

# Political Perspectives of the



## Challenging White Supremacy Workshops

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The Challenging White Supremacy Workshop is a project of The Tides Center.

## WHAT WE BELIEVE

**The purpose of the Challenging White Supremacy workshops is to train principled and effective grassroots anti-racist organizers.**

Challenging White Supremacy (CWS) workshop organizers believe that the most effective way to create fundamental social change in the U.S. is by building mass-based, multi-racial grassroots movements led by radical activists of color. We also believe that the major barrier to creating these movements is racism or **white supremacy**. One way to challenge white supremacy is to do anti-racist training workshops in our own communities. CWS works primarily in the broad-based radical, multi-racial community of the Bay Area. We welcome everyone from that diverse community to our workshops.

CWS workshops have been designed by a collective of white anti-racist organizers. We believe our special responsibility is to help white social justice activists become principled and effective anti-racist organizers -- both to challenge our white privilege and to work for racial justice in all our social justice work. We prioritize working in collaboration with grassroots organizers of color in our anti-racist training workshops.

We think that anti-racist training and organizing with white social justice activists complements and supports grassroots organizing and leadership development in communities of color. Both kinds of work are necessary to build mass-based, multi-racial social justice movements.

# **CHALLENGING WHITE SUPREMACY**

## **Our Vision**

As social justice activists, we are all working for a world of self-determination, equality, and peace for all peoples; a world free of racism, class exploitation, patriarchy and heterosexism; a world which respects Mother Earth and all her creatures. The CWS organizers believe that such a world cannot be created unless there is revolutionary social change in the United States. And we believe that the most effective way to create fundamental social change is through building mass-based, multi-racial social movements, led by radical social justice activists of color.

Through experience and study, we have come to the conclusion that the major barrier to creating these mass movements is racism or white supremacy.

## **White Supremacy**

We define white supremacy as an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white people and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.

## **Learning From History**

The history that has been hidden from us reveals how white supremacy was created in the United States, how it functions today, and what strategies might be useful in challenging it.

The United States is a capitalist nation-state created by military conquest. European colonialists stole the lands of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, committed genocide against the indigenous peoples, then kidnaped and enslaved African people to work the stolen land. The wealth created from land theft and enslaved labor made some of the colonialists very rich and enabled them to establish the United States. The United States was the world's first white supremacy state -- a state in which white supremacy and capitalism are like two peas in a pod.

The United States expanded its land by military conquest. It made war on Mexico and took half that nation's territory. It wrote laws that robbed the Mexican people of their homes and lands in "Occupied America." And it blessed this theft with the myth of "Manifest Destiny."

The U.S. imported Chinese and Mexican labor to build the railroads that would connect the vast land mass "from sea to shining sea." It used Mexican workers to grow the food and extract the minerals that made Occupied America a pasture of plenty for the rich. Then it hopped a gun-boat and gobbled up Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam, Hawaii and the Philippines. And it has been invading nations of color ever since, until today the United States is the most powerful imperialist state in the world.

The slave-owning "Founding Fathers" founded a nation-state for white people only. When they wrote the U.S. Constitution, they legitimized slavery of African people and excluded indigenous peoples from the new republic. The Congress of the United States promised to respect the sovereignty and land rights of native nations. From 1790 to 1870, the U.S. signed 371 treaties with indigenous nations, and broke every treaty it signed.

The first Congress in 1790 declared that only white immigrants could become citizens; and non-citizens could not own land. In the 1890's, the U.S. welcomed newcomers from Europe, while excluding the Chinese. And in the 1990's, sojourners from Mexico and Central America are greeted by armed border guards and barbed wire fences, while those from Canada pass through with a wave of a hand.

### White Privilege

'Privilege' is a right, advantage, favor or immunity specially granted to one, especially a right *held by a certain individual, group or class, and withheld from certain others or all others.* (Webster's Dictionary. Italics added.)

U.S. institutions and culture give *preferential treatment* to people whose ancestors came from Europe over peoples whose ancestors are from the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Arab world; and *exempt* European Americans -- white people-- from the forms of racial and national oppression inflicted upon peoples from the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Arab world. This web of institutional and cultural preferential treatment is called **white privilege**. In a white supremacy system, white privilege and racial oppression are two sides of the same coin.

Whites are differentially privileged, and these differences are vast. The white ruling class has state power. It owns and controls all the major institutions in the United States.

*Non-ruling class whites are both oppressed and privileged.* We are oppressed most significantly on the basis of class, gender and sexual orientation; and also on the basis of religion, culture, ethnicity, age, physical abilities and politics. But, at the same time, we are also privileged in relation to peoples of color. Ancestral origin from Europe gives white people preferential treatment and exemption from racial/national oppression, whether or not we personally support or agree with this unjust system of privilege.

## **The Strategy of the Slave Owners**

In 17th century Virginia, slave-owning colonial rulers, faced with armed rebellion by African and European servants, created a strategy to prevent the oppressed majority from uniting against the colonial ruling class. They made "white" a legal concept to describe poor Europeans. They gave "white" servants, who demanded better treatment for themselves only, certain privileges (land, freedom, an opportunity for a job on the slave patrol, and a tiny bit of access to those with political power), but severely punished "whites" who organized with Africans. They maximized the oppression of Africans by solidifying chattel slavery, and they justified their actions by asserting the "superiority of the white race" and the "inferiority of non-white races."

The strategy was brilliant. The punishments deterred all but the most courageous Europeans from organizing with Africans or Native Americans. The privileges wiped out much of the material basis for unity between the most oppressed Europeans and all Africans by giving freedom to the poor Europeans while enslaving the Africans. And poor European immigrants came to believe that the privileges given them by the ruling class were, in fact, their entitlements as 'white people.'

The strategy set a precedent which still works today. Virtually all the politically progressive movements led by white activists, historically and in the present, (trade unions, women, farmers, political reformers, environmentalists; queers and transgendered activists, peace and anti-intervention, etc.) have recreated, consciously or unconsciously, the structures and culture of white privilege.

For example, trade unions, especially in California, were organized effectively on the basis of excluding African American, Chinese and Mexican workers. White women did get the vote, after 100 years of struggle, by supporting white supremacy in the South. Mainstream environmental organizations have preserved the spotted owl, while seldom challenging environmental pollution in communities of color. And white activists continue to ask activists of color to join predominantly white movements, offering little or no support for their issues and movements in return.

When oppressed whites protest militantly against our own oppression, while refusing to simultaneously challenge racial oppression and white privilege, we can win short term victories (a union, legislative reform, a constitutional amendment, a temporary shift in foreign policy, an agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency). But when we organize in this way, we become accomplices in the oppression of people of color. Silence is consent to racial oppression and white privilege. We sacrifice the coalitions and alliances with activists of color which could challenge the power of the descendants of the slave owners -- a power which continues to oppress all of us today.

And, as moral and spiritual human beings, we are frustrated and outraged because we lack sufficient power to stop the U.S. government from murdering peoples of color, locally and globally -- in our name.

## **Challenging the Strategy of the Slave Owners with Anti-racist Training**

One way to challenge white supremacy is to do anti-racist training workshops in our own communities. CWS works primarily in the broad-based radical community of the Bay Area: dedicated people -- white and of color -- committed to overturning capitalism and imperialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism and environmental degradation, and to supporting struggles for social justice at home and abroad. We welcome everyone from that diverse community to our workshops.

The Challenging White Supremacy workshops have been designed by white anti-racist organizers. CWS believes our special responsibility is to help white social justice activists become principled and effective anti-racist organizers -- both to challenge our white privilege and to work for racial justice in all our social justice work.

Anti-racist training and organizing with white social justice activists complements and supports grassroots organizing and leadership development work in communities of color. Both kinds of work are necessary to build the mass-based, multi-racial social justice movements, led by radical activists of color, that can bring revolutionary change in the United States.

### **Workshop Goals**

\*\* To contribute toward building multi-racial revolutionary movements, led by activists of color, that can bring justice and peace to this country;

\*\* To strengthen the capacities of white social justice activists to work for racial justice and challenge white privilege in all their social justice work.

\*\* To enable all workshop participants to become more effective grassroots anti-racist activists and organizers, through a collective learning process.

CWS uses the concept of '*analyzing with an anti-racist lens*' (a term created by the African-American anti-racist trainer Enid Lee) to examine the interrelationships between the white supremacy system and other systems of oppression: capitalism and imperialism, patriarchy and heterosexism, and the systemic violence of the state.

CWS defines an *anti-racist activist* as a person who is deeply concerned about racism, who takes action to express that concern, and for whom taking action becomes a way of life. An *anti-racist organizer* is an activist who motivates and educates others to become anti-racist activists, who assists them in their efforts to challenge racial injustice effectively, and who helps them understand their power: their capacity as a group of people to decide what they want and to act in an organized way to get it.

