

Building the Beloved Community

Lesson 8: Privilege and Racism

3.24.2024

Objectives: Understand connections between personal and systemic racism, and begin to understand how privilege and racism functions in our interconnected lives.

Materials: flipchart, Post-It notes, video for YouTube, lesson attachment.

Time allotments suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service.

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ What is one form of privilege that you have begun to notice more and more in your life? Why?
 - ▶ What is an example of white privilege?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: Never Have I Ever! (5 minutes max)

Youth play one round of “Never Have I Ever” (aka Five Fingers) as they continue to know one another and deepen in relationship:

- a) Ask everyone to hold up five fingers and keep that hand up throughout the game.
- b) The goal is to think of things YOU (not others) have **never** done or experienced that others will likely have experienced. Go around the room, taking turns, each person sharing ONE “Never Ever,” hoping that others will have done it. Whoever HAS experienced that thing must put one finger down.
- c) After you go around the entire room, see who has the most fingers still up.

3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

Teacher reads: (from educator, anti-racism scholar who pioneered work on white privilege, Peggy McIntosh)

“I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group.”

4. Community Profile (15 minutes)

Distribute copies of *Community Profile* and have youth complete on their own. Then have youth share in pairs, especially noting any *patterns* they see in their personal experiences. Back in larger group, share in discussion:

- How did you feel completing the Community Profile? What did you notice?
- We know that our **personal** experiences are unavoidably shaped by **systemic** issues and policies operating in the larger society. (For example, being a “good” student isn’t simply a matter of individual talents/gifts without any consideration if schools have funding for libraries, or if classrooms are in disrepair, or if teachers’ salaries require them to work a second job.) What connections can you imagine between the personal and systemic that may have shaped your experiences with racial diversity?

5. Individual and Systemic Racism (30 minutes)

Teacher introduces: One of the most important insights about racism is the distinction between individual and systemic racism. **Individual Racism** refers to an individual’s racist beliefs and behaviors that stem from conscious and unconscious personal prejudice. **Systemic Racism** includes policies and practices in established institutions and history, which result in the exclusion or promotion of designated groups. It differs from overt discrimination in that no individual intent is necessary. It’s the “water we swim in.”

Question for Discussion:

- Consider this statement from antiracist educator and activist, Robin DiAngelo: *“The two most effective beliefs that prevent [white people] from seeing racism as a system are: (1) that racists are bad people and (2) that racism is conscious dislike. So if we are well-intended and do not consciously dislike people of color, we cannot be racist. This is why it is so common for white people to cite their friends and family members as evidence of their lack of racism. However, when you understand racism as a system of structured relations into which we are all socialized... you understand how socialization works, you understand that much of racial bias is unconscious... While having friends of color is better than not having them, it doesn’t change the overall system or prevent racism from surfacing in our relationships.”*
- Tough question, but can you understand why DiAngelo would refer to herself as an “antiracist racist”? (Similarly, can you imagine someone who is an antisexist sexist?)
- What makes systemic racism – with its unequal distribution of resources, power, opportunity between white people and people of color – more invisible and so difficult to dismantle? (Hint: How is racism concealed? Think back to being a “good” student. How does racism factor into our education system?)
- Does knowing or not knowing the history of a community make a difference in making systemic racism more visible?

Watch Video: “Rondo: Building Highways, Building Conflict”

(Video project created by Ruby Thompson and Arielle Hay for Minnesota History Day 2008, when they were in middle school. Video narrates the destruction of the Rondo neighborhood in St. Paul, MN, in the early 1960s by the construction of Interstate 94.)

- <https://youtu.be/JaI8USAtJyE> (9:55 minutes)

Question for Discussion:

- Why was I-94 constructed through the Rondo neighborhood instead of the Pierce Butler Route or Summit Avenue?
- What is Open Housing Law?
- Where do you see systemic racism in this story?
- How is knowing this history about Rondo critical to seeing racism and advancing antiracist work today in the Twin Cities?

***Note:** In 2015, MnDOT Commissioner Charlie Zelle, and then St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, together apologized for the way the interstate construction was handled. MnDOT formed “Rethinking I-94” as part of a promise to the Rondo community to do better, including: community-based approach to reconnecting neighborhoods, revitalizing communities, and ensuring residents have a meaningful voice in transportation decisions that affect their lives. This work continues...

6. Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”

7. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets