UNDERSTANDING RACISM: AN HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

(This presentation and exercise is inspired by the UNDOING RACISM WORKSHOP of The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond.)

Introductions

(1) Please say your name and something about yourself you want to share.

(2) In what ways do you believe that understanding racism can help make you a more effective grassroots social justice activist?

Agenda Review
(1) What is Racism? focuses primarily on racism's effect on people of color.
(2) Shinin' the Lite on White focuses primarily on racism's effect on white people.
(3) Both pieces form part of an analysis of the U.S. white supremacy system.
(4) The analysis is specific to the U.S.A.
(5) I call this session "an historical introduction" because I believe that we cannot understand how racism operates today, if we do not know its history. And if we don't know how it works today, we can't work effectively to challenge it tomorrow.

What is Racism?
A Group Brainstorm

* Ask each person to give a brief definition or description. Scribe it on the newsprint. Fill up no more than one page of print.

** After the brainstorm, ask " What do you notice about this list of definitions?
-- There are many different definitions. -- Few or none mention the word 'race.'
Imagine if we had 3 hours to decide on one effective action to challenge racism. If we have 15 different definitions, how could we agree on a common action?

I believe that the inability to decide on a common action is the result of a consciously constructed campaign of confusion implemented over the last 30 years. I'm not a conspiracy theorist. I'm talking about people in power making plans over coffee, in board rooms, on golf courses. All legal and above board. A bit of history will help make my point.

A Campaign of Confusion on "Racism"

During the height of the Southern Black Freedom struggle, in the 1950's and 1960's, people were clear on what racism was. Racism was visible, legal and institutionalized. They called it "segregation." Across the ocean folks called the same system "apartheid." Every institution was separate, unequal, maintained for the clear purpose of subordinating people of African descent and benefiting all classes of people of European descent.

The movement, led by African Americans, was massive and multi-racial. And that movement inspired many other movements: liberation struggles of Chicanos/Latinos, Native Americans and Asian Americans; movements for education reform and against the U.S. war in Vietnam; the women's movement, and the movements for gay and lesbian liberation.

But the price activists paid was high. In the South, for example, when Black people challenged racism, they were often fired, evicted, imprisoned, raped or murdered. When white people challenged racism, they were called "race traitors," ostracized by their friends and neighbors, denied opportunities to earn a living, and occasionally had crosses burned in front of their houses.

In spite of the overwhelming odds, the power of organized, committed people won some significant gains, the most prominent of which was the end to legal apartheid. Perhaps even more important, people who organized got a real sense of their own *power.*

When the Black Liberation Movement moved north, activists targeted institutions—schools, housing, social services—that practiced segregation in fact, though not by law. Furthermore, African Americans called for self-determination in their own communities, and challenged the white domination of institutions within their communities. Many liberal whites worked as professionals within these institutions and felt their privilege personally threatened. Using their discomfort with the term "Black Power" as an excuse, they abandoned their solidarity with the Black liberation struggle.

Progressive whites abandoned their solidarity for different reasons. As they began to "organize in their own communities," against the war in Vietnam, for educational transformation, for women's and gay liberation, and for an end to environmental degradation, they found that it was very difficult to mobilize large numbers of white activists if the organizers demanded that these activists start from a firm anti-racist perspective, a lens through which to view their own issues.

SNCC (Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, a leading group in the southern Black Freedom Movement) had suggested that radical whites organize *against racism* in their own communities in order to build genuine coalitions between activists of color and white activists. But white activists simply *organized in their own communities* and said less and less about racism. (There were many exceptions to this racist organizing: for example, the Students for a Democratic Society — SDS — was the largest anti-racist organization made up of mostly white students that the country had ever seen.)

Meanwhile, the government was exercising its own form of virulent and violent racism. Under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI, with the complicity of police departments all over the country, the government waged a war against revolutionaries of color: African American, indigenous, Chicano, Puertorriqueno and Asian American. Hundreds were imprisoned, exiled or murdered. The FBI planted agents within revolutionary organizations, who spread distrust and often incited incendiary actions as a way to entrap activists, and ensure them long prison terms. The FBI called this campaign COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program), and many activists believe it is still in effect today.

With liberation movements in disarray, white-controlled institutions began to redefine the meaning of the term "racism" in order *both to undercut white support for liberation struggles, and to aggravate divisions among activists of color.*

#1: Reverse racism is a form of racism.

Reverse racism is supposedly something nasty that people of color do to white people. The term was first coined during the 1968 presidential campaign of arch-segregationist George Wallace. In order to win white working class support in the South, Wallace asserted that government programs that supported Black people were deliberately victimizing white people. He called this governmental action *reverse racism*.

In my 35 years of doing anti-racist organizing, I have actually witnessed only one example of "reverse racism." That was when the lawyers defending the white cops who beat Rodney King played the tape of that beating backwards during the trial!

But in spite of the bogus nature of "reverse racism," it was brilliant as a campaign strategy. Dubbed the "Southern Strategy" by electoral analysts, its aim was to win white working and middle class voters away from the Democratic Party by consciously catering to their racism. The strategy bore bitter fruit. Wallace's American Independent Party garnered 10 million white voters, who became the foundation for the New Right organizations of the Republican Party which now control Congress and the "bi-partisan" national dialogue on virtually all social and economic issues.

#2. Racism is personified by the TV character Archie Bunker.

Pop culture did its bit to confuse the white populace. TV created the image of Archie Bunker, the loud mouth, verbally racist, white working class man who was funny (to some viewers) as well as obnoxious. The image of Archie the racist promoted several false concepts of racism: it's the result of individual, not institutional, behavior; it's carried out only by white working class men, not white working class women or white middle class men and women; and it is overt language that may be sickening and offensive, but is really just "harmless talk."

#3. "Racism" is the same as "prejudice" or "discrimination."

This definition of "racism" has been widely disseminated in public schools and universities, so that many people use these terms as synonyms. But they are not.

Prejudice is a prejudgment, which can be either positive or negative, about a person, group, event or thing, for or against. *Discrimination* is action based on that prejudice. A negative prejudice about a group of people is often called a *stereotype*. An action based on a stereotype is usually called *bigotry*.

What distinguishes all these terms from *racism* is that none of them necessarily involve a power relationship as a condition of their existence. For example, a person of color can be prejudiced against another person of color or a white person, but that doesn't make her a racist because she has little or no access to the institutional power that could back up her actions.

Why has the misconception of "racism" as "prejudice" or "discrimination" been so widely used in educational settings? Educational institutions have been a major political battleground against racism and for community of color self-determination since the mid 1960's. Activists have challenged racist school curricula, teaching staff, disciplinary procedures against children of color, tracking systems, limitations of access to higher education, and lack of accountability of schools to the community.

My belief is that popularizing "racism" as "prejudice" is consciously used to take all white professionals working in any capacity in any school systems off the hook. They are not implementing institutional racism, because there is no such thing! A six year old child who acts out can be blamed for "racism" just as much as the principal responsible for the school that has failed to educate him. It's not an issue of *power* but merely of *prejudice.*

#4. Racism is the same as "race relations."

This definition is, I think, a creation of sociologists. Racism isn't just about the Archie Bunkers. It's about how groups of different "races" treat each other. What's left out of this "group dynamics" explanation of racism is any analysis of the differential power of the participating groups. Perhaps this is because the (mostly) white sociologists using this analysis do not choose to recognize how mainstream white institutions demonstrate preferential treatment to *all white groups as compared to all groups of people of color.*

#5. Anti-racism is the same as diversity or multi-culturalism.

Progressives have added to the campaign of confusion. This particular mis-definition of "racism" has been perpetuated by social justice educators and trainers. *Diversity* refers to different kinds of people: gay, straight, old, young, white, different communities of color, able, physically challenged, etc. When white folks use the term *diversity,* they usually mean a few folks who are not white in a predominantly white group. The term *diversity* achieved popularity among anti-racist trainers when many Fortune 500 companies hired these trainers to run 'diversity' workshops for their multi-racial work forces. Corporate CEO's knew that they needed to ensure good relations among their workers to keep out unions, maintain production, and increase profits.

Multi-cultural at its best celebrates different forms of culture; it has nothing necessarily to do with "races" of people, nor with "diversity" of people. A group or institution that endorses multi-culturalism can support racism or anti-racism. The issue is not one/two/many cultures but who has the power?

As People's Institute trainers ask in their Undoing Racism Workshop,
"If you want to have a 'multi-cultural table,' what does white culture bring to that table?" *The table.*

#6. Racism is an oppression like other isms: sexism, classism, or heterosexism.

In the mid 1980's, many white progressives began organizing themselves through consciousness of their own oppression as individuals and as part of a group, instead of around "issues." This method of organizing became known as *identity-based politics.* It was a very powerful form of consciousness-raising for thousands of people, and became the basis for many of the social justice movements against sexism and homophobia and anti-semitism.

But identity-based politics also has had some negative effects, such as:

(a) *Oppression olympics* (a term coined by Elizabeth Martínez): endless arguments that begin with "my pain is worse than your pain;"

(b) Fruitless debates about the "hierarchies" or "equalities" of oppression, all of which ignore the *historical and institutional interrelationships among oppressions;*

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(c) False analogies between racism (usually referring to the experience of African Americans) and other "isms," especially sexism, heterosexism and anti-semitism. Although all these are forms of oppression, there is no historical similarity between the slavery experienced by people of African descent, the genocide experienced by Native Americans, the colonial wars of conquest experienced by Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and Filipinos -- and any forms of discrimination faced by European immigrants *once they came to the United States.*

These false analogies also paper over the distinct history of racism that has pervaded white progressive movements of electoral reformers, women, workers, farmers, environmentalists, anti-war and queer activists for the last 250 years.

Finally, false analogies marginalize the issues of activists of color within these social justice movements, and prevent these activists from exercising their leadership potential in building bridges among different identity-based social movements.

A Working Definition of Racism

If you take apart the term *racism,* you get an "ism" -- an oppression -- based on *race.* The People's Institute uses this working definition:

Racism equals race prejudice plus power.

We've already defined *prejudice.* Let's examine *race* and *power.*

RACE

The Human Race:
Born and Bred in Africa

Have you ever heard a well-meaning white person say, "I'm not a member of any race except the human race?" What she usually means by this statement is that she doesn't want to perpetuate racial categories by acknowledging that she is white. This is an evasion of responsibility for her participation in a system based on supremacy for white people.

But anthropologically speaking, her point is well taken. Taking the term "race" to mean "species," there is only one species of human. All of us belong to the human race. And the human race was born, raised and bred in Africa. Africa is the motherland of human civilization: religion, philosophy, art, language, architecture, science, medicine, agriculture and urban planning.

People indigenous to Africa and the Americas have always celebrated the diversity of the human species. You can see that celebration in paintings of peoples on the tomb of Ramses III (1200 BC) of Kemet (Egypt) and the four directions of the world celebrated by Native Americans. What makes these representations so different from those introduced by Europeans is that the former bear no witness to any hierarchy of value of humans based on ethnicity or skin color.

Europeans: Seeing the Human Race
through 'Race-colored' glasses

Beginning in the fifteenth century, Europeans began to *see the world through race-colored glasses.* At first, their priests and Popes justified the new worldview as God's law revealed to Christians. By the 18th century their scientists used their racial lenses to construct racial categories for human beings, with distinct hierarchies based on religion, ethnicity and skin color. European slave-owners in the colonies created a whole legal system based on race. And by the 19th century, politicians asserted that 'race' was the reason Europeans and European-Americans deserved to run the world.

To understand why and how this happened, we need to examine elements of the history of Europe and the United States. But first, let's start with a working definition of race, created by The People's Institute:

Race is "a specious classification of human beings created by Europeans (whites) which assigns human worth and social status using "white" as the model of humanity and the height of human achievement for the purpose of establishing and maintaining privilege and power." (Ronald Chisom and Michael Washington, Undoing Racism: A Philosophy of International Social Change. People's Institute Press: The People's Institute, 1444 North Johnson St., New Orleans, LA. 70116. Second Edition, 1997. pp. 30-31.)

European Race-Colored Glasses

Biology: the blood lens

Race as a biological concept was created in 15th century Spain by the Spanish Inquisition. In 1492, just as Columbus was sailing the ocean blue -- and getting lost -- the Christian kingdom of Ferdinand and Isabella succeeded in driving out the Moors (African and Arab Muslims) who had ruled the Iberian Peninsula since 721 A.D.

