

## FAMILY HERSTORIES

### Session 7

### Homework

#### A. TOPICS & THEMES

1. Common patterns among European- American families:
  - a. oppression and hard work as new immigrants
  - b. white privilege in relation to families of color
  - c. when resisting oppression, often acting (consciously or unconsciously) as accomplices in the oppression of people of color
2. What family herstories reveal about how systems of oppression interrelate to maintain the white supremacy system

#### B. READINGS:

1. In CWS Manual:
  - a. Study Family Herstories Section (O- 19-26)
  - b. Browse "Create a Culture of Resistance" (rest of Section O)
2. In "How European Immigrants Became White People" readings packet
  - a. Study Mab Segrest, "On Being White and Other Lies: A History of of Racism in the United States," from Memoir of a Race Traitor
  - b. Study any other of the readings that apply to your family ancestry

#### C. FAMILY HERSTORY RESEARCH\*

1. Read "Family Herstory Workshop Instructions"
2. Use "Family Herstories Worksheet" as your guide for your research
- \*3. Begin family research by calling family relatives and/or other forms of research. *If this part of the exercise is too difficult for you emotionally or financially, please pass on it.*

#### D. PREPARE TO BRING TO YOUR SMALL GROUP\*

- \*1. The Small Groups for the Family Herstories exercise will be organized by primary European ancestries: (1) English/Scottish/Welsh; (2) Northern European: French, German, Scandanavian countries (3) Irish (4) Jewish from all countries (5) Eastern and Southern Europeans: Italian, Greek, Balkan countries, Russia, Spain, Portugal
2. Create a timeline of your family's herstory. Focus on oppression, survival, resistance, privilege. You can use words, pictures, drawings — be creative. Whenever possible, make connections between your family's story and what you have learned about the history of white supremacy. When you tell your family story in your small group, you can use the timeline as a visual guide.
3. As you create your family timeline, examine "The Boot" in your packet of readings. Use it to analyze your family's experiences.
4. You might want to bring a picture or object that has significance to you that relates to your family.
5. Food for thought for white folks: *When did your ancestors become white? What did they give up to become white? What did they gain? How did their culture (way of life) change as they became white?*

## Family Herstories Worksheet Instructions

To prepare for the "Family Herstories" session, research answers to the questions in the "Family Herstories Worksheet" about your own family. If different branches of your family have very different experiences, write what you know about two sets of ancestors. Some things to keep in mind:

- (1) The goal of this exercise is simply to obtain information about our families, to hear the family myth that has been passed down through the generations.
- (2) The goal is NOT to confront, create conflict, or create defensiveness (Though these dynamics may already exist in your family).
- (3) Use the "Family Herstories Worksheet" as an interview tool, tailoring it to your subject. (Ask the questions you think will help that person open up.) You may not be able to answer all of the questions.
- (4) If there is a story teller in your family, start your research with her/him.
- (5) Use active listening and ask follow up questions.
- (6) Look for differences in experience based on gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.
- (7) Questions 10 and 11 on the Worksheet are questions for you to think about yourself, not to ask the subjects of your interviews. Refer to "The Boot" visual to help you think about how the institutions of white supremacy have affected your family.
- (8) Remember, this can be a very challenging experience. There are many complicated emotional issues that exist in our families. Take care of yourself as you do your research. Be aware that it may bring up a lot for you emotionally. If you need to talk about it, seek out your SGO or a friend from the workshop.

## **Family Herstories Worksheet**

(Use a separate piece of paper for your research.)

1. Where did your ancestors come from and when did they come to what is now the U.S.?
  
2.     a. If your ancestors came from another continent, what circumstances (political and economic) impelled them to come to what is now the U.S.?  
  
       b. If you have indigenous ancestors, how and when did your ancestors' homeland become part of the U.S.?
  
3. Where did your ancestors first settle?
  
4. What kind of work (paid and unpaid, men and women) did they do? How were women's and men's work remembered and/or valued differently?
  
5. Describe the obstacles your ancestors faced, noting differences based on gender, sexual orientation, class:
  - a. Finding work
  - b. Finding a place to live
  - c. Traveling to places where they might find work
  - d. Going to school
  - e. Marrying and raising a family
  
6. Were they targets of violence? If so, why were they targeted?
  
7. Were they eligible to become citizens? Did they do so? Do you know why or why not? Did any of your ancestors lose their citizenship?
  
8. Think of a story of how your family overcame a specific obstacle or form of oppression.

9. What kind of organized support networks did they have to survive and resist oppression?

- a. Familial, e.g., extended family
- b. Religious and cultural
- c. Social
- d. Neighborhood
- e. Economic (co-ops, credit unions, business associations, etc.)
- f. Political

**\*Note:** Questions 10 and 11 are intended for you to answer after you have completed your research. Maybe there is a family member you feel would like to answer 10 or 11. If there is, use your intuition as to how to approach her/him.

10. If your ancestors are of European origin:

- a. How did institutions of white supremacy privilege them? Be specific. List three specific examples of privilege relative to families of color in the same time period.
- b. How did the practices of your ancestors' support networks impact on specific peoples of color? Did your relatives tell you any stories about these practices? If the practices were oppressive to people of color, did your relatives acquiesce, object to, or initiate them?

11. If some of your ancestors are of African, Native American, Latino/a, Asian or Pacific Island, Arabic or mixed racial/continental origin:

- a. How did institutions of white supremacy oppress them? List three examples.
- b. Did organized networks of European Americans fighting against their own oppression also oppress them? List three examples.
- c. How did they resist these different forms of oppression?