

**The Undergirding Factor is POWER:
Toward an Understanding of Prejudice and Racism**

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As the dawn of the 21st century nears, racism – the most important and persistent social problem in America and in the world today – is on the rise in increasing ways. Whether we are talking about ethnic cleansings, group hatred, or retraction of equity laws under the guise that these are unfair, the underlying issue is the same. One group, threatened by the perceived loss of power, exercises social, economic and political muscle against the Other to retain privilege by restructuring for social advantage. Such actions and efforts call for an understanding of the basic concepts of prejudice and racism, and how to lessen their destructive effect.

At the heart of prejudice lies two concepts: *ignorance* and *fear*. These two concepts are correlated, for as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Fear always springs from ignorance.” All of us tend to have prejudicial attitudes towards others. This type of prejudice or “pre-judgment” is based on ignorance. It is a normal human response to racial, social, sexual and other forms of differences, because all human beings tend to prejudge others on the basis of limited knowledge, especially if they are different from us. Thus we are all prejudiced, and virtually none are exempt. Most of what passes for prejudice in society is the result of ignorance of other groups and their way of life and social condition. Because of the way American society is presently structured, most Whites have almost no conceptual idea nor first-hand experience of life in the African American and Latino communities. This is because the prevailing norms of separation and segregation that prevent people of different racial/ethnic groups from interacting with each other in a meaningful and positive way, perpetuate this ignorance of groups, which in turn gives rise to attitudes of prejudice. In light of such a common human condition, the advice of a former seminary professor of mine is most helpful and worthy of practice: “The mark of a mature mind is the ability to suspend judgment until all the evidence is in.”

The other factor is *fear*, and this one goes much deeper than ignorance, for it strikes at the root of prejudice, the issue of privilege and power. What makes racial prejudice so sinister is not just the act of prejudging a person or a group. *Prejudice is an inflexible, rational attitude that, often in a disguised manner, defends privilege, and even after evidence to the contrary will not change, so that the **post-judgment** is the same as the pre-judgment..* In the definition of prejudice, the indictment is greater for post-judgment than for pre-judgment. If you don’t have *post-judgment* in your definition of prejudice you don’t know what you are talking about. This is because racial prejudice is the refusal to change one’s attitude even after evidence to the contrary, so that one will continue to post-judge people the same way one pre-judged them. This is due to the fear of losing the power of privilege. In prejudice people are basically defending privilege of position and thus stand to gain emotionally, culturally, socially and economically from an attitude of prejudice towards others. Whenever people sense that

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these privileges are threatened they become fearful of the Other and react. The old adage applies here: "A person convinced against their will is of the same opinion still." Prejudice thus becomes the mental framework to protect from fear, thereby safeguarding a position of social advantage and privilege over others defined as different, and therefore, undeserving. People find great social and economical benefit from being prejudiced. And as long as these gains are forthcoming, people will continue to maintain their prejudice, in spite of the evidence to the contrary, for prejudice is more visceral than cerebral.

Prejudice operates on three levels:¹

1. *The Cognitive Level* – What people believe about others, their stereotypes. Stereotypes are a set of exaggerated and inaccurate generalizations about a group or category of people that is either favorable or unfavorable, which are often emotionally toned and not susceptible of modification through empirical evidence. These generalizations are maintained because they are a shared belief receiving strong support from one's reference groups.² Stereotypes are the *social scripts* we have in our heads about others and the roles we believe they should play in our socially constructed world.

2. *The Emotional Level* – The feelings that the Other arouses in an individual. These may be negative feelings of fear, dread, caution, fight or flight; or positive feelings of joy, solidarity, and we-ness, depending on how the Other is viewed. The deep well out of which these feelings rise is filled with early memories of encounters with others or with behaviors and beliefs we were socialized, which surge to the surface when the Other is encountered. The emotional level is the most important level because even after the cognitive level has been challenged and undermined, we still hang on to prejudice at the emotional or affective level because of the psychological need it fulfills – the need to feel superior, which in actuality is a state of inferiority. Much of this can be attributed to an educational system in this country that has deprived most White Americans of their ethnic heritage, by touting the experience of one group – the English – as the norm for all. Thus, Nathan McCall is correct when he declares that "the education system in this country has failed white people more than it's failed anybody else. It has crippled them and limited their humanity. They're the ones who need to know the most about everybody because they're the ones running the country. They've been taught so little about anybody other than white people that they can't understand, even when they try."³ When Whites see persons of color expressing pride in their heritage there is a sense of estrangement because they cannot do the same except in some generic "American" heritage. The result is an attack on multiculturalism and the need for a sense of psychological superiority expressed in prejudice at the affective level.

3. *The Behavioral Level* – The tendency to engage in discriminatory behavior. Discrimination is the unequal treatment of individuals or groups on the basis of some, usually categorical, attribute, such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, or social class membership.⁴ Prejudice is an attitude, however. When it results in

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an action, it becomes discrimination. Both together form the basis for racism. Prejudice is an *attitudinal bias*, while discrimination is a *behavioral bias*.