Under Moorish rule, Spain had been the center of European culture. The Moors built 11 universities, thousands of book stores, hot and cold running water perfumed with roses, and a system of public baths for poor as well as rich. Moorish cities were centers of trade with Africa and Asia. Jewish people flourished during the Moorish empire; they had major roles in education and commerce, and were treated more justly than at any other time in European history.

But the Christian conquest changed all that. The Inquisition demanded that all Muslims and Jews convert to Christianity or face expulsion from Spain. Many converted but practiced their religions in secret. So the Inquisition established the infamous practice of *limpieza de sangre:* testing the blood as well as the family tree of Moors and Jews to ferret out non-Christians. One drop of "dark" blood and you were out!

The tradition of one drop of dark blood lived on in the apartheid South. Until very recently, if you lived in South Carolina and had 1/16 Black ancestry, you were legally classified as Black. If you lived in Louisiana, the percentage was 1/32. So crossing state lines could change your ancestry!

Is it a coincidence that Inquisitors did their "racial blood tests" wearing long white robes and pointed white hoods?

In the 16th and 17th centuries, European conquistadors needed to create a theological justification for their conquest of the Americas and Africa. How could they steal the land inhabited and cherished by millions of indigenous people and not be considered thieves? How could they kidnap and enslave and murder millions of African peoples and still be good Christians? How could they annihilate whole nations of indigenous people and not go to hell?

Spain and Portugal, good Catholic countries, sought out the wisdom of the Pope who clarified their Christian duty for them. It's OK to take the land of an "infidel" (one who does not practice Christianity) because an "infidel," by definition has violated Christian law. If the 'infidel' protests, it's appropriate to kill him. It's important to enslave someone who is a "savage" (one who does not practice European culture) to teach the enslaved person the virtues of "civilization." As a matter of fact, you're doing him or her a Christian favor, by removing his/her sinful ways.

African slavery could also be justified by Christian symbolism that pre-dated any European contact with African peoples. In Christianity, the color black is associated with death or evil; the color white with life, goodness and purity. So when the light skin Englishmen met dark skin Africans, the Englishmen justified their brutal treatment of Africans by the notion that *white* 'good' was conquering *black* 'evil.' Check out the terms "black" and "white" in the dictionary; these absurd connotations still exist.

The "Scientific" lens

The 18th and 19th centuries were the height of European colonialism of Africa. By this period, Christianity's hegemony over European values and ideology was being seriously challenged by the scientific revolution. European intellectuals had to come up with a new world view to justify their nations' conquest of Africa. So, 'scientists' created the racial categories of *Mongoloid, Negroid and Caucasoid* and assigned them to a hierarchy in the human family: (1) Caucasoid (2) Mongoloid (3) Negroid. These categories are still taught in some U.S. schools today.

Mongolia was presumably the historical home of "mongoloids" or people of Asian descent. If you check the dictionary you'll find that an "obsolete" meaning of "mongoloid" is an idiot. (A far cry from today's stereotype of "the model minority.")

The Caucuses, the steppes of Russia, was the ostensible homeland of Caucasoids or Caucasians. Conveniently, a skull was found there with a larger cranium than others discovered, indicating to the scientific racists that people of European descent had more brain power than darker folks did!

But what about Negroids? Where is Negro land? And if "negroids" came from Africa, how come they weren't called "africoids?" The answer, I think, lies in the ideological justification for slavery. White people had to dehumanize people of African descent in order to convince themselves that Africans could do nothing useful except perform enslaved labor.

If a people has no homeland, they have no history, no culture, no civilization. They are not really "a people." Hence, their "racial category" is not named after their continent, but after their 'race,' -- "Negro." ('Negro' is the English term for the Spanish word "negro," which means "black." Spain was the first European country to institute the trans-Atlantic slave trade.)

The worldview based on 'race' was created by Europeans in the 15th century to justify and legitimize European conquest of Africa and the Americas, and the genocide and system of slavery which resulted from this conquest. European Americans added some key aspects to the 'race' lens as they colonized and conquered the lands that were once called "Turtle Island."