The processes which move a white person of conscience from concern for social justice, through anti-racist consciousness, to anti-racist activism and organizing, are very complex. The path is never linear. Moreover, the processes express themselves in spiritual and moral, cultural and political ways, often in the same action. And each person's path is her or his own.

We call the experience of traveling this path 'Creating an Anti-racist Agenda.' The agenda has six principles which anti-racist activists can use to challenge the strategy of the slave owners-- the creation of white privilege in progressive movements.

### **Creating An Anti-Racist Agenda: Six Principles**

#### **\*\*\* Act on Your Principles**

*Do the right thing. Practice and model respectful behavior. Challenge white privilege -- your own, your friends' and family's, your organization's and movement's. Practice 'Each One Teach One.'*

#### **\*\*\* Create an Anti-racist Culture of Resistance**

*Create anti-racist language and group dynamics. Learn the true history of the U.S. white supremacy system, and the legacies of resistance and liberation in different communities of color. Research your family's herstories of oppression, resistance and privilege. Uncover the hidden herstories of white anti-racist organizers, past and present. Challenge white culture in progressive movements, especially the universalizing and normalizing of the experiences of oppressed whites.*

#### **\*\*\* Stand in Solidarity**

*Break the silence on violence against individuals and communities of color. Support racial justice struggles locally and nationally. Support the principle that 'No human being is illegal.' Demonstrate solidarity with national liberation movements against U.S. imperialism, within and 'beyond' U.S. borders. Support U.S. political prisoners and prisoners of war.*

#### **\*\*\* Prioritize the Issues of Radical Activists of Color**

*Reframe the issues of white progressive and radical groups using an anti-racist lens. Link issues raised by white social justice activists to those raised by radical activists and organizations of color without making false analogies. Educate other white social justice activists about how prioritizing the issues of radical activists of color is central to winning 'their own' issues in the long term.*

#### **\*\*\* Respect the Leadership of Radical Activists of Color**

*Develop principled political relationships with organizers and organizations of color based on consistent accountability, respect and solidarity practice. Participate in coalitions led by organizations of color. Share resources with organizers of color.*

*Develop your group's criteria for principled and effective leadership so that you can have honest relationships with leaders of color. Remember that 'respect' does not always mean 'agreement,' nor does it mean 'follow without thinking.' Develop mutually acceptable guidelines with organizers of color for practicing 'Constructive Criticism is an Act of Love.'*

**\*\*\* Hold on to Your Visions**

*Imagine the beauty of a world created by the organized power of millions of oppressed people, acting out of their commitment for justice and liberation. Make anti-racist activism a way of life for your lifetime. Create your own anti-racist loving community because no one can do this work alone. Nourish your spirit; take good care of your body. Listen to the wisdom of indigenous people. Act as if you are creating a world for the next seven generations.*

The principles are like moral/spiritual/political rudders than can guide individual and collective transformation of anti-racist activists. The processes of transformation may differ for each person, but we believe that they have reflective action at their core. 'Reflective action' is a spiraling cycle: listen, learn, reflect, act, reflect, learn, listen. The workshops' educational strategy is designed to strengthen participants' capacities to understand and practice the six principles in their anti-racist work.

All CWS Workshops are organized around the theme of "Creating an Anti-Racist Agenda." The message of the six principles is simple. But to practice the principles, we have to overcome 500 years of white supremacist socialization.

### **Becoming an Anti-racist Activist**

As activists, we are committed to taking respectful action. "Re-spect" means to look back on, to re-vision. We will evaluate our actions by their processes as well as by their effects. Our commitment is nourished by a willingness to be critically conscious of what we do in the world, and how we do it with other people. We want to learn from the setbacks, as well as from the successes.

We believe that when we act on our principles, our lives are transformed. That is the essence of uniting the personal and the political. When we challenge white supremacy, both our own white privilege and the oppression of people of color, we are healing ourselves -- of our fears, of self-doubt, of the guilt that comes from being who we are -- white people of conscience in a white supremacist society.

As non-ruling class white people, we experience the oppression of living in a system that murders women and men of color, white women and queers; that starves the hungry, criminalizes the homeless, exploits the worker, pollutes the planet, and makes heroes out of war criminals. As our understanding of this hydra-headed monster deepens, we realize that challenging white supremacy is crucial to ending all these forms of oppression.



As political activists, we have learned that it takes pressure to challenge injustice. As Frederick Douglass said, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." History teaches us that white supremacist institutions will budge only with massive pressure, the kind of pressure that comes from organized and determined mass movements.

As anti-racist activists, we have experienced that creating an anti-racist agenda is hard work. While we strive to be anti-racists, we continue to behave in racist ways. That is what it means to be both privileged and socialized by a white supremacist system. We live in the belly of the beast, and the beast is in our bellies.

As human beings, we trust in the power of our visions. Becoming anti-racist activists brings us great joy. We're doing what we can to help lay the groundwork for building the mass-based, multi-racial movements, led by activists of color, that can fundamentally transform the United States into a social justice nation. It's a good way to spend a life.

### **The Workshop as a Laboratory**

The Challenging White Supremacy Workshops are laboratories for grassroots anti-racist activists and organizers to prepare for, create, reflect on and evaluate the anti-racist grassroots organizing work we will be doing in the real world outside the workshops' doors. The workshops may be challenging and intensive. But they can never be a substitute for the real work, nor can they be an escape from the real world.

The workshops' guidelines emphasize the centrality of respectful behavior, the same forms of respect that serious activists give (or ought to give) each other in their political work. They also emphasize developing qualities such as patience, courage, self-discipline and responsibility. They encourage collective activity, while recognizing the importance of experienced leadership. They utilize modeling and inspiration as important forms of motivation for behavioral transformation.

The workshops are not an "enchanted space" where 500 years of white and male supremacy, class exploitation, heterosexism and violence can miraculously be erased in a three hour time period. For this reason, CWS recommends that participants learn to "Challenge the behavior, while respecting the person." And to strengthen our collective effort, we suggest that participants practice evaluation of our work together from the perspective that "*Constructive Criticism is an Act of Love.*"

CWS will not support requests by white participants for a "safe space." We believe that yearning for "safety" on the part of white activists is an expression of white privilege. Anti-racist work is not safe, especially for activists of color. People of color are routinely fired, evicted, beaten, jailed and murdered for their anti-racist activism. White anti-racist activists are often isolated and threatened, sometimes fired and jailed, and even killed for their solidarity efforts.

Anti-racist work necessitates trusting, cooperative relationships among activists. But trust does not come from uttering earnest words in a workshop. People of color have no reason to trust whites. The legacy of 500 years of white supremacy warns against that trust. If white activists are to be trusted, we will have to demonstrate long term, committed anti-racist practice in the real world.

The workshops can provide participants with an opportunity to meet some people with whom they would like to work in the world outside. And that is vital, because anti-racist work is hard and isolating. We need to create strong anti-racist communities to carry on the work for a lifetime.

### **Practicing and Modeling Respectful Behavior**

CWS workshops focus on the practice of respectful behavior as a key way for white social justice activists to challenge white privilege and racial oppression in their daily lives and political work. The guidelines we will follow for respectful behavior are all based on the principle: *Respect the Person; Challenge the Behavior*:

- \* 1. Speak from your heart and your experience. Use "I" statements.
- \* 2. We're not here to judge each other, put each other down, or compete.
- \* 3. Listen to the wisdom everyone bring to the group.
- \* 4. Give each person the time and space to speak.
- \* 5. Practice 'Active Listening.' Respect the person; challenge the behavior.
- \* 6. Create anti-racist language and anti-racist group dynamics.
- \* 7. Please come on time!
- \* 8. Your 'homework' is part of the workshop. Please do it.
- \* 9. Please call if you can't come to a workshop session.
- \* 10. Please share workshop expenses. Donations will be requested.

### **Grassroots Anti-racist Organizing Strategies:**

#### **\*Each One Teach One**

Each One Teach One is a grassroots organizing strategy used by African American organizers in the Southern freedom movements of the 1950's and 1960's. As the name suggests, each organizer focuses her/his efforts on intensive, one-on-one communication as a method of bringing another person into the struggle.

CWS workshops advocate the use of the Each One Teach One organizing strategy as an important way to do anti-racist organizing. It is personal, an intensive conversation between two people. It is experiential, allowing the organizer to draw on her/his own processes of anti-racist transformation to communicate her/his commitment to anti-racist work. It is respectful: to be effective, it necessitates active

listening and respectful dialogue on the part of the organizer. It is educational: teaching another is the best way to learn yourself. It is political: the content of the message conveys the struggle for justice. And it is spiritual: the organizer is inviting the person addressed to join her/him on a life-transforming path of becoming an anti-racist activist.

**\* *Creating an Anti-racist Organizing Core Group (An 'AROC')***

CWS Workshop participants will learn to use an Each One Teach One strategy to recruit a small group (two or more) of anti-racist activists committed to becoming principled and effective anti-racist organizers. A core group is important for several reasons. The work is too difficult to do alone; a core can nourish your spirit when you need it most. A core group can keep each other accountable, by practicing and modeling respectful behavior. It can create, implement and evaluate anti-racist organizing strategies. And it might be the nucleus of a new anti-racist community within an organization undergoing a process of anti-racist transformation.

**\* *Creating Strategic Collaborations or Alliances with Organizers of Color***

If the core group is predominantly white, it should work to develop relationships of strategic collaborations or alliances with organizers of color. Ideally, these organizers of color would have a strong interest in seeing that the constituency being organized by the anti-racist core group creates a consistent, long term anti-racist agenda. For the core group, a strategic alliance with organizers of color is key to keeping white anti-racist activists principled and accountable in their daily practice.

There are many models of relationship-building between activists of color and white anti-racist activists, and many different perspectives among activists of all colors about how these relationships can or should be built. There is wisdom to learn from all perspectives, and principled dialogue based on evaluation of real practice can only strengthen the work of all anti-racist organizers.

**\* *Organize with 'Principles, Pragmatism and Pressure'***

CWS suggests using the strategy of organizing with 'Principles, Pragmatism and Pressure' as one method of initiating anti-racist transformation within white-dominated grassroots social justice groups.

The strategy is based on an analysis developed by Enid Lee, an African-American anti-racist trainer in the public schools. She speaks of what motivates white teachers who participate in her training sessions to take anti-racist action:

"You have the people who change because they feel a moral imperative. They see themselves as upstanding citizens, as good people, and so they want to do the

right thing. And those people can be appealed to on principle. Then there are those who are entirely pragmatic, who will change out of enlightened self-interest. Things are not going well within the classes; they can't control the kids. So they want to do something to change the annoying situation. And then there are those who will change because it's legislated, because they are told they have to. *So we have three motivations: it's right; it will help me; I must.*" (Enid Lee, "The Crisis in Education: Forging an Anti-Racist Response," Rethinking Schools. Autumn, 1992. Vol. 7, #1. Italics added.)

White social justice activists are motivated to do what we do by strong moral principles. We also want to put our principles into practice, for our political work to be effective, so we are also motivated by pragmatism. And, as activists, we know the truth in Frederick Douglass's wisdom that "Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never has and it never will." So we understand that challenging unjust power requires pressure, action and organization -- *the power of the people*.

How might an anti-racist organizer apply the strategy of "Principles, Pragmatism and Pressure" to initiate an anti-racist process within her grassroots organization? She might begin by utilizing the intensive "Each One Teach One" method to identify, motivate and educate an anti-racist organizing core (AROC) group (ideally, a multi-racial one) who are motivated to anti-racist activism by their principles. The group would develop a strategy for convincing a larger number of organizational members that creating an anti-racist agenda (a conscious anti-racist political practice) is the right thing to do, and in the organization's best self-interest: *it is both principled and pragmatic*.

But anti-racist transformation of an organization may be challenged by many (perhaps most) organizational members -- because white privilege confers real, though short term, benefits on white social justice activists just as on the rest of the non-ruling class white population.

Anti-racist organizers then have the task of developing a strategy for bringing pressure to bear on the 'reluctant reformers.\*' The strategy might combine voices from within the organization as well as respected voices in the organization's constituency and community. *The purpose of the pressure, at this point, is not to change hearts and minds, but to change behavior.* The process of transforming consciousness will last for the lifetime of the organization.

The strategy of "Principles, Pragmatism and Pressure" is experimental. Its effectiveness can only be judged by its results in real, grassroots anti-racist practice.

(\* Term adapted from Reluctant Reformers: Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States. By Robert Allen. Howard Univ. Press, 1983.)

**\* Organizing an Anti-racist Education Program for  
White Social Justice Activists**

*Anti-racist education should be required and permanent for all white folks who call themselves 'social justice activists.'* Social justice work by white grassroots activists that is not anti-racist cannot change any power relations in this country, no matter how 'militant' its tactics or 'radical' its rhetoric.