The privilege that prejudice rationally defends is a product of racism. Racism, however, is more than just prejudice and discrimination combined. Racism is a socially constructed reality at the heart of society's structures. *Racism is the deliberate structuring of privilege by means of an objective, differential and unequal treatment of people, for the purpose of social advantage over scarce resources, resulting in an ideology of supremacy which justifies power of position by placing a negative meaning on perceived or actual biological/cultural differences.*⁵ Racism and prejudice are not mental illnesses or psychological problems people have. Neither are they the product of "psychological abnormalities." Both are rational, cultural and structural phenomena to defend power. Racism goes beyond prejudice (an attitude) to structure this power advantage politically, economically, culturally and religiously within a social system, whether it be simple (as in personal bias) or complex (as in the role apartheid played in South Africa), which gives social advantage to some at the expense of others perceived to be inferior and undeserving.

In its essence, racism is culturally sanctioned strategies that defend the advantages of power, privilege and prestige which "Whites have because of the subordinated position of racial minorities."⁶ This deliberate political, economical, religious and sociocultural structuring of privilege, does not take place in some moral vacuum. It has behind it the moral force of an ideology of supremacy, an ill-will that claims racial superiority and pride of position. By ideology I mean a system of ideas and beliefs about the universe, to which a people adhere in order to justify their attitudes and actions. This ideology can have a religious or a scientific basis, depending on which one shapes our worldview. Nevertheless the outcome is the same, where one group benefits and the other does not.

Ever since the European restructuring of the world from the 16th century on, racism has become affirmative action *for whites*. It is both an attitude and an act of structural superiority, which justifies its very existence by giving biological differences, such as skin color, texture of the hair, physical features; or cultural differences such as language, religion, ethnicity, or accent, a negative value and meaning. This negative meaning then legitimizes treating the Other as inferior to oneself or one's group. The result is an objective (visible, measurable, tangible), differential (there is an obvious difference between groups), and unequal treatment (the difference in treatment is not the same), where one group gets consistently short-changed. The working definition for both racism and sexism is the same. Both refer to evil perpetrated against others. The only difference is that in racism color is the excuse for oppression, while in sexism it is gender. But racism has very little to do with color, just like sexism has little to do with sex or gender. Biological differences are not the problem; they are merely the excuse for oppression. Let me illustrate.

No person of color has ever suffered discrimination because of the color of their skin. If color were the problem then the solution would be to change your skin color, an

action which persons of color throughout history have often attempted, because of the wrong assumption that the problem was the color of their skin. Yet, the problem is not skin color, but systems that perpetrate evil against others and then justify that evil by blaming the victims. There is nothing wrong with the color black, brown or yellow. It is not skin color that forms the basis for discrimination, but the *negative meaning* given to the color of skin.⁷ "Color is neutral; it is the mind that gives it meaning."⁸ Neither are women discriminated against because of their gender. If gender were the problem then the solution would also be to have a sex-change operation. But the problem is not gender but systems which benefit men at the expense of women and then justify the evil perpetrated by putting the blame on gender. Women are discriminated against because of the *negative meaning* given to their gender. It is not our gender or skin color that we have to change, but systems of oppression that benefit some groups at the expense of others. This whole process is what William Ryan calls "blaming the victim." It is an ideological process that justifies inequality by finding defects in the victims of inequality. The logical outcome of analyzing social problems in terms of the deficiencies of the victim is a simple formula for action: Change the victim!⁹

William I. Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas, who are numbered among the founders of American sociology, enunciated a most important concept in 1928, "the definition of the situation" – the Thomas Theorem – also known as "the self-fulfilling prophecy." "If a situation is defined as real, it is real in its consequences."¹⁰ Thus how one defines a situation depends on how one perceives it. For example, the congestion in an elevator or crowded subway is called "intimacy" at a party. This theorem has far-reaching implications for an understanding of race relations as well as the role of women in the church and in society, for "all social reality is defined, [and] power comes from the ability to control the definition of situations."¹¹ For example, if women are regarded as emotional, concerned only with domestic matters and immediate concerns, and incapable of achieving leadership positions because of a lack of leadership skills, the consequence is that they are not given adequate occupational opportunities. They end up being relegated to secondary roles, thereby making true in reality the definition enunciated. It also holds true in race relations. If African Americans and Latinos are defined as lazy, incompetent, unintelligent, culturally deficient and lacking leadership skills, they too will be relegated to a secondary status in society and not given the opportunity to advance, resulting in consequences which are real thereby justifying the original definition of their situation.

Thus the meaning that people give to their reality, whether or not true, causes people to behave in a manner that makes the original meaning actually come true. "A man pretending to have a gun can order his victims around just as effectively as if he really had one, provided that they believe he does."¹²

What this means is that as human beings we have the capacity of giving meaning to the world around us. None of us sees the world exactly as it is, for the reality that we see is literally an invention of the brain, actively constructed from a constantly changing flood of information we take into our minds, which is then interpreted through our

experiences.¹³ The fact that two people looking at the same object do not see the same thing is a result of two different types of vision—the “visual field” in the eye and the “visual world” in the brain. The visual field is made up of the light, colors and figures recorded by the retina. The visual world is made up of all the sociocultural experiences stored in the mind that define the image in the retina, giving it an interpretive meaning called “perception.” Though the image is in the eye, perception is in the mind. What people actually “see” is not the reality of the image, but the reality of the perception.¹⁴ Thus, American writer, Anais Nin (1903-1977) is correct when she says: “We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are.” *Perception is reality!* And however one defines the world, that is how it will be.