A human being is renamed a 'slave:'
the economic lens of race

As Elizabeth Martínez pointed out in her essay, "What is White Supremacy?," the wealth that initially made the United States possible as an independent nation-state was created when European colonialists stole the land of Native Americans, kidnaped people from Africa and forced both Africans and Native Americans into a system of enslaved labor. Stolen land, genocide and enslaved labor provided the initial *capital* of *capitalism*.

Few U.S. history textbooks describe the origins of the U.S. economic system in this way. Nor do they describe in great detail how Europeans created the world's first system of racially-based slavery. The Africans who were brought to Virginia in 1619 were 'captives' but they were not yet 'slaves.' Their economic status was ambiguous: some remained in bondage to an English colonialist for a lifetime, while others were freed.

Yet by 1662, the colonists passed a law stating that the status of a child born to an African woman, but fathered by an Englishman, would be 'bond or free' depending on the status of the mother. This was the beginning of racialized slavery. In another few generations, colonizers used the terms 'Negro' and 'slave' interchangeably. If an African was not enslaved, she or he would be specifically identified as "a free Negro." The implication of this usage was clear: the colonizers assumed that all enslaved people were of African descent, and that the only status appropriate to people of African descent was that of a slave.

Race: the lens of 'subhumanity'

A corollary of viewing race through an economic lens is viewing 'racialized' people as subhumans. If the only possible status for a person of African descent is as a slave, how do you account for the thousands of free Africans in the colonial and post independence period? Reduce their humanity, culturally and legally, until it is as close as possible to the status of "slave."

In colonial South Carolina, an enslaved African who was manumitted (freed from slavery) by a white owner had to leave the colony within a few months, or else be liable to legal re-enslavement. During the era of Jacksonian "democracy," the right to vote was taken away from Pennsylvania free people of African descent at the same time as voting restrictions were lifted on all new Irish immigrants. Visual images of African Americans often resembled animals more than humans (see Marvin Riggs' superb film, Ethnic Notions).

The notion of indigenous people as more akin to animals than human beings is at the basis of U.S. policy toward Native Americans. In 1784 George Washington, famous Indian fighter, large landholder and slave owner, advised the Continental Congress that it would be cheaper for the new nation to buy up Indian land than to make war on Indian people for the land.

If you make war, Washington cautioned, "the savage as the wolf" -- both wild beasts of the forest -- will retreat for awhile and then come back to attack you. Washington's metaphor stuck. The young U.S. nation-state, and all sectors of European-Americans, began to view the Native American as a wild animal.

(For more on this analysis, see Robert Williams, "Sovereignty, Racism and Human Rights: the case for Indian self-determination." From a speech given at the University of Montana, in April, 1994. Robert Williams is a professor of Law and American Studies at the University of Arizona. Speech on tape is distributed by Alternative Radio Project. 2129 Mapleton. Boulder, Colordado, 80304.)

Race through the legal lens

Race was created as the law of the land in the late 1600's. The governing class of the colonies developed an intricate legal system to institutionalize the means by which they had created their own wealth from stolen land and enslaved labor. The Virginia "Slaves Codes, " written from 1680 to 1705, defined a slave as either an African or an Indian, a servant as a "white" person; banned racial intermarriage, stipulated specific forms of punishment for Blacks or whites who defied the system of racialized slavery, and even curtailed non-brutal behavior of owners toward their "property."

(For a detailed study of racial laws in the colonial period, see A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., In the Matter of Color: Race & The American Legal Process: The Colonial Period. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980. pp. 19-60.)

(For an analysis of how European colonialists justified theft of indigenous land and extermination of indigenous people, see Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest. NY: Norton & Company, 1975.)

The Invention of the 'White Race'

In the colonial period, colonial rulers referred to Europeans who came to the colonies as indentured servants in a variety of ways which differentiated them from African or indigenous people. They were called "Christians" to distinguish them from indigenous and African "heathens" or "savages." They were called "servants" to distinguish them from "slaves." They were also referred to by their country of origin (English, Scottish, etc.) to distinguish them from Africans. In early 17th century Virginia, legal codes relating to the regulation of the working poor of all nationalities, an African was usually called "a Negro," followed by a name, while Europeans were simply called by their first and last names.

Note that these distinctions were made by the rich about the poor. The land owning law makers, who got their 'right' to own land and make laws for the Virginia colony by buying stock in the Virginia Company, had no need to describe themselves. These stockholders knew who they were.

But in 1691, the colonial legislators created a new legal category:
"whatsoever English *or other white man or woman, bond or free*, shall intermarry with a Negro, mulatto, or Indian man or woman, bond or free, he shall within three months be banished from this dominion forever." (Higginbotham, op. cit., p. 44 Italics added.)

Up until this point, the term "white" may have been used in dialogue, but never in law. And when it was used, it referred only to indentured servants. The 1691 law set

several legal precedents that have profoundly effected the concept of race to this day:
- °° The first legal use of "white" was used to ban racial intermarriage;
- °° The law focused the punishment on the "white" lover;
- °° The law created a racial category, in that it covered all white people, men and women, bond or free;
- °° The law distinguished "white" from all other inhabitants of the colonies: "Negro," "mulatto," and "Indian;"
- °° The law created a new synonym: English equals white. By implication, when other European immigrants came to the colonies, they could be included in the new legal category of "white."

Thus, a small group of colonial slave owners invented the "white race."

(For more info, see Theodore Allen, The Invention of the White Race, Racial Oppression and Social Control. Vol. I and II. New York: Verso Books, 1994 and 1997.)

The creation of a 'white' nation

The U.S. Constitution established the new nation as a white republic. Indigenous and African peoples were excluded from participation in the republic. The first law of the first (white) congress in 1790 banned all non-white immigrants from becoming citizens of this white republic. This law meant that first generation immigrants from any continent except Europe could not own land -- the main means of earning a living in the new republic -- because state and territorial constitutions prohibited non-citizens from owning land.

In the 19th century, European Americans ran over the remaining lands of indigenous nations in the West, made war on Mexico and took half her land as war booty -- now called the Southwest or "Occupied America," depending on your viewpoint of these historical events. These acts of expansion of the white republic were called "Manifest Destiny," the god-given right of the white U.S. to conquer nations of color and establish them as colonial territories.

Today we still call the U.S. "America," a linguistic expression of white nationalism (a term coined by the famous African American scholar John Henrik Clarke). Using the term "America" to refer to the U.S. ignores the existence of both Canada and all the nations south of the Rio Grande which are also part of the American continent.

Under the banner of white nationalism, "America" has brought "democracy" -- under the barrel of a gun --to nations of color around the world.

Sexual violence through the lens of 'race'

One of the most pervasive, destructive and hypocritical myths to come from the concept of "race" has been the belief that indigenous and African-American men are sexual predators on white women; and that all women of color are sexual vampires luring white men.

This mythology comes, I believe, from a white psychological projection which legitimates as well as covers up the socially sanctioned sexual violence by white men against men and women of color. White men have raped African American women as a matter of racial prerogative; then fantasized that Black men are raping white women. The punishment meted out to Black men, in particular, for this crime committed by white men has been barbaric: lynching, burning and castration. And white women have

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bought this barbarity as the price they pay for "safety."

(For more on this complex topic, see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Mind that Burns in Each Body," in Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology. Edited by Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins. Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1992. pp. 397-412.)

Another interpretation of the barbarity and pervasiveness of racially motivated sexual violence by whites against people of color, and especially against peoples of African descent, is the theory of the pre-eminent African American psychiatrist, lecturer and anti-racist activist, Dr. Frances Cress Welsing. In her "Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation and Racism/White Supremacy," Dr. Welsing analyzes the root causes of white supremacy. She demonstrates that the genes of white people are recessive as compared to those of people of African descent. Thus, if whites and African-descended people mate and create children, the family tree will have more darker skin offspring.

Dr. Welsing concludes the the virulence of white supremacy stems from white fear of genetic annihilation. In other words, if white/African sexual interrelationships become the norm rather than the statistical exception, in a few generations there will be no more white people. An historical analysis of the pervasiveness of white fear of intermarriage, from 1691 to the present, lends much credence to this perspective.

Dr. Cress Welsing further asserts that white people keep this fear in their white closets. I agree. For over two decades, Dr. Cress Welsing has been a featured speaker at African American gatherings, and her book, The Isis Papers, is a best seller in Black book stores. But I have yet to see her name mentioned by any white writers on race, or any reference, supportive or critical, to her theories. It is as if white writers want to white her out of the discussion on race!

(For more info, see Dr. Frances Cress Welsing, "The Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation and Racism (White Supremacy) in The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors. Chicago: Third World Press, 1991.)

"Race" is just like ethnicity:
the sociologist's lens

In the aftermath of the Black Liberation Movement of the 1960's, liberal racists had to develop subtler race lenses in order to gain white mainstream credibility. Chief among them was Nathan Glazer, the well known sociologist of patterns of European immigration. After studying the experiences of European immigrants who "pulled themselves up by their bootstraps," Glazer then compared them with the experiences of African Americans in the same time period who did not climb the ladder of success. Instead of analyzing who gave the Europeans their boots, and kept the people of African descent without shoes, Glazer concluded that Europeans were enterprising, while Blacks were lazy.

Glazer confounded the terms "race" and "ethnicity." *Ethnicity* comes from the Greek word 'ethnikos' meaning "a people, with a common language, culture, historical and geographical land base." But more important, Glazer's theory laid the foundation for the "Blame the Victim" racist ideology, as well as the white backlash against affirmative action programs. In Glazer's view, people of African descent were responsible for their own poverty and oppression. White America was off the hook.

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Our historical analysis has brought us full circle back to the well—meaning white person who says, "I'm not a member of any race except the human race." All this talk about race is painful to her. Talking about race just perpetuates racial categories, she asserts. If we all forget about 'race,' it will go away. Returning to the original metaphor of this essay, I'd suggest that the young woman remove her race—colored glasses.

Anti—Racist Concepts of Race

Up to this point we have been talking about racist concepts of race, concepts created and perpetuated by Europeans and European—Americans. But there are also anti-racist concepts of race, most of which have been created by people of color in resistance to this racism. Most of these anti—racist concepts of race employ what I call "creating a culture of resistance," that is, taking the oppressor's language *(their power to define reality and to convince other people that it is their definition)* and redefining it so that the language becomes an expression of self—determination. A few examples:

°° Since the 19th century, African American people have used the term "a race man" or "a race woman" to describe any African American who has devoted her/his life to the self—determination of her/his people.

°° In the early 19th century, Richard Allen and other founders formed the first all Black church. They proudly called it "The African Methodist Episcopal Church" at a time when the white U.S. population equated "Africa" with "barbarism."

°° Indigenous leaders refer to their people as "nations" instead of "tribes" with whom the U.S. government negotiated treaties as it would England or France.

°° Indigenous scholars and activists remind U.S. "historians" that the first great democratic document in what is now the U.S. of A. was the "Great Law of Peace" of the Iroquois Confederacy, not the Declaration of Independence. So much for "Indians" being "savages."

°° In the 1960's and early 70's, revolutionary movements within communities of color used terms like "Black is Beautiful," "Black Pride," "Black Power," "Red Power," "Brown Power" and "Yellow Power." The color—coded language of degradation was turned into a language of pride and community affirmation.

°° In response to the white nationalism of "Manifest Destiny," and its current derivative, "illegal alien," contemporary Chicano/a activists proudly wear T-shirts with a map of "Occupied America," over the motto, "We didn't cross the border. The border crossed us."

These are but a tiny sampling. I'm sure you can think of many many more.

POWER

Race may be a specious category, but racism is very real. And it is deadly, because it is "race" backed up by *power*. The People's Institute defines power as "having legitimate access to systems sanctioned by the authority of the state." (Chisom and Washington, op. cit., p. 36.) Other definitions which you might find useful are:

°°° *Power is the ability to define reality and to convince other people that it is their definition.* (Definition by Dr. Wade Nobles)

°°° *Power is ownership and control of the major resources of a state, and the capacity to make and enforce decisions based on this ownership and control.*

When these forms of power are exercised against people based solely on the specious and arbitrary concept called "race," the result is a system of *racial oppression.* In the United States, the most significant manifestations of racial oppression are:

Individual racism	Institutional racism
Cultural and linguistic racism	Environmental racism
Militarism as applied racism	Economic racism
Health system of racism	

(Thanks to The People's Institute for this material.)

While our actions to challenge racism will always focus on some aspect of the manifestations of racism, we should not forget that these manifestations are the visible indications of an entire *system* that is built on the oppression of some peoples, based on the concept of "race," for the benefit of other people, also based on the concept of "race."

Racism and White Supremacy

Let's go back to The People's Institute's definition of racism: **racism equals race prejudice plus power.** Next, let's take a look at the "manifestations of racial oppression," mentioned above. Pick your favorite mainstream institution, and do a little power structure research. (See exercise on *Manifestations of Racism.*) In a race-constructed system, who owns or controls the institution? Who are the most privileged workers within it? *Whom do the policies and practices of that institution primarily benefit?*

Now, let's review the CWS Workshop definition of *white supremacy:*

White supremacy is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and peoples of color by white peoples of European origin; for the purpose of establishing and maintaining wealth, power and privilege.

I think it will be obvious that, if you're talking about the United States, *racism* and *white supremacy* are synonyms.

'Understanding Racism: An Historical Introduction'
by Sharon Martinas

FOR MORE READING

Here's an incomplete list of books I've found useful in developing these thoughts:

Rodolfo Acuña, Occupied America: A History of Chicanos. NY: Harper Collins, 1988. Third Edition.

Karin Aguilar-San Juan, Editor. The State of Asian America: Activism and Reisistance in the 1990's. Boston: South End Press, 1994.

Tomás Almaguer, Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Robert Allen, Reluctant Reformers: Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States. Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1983.

Theodore Allen, The Invention of the White Race, Racial Oppression and Social Control. Vol. I and II. New York: Verso Books, 1994 and 1997.

Marimba Ani, Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior. New Jersey: African World Press, 1994.

Derrick Bell, And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Social Justice. NY: Basic Books, 1987.

Dee Brown, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West. NY: Henry Holt, 1970.

Thomas Byrne and Mary D. Edsall, Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics. NY: Norton, 1992.

Farai Chideya, Don't Believe the Hype: Fighting Cultural Misinformation about African-Americans. NY: Penguin Books, 1995.

Ronald Chisom & Michael Washington, Undoing Racism: A Philosophy of International Social Change. New Orleans, People's Institute Press, 2nd ed., 1997.

Dr. John Henrik Clarke, "White Nationalism," (a tape aired on KPFA during African Mental Liberation Weekend, early 1990's.

Cheikh Anta Diop, The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality? Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1974.

St. Clair Drake, Black Folk Here and There. Vol. 1 & 2. UCLA Center for Afro-American Studies, 1990.

Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America. New York: Bantam Books, 1984.

Donald A. Grinde, Jr. The Iroquois and the Founding of the American Nation. Indian Historical Press, 1977.

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Mind that Burns in Each Body," in Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology. Edited by Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins. Belmont,

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A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., In the Matter of Color: Race & the American Legal Process: The Colonial Period. New York: Oxford University PRess, 1960.

Noel Ignatiev, How the Irish Became White. New York: Routledge, 1995.

M. Annette Jaimes, editor, The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance. Boston: South End Press, 1992.

Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest. NY: Norton & Company, 1975.

Winthrop D. Jordan, White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550 – 1812. New York: Norton & Company, 1968.

Elizabeth Martínez, editor, 500 Años del Pueblo Chicano; 500 Years of Chicano History in pictures. New Mexico: South West Organizing Project, 1991.

Devon A. Mihesuah, American Indians: Stereotypes & Realities. Atlanta: Clarity Press, 1996.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960's to the 1980's. New York: Routledge, 1986.

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, Undoing Racism Workshop.
(For information, contact 1444 North Johnson Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70116. Phone: 504-944-2354.)

Audrey Smedley, Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.

Ivan Van Sertima, editor. Golden Age of the Moor. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1992.

Dr. Frances Cress Welsing, "The Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation and Racism (White Supremacy) in The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors. Chicago: Third World Press, 1991.

Professor Robert Williams, "Sovereignty, Racism and Human Rights: the case for Indian Self-determination." Tape from a speech at University of Montana, April, 1994. Distributed by Alternate Radio Project. 2129 Mapleton. Boulder, Colorado, 80304.

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