

PREACHING TO THE CHOIR

There's no getting away from it. We live in a race-based society. Nothing could be more evident, whether we're reading today's newspaper or driving from neighborhood to neighborhood in any city. Touch any aspect of your daily life, and see that it is deeply affected by race. Every issue of our daily existence is defined and lived out in ways that are race-based.

Race is not an occasional factor, but is deeply rooted in the underlying structure of everything we do. Race, and racism, are embedded in our institutional genes. One of Crossroads' basic principles is that every system and every institution in our country was created and structured — legally and intentionally — to serve the white society exclusively. And this original purpose is still a driving force today. Most of our institutions have not been redefined and re-equipped to do otherwise. They are still designed to distinguish between races, and to serve white people better than people of any other racial identity.

But reality is not always what people perceive it to be. On the one hand, more than ever, the "race factor" is present, predominant, and of major significance in every aspect of our lives. Yet at the same time, this presence of race, this predominance of race, and this significance of race are still denied by the majority of white Americans.

And it is not just the 'right wing' that lives in denial. The significance of race and the predominance of racism are discounted and denied by liberals as strongly as they are by conservatives. Most of the proponents of otherwise progressive causes in America tend to go silent on the issue of race.

Crossroads has sometimes been accused of "preaching to the choir," because of our

insistence that progressives need to develop an analysis of racism. But the reason those of us who think we are progressive *need* preaching to, is that most progressive choirs in this country go off key when the issue of race appears in our social and political scores.

The simple truth is, if you work on any other issue of justice and do not at the same time build in an understanding of racism, you will be working on that issue in a racist way. If you work on women's issues and do not take race seriously, you will be a racist feminist. If you work on economic issues and do not understand how racism is involved, you will be racist in your work against classism. If you are working against heterosexism and homophobia and do not deal with race and racism, you are racist in your support for gay and lesbian rights. If you are a community organizer and still believe that you can't organize around the issue of race and racism, you are a racist community organizer. If you are working for peace and against militarism and do not understand the interrelatedness of race and peace, you are a racist peacemaker. If you are an environmentalist and do not understand environmental racism, you are inevitably a racist environmentalist.

Every issue of justice and social change intersects the issue of race, if you are without a working knowledge of how racism functions in the context of your issue, to that extent your organizing will provide benefits mostly for white people.

Neither racial injustice nor racism will go away until the race-based nature of our society is dealt with, and until we remove the white privilege that the race-based society was

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designed to protect. Race will not go away by itself. Race cannot be ignored. Race is the inevitable factor. And it will be there until we intentionally recognize it, and decide to do what

is necessary to change it. No matter how long we seek to avoid it, we must finally come to the place of organizing to dismantle our racism.

Joe Barndt