Take a piece of cloth such as a handkerchief. What is the function of a handkerchief? To wipe off sweat, clean our hands, wipe our mouth, blow our nose—all menial tasks. Is the meaning of these functions in the cloth? No. It is in culture, in our human society which has taught us to view and regard a handkerchief in this way. You can take the same piece of cloth and make it into a shirt or a blouse and give it the functions of both protecting and celebrating our bodies. You can also take this same piece of cloth, add some red, some blue and some stars and turn it into a flag, and it becomes the signature of a people, symbolizing their group identity and nationality. And many are willing to die and kill for it, and others to stand at attention with tears in their eyes in a moment of triumph, like the many athletes at the Olympic Games as their national flag is raised in celebrated honor of their world-record victories. Consider Karch Kiraly, Captain of the United States Olympic volleyball team, which won the gold medal in both the 1984 and 1988 games, and who was been designated “The World’s Best Volleyball Player” by the International Volleyball Federation. After the team won the gold medal at the 1984 games in Los Angeles, Kiraly declared: “I don’t remember much about the last match for the gold in Los Angeles, and I don’t remember the medal being put around my neck, but I’ll never forget singing—screaming—the anthem as our flag went up just a little higher than the others.”¹⁵ Over what? Over a mere piece of colored cloth! Not just any cloth, however, but a cloth imbued with meaning, significance and national symbolism and in which we invest emotions that bring spin-tingling sensations in moments of victory or patriotism, or outrage when desecrated, such as the 1989 political flap over the burning of the American flag.

The problem is that for too long in American society we have been placing meaning not just on cloth, but on the perception of physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, gender, age, sexual orientation; or on social differences such as religion, ethnicity, language and social class. We have relegated some people to be the handkerchiefs of life, and others to be the blouses and shirts, all the while securing a prominent place for those whom we chose to celebrate as flags. We even publish magazines and sleaze newspapers so that we can keep up with the daily life of our favorite human flags.

I submit to you that the United States is not only a multicultural nation, but also a nation in conflict with its values, values of freedom, equality, liberty and justice for all.

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For the meaning is not in the cloth, the meaning is not in the gender, the meaning is not in the hair, the meaning is not in the color of the skin nor in the ethnic origin or language of a people, nor in the sexual orientation; the meaning is in the culture and in the socioreligious values transmitted from one generation to the next. It is this negative meaning, based on a system of beliefs that one group is superior to another group, that forms the basis for attitudes of prejudice and actions of discrimination, which result in racism – the social construction of power – both in society and in the church.

The importance of all of this to society is that we often treat others, especially those who differ from us whether by race, class or gender, as below us and regard them as handkerchiefs, as menial and insignificant; while we regard others, our colleagues and friends, as shirts and blouses; and still others, such as leaders and those in positions of power, as flags before whom we do obeisance and pay our due respect.

What we have in American society is the problem of a homogeneous value system operating within a heterogeneous society. It is the problem of maintaining stereotypes and actions of discrimination which dehumanize, and in many ways make less of human beings. Yet, *if we are good enough for God, we ought to be good enough for each other.* Being a “world citizen” – a transcending person who knows no boundaries – begins with compassion, love-action that gives a positive meaning and sense of worth to all human beings, resulting in our treating each other as the beautiful human flags that we all are.

The Issue is Power: Both Material and Moral:

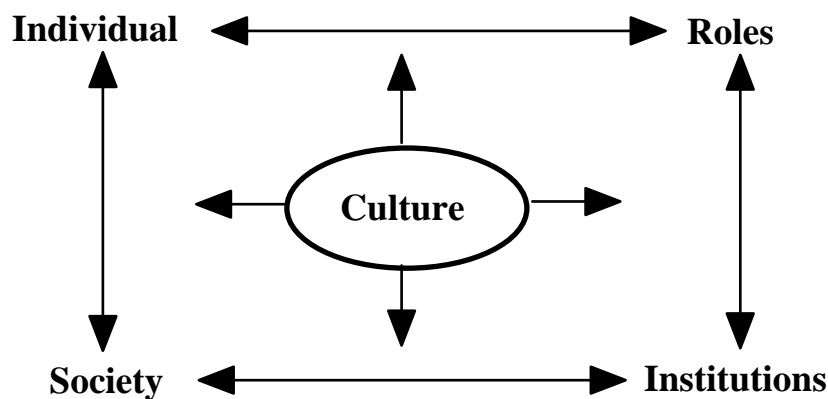
Racism, however, is more than an ideology, a belief system or a negative attitude towards others arising out of prejudice. If that alone were the case, then racism would be “reduced to something which takes place inside human heads, and the implicit presupposition here is that a change of attitude which will put an end to racial oppression can be brought about by dialogue, by an ethical appeal for a change of mentality.”¹⁶ But such an understanding ignores the real factor behind racism (as well as sexism) *Power!* Racism – and sexism – are not about color or gender; they are about Power! They can thus afflict anyone of any gender, color, community, culture, or country, who craves power above the need to respect the Other. At the heart of racism (as well as sexism) lies the concept of group competition – the quest for power.

What is power? Power in its essence is *the capacity to act..* Sociologically, power comes in two forms, as *coercive* and as *choice*. In its coercive form it is the capacity to act in a manner that influences the behavior of others even against their wishes. This is *material power*, the most prevalent and destructive form of power in society today, and appeals to the baser qualities of human beings, because of competition over scarce resources. Power as choice, on the other hand, is the capacity to act in a manner that influences the behavior of others without violating free moral choice. This is *moral power*, which appeals to the higher faculties of humankind. This type of power gives rise to *true power*. “True power is knowing that you can, but you don’t.”¹⁷ To practice this form of power is the height of self-control. Once one understands that racism at its

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core has to do with power, one will then recognize that at the root of racism lie two important elements – the material and moral basis of oppression.

The Material Base of Oppression: Racism is more than just a *meaning* system, a reinterpretation of reality; it is also a *material* system, economically and politically structured, from which this meaning system emerges. In order to grasp the significance of this, one needs to understand a basic premise of sociology, that no single institution in society can be understood in isolation from the larger society of which it is a part. This is because institutions do not exist in a social vacuum, but are social-historical entities influencing and at the same time being influenced by their socio-cultural milieu. Individuals and institutions, in many ways, are products of the larger society of which they are a part. And the reciprocal influence of the one upon the other, often goes unnoticed to human observation, but it is there nonetheless. Therefore it is helpful to visualize the reciprocal relationship between the individual, roles, institution, society and its undergirding culture, for each one shapes the other.



Individuals are shaped and in turn shape the roles they play, which are formed by the institutions in which the roles are played out. Institutions in turn are shaped by the needs of society as well as give structure to that society, which shapes individuals as well as is influenced by those individuals that comprise society. This entire process of reciprocal exchange is largely influenced by the specific culture of a given society. Culture influences who we are as individuals and the different roles different individuals are permitted to play within which institutions, and in what way these shape society, which in turn shapes individuals and vice versa. It is in culture where both prejudice and racism reside. These forces and power arrangements shape people's lives as well as the roles and institutions within society, resulting in exclusive structures and society. Culture is the key factor, for as Shirley Teper declares:

Culture is called a habit system in which "truths" that have been perpetuated by a group over centuries have permeated the unconscious. This basic belief system, from which "rational" conclusions spring, may be so deeply ingrained

that it becomes indistinguishable from human perception – the way one sees, feels, believes, knows. It is the continuity of cultural assumptions and patterns that gives order to one's world, reduces an infinite variety of options to a manageable stream of beliefs, gives a person a firm footing in time and space, and binds the lone individual to the communality of a group.¹⁸

Thus, culture impacts all aspects of this reciprocal process of social influence, which process is prevalent in all human societies.

Throughout human history racism has expressed itself in the socio-economic exploitation of God's dark-skinned children, which exploitation has been justified by biological-cultural differences, when the real reasons were economic as a result of group competition. This material basis of exploitation is the principle reason behind the White domination of the darker races and the limitation of their access to power, which has resulted in an objective or visible, differential and unequal treatment.

In 1903 W. E. B. DuBois, the great African American writer and sociologist, declared in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”¹⁹ Fifty years later, however, he altered his views with the realization that the real problems were economic. “Today I see more clearly than yesterday that back of the problem of race and color, lies a greater problem which both obscures and implements its: and that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellowmen.”²⁰

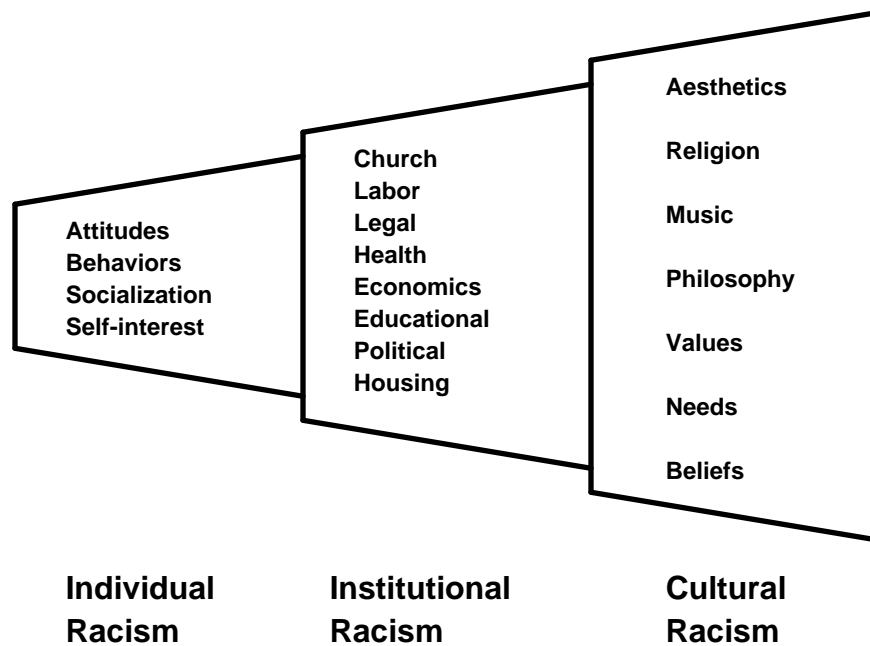
Prejudice by itself does not constitute racism, however. Neither does power by itself. But when people use their position of power, be it political or institutional, to reinforce their prejudices and to enforce them so that as a result of their racial prejudices the life chances, rights and opportunities of others are limited, the result is racism. Thus, the simplest definition of racism then is: *Racism is prejudice plus power.*²¹ On the basis of this definition, while all people can be prejudiced, only those who have power are really racist. African Americans, Latinos, Asians and American Indians – the powerless in American society – can be and often are most prejudiced toward Whites on an individual basis, but they are not racists at the structural, institutional level. Within this understanding of racism, to be a racist you have to possess two things: 1) socioeconomic power to force others to do what you desire even if they don't want to, and 2), the justification of this power abuse by an ideology of biological supremacy. Keep in mind that what often is described as racism in society today, is really nothing more than prejudice and discrimination. While a Black or Latino person, through the use of a gun and/or intimidation, can force a

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White person to do as he – as an individual – desires, this is an individual act of aggression, not a socially structured power arrangement. At present, however, only Whites have that kind of power, reinforced by a belief in an ideology of supremacy, both of which constitute the basis of racism in America today.

What I am talking about here is not *individual* racism, the micro level of human relationships, but *institutional* racism, the macro dimension, of social forces. There are essentially three types of racism operating in society: Individual, Institutional and Cultural. *Individual racism is a belief in the superiority of one's own race over another, and the behavioral enactments that maintain these superior and inferior positions.*²² Individuals of any color can and often behave in prejudicial and racist manners, by setting themselves up as inherently superior to other groups. But this is individual behavior, and its influence does not extend much beyond the individual's beliefs and behaviors. Unless, of course, the individual has the power to transform these beliefs and behaviors into institutional and social policies that govern action. This is Institutional Racism. *Institutional racism is the conscious manipulation of the structures of society's institutions so as to systematically discriminate against people of color by their prestructured practices, policies and power arrangements. Merely conforming to the institution's mode of operation frees individuals from personal discrimination, as the institutions now do the discriminating for individuals.*²³ Institutional racism is the most pervasive and powerful expression of racism in American society. Because most people carry out their lives within institutions, control of institutions affects people's life choices. Yet, "people don't always know what choices they have until they know what options are available."²⁴ And when the options are limited or non-existent, then the life choices are scarce. Thus, the power of institutions. The third type of racism is Cultural Racism, a combination of both. *Cultural racism is the individual and institutional expressions of the superiority of one race's cultural heritage over that of another race.*²⁵ We live in a society where racism permeates all areas of our culture in an expanding manner, at the individual, institutional and cultural dimensions. The "telescoping effect" of all three forms of racism has a most devastating and self-perpetuating influence on society, for each type impacts the other (see graphic²⁶).

THE TELESCOPING EFFECT OF RACISM



Thus, individual racism (based on the attitudes, behaviors, and self-interests by which we have been socialized), is given a structural form through the various institutions in society (such as the church, labor, health, economics, education, politics, etc.), which in turn impacts our cultural expression (our aesthetics, religion, philosophy, ideals, values, needs and beliefs). Of all three forms of racism, the most pernicious and influential is the middle one, institutional racism. Our society is so structured that most people, especially Whites, buy into this institutional racism without personally having power or being personally aware that they have power or that they are in a situation of privilege. As Peggy McIntosh says, "As a white person I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, *white privilege*, which puts me at an advantage . . . I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring domination on my group."²⁷

Audrey Smedley, in her outstanding book, *Racism in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*, brings out the force of White privilege and its expression in institutional racism, in the following statement.

Race in the American mind was and is tantamount to a statement about profound and unbridgeable differences. In whatever context race comes to play, it conveys the meaning of nontranscendable social distance. This sense of difference is conditioned into most individuals early in their lives and becomes bonded to emotions nurtured in childhood. In the United States, it is expressed in all kinds of situations and encounters between peoples. It is structured into the social system through residential separation, differential education, training,

and incomes, and informal restrictions against socializing, intermarriage, and common membership in various organizations, including, most visibly, the church. It is reflected in virtually all media representations of American society and in institutional aspects of culture such as music, the arts, scientific research, educational institutions, politics and political forums, businesses, the theater, television, music, and film industries, and recreational activities. It provides the unspoken guidelines for daily interaction among persons defined as of different races, especially black and white. It sets the standards and rules for conduct, even though individuals may not always be conscious of this fact.²⁸

Such institutional expressions of privilege are not readily perceived by Whites as “privilege” but as the “normal” day-in and day-out opportunities of life, to which everyone has access. However, when, as a result of demographic and political changes, Whites see their status and the landscape of social power changing, this heretofore unseen privilege now becomes most visible. “We are probably never so aware of phenomena and objects as when we are about to gain or lose them. Conversely, we never take them so much for granted as when we are assured in their possession.”²⁹ When threatened, this previously unseen privileged status becomes something to be protected at all costs. Blacks tend to do the same when they sense Latinos and Asians encroaching on their hard-fought gains and privileges. This kind of exclusive behavior cuts across all race groups, not just Whites, and is correlated with a sense of a loss of power and privilege. Langdon Gilkey puts it this way. “When [people] give their ultimate devotion to their own welfare or to the welfare of their group, they are no longer free to be completely moral or rational when they find themselves under pressure. Whenever the security of the object of this commitment is threatened, they are driven by an intense anxiety to reinforce that security.”³⁰

It is under such conditions that people will riot, both Blacks and Whites. People riot when they feel frustrated. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that, “A riot is at bottom the language of the unheard.”³¹ This is usually the experience of persons of color, who due to their state of powerlessness will often burn, loot and destroy. But White people riot also, just in a different way. Whites riot, not by burning and looting, for one does not burn down what one owns, but by using the system over which they have control to pass laws and ordinances which limit the opportunities of others in order to secure their “rights”. These legislations, in the long run, are destructive of more lives than any riots which loot and burn. The two propositions passed in California, Proposition 187 in 1994, the Save Our State Initiative, which sought to protect the rights of legal U.S. residents by not granting the same rights to undocumented immigrants; and Proposition 209 in 1996, the Civil Rights Initiative, which eliminated affirmative action laws, are both examples of the way White people riot. When you have control of the socioeconomic and political system, you will use this power to retain your privileges when you see these being eroded. Thus, both Blacks and Whites riot, just in different

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ways; one as an expression of powerlessness, the other as an expression of power. This latter mode is what institutional racism is all about.

Thus, from a macro perspective, only Whites as group can be labeled as racist in society, for the socioeconomic system is structured in their favor. Now this does not imply that given the reserve in a shift in power, that minority groups would not do the same, because in all probability they would. Thus the problem is not one of race or ethnicity; the problem is the basic human condition, which God long ago described in the following words: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). This is why Lord Acton declared: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

In order to best understand who is and who is not racist, we need to look at racism from two different perspectives. The first is Aggressive Racism (or institutional racism). This is racism *with power*. "It can walk on its feet and strike with its fists because its spirit permeates the institutions of power." The second form is Counter Racism (or the so-called "reverse racism"). This is racism *without power*, the racism of the powerless. "It lacks feet to walk on and fists with which to strike. The spirit is present; the hope is compelling; but the will to power cannot find the institutions of power through which it can express itself."³² Whites express the first, persons of color the second. But this second is not really racism, since it lack the power structure through which to manifest itself, except on a one-to-one basis of personal attack. Thus, the color of racism is not white, its not black, its not brown, nor is it yellow or red – it is *green!*, the color of money, the color of power in American society!

The Moral Basis of Oppression: In order to justify such evil use of power, people will use color, race, gender or sexual orientation as an excuse for oppression by appealing to those moral systems which give them a sense of meaning, righteousness and ultimate value in life – their ideological belief system, which serves as the highest authority in their lives, the moral basis of their existence. Therefore, if people use religion to explain their social reality, then a religious ideology with its sacred writings will be used to justify this exploitation, thereby transforming God into the biggest exploiter, racist and sexist, even when this is done unconsciously. And if God is against you, then who can be for you? If, however, a scientific perspective dominates a person's worldview, then a scientific ideology will be used to show why some groups of people are inferior to others. Richard J. Herrnstein's and Charles Murray's book, *The Bell Curve*, is an excellent example of this approach. In either case, the results are the same – the relegation of a segment of God's creation to a second-class status with an unequal treatment.

Such an approach is based on the myth of the biological supremacy of one group over another group. Yet "myths are created to fill psychological needs."³³ Thus, "although race is a biological concept, racial differences are important for intergroup relations solely to the extent that people attach cultural meaning to them.... Biological differences may be unchangeable, but by themselves they are not important. It is what we *believe* about these differences that matters. And what we believe can change. The

notion of a society that is color-blind simply refers to a society in which no cultural meanings are attached to human biological variations."³⁴

This being the case, racism and sexism will persist in human hearts as long as they satisfy the felt needs of people—such as the need to feel superior to others. “No amount of statistical data or hard scientific evidence suggesting a sociological rather than a genetic origin of differences will change a 'true believer's' mythic ways.”³⁵ As long as an attitude and action satisfies our needs, we will not change. Only when people can be shown that a continued action or attitude will prove to be destructive to their well-being, will they be willing to consider an alternate course of action.

The Solution:

Where does the solution to this basic human problem lie? The simple answer is in helping people “consider an alternate course of action.” How? Here is where it gets complex. Let me present several complementary models. First, a basic premise: *Racism in its essence is the refusal to accept the Other as an equal.* To do so, one will have to share in the societal rewards of social wealth, political power, and structural privilege. Thus, if racism has nothing to do with biology, but has everything to do with socially structured beliefs and behavior, then it can also be socially *unlearned* and *unstructured*. How people proceed, however, depends on how they see themselves when confronted with evil. There are four types of people in the face of evil:³⁶

1. Perpetrators—the inflictors of evil.
2. Victims—the recipients of evil.
3. Bystanders—the ones who do nothing in the face of evil.
4. Rescuers—the compassionate and altruistic who take action against evil.

The kind of action people take in a given situation will largely depend on how they interpret that situation, or in general view themselves. Thus, if people generally see themselves as Perpetrators, they will come to the help of no one. Being a Victim, however, can have a paralyzing effect. When it comes to racism, people tend to respond on the basis of their own experience. Thus, Whites tend to downplay a situation of racism or discrimination because it has not greatly impacted them. People of color, on the other hand, if they have experienced discrimination, tend to view it as a more aggravated offense. It is a matter of, *where you stand determines what you see.* If people do not see a situation as threatening to them they may conclude that it is not threatening to others as well, and will remain as Bystanders, often because they see the social system as fair, “with liberty and justice for all.” This is a result of the “Just World Phenomenon.” Stanley Coren explains the concept this way:

People tend to feel that the world is, with a few bumps here and there, pretty much a fair place, where people generally get what they deserve and deserve what they get. This notion of a just world results from our training as children that good is rewarded and evil is punished. A natural conclusion can be drawn from that kind of reasoning: Those who are rewarded must be good, and those

who suffer (even from our own discrimination and prejudice) must deserve their fate.³⁷

Unfortunately, much of what passes for racism in America today is not regarded as such by Whites, because they buy into this Just World Phenomenon. The result is that they tend to see situations from their own perspective – as fair and just – and seldom from the perspective of the Other, the victims of evil. If people of color see themselves as victims it is often believed they bring it on themselves or are making a bigger issue of things than there really is need for. The end result is that when it comes to racism in American society, most Americans “naturally” gravitate to the role of bystander and do nothing.