A primary task for an anti-racist core group should be organizing this anti-racist education program. An effective education program would combine study, reflection and action; theory, practice and evaluation. A central theme of the program should be, "How can our group learn to act both to challenge white privilege and to work for racial justice in all our social justice work?" Activists of color who wish to participate in the program should be welcome to do so.

**\* Creating Grassroots Anti-racist Organizations**

Here are a few starting ideas: Start from the perspective that anti-racism is a foundation of your social justice work, not an 'issue on your agenda.' Rewrite your mission statement or principles of unity, and all your group's literature using an anti-racist lens. Reframe all your group's programs and activities using an anti-racist lens. Examine every aspect of your group's culture (language, art, food, assumptions, values, ideology, individual and group behavior) to determine how it expresses white privilege; and develop a systematic plan to change it. Develop a long term, strategic plan for recreating your group as an anti-racist organization. And start with the principle that "Constructive Criticism is an Act of Love."

(For anti-racist training for progressive non-profits, contact The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (Phone 504-944-2354, e-mail: pisabnola@aol.com) or ChangeWork (Phone 919-490-4448, e-mail: temaokun@aol.com).

**\* Creating Grassroots Anti-racist Movements**

Using "Each One Teach One," share all that you are learning in your anti-racist journey with other activists and organizations in your movement. Hold on to your visions, and dig in for the long haul.

Revised January, 2001.

Your comments are welcome.

*"Constructive Criticism is an Act of Love."*

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# DEFINITIONS

## Analyzing and Organizing with an Anti-Racist Lens

*Analyzing with an anti-racist lens* means to examine every situation, event, relationship, story, institution, culture, belief, etc., to understand how the dynamics of racial/national oppression and white privilege work in that instance.

*Analyzing with an anti-racist lens* means to understand the interrelationships between the white supremacy system and the other major systems of oppression: capitalism and imperialism, patriarchy and heterosexism, and the systemic violence of the state from the perspective that people of color will always be affected differently by these systems than non-ruling class white people.

Because of the impact of the white supremacy system on other systems of oppression, people of color will be hurt first, hardest and longest by *all* systems of oppression. Non-ruling class whites will be impacted negatively by other systems of oppression, but at the same time they will *benefit* in some way (material, psychological or cultural) by the structures of white privilege (affirmative action and exemption from racial oppression) in the white supremacy system.

Organizing with an anti-racist lens means that anti-racist organizers need to base their strategies on the understanding that because non-ruling class whites (including white social justice activists) are *both oppressed and privileged*, their resistance to oppression -- and all of their social justice work -- is likely to be a *bundle of contradictions*. These activists will challenge their oppression, or try to do social justice work, while marginalizing or ignoring the struggle for racial justice.

Organizing with an anti-racist lens, therefore, involves figuring out how to convince non-ruling class white activists that the *long term benefits* of fighting for racial justice and challenging white privilege *outweigh the short term costs* of doing this difficult work.

(The concept of 'Analyzing with an Anti-Racist Lens' was created by Enid Lee, an African-American anti-racist trainer, in her essay, "Looking Through an Anti-Racist Lens," in Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development. Edited by Enid Lee, Deborah Menkart and Margo Okazawa-Rey. Washington, DC: Network of Educators on the Americas. 1998. pp. 402-404 (NECA, PO Box 73038, Washington, DC. 20056. Phone: 202-238-2379. E-mail: necadc@aol.com).

## **Anti-Racist Activist and Organizer:**

An anti-racist activist is a person who is deeply concerned about racism, who takes action to express that concern, and for whom *taking action becomes a way of life*. An anti-racist organizer is an activist who *motivates and educates* others to become anti-racist activists, who assists them in their efforts to challenge racial injustice *effectively*, and who helps them understand their *power*: their capacity as a group of people to decide what they want and to act in an *organized* way to get it.

## **Oppressor, Oppressed, Oppression:**

An oppressor is one who uses her/his power to dominate another, or who refuses to use her/his power to challenge that domination. An oppressed is one who is dominated by an oppressor, and by those who consent with their silence. Oppression is the power and the effects of domination. In the United States, there are many forms of (often) interlocking systems of oppression: white supremacy, capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, heterosexism and the violence of the state; ageism, ablist, anti-semitism, etc.

In a white supremacist, capitalist, male supremacist and heterosexist system, all non-ruling class whites (the poor, working and middle classes) are in some way oppressed by that system, but they are also privileged by it. When they organize against their own oppression, but not against their privilege -- that is, against the oppression of people of color -- they become oppressors of people of color. Inaction is complicity. Silence is consent. To cease being oppressors, white people must act against oppression.

## **Power:**

"Power" is a relational term. It is a relationship between human beings in a specific historical, economic and social setting. It must be exercised to be visible. Here are several different definitions of "power."

(1) POWER is "having legitimate access to systems sanctioned by the authority of the state." (Definition by Ronald Chisom and Michael Washington in Undoing Racism: A Philosophy of International Social Change. The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond., Second Edition, 1997. Page 36. The People's Institute is located at 1444 North Johnson Street, New Orleans, Louisiana, 70116. Phone: 504-944-2354. E-mail: pisabnola@aol.com)

(2) POWER is " the ability to define reality and to convince other people that it is their definition." (Definition created by Dr. Wade Nobles and used at an Undoing Racism Workshop of The People's Institute.)

(3) POWER is ownership and control of the major resources of a state; and the capacity to make and enforce decisions based on that ownership and control. (CWS)

(4) POWER is *access* to those individuals, social groups, class and institutions which own and control the resources of the state. (CWS)

(5) POWER is the capacity of a group of people to decide what they want and to act in an organized way to get it. (Definition by Jan Adams and Rebecca Gordon, anti-racist activists in San Francisco.

(6) POWER is the creative capacity of an individual to act. (CWS)

### **Prejudice:**

A prejudice is a prejudgment in favor of or against a person, group, event, idea or a thing. An action based on a negative prejudgment is called discrimination. A negative prejudgment of a group is often called a stereotype. An action based on a negative stereotype is called bigotry.

What distinguishes this group of terms from such terms as 'racism,' 'sexism,' 'classism,' or 'homophobia' is that there is no underlying *systemic power relationship* necessarily implied or expressed by 'prejudice,' 'discrimination,' 'stereotype' or 'bigotry.'

### **Principles:**

CWS workshops are based on the practice of six 'principles,' called Creating an Anti-Racist Agenda.' The first of the six is "Act on Your Principles." The use of the term *principles* suggests that at its core, anti-racist transformation for white social justice activists is a spiritual and moral process.

The daily, often unconscious practices of white privilege and racist behavior, either in actions or by the silence of consent, poisons the psyches of all white people. It adjusts them to injustice. A spiritually healthy response to injustice is anger -- with love -- and a desire to right a wrong. Anti-racist action that comes from this spiritual basis often gives an activist a sense of 'finding her path.' That centeredness will help her figure out ways to make her anti-racist work *more effective as well as principled*.

### **Race:**

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." (Definition by Ronald Chisom and Michael Washington in Undoing Racism: A Philosophy of International Social Change. *op. cit.* Pages 30-31.)



## **Racism:**

Racism is race prejudice plus power. (Definition by The People's Institute.)

\* *Note: CWS uses the term 'white supremacy' as a synonym for 'racism.'*

### ***Internalized Racism:***

(1) The poison of racism seeping into the psyches of people of color, until people of color believe about themselves what whites believe about them -- that they are inferior to white people.

(2) The behavior of one person of color toward another that stems from this psychic poisoning: often called either inter-racial or intra-racial hostility.

(3) The acceptance by peoples of color of Eurocentric values.

(See Virginia Harris and Trinity Ordoña, "Developing Unity among Women of Color: Crossing the Barriers of Internalized Racism and Cross Racial Hostility," in Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras. Edited by Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 1990. Pages 304-316.)

### ***Reverse Racism:***

A term used by white people to deny their white privilege. Those in denial use the term 'reverse racism' to refer to hostile behavior by people of color against whites, and especially to affirmative action programs which allegedly give 'preferential treatment' to people of color over whites. There is no such thing as 'reverse racism.'

The concept of 'reverse racism' was coined by arch segregationist George Wallace in his 1968 presidential election campaign. The term was the ideological foundation of "The Southern Strategy," which used the racist resentment of non-ruling class whites against the Black Liberation Movement to win them away from the Democratic party. The effort was successful: ten million whites voted for Wallace, and these voters eventually became the base of the Republican party in the South and Midwest. (See Thomas and Mary Edsall, Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics. W.W. Norton & Co., New York. 1992.)

