, and cultural peace with our spouses, in-laws, and children—and with our own hyphenated or divided selves”.

## White Privilege or Journey to a Color Palette

Growing up in a white country, I directly suffered from white privilege. No movies or TV shows represented people who looked like me, no novels talked about my experiences, and no make-up guide was tailored to my skin color. Hairdressers were surprised by my hair (and I am lucky they were just surprised and not overwhelmed).

Recently, the sewing community has been talking about color palettes as they relate to a capsule wardrobe, where everything goes with everything, tailored just for you. Color palettes are something I always had an interest in, but never researched. Because, for people of color, it's just too hard.

I remember being a teenager, flipping through a book named something like "the Great Book of Beauty." It was 2 inches thick, and still I could not find anything applicable to me except "for tanned skins, light pink lipstick should be avoided". I remember visiting a "makeup artist" in Sephora to be pampered before prom. The result was my face looking just too beige compared to my "yellow" glow.

Even now, if we look for color palette quizzes on the internet, the first question excludes most people of color by definition, doesn't it? Does that mean that all people of color are "Deep Autumn" (warm color palette)? I always thought, in the back of my mind, that I was "warm" because my skin is "yellow". One of the tests is to check the veins in your inner wrist to see if they are more blue/purple (then you are cold) or greenish (then you are warm). But when I look through my yellowish skin, they look mostly green but also purple?

So, as with so many other things, people of color have to create their own guides, their own tutorials, do their own experiments for anything skin/hair/eyes related. I am slowly gathering information on my color palette for my own research for my South-East Asian skin. Are you researching your own color palette, too? Or do you not believe in the concept? What are your thoughts?

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# Perspectives on Farming and the Church

By Lairalaine M. White

## Author Introduction

As an advocate for housing and community development, as well as an activist and organization development expert, Dr. Lairalaine is founder and president of LMW Enterprises, a private consulting firm assisting both profit and non-profits with development. As an ordained itinerant Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, she has gained notoriety for her wit and candor in various speaking opportunities in the United States and abroad focusing on social justice along with the spiritual development of women, strategic planning, succession planning, change management, board development, and housing and urban development.

Since 2018, LMW Enterprises has acted as managing producer of a social justice project called *The Sister's Perspective*. The aim of the project was to bring awareness to communities on subjects pertaining to farming, religion, immigration, politics, women's rights, and education. At the end of 2019, in a strategic move to be more inclusive and streamline its focus, *The Sister's Perspective* was rebranded to *Perspectives On*.

Currently, Dr. Lairalaine hosts a weekly live show and a monthly podcast called "Perspectives On." The shows focus on the latest social justice issues as they relate to organizations' 2020 foci including food, climate, education, and religious justice. A monthly blog available on the website complements the show's monthly emphasis.

Dr. Lairalaine is a graduate of Texas Southern University with a BA in Psychology/Biology. She holds both a Masters of Divinity in Church Administration and Leadership and a Doctorate of Ministry in Social and Environmental Justice from the Interdenominational Theological Center.

## Perspectives on Farming

**A significant number of American households are without reliable access to a sufficient amount of quality food, which is a justice issue.**

In the farming world, the pandemic has proved a worthy and powerful catalyst in changing how we navigate the nation's food supply. The USDA reports that food insecurity has doubled and in some instances tripled, from 11% in 2018 to 22–33% as of April 2020<sup>1</sup>. These represent higher rates than at any point since data collection began.

The COVID–19 pandemic has produced disruptions in the nation's food chain, shifting the farming landscape. Out of necessity, many communities have been forced from dependency on what seems to be a highly fragile, highly tenuous industrialized/corporate food system to small-scale, community-focused farms, representing an overlooked link in the food chain—a link that has responded quickly to local community needs.

While planning our 2020 emphasis on farming and food security, I am often reminded of Paul Harvey's creation motif, which opens with "And on the 8th day, God looked down on his planned paradise and said, 'I need a caretaker'"<sup>2</sup>. It is the responsibility—some would say the obligation—of all of us to act as stewards, caretakers, and spiritual beings living out the natural experience of life, and to govern ourselves responsibly in the management and enjoyment of the land entrusted to us.

To that end it is imperative that we all come together in our respective communities to take care of creation, to guard our actions on the environment, and to care for the land appropriately. In the words of John Boyd, Sr., "when you take care of the land, the land will take care of you"<sup>3</sup>.

It is past time for us to dedicate our time and resources to things like reducing our carbon footprint, raising our own food to impact the food chain, and taking advantage of alternate