Another reason for such a lack of response is that Whites often see racism as *acts of commission* – what you *are* doing; while people of color see racism as acts of omission – what you *are not* doing. “Whites start from a premise that a situation is not racist until we prove it is. Blacks start from a premise that the situation is until you prove it’s not.”³⁸ Yet, it is only when we see evil from the perspective of the Other that we will respond as Rescuers. Thus, the number of Rescuers in society at any given time, willing to take a stand against evil, may not be all that large. The point is that however we interpret a given situation determines the type of response we take. What is interesting about this conceptual scheme is that at any one time in our life from childhood, each of us will have been all four of these types. The real test is what type we are as mature adults? The answer to this question pretty much determines whether we will be part of the problem or part of the solution to the evil in the world.

Throughout history there have been two ways of bringing about social change – one is normative, the other is transformative. The Normative Model of Change is based on the premise that change must start with the individual and that beliefs change behavior. It follows a four-step process:

The Normative Model of Change

(Premises: Change must start with individuals; beliefs change behavior)

- 1. Knowledge--provide people with all the necessary information.**
- 2. Attitudes--knowledge will result in attitudinal changes.**
- 3. Individual Behavior--attitudinal change results in individual behavioral change.**
- 4. Group Behavior--individual change results in group change.**

I call it “Normative” because it is the most prevalent model to effect change. This four-step process, the normal way people think change takes place, looks very logical, neat and workable, so that by giving people the necessary information gradual change will take place from the individual to the group. But there is one problem with

it—it seldom works. The model breaks down at step 2. All the knowledge in the world does not necessarily change people's attitudes. That's the point of this whole discussion, as the old adage says: "A person convinced against their will is of the same opinion still." In addition, individual behavioral change does not necessarily translate into group behavioral change.

A second model is the Transformative Model of Change, which is based on the premise that change must start with institutions and that behavior changes beliefs. As can be expected, this model involves fewer steps, a two-step process:

The Transformative Model of Change

(Premises: Change must start with institutions; behavior changes beliefs)

- 1. Change Behavior.**
- 2. Change Beliefs.**

The first step in this model is to focus on the required institutional behavioral changes. People will then bring their beliefs into line with their behavior, which in turn affects their beliefs, and so on through the spiral. Of the two, this is the more effective process to bring about change, since people will not change unless forced to. Laurie Beth Jones reminds us that, "Leaders who think others will follow them for no reason, because it is their job description, or because they are afraid to do otherwise, fail to understand a key element of the human psyche. *People will give up what they are used to only when they clearly understand and are shown something better.* The trick is understanding and communicating the difference between good and better,"³⁹ for good is often the enemy of the best.

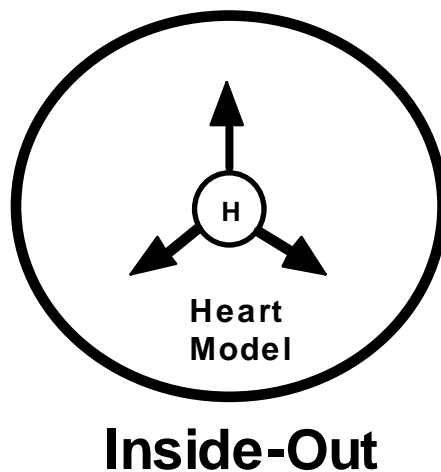
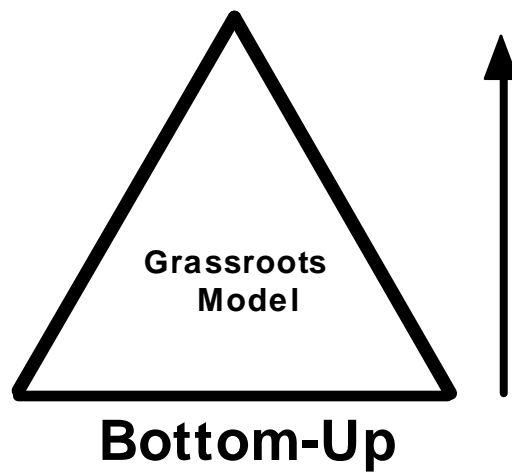
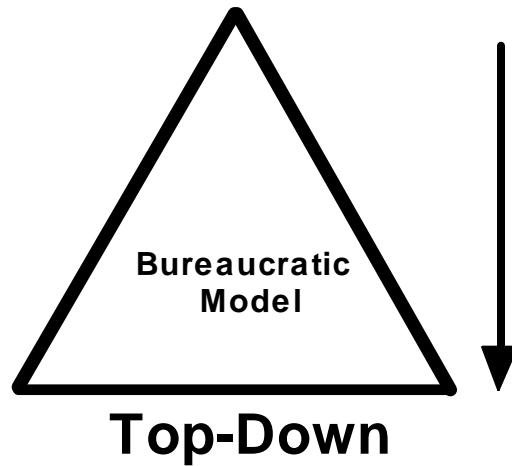
Social psychologist Thomas F. Pettigrew declares: "It is commonly held that attitudes must change before behavior; yet social psychological research points conclusively to the opposite order of events as more common. Behavior changes first, because of new laws or other interventions; individuals then modify their ideas to fit their new acts."⁴⁰ Anthropologist Benjamin D. Paul adds: "We assume that people base their actions on reasoning and that the remedy for erroneous action is to correct the erroneous reasoning. But the reverse of this proposition probably comes closer to the truth. People think the way they do because they behave the way they do, and their behavior is modeled on the behavioral patterns of their culture. People rationalize more often than they reason."⁴¹

Thus, once one understands the material and moral basis of racism, these two factors can be turned on their heads and used against racism. While an appeal to the moral foundation of human beings to get them to do the right thing because it is the right and moral things to do has its place, in our corrupt world with imperfect human beings "morality can never replace force." It can, however, as Langdon Gilkey reminds us, "provide the deep basis for the creative use of force. . . . But if people won't be persuaded, and if they can't be compelled, how is the justice to be enacted? . . . Legitimate force is one of the necessary bases upon which justice can be established in

human affairs.”⁴² People will then, more often than not, line up their beliefs with their behaviors, at least outwardly, if for no other reason than for economic expediency or social approval or political power. Thus, the Transformative Model of Change is the more workable model of the two to effect change. This is not to imply that the Normative Model is not needed, but that the assumptions implied in it are false.

There is another conceptual scheme, drawing from the Transformative Model, that utilizes three modes for bringing about change, as illustrated by the following graphic.

THREE MODES OF EFFECTING CHANGE



Constructed by Caleb Rosado, from ideas from Pearl M. Oliner and Samuel P. Oliner, *Toward a Caring Society*, (Praeger, 1995)

The first is the Bureaucratic Model that works from *the top-down*. Since racism is a structural response to the rejection of differences, racism cannot be eliminated without first addressing institutional structures of exclusion. The elimination of racism is not possible, therefore, without the basic institutional alteration of society, because it is a culturally and structurally sanctioned reality.

The key factor for success in this process is to work through the primary social institutions that perpetuate the learning of racism and its corresponding behavior of exclusion: the family, the school, the church, the workplace, and government. Yet, these institutions tend to have four basic characteristics.⁴³ First, *institutions tend to be resistant to change*. Once established institutions only change with great difficulty. Second, *institutions tend to be interdependent*. They tend to hold the same values, norms and interests, and penalize the same groups. Third, *institutions tend to change together*. For the sake of cultural continuity, changes in one institution are usually followed by changes in the other institutions. Fourth, *institutions tend to be the sight of major social problems*. Because institutions exist to meet basic social needs, failure to meet people's needs results in the emergence of conflict. Also the need to maintain the status quo, meaning the prevailing power privileges for those in control, further exacerbates conflict.

These institutions must undergo a dramatic transformation for racism to be eliminated. Yet, fundamental change as opposed to cosmetic change has not taken place in America in terms of diversity, because the very institutions that established the prevailing doctrines and practices justifying unequal treatment are only willing to undergo superficial reforms rather than radical transformation. A moral appeal by itself will not work, for the societal forces pushing for exclusion are too strong. Thus, the need for legislative and economic pressures to ensure that change and inclusion will become a living reality.

A second mode is the Grassroots Model, from the *bottom-up*. This was best illustrated by Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the Women's Movement, challenging systems at the ground level. Here is where Gordon Allport's Theory of Racial Contact comes in. Allport suggests that contact between groups will decrease prejudice when it occurs under conditions of equal status and cooperation.⁴⁴ What Allport is saying is that the problems of intergroup conflict (prejudice, discrimination, racism or sexism) in the world today are the result of status inequality (differences in wealth, power and prestige), coupled with socioeconomic competition. The solution to these problems lies in first eliminating status inequality and socioeconomic competition at the grassroots level. It is then, and only then, that prejudice, discrimination, racism and sexism will cease. Efforts to overcome prejudice before overcoming status inequality are bound to fail, thus the need for eliminating inequality. Studies do show that when groups come together on an equal basis, in a non-competitive environment, prejudice is definitely reduced.⁴⁵

The problem with both of these models is that they are based on a vertical orientation, with one group up and the other down, in a struggle for power. Such an orientation does not always get to the heart of the problem. Another model is needed.

This third mode is the Heart Model. It is based on a horizontal orientation that proceeds from the *inside-out*. In addition to the other two approaches, *individuals* also need to experience an *internal transformation*. Herein lies the key factor. All the diversity training and race relations classes in the world will effect little good, because much of the approach is cerebral, fact-filled and intellectual. But this cerebral, external approach has to be balanced off with an approach to internal transformation. The Heart Model suggests that to bring about a change in human relations more than just lip-service, unbalanced approaches and fine words are needed. When Jesus declared that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34), he meant that our words and attitudes toward each other well up from a deeper source, our genuine heart-felt feelings. All the diversity training and education in the world will not effect much lasting change if the source of such change, our emotions and feelings toward one another, are not transformed. For this reason, the most effective and lasting change in race relations can only take place when the transformation is internal – at the heart level, our gut reaction – and not just external in superficial words and cosmetic deeds.

This is the weakness of the Normative Model of change, in that all the intercultural knowledge in the world will effect little change if it is not accompanied by internal heart/emotional transformation. It is not the mind that so much needs transformation as the heart, the seat of emotions, feelings, and psychological needs that preserve self-interest even against evidence to the contrary. If individuals themselves do not