### ***A Racist:***

A racist is one who is *both privileged and socialized* on the basis of race by a white supremacist (racist) system. The term applies to all white people (people of European descent) living in the United States, regardless of class, gender, religion, culture or sexual orientation. The term has nothing to do with one's intentions or individual actions. It denotes a relationship of relative access, based on ancestral origin, to the power of institutions in a white supremacy system.

By this definition people of color cannot be racists. Living within the U.S. white supremacy system, they do not have the institutional power to back up their individual or group prejudices, hostilities or acts of discrimination. (This definition does not deny the existence of such prejudices, hostilities, acts of discrimination or even rage.)

***An Anti-Racist:***

As applied to white people, an anti-racist is a person who acts to challenge some aspect of the white supremacy system. That is, she challenges both her white privilege and racial oppression, and she works for some form of racial justice.

As applied to people of color, some use the term 'anti-racist.' Others use synonyms such as freedom fighter, racial justice activist, warrior, liberation fighter, political prisoner, prisoner of war, sister, brother, etc. In practice, it is difficult for a social justice activist of color not to be an anti-racist, since the struggle against racial oppression intersects with every issue affecting people of color.

***A Non-Racist:***

A non-term. The term was created by whites to deny responsibility for systemic racism, to maintain an aura of innocence in the face of racial oppression, and to shift responsibility for that oppression from whites to people of color ('blaming the victim').

Responsibility for perpetuating and legitimizing a racist system rests both on those who actively maintain it, and on those who refuse to challenge it.

*Silence is consent.*

**Respect the Person; Challenge the Behavior:**

This phrase is the core of CWS's suggestions for *Practicing and Modeling Respectful Behavior*. It means that when a person is challenged for a racist or white privilege action or inaction, the challenger should focus on the behavior and its effects, not on the supposed intention of the person being challenged. No human can look into the soul of another. That examination is for a person to engage in with her creator.

Respecting the person and challenging the behavior also suggests that "*Constructive Criticism is an Act of Love*." Therefore, it is helpful to praise a person's efforts before raising criticisms of what actions need to be changed. And it is also helpful to be able to suggest some steps to behavioral alternatives.

**White People:**

The term 'white,' referring to people, was created as a legal concept by Virginia slave-owning colonial rulers in the 17th century. It replaced terms like 'Christian' or 'Englishman' (sic) to distinguish the legal status of English indentured servants from that of Africans or indigenous peoples. The colonial powers established the legal construct of 'white' after Bacon's Rebellion of 1676 united European indentured servants and African kidnapped workers against the colonial elite. The construct separated the servant class on the basis of continental origin and skin color.

The Virginia ruling powers enacted Slave Codes from 1680 through 1705 which defined the legal *privileges* for 'white' indentured servants (a plot of land after they finished servitude, a gun, and a measure of tobacco -- legal tender for the colony). The same Slaves Codes also defined the status of kidnapped Africans as chattel

slaves. The Codes equated the terms 'slave' and 'Negro,' thus institutionalizing the world's first system of racialized slavery.

## **White Privilege:**

"A privilege is a right, favor, advantage, immunity, *specially granted to one individual or group, and withheld from another.*" (Webster's Dictionary. Italics added.)

White privilege is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of:  
\*\* *Preferential treatment* of white people based solely on their ancestral origin from Europe; and

\*\* *Exemption from racial and/or national oppression* based on ancestral origin from Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Arab world.

All U.S. institutions give preferential treatment (*affirmative action*) to people whose ancestors came from Europe over peoples whose ancestors are from the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Arab world; and exempt people of European descent -- white people -- from the forms of racial and national oppression inflicted upon peoples from the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Arab world.

All white-dominated U.S. culture perpetuates the ideology that white people -- people of Europe and of European descent -- are morally and intellectually superior to people of color; and that peoples and nations of color -- people from the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Arab world and their U.S. descendants -- are morally and intellectually inferior to white people.

In a white supremacy system, white privilege and racial/national oppression are two sides of the same coin. Wherever there is racial oppression, there is always white privilege.

*Non-ruling class white people (poor people, working class and middle class) are both oppressed and privileged.* They are oppressed most significantly on the basis of class, gender and sexual orientation; and also on the basis of religion, culture, ethnicity, age, physical abilities and political expression. At the same time, they are all privileged in relation to peoples of color.

Ruling class white people do not need white privilege. They have *class power*.

## **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 and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege.

Definitions Revised December, 2000