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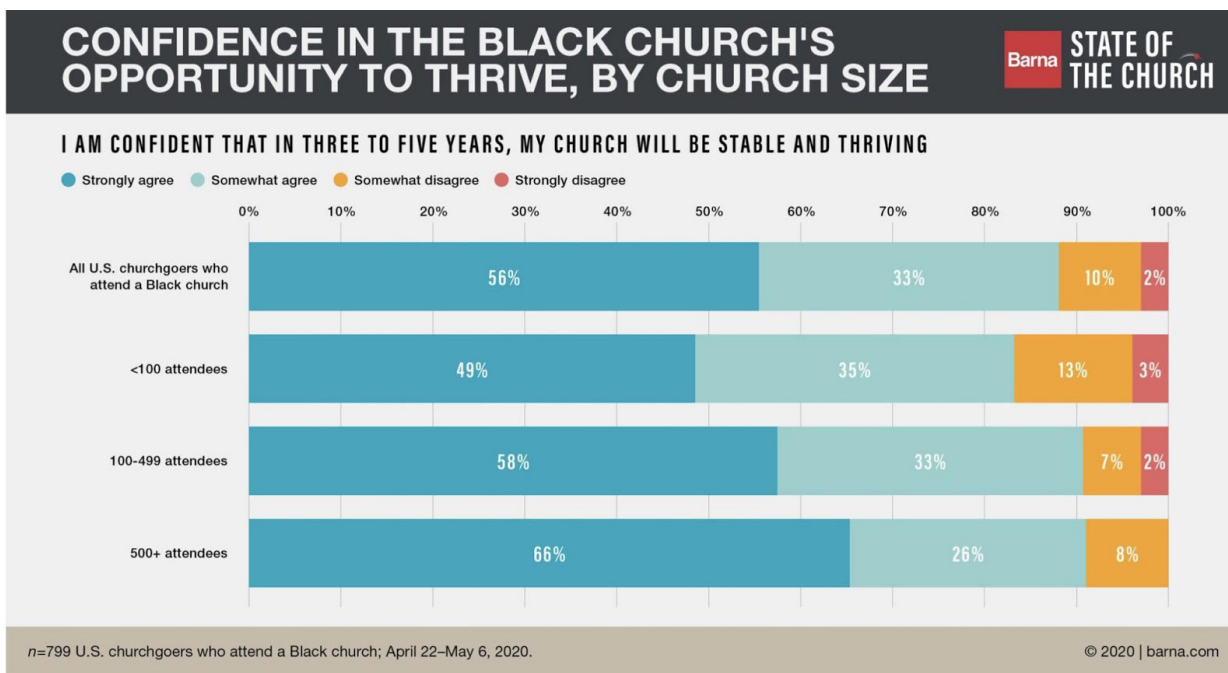
<sup>1</sup>Food Prices and Spending, 2020, <sup>2</sup>Harvey, 1986. <sup>3</sup>personal communication, June 2019.

<sup>4</sup>Barna, 2020.

forms of energy such as that which comes from the sun. Then, as the Bible says, He “will heal the land” and our communities in the process.

## Perspectives on the Church

A Barna study of 822 Black Church churchgoers conducted between April 22 and May 6, 2020, via an online survey revealed 49% of small Black churches (100 adults or less) are significantly concerned about their church’s ability to thrive over the next three to five years<sup>4</sup>. The chart below shows how, despite the general optimism surrounding the future of the Black Church post-COVID, smaller congregations find themselves in a more vulnerable position than mid-sized or large churches.



Since March, the spread of coronavirus has exploded across the globe, leading to over-capacity emergency rooms with patients on ventilators, and families grieving over the loss of loved ones. The nation’s education system has been in an uproar over whether or not to reopen. Some schools have had to close their doors within days of reopening due to infections. To limit the spread of this virus, most governments implemented strict stay-at-home orders. If mandatory stay-at-home orders were not enforced back in March, the rising number of infections would have overwhelmed health care systems and deaths would have escalated even more quickly. As part of the effort to stay the spread, churches had to close their doors to in-person worship, taking on a virtual platform when able, and now are preparing to reopen their doors.

As governments have eased restrictions, with schools attempting to reopen, we are now in a new wave of COVID–19 infections. With 24 states, including Texas, California, Georgia, and Florida. Governors and other officials are urging Americans to adhere to the protective guidelines. Many in the faith community are asking questions about how we should proceed. The church, particularly in the Black community, has been a vehicle for social justice in the past.

Many are wondering what position, if any, church leaders will take during this time. As a professional in the ministry, I take the position that it is incumbent for the African American church to reach beyond the offer of online services during a time when the nation’s moral compass is exercised in so many ways. Additionally, mainline denominations, especially those serving communities of color, have resources that could aid parents in their decision-making

<sup>4</sup>Barna, 2020.

when it comes to school, providing meals and educational support in the online effort, as well as what it does naturally in spiritual wellness. We only need to hold ourselves and elected officials accountable.

## **Selfcare Activity**

### **Roberson Stick**

*A Natural Balm for the hands and feet. (And the lips too!)*

You will need:

- 1 tsp. of beeswax
- 2 tsp. of cocoa butter
- 1 tsp. of sweet almond oil
- 5 drops of lemongrass essential oil

Gently melt first ingredients together on low heat. Once all melted add your essential oil and pour into your storage container, lip balm tube, or pot. This recipe will make about one 6 ounce container or two tubes.

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# Political and Statement Quilts

By Katie Blakesley

I am late to social justice work.

**It is a mistake for sewists and quilters and the broader public to think quilts have only recently become “political” or “radical,” when this has been the case for the last two centuries, and likely since the first person started stitching the first quilt**

I grew up in a very diverse community in the Bay Area, attending high school in the 1990s. Some of my strongest childhood memories involve experiences that were initially unfamiliar to me—a teammate practicing basketball while fasting during Ramadan, a friend’s mom speaking exclusively in Urdu to her, a Gay Straight Alliance club meeting. I work as a historian, and read a large variety of authors. I am white—I have Black family members and friends that I love and had deluded myself into thinking that these experiences, relationships and educating myself were enough.

In the last few months, I have come to understand that “not being racist” is a really low bar to set for myself. I am working to listen, learn, and act, to support activists and organizations who are doing the work, and to use my voice and my platform within the quilting community as I work towards being anti-racist. I believe art can be transformative.

## Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt

In 1985, Cleve Jones, a San Francisco gay rights activist started to conceptualize what eventually became the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt. He remembered, “I imagined families sharing stories of their loved ones as they cut and sewed the fabric. It could be therapy, I hoped, for a community that was increasingly paralyzed by grief and rage and powerlessness. It could be a tool for the media, to reveal the humanity behind the statistics. And a weapon to deploy against the government; to shame them with stark visual evidence of their utter failure to respond to the suffering and death that spread and increased with every passing day.”

On Saturday, June 28, 1987, more than 200,000 people attended the Gay Freedom Day parade in San Francisco, and saw the first five panels of the quilt, measuring 3 x 6 feet, hanging from the Mayor’s Balcony at City Hall. Several months later, on October 11, the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt debuted on the National Mall during the second March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights, with 1,920 individual canvas “blocks” on display, each representing someone who had died from the epidemic.

The quilt went on tour across the United States, first in 1988, and since then, different portions have been displayed at events, quilt shows, museums, marches, schools, and more, raising money for AIDS prevention and education efforts. Today, there are over 50,000 quilt panels.<sup>1</sup>

While the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt is the most prominent example, using quilts as an art form to express political views, both supportive of and in opposition to governments and the political climate of the day is not a new form of support or protest.

According to Patricia Maniardi in her book *Quilts: The Great American Art*, “In designing their quilts, women not only made beautiful and functional objects, but expressed their own convictions on a wide variety of subjects...as the story goes, there was more than one man of Tory political persuasion who slept unknowingly under his wife’s Whig Rose Quilt.”<sup>2</sup>

## From 1904 Forward

In 1904, women from the M.E. Church in Ashland, Pennsylvania charged candidates to put their name on a political quilt as a fundraiser. A 1912 newspaper article asserted that it was not well known that quilt patterns were often given political names, including the Tory Rose and the Alabama Rose, created during the 1848 Harrison–Tyler campaign. In 1932, Mrs. Mary Bradley pieced a political quilt with a large donkey in the middle, surrounded by elephants, with the assertion that the larger animals would prevail.<sup>3</sup> Some of the quilts made during this period, and later part of the Political Patchwork show hosted in 1984 by the Kentucky Historical Society and Kentucky Heritage Quilt Society, showed “160 years of hand-sewn



passion and prejudice, slogans and sympathy.” Quilts shown there included “Mr. [Theodore] Roosevelt’s necktie, Mrs. Taft’s Choice, Lincoln’s Favorite, [and] Whig Rose.”<sup>4</sup>

In the last 40 years, there have been numerous retrospectives or gallery shows focusing on displaying political quilts. In 1983, the La Pena Cultural Center in Berkeley, California hosted a reception for four political quilts. Three years later, Euphrat Gallery in Cupertino, California hosted “The Power of Cloth,” including a child’s quilt created by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union decrying “demon alcohol,” and a 1979 quilt by Chris Wolf Edmonds depicting the “Cherokee Trail of Tears.”<sup>5</sup> In 2000, “The Fabric of Persuasion: Two Hundred Years of Political Quilts” opened at the Brandywine River Museum in Pennsylvania and in 2002, “Cast Your Vote: Political Quilts from the IQSC” opened at the International Quilt Study Center in Nebraska. More recently, “Patchwork Politics: From George to George W.” ran at the Heritage Center Museum in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.<sup>6</sup>

## **A Shift of Focus**

In recent years, the term “political quilt” has shifted from identifying a patriotic quilt, or focused on a particular politician, towards quilts intended to highlight social movements, protest inequality, or recognize historical events, more in the vein of the AIDS Memorial Quilt. For example, Nancy Applegate showed her “Flying Free Quilt,” featuring the Berlin Wall, at the American House Gallery in Munich in 1992.

Nancy wrote that she was proudest of the Berlin Wall quilt, because “there’s something more to it than being attractive. It has a lot of emotional meaning. I felt strongly about the events that were occurring.”<sup>7</sup>

Jayne Willoughby Scott, from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, feels that quilts are “an artistic expression, an intellectual and emotional medium.” She creates powerful quilts, including anti-domestic violence pieces (Last Night I Hear the Screaming) and anti-war quilts (Operation Desert Tears). In 1997, Jane said, “I was angry because there was no attention being paid to the human side of things...The quilts that get the most attention from people are the ones that make social statements. Quilts are supposed to comfort. People are shocked when they don’t.”<sup>8</sup>

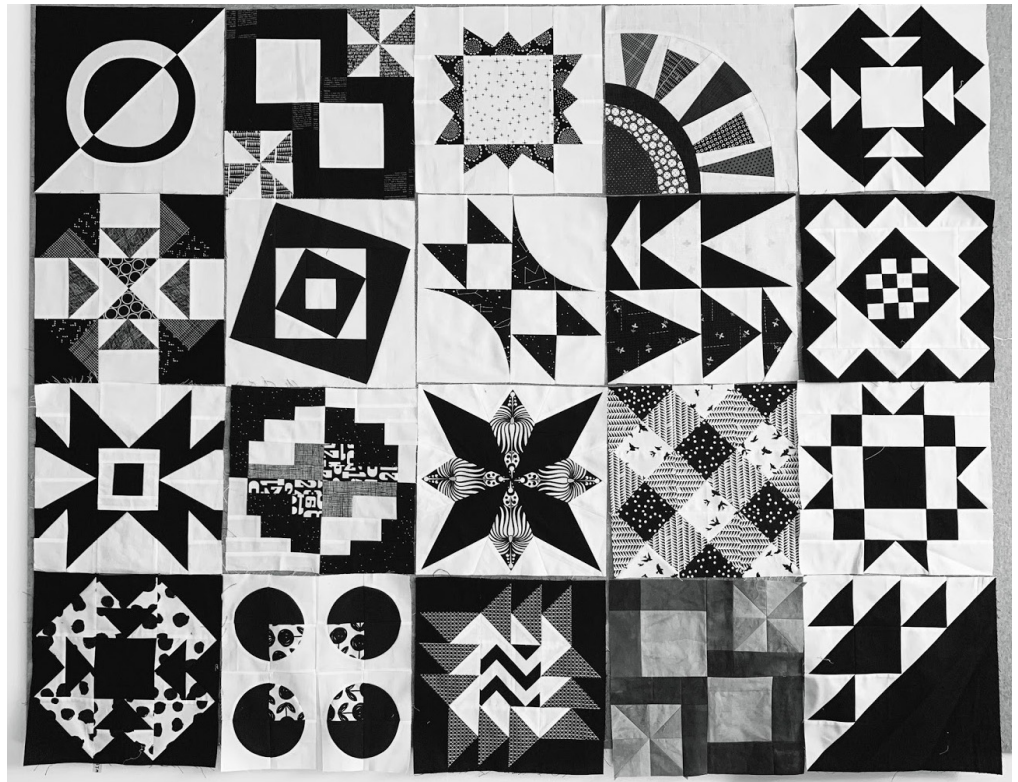
Today, there are many quilters who create statement quilts to protest mass incarceration, homophobia, transphobia, racism, white privilege, global warming, mass shootings, and advocate for human rights.

Cleve Jones believes that “compassion, human rights, and solidarity were part of the answer” to the AIDS tragedy, and this can be expanded to include broader social issues. The work of the Social Justice Sewing Academy is carrying on this longstanding tradition of political and statement quilts, and moving the work forward.

## **The Summer Sampler Black Lives Matter Quilt**

In 2011, Faith Jones, Lee Heinrich and I launched our first Summer Sampler Quilt Along, where we designed and published quilt blocks and instructions to be used in a block of the week sew along.

This summer marks our 6th Summer Sampler, and between the time we launched the quilt along and it actually started, George Floyd had been murdered and the Black Lives Matter movement and anti-racist work had entered the national consciousness and conversation in a new and urgent way. Faith, Lee, and I decided we could use our platforms to raise money for the Social Justice Sewing Academy (and another group), and part of that effort includes the Summer Sampler Black Lives Matter Quilt. We reached out to our 50+ current and alumni Summer Sampler designers, and we ended up with 20 blocks, shown on the next page. You can follow the progress of the quilt, which will be auctioned and the proceeds donated, on Instagram via the hashtag #summersamplerblm.



6th Summer Sampler: Black Lives Matter Quilt, 2020

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# Quilters Collaborating for Racial Justice: “Allyship” and Accountability in the Craft Community

By Emily Prescott

**Apart from being a harmful media cliché, the White Savior Industrial Complex is certainly alive and well in white activist culture, and the ally framework plays a part.**

Recently, I learned about a different word, “accomplice,” to use in a similar context to allyship. This conceptual turn in the language of allyship was introduced to me by a fellow graduate student. It was in response to a question we had on our mind after reading about critical pedagogy and Paulo Freire, an educational philosopher. *How do you fight against oppression if your identity is not oppressed? How can you be a good ally?*

These questions, for which there are no simple answers, have certainly grown louder as racial injustice proliferates in my city and across the globe. White folks’ responsibility to challenge systemic racism is more urgent than ever, which is why I initially bristled at the suggestion to stop thinking of myself as an ally and strive for the role of “accomplice,” “collaborator,” or “co-conspirator” instead. At first, the distinction seemed arbitrary (even tedious), but as I really considered the idea of white allyship and learned more, the clearer I understood its problems.

In a piece for the online publication *Learning for Justice*, Colleen Clemens (2017) explains that this language matters because it pushes us to rethink whether we work *for* or *with* each other for social change. A white ally may stand up *for* BIPOC on their behalf, while an accomplice works *with* their fellow humans to strategically disrupt the racist status quo. This shift in our framework determines the way we view ourselves and act within the community.

The whole notion of “being a good ally” reinforces the idea that anti-racism is a final destination rather than active, continuous work. The myth of a “good white ally” even *hinders* change; often, the specter of a faultless, white, ally casts its shadow over our relationships with each other, offering the perfect excuse for white people like me to focus much more on getting it “right” than actually doing something...any something. In her article, Catherine Jones writes “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” (2013). Mixed up with good intentions and white guilt, the indecisiveness of white allyship reveals itself as a tool *for* injustice, not against it.

Then there is the issue of *white saviorism*. You probably recognize this pattern from movies like *The Blind Side*, where a heroic white person improves the lives of Black people in a show of inspiration for white audiences. A helpful standard I learned from SJSAs’ social change questions is to ask whether we are concerned with *credit* or *change*? As white folks, we often expect some sort of gold star for our alliance with racial justice causes. Claiming the identity of an ally is (often) accompanied by praise and kudos from other white people. In this way, allyship becomes a self-perpetuating circuit of white folks patting each other on the back, thus reinforcing a system that characterizes white people as exceptional individuals, co-opting Black leadership and pushing POC further into the margins.

The problem with our language for white activism is its ability to foster guilt, saviorism, and stagnation. Freire describes the necessity of balancing theory, reflection, and *action* in the work of social transformation. Too often, our preoccupation with being a perfect ally mires white people in the reflection stage of this cycle. The action component is much better embodied by the work of an *accomplice*. Whereas an ally might reflect on their privilege, an accomplice uses that privilege to strategically dismantle the systems that they can access because of that inherent power.

Another productive role is that of the *collaborator*, who reminds us that social justice involves everybody—white supremacy is the problem, but this isn’t about white people. Of course, there is also the necessary role of the *co-conspirator*, who is a good reminder to work subversively in the fight for racial justice. Racism is built into our institutions, so it makes sense that we would need to break some rules in order to dismantle them.

Obviously, language isn't everything. Talking the talk is much different than walking the walk. In fact, running around in circles over the perfect language to use is probably its own form of performative white allyship! With that in mind, it is much more useful to use the ally vs. accomplice framework as a *tool* rather than an identity. Build the question into your day-to-day. Ask, *what role am I inhabiting? Am I an ally or accomplice? What is needed in this moment?*

The active work of an accomplice, collaborator, or co-conspirator can be many things and take place in different settings. The free and online *Opportunities for White People in the Fight for Racial Justice* is a great resource to check out on this topic. One of the places where active measures are needed most is within our own communities, especially networks of other white people. As quilters, we are lucky to be part of a rich network of humans who are bound together by our incredible craft. Still, so many quilting spaces are characterized by their whiteness. This dynamic underscores the reality that non-white quilters are marginalized within the contemporary crafting community and there is *plenty* of work for all white crafters to do in the wake of historic and contemporary inequities.

**If you have come to this guidebook looking for “what more you can do,” I hope that you feel empowered to use the accomplice/ collaborator/ co-conspirator framework to create waves of change in your communities, especially if it feels useful.**

I want to focus in on one change tactic that is particularly relevant for quilters, sewers, and crafters. As suggested by *Opportunities for White People in the Fight For Racial Justice*, the accomplice's role in their white communities is to disrupt and make things uncomfortable; an accomplice interrupts the status quo and challenges their peers, even when it's risky. Let's start having hard—really hard—conversations with each other about race, whiteness, and what explicit measures must be taken to unpick the racist threads of our community's patchwork. Holding our community accountable for anti-racism by checking each other in and calling each other out when we do harm. This work is necessarily uncomfortable; the discomfort is the point!

As contemporary quilters, a lot of our work is done alone, at the sewing machine; it is easy to forget our history in signature quilts and sewing bees. Still, quilters have a way of finding each other. Some of us belong to guilds and clubs and a lot of us find fellowship in the robust online quilting community. Whiteness, and therefore white supremacy culture, permeates so many of these spaces, but it also offers a robust opportunity to activate other white people and repurpose our communities for justice. Beyond the language of *ally* and *accomplice* lives another “A” word: accountability. As white folks, we are simply entrenched in the systems that benefit us. This fact leaves us with inherent blind spots, making it easy to perpetuate the same systems of injustice that we are here to challenge. Accountability, to ourselves and each other, is a key part of taking this on.

Below you'll find a jumping-off activity for starting a different kind of sewing bee. There are a lot of different ways gain new perspectives, stay on track, and mitigate harm as a white person fighting for social justice; accountability groups are a good place to get started. They provide an opportunity to learn from others and organize for specific outcomes. Collaborating with others can get us out of our own heads—important work in its own right.

Quilters already love sewing together, so why not use those connections as a starting point for important discussions and transformational art making? As you meet, consider working on a collaborative quilt as you go. Have each member sew up blocks with quotes, images, and ideas; at the end of the project, you can raffle the project to raise funds for racial justice organizations or gift the quilt to a new cohort of quilting collaborators.

### **Workshop Building Activity**

Start a *Quilting Bee for Social Change*, the quilter's version of a racial justice accountability group. Reach out to quilters in your network, your guild, LQS, or internet friends from the online quilting and crafting community. A circle of like minds may have less impact than one that includes folks with different levels of understanding. Before starting, figure out the logistics of your meetups.

- Will your quilting bee take place over the course of several meets, or be a continual practice?
- How long will each meeting be and where will they take place?
- What are some ground rules for participants?
- What supplies will folks need to bring?



Once all the details are stamped out, feel free to use the following template as a jumping off point for your accountability group practice.

## Meeting Planner

1. Craft a mission statement that names your objective(s).  
*Commit to measurable social change goals that you can return to each week as a group. Hold yourself and each other accountable for working towards those aims.*  
**Reflection Questions:** By the end of your meetings, how do you aim to grow personally? How do you aim to productively impact each other? What needs to change in your community and how will you change it?
2. Choose a primary source text to analyze and discuss.  
*White people often center their own experiences when it comes to racial justice. Use this opportunity to read, critically analyze, and discuss work by Black writers, artists, and leaders.*  
**Reflection Questions:** Whose voices are not always heard and why? What lessons are hardest to learn and why?
3. Pose critical questions and facilitate discussion.  
*Disrupt. Challenge. Dig deep.*  
**Reflection Questions:** What topics are the most difficult to discuss? Why?
4. Organize.  
*Theory and reflection is only one part of the equation. Leverage your meetings to organize outside the group. One example is to raise funds for groups that explicitly work towards racial justice, or start a letter writing campaign, or volunteer for a group that needs it.*

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# The Violence of White Womanhood

By Heather Marie Scholl

**What's my part? Understanding the history of and roles of white women has been my focus for several years now. But this wasn't always the case.**

My racial justice journey began as a teenager. Attending protests, from anti-war to anti-police violence. I learned about feminism from icons like bell hooks, Angela Davis, and Gloria Anzaldua. I found commonality with Bayard Rustin. As an out teenager from a Quaker family, Rustin's experiences in the civil rights movement of homophobia, deep commitment to liberation, and pacifism moved me. I learned about the profound legacy of the Black Panthers, and the pitfalls of non-violence. All this before I was 20. Over time I became more and more uncomfortable with the white liberal communities I was a part of in the Northwest. Specifically, I struggled with the misalignment between our words and actions.

Later, in NYC, I along with thousands of others, flooded into the street when Daniel Pantaleo was not indicted for the murder of Eric Garner. I felt overcome with grief and helplessness. I had wanted most of my life to address racial justice in my creative practice, to find a voice in my community that extended beyond my immediate family and friends. Despite this desire, I found myself blocked and silencing myself.

Something about that moment, hearing the stories of so many lost lives, so much grief and fear, and of people who had learned to deal with the threat this country posed to their families and loved ones. Mixed with an outpouring of support that I had never seen before it clicked that my job was not to tell their story, but to address my own lineage. To examine, what is my part? I needed to investigate: What does it mean to be a white woman in this world? How have we perpetuated violence? Where are we complicit in this system? And more than that, in what ways have we been active agents of white supremacist violence?

I began a fine art series, *Whitework* (<http://www.heathermariescholl.com/whitework>), that uses whitework embroidery and other white on white techniques to interrogate white women's role in white supremacy. This series has turned out to be a piece of my life's work, with the final vision for the project still emerging. Shortly after beginning the series I connected with two other women, Sophie Ellman-Golan and Rhiannon Childs, to start *Confront White Womanhood*, which held anti-racism workshops for white women (2016-2020). Having that opportunity to support and hear from women across the country has impacted my understandings of white womanhood. In particular, the ways we block progress, even as we speak of being committed to anti-racism. It has been inspiring to witness how conversations of white women's complicity has exploded, as we work to challenge ourselves and others.

Through this work, a space opened up to investigate my own life: examining my family histories and starting new conversations with family members. I heard stories of encounters with the KKK, or roles of complicity. Some of my family's stories have been inspiring, some horrifying, some clearly exaggerated to maintain the idea of our goodness.

Focusing on white women, allows me to get specific. It creates a path of awareness so that change might actually happen. I don't do this to claim that white women are worse than white men, nor to say we are better than them. But to understand this history, how it manifests in me and fellow white women, so that we can actually witness these wounds and change. I believe we all have the power to change. I believe that women, trans and non-binary people are leading the movement towards liberation and greater humanity. We can choose to do the work to be part of that or not.



**White womanhood is a set of behaviors and expectations at the intersection of whiteness and womanhood. It is a construct that exists outside of individual white women, yet is enacted by us.**

**White Women's safety and comfort has been prioritized, particularly in relation to Black people. Stemming from the misogynist belief that women must be protected and cared for by (white) men, during slavery and particularly during reconstruction this became overtly racialized.**

## What is white womanhood?

I want to start off being clear, *white womanhood* is different than white women. White womanhood is something that can be invoked whether or not white women are present or involved. We can think of the legacy of the lynching of Black men in America. Many of those brutal murders, were justified through the claim of a white woman being violated, yet for many of those there is no record of a named white woman. Rather the idea of white women was used, as justification and as a threat. Often the real threat to whiteness was Black people's accumulation of resources or influence.

Since white womanhood is a construct, it does not care who you are or how you identify, but expects compliance to patriarchal white supremacy. The expectations of white womanhood have also been thrust on trans and non-binary people, even when they do not identify as woman. These expectations have been part of erasing indigenous women's heritage and efforts to turn them and other light skinned people of color into "white women".

The dynamics of white womanhood, are a burden and violence that we all bear. Whether we've been forced to view ourselves through that lens, or whether you are participating in destructive racialized "protection" of white women.

I think of these behaviors and expectations in a couple of categories; safety and comfort, innocence and victimhood, universalism or centering, and white saviorism. Each of these blend into each other and can come into play simultaneously.

## Safety and Comfort

Prior to reconstruction and the abolition of slavery, the interactions of white women and Black men were not heavily policed or seen as a threatening beyond immediate family relations (*White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the 19th-Century South*, by Martha Hodes). However once slavery ended, and Black men were considered, by law, to be free men no longer defined as property, this changed. This is when the first wave of the KKK started and when claims exploded that Black men were raping white women every chance they got. Suddenly Black men were the danger lurking behind every white woman, and white men were the only ones standing between this certain violence. It was propaganda designed to maintain racial oppression, a way to ignite people's primal instincts of protection, for the use of protecting white supremacy, and wealth. I believe it's this moment that defines, for America, that rape and sexual assault is what happens between Black men and white women. This movement to defend women against supposed sexual violence was completely blind to the frequency of white male perpetrators and entirely focused on the mythical Black assailant.

What does this mean for how we live today? Every decade of American history since this moment, you can find cases, laws, anecdotes, etc. that re-emphasize this threat. Even our attempts to enact legislation to protect women from violence, like the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1995, was led by white women primarily from middle class and affluent backgrounds. This law resulted in reinforcing racial stereotypes of violence, and mass incarceration of mostly Black, Latinx and Indigenous men as the resolution (<https://theslot.jezebel.com/the-long-shadow-of-joe-bidens-legacy-on-violence-against-1833875134>). Even while Black women organizers at the time were saying, this is not what we need for healing violence in our communities.

Today, this seeps into how we navigate daily encounters. The hyper vigilance we may have towards potential Black and Brown strangers assaulting us versus our much more likely white community members. Watching the hundreds of "Karen" videos that now exist, shows just how reactive we can be to the presence of Black people around us. And often how we expect our authority to lead to them behaving the way we deem appropriate.

I often think of an incident on a train traveling through wine country in California, back in 2015. A white woman complained about a group of Black women who were loud and enjoying themselves. She, rather than take care of her needs by being relocated, spoke to the staff who echoed her own bias of social norms. The group of Black women were forced off the train,

and met with law enforcement. Because this woman, and the mostly white staff, felt that white women's comfort was a priority, they made this group of Black women responsible for it. And law enforcement, agreed. The women later settled in a racial discrimination suit (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/nation-now/2016/04/20/black-women-kicked-off-napa-valley-wine-train-settle-racial-discrimination-case/83280120/>).

Sometimes prioritization of our safety and comfort can look like expecting others to side with us, or turning to managers or husbands to intervene, or only listening to facts about racism and white supremacy when it's said in the 'right way', it can appear in almost any environment. Its built on the often unconscious idea that our needs are ultimately more important than the people of color around us. Importantly, all of this exists in an environment that still disproportionately incarcerates and murders Black, Latinx, and Indigenous men. This, like every role I will discuss, is both individually enacted and reinforced by people and systems of power around us. Effectively reinforcing these behaviors and beliefs. That our comfort and safety is the most important, even when it comes at the expense of others. And unfortunately, when it is violated we can become righteous victims, furthering harm.

## Innocence and Victimhood

**White women have historically — biblically — been lifted up as the ultimate image of purity and goodness. In that way white women have represented the preservation of whiteness.**

An over abundance of protection is one effect of this perception of white women. The assumption of innocence goes hand in hand. That we are not responsible for our actions, that someone or something else is causing it. Ultimately believing that we are victims within our lives, and in our relationships with others. If there is a disagreement, an offense, or even if there is abuse or violence, we are assumed to be victims. While we certainly do experience the violence of sexual assault, family and intimate partner violence, sexism, and misogyny in our lives and workplaces, we are also the perpetrators of violence.

The positioning of us as victims aids in evading responsibility. If we are victims to your anger, your actions, then we no longer have to be accountable for our racism whether covert or overt. There is a lot of power in this. By seamlessly transitioning from being an aggressor to a victim, we disguise the influence of whiteness hiding ourselves from the power of privilege we hold. In one sense when we are coming from a place of victimhood, it can feel like we are at the whim of others. However, for us as white women our victimhood is weaponized. In 2020, when Amy Cooper threatened to call the cops on Black birder, Christian Cooper, she invoked her victimhood. Saying "I will call the cops and tell them a black man is threatening me". Because of the cultural and institutional practice of protecting us especially against perceived racial threats, most respond to this quickly and with action.

If I was walking down a street through a predominately Black neighborhood, I may feel a fear of assault (real or imagined). Yet at the same time I hold power, the potential danger of me claiming assault, or calling authorities, looms large. And presents a far greater threat of violence in those moments.

Innocence and protection of us are deeply tied. Historically, Carolyn Bryant and her responsibility for Emmitt Till's murder comes to mind. After Till's mother passed, Bryant revealed that she lied about what happened. Her innocence and victimhood carried her through years of evading responsibility for her words and actions. More recently I think about Bothem Shem Jean's murder and Amber Guyger who walked into his apartment in 2018 and shot and killed him. The forgiveness showered on her during her trial, even as she refused to speak honestly to her own culpability. She evaded questions of why she did not perform CPR and other life saving measures, as Jean lay dying on the floor. Yet, by the end of the trail, she received public hugs, counsel and forgiveness from the presiding judge and Jean's brother. She was clearly the victim, of what I'm still not sure.

Sometimes the actions can be small, microscopic even. The daily ways we are given grace for misdeeds rather than punished and criminalized. Innocence can be an extra dose of compassion that is not afforded to others. Innocence is seductive. The privileges we are awarded by being white women makes our lives easier, and it is challenging not to accept them. When we are handed innocence, why wouldn't we want to accept? It does not feel good

to be guilty. When an offer to no longer be fully responsible for our actions appears, its easy to want to grab it. Ask yourself: “Do I deserve this? Can I show myself compassion, without accepting false forgiveness from others? How can I be more honest about my part?”

## Universalism and Centering

**As white women we are also known for centering ourselves—assuming our experiences apply to all women. This is most insidious in liberal, activist, and feminist spaces.**

Centering can feel like empathy. We may hear a person of color’s experience and attempt to relate by sharing a story of our own, or how we feel about that persons shared experience. Sometimes this may be recommended as a way to show empathy and listening skills. When it comes to whiteness, it can result in re-centering ourselves, no matter our intentions. When we respond to a person of color sharing their experiences with our own it puts the spot light, comfortably, back on ourselves.

In feminist spaces, we often assume women’s rights looks the same for women of color as it does for white women. For example, the fight for abortion rights can fall flat, when its not also paired with an understanding of how Black and Indigenous women are fighting for their right to have and raise children. Studies have shown that Black women are 2.5 times more likely to die from childbirth (<https://www.nbcnews.com/health/womens-health/u-s-finally-has-better-maternal-mortality-data-black-mothers-n1125896>), or 4 times more likely to have their children removed and placed into childcare (<https://www.wnyc.org/story/black-parents-nj-lose-custody-their-kids-more-anyone-else/>), and frequently are encouraged to have abortions when seeking pre-natal care.

Women of color have been told in feminist movements to wait, that its not time to address their issues. Prioritizing our own experiences over others. This was a factor in the passing of VAWA, which ignored the women of color organizers and survivors who were saying we do not want this. That tying this aid to the Crime Act was dangerous. VAWA essentially married the idea that to protect women against violence, we needed a rigorous system of incarceration. Because of the biased intuitions in this country, that means more Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people behind bars. This is also an example of people outside of a community proposing solutions and seeking to rescue others, also known as white saviorism.

## White Saviorism

**We arrive in communities of color, assuming that we can single-handedly “fix” a community of color’s problems without following the leadership existing in that community.**

White saviorism is essentially a destructive form of caretaking rooted in the experience and satisfaction of the white person. As Teju Cole defines it, “The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege.” Unfortunately, white saviorism is the way that white people are taught to show up, especially white women. We take over movement spaces, organizing efforts, centering ourselves, our beliefs, our ideas for how things should get done. Often resulting in further damage to those communities we sought to help.

I understand white saviorism to be an extension of the European Christian traditions of alms. Alms meaning pity or mercy. It is the idea that I give to you so I can get into heaven, so I may receive. Its built on a class-based understanding that those with resources are deserving and more pious than others. The missions that have sprung from this belief have damaged communities across the globe. From groups who “liberated” Africans from slave ships, only to place them within missions and boarding schools to train them into European Christian traditions and gender roles. Or the initiative in America, to re-educate all indigenous people on Turtle Island (North America), after genocide proved inefficient. This resulted in generations of cultural loss and physical and sexual abuse from these boarding schools.

Each of these efforts were typically led by white women. They insisted that these actions were ones of compassion. That ripping children from their families and culture was part of saving them, and providing possibility for them. This idea continues today in the disproportionate number of Black and Indigenous children in the foster care system. Even in our modern systems of education, opportunity and success for Black, Indigenous and Latinx children means removing them from families and culture and placing them in white schools, families, or communities.

At times our desire to help others has been manipulated by those in authority. For example, during the internment of Japanese people in America (1942-4), state welfare social workers were used to coordinate this massive human task (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/592361?seq=1>). Social workers, who were majority white women, were reassigned. Some of them were responsible for sending families to camps that they had previously helped to receive welfare benefits.

A few years ago, I learned that my Grandmother was one of these social workers. It was an unexpected piece of her story, that we learned long after her passing. She was known as someone who resisted World War II, when it was unpopular to do so. Her Quaker community had supported Gordon Hirabayashi, who resisted curfew and internment orders in Seattle, WA. So, it was shocking to discover she was among many other women, responsible for ensuring all Japanese people were accounted for and sent to internment camps. Institutions had the power to convince people that supporting the internment of Japanese people was a compassionate way to help.

So often our forms of helping can turn into forms of violence to the very communities we seek to serve. In these situations, it's important to ask those communities, what do you need from me, and then do that thing. It could mean challenging the violent bureaucracy of the organizations we work with, and speaking to authority figures. Sometimes that could be to go home, to not be a part of whatever action or organizing is happening in that moment. Even when we want to show up and dismantle white supremacy culture in our lives and communities, sometimes our most impactful action is about stepping back. Its about giving up the power that we have. And instead making peace with us not having all of the answers. With perhaps it not being the time for things to be led by white women.

## Conclusion

**The history of the UDC's efforts across the country is important to understand. Much of their labor was seen as charity, as social services for those in need, championing education, food aid, and public services. Yet they served through the violent lens of white supremacy.**

I want to conclude with an historical note on the violence of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). They greatly shaped our nation and our roles as white women. The UDC was created to provide aid to white communities, to educate, and as willful creation of white supremacy propaganda. They joined together after the Civil War and the defeat of the Confederacy, with the goal of carrying on the legacy of the confederacy and the values of the old south. With the express purpose to ensure that future generations knew of the idyllic superiority of the old south, "old south" was code for slavery (*Dixie's Daughters*, by Karen L. Cox).

The UDC worked to erect monuments for decades working with state and national government officials. In addition, they organized the Children of the Confederacy who were often seen at unveiling ceremonies. They raised funds to send white women from confederate families to be trained as teachers, so they could re-enter school systems and teach these values to future generations. They successfully got pro-confederate and pro-KKK literature into public schools, and drastically changed school curriculum for generations to come. For example, in 2015, Roni Dean-Burren went viral after taking photographs of her child's Texas textbook that called enslaved Africans, workers and immigrants. This modern textbook came from the legacy of white women organizing.

Their actions ensured that thousands, perhaps millions of children, for multiple generations would be impacted by their propaganda. And ultimately, I believe they are a driving force behind the beliefs that continue to drive white supremacists today, including the insurrection at the Capital on January 6, 2021. To understand white women's roles in history is to acknowledge our influence in creating the conditions for the modern white supremacist movement.

Members of the UDC were able to take up roles as organizers and public speakers, while still being seen as embodying the appropriate role for white women. Suffragettes at the same time were not given that understanding. It was because their public roles strengthened the legacy of white supremacy, that they were seen as still abiding by appropriate gender roles. As I think about saviorism and white women's socialization around helping others, this piece is important to understand. Specifically, how it had not been an accidental tool

of white supremacy, but an active one that demonstrates the violence in education and aid work. Today social workers, educators, and other helping and care professions are dominated by white women. Who's values are being served by that? How are diverse communities being supported through a monolithic force of white womanhood?

When we read history, it's easy to separate ourselves from it. To see those actions as other people. That it has nothing to do with our lives now. However, its embedded into our families, our culture, our institutions and there has been no great change to erase that. When looking at our own families, we can easily touch family members that had overt or covert roles in this. What did you hear from your mother or grandmother? Or even great-grandmother? What jobs or organizations were they part of? What language did they use? How did they support the violence and actions of men in their lives? I think of my grandmother who I would have never guessed had an active role in Japanese internment. But I also think of my other grandmother who grew up in the deep south, who expressed a disdain for people of color and had a husband known for violence. The aunt who ranted about seeing Spanish language programs when I was a child.

Part of our white womanhood is to focus so much on our powerlessness. Infamous for our refrain, "What can I do?" We see the impossibility of how one person could change anything. Whether that be the impact of our anti-racism on collective change, or the impact of a family member who cannot stand Muslim or Latinx immigrants. We are just one person, they are just one person, we're not that impactful. Yet with the lens of history we can see how each individual has had profound impact. That our singular actions are never in isolation. Each act is certain to have a ripple effect. The ripple of one exaggerated call to 911. Or the unknown effect of starting to have regular conversations about racism with a parent, or a niece.

Still fresh on my spirit, the lessons for me of January 6, 2021 remind me of the importance of every act. It demonstrated that doing anti-racism work, is not about helping or saving someone else. It's about deciding if we want to align with the core of our values. At the root of the insurrection was racism, was white supremacy, and the rage of whiteness. It was about how embedded those values are in law enforcement, in military, in government, and in every sector of life. Our anti-racist actions are about investing in the values we believe in, in the country we believe in. Do you want to live up to the ideals of democracy? Then we must undo white supremacy's grip.

This is what it means when Audre Lorde says "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own."

### **Activity**

Trace your family history. This does not need to be a literal, or traditional family tree. But a documentation of the lessons we've learned, of the histories we come from. Where possible, talk to your family members about their past, when and how did they understand race? What stories you have heard? What jobs did they take? Feel free to add in historical facts that feel relevant, perhaps you had relatives that lived in Oklahoma during the Tulsa Massacre, even if they lived far from Tulsa. This is an opportunity to trace our lineages that often go invisible.

I encourage you to use any medium that feels expressive to you; quilting, embroidery, painting and drawing, writing, etc. And explore using mostly tones of white. My own series whitework, built on these white-on-white techniques, is a way to represent the invisible nature of these stories to ourselves. We can make them visible.

Share what you learned and created with your family with your community, talk about what this means to you. Talk about your responsibility in this web. I would love to see what you come up with. You can send images to SJSA or directly to me at: [scholl.heather@gmail.com](mailto:scholl.heather@gmail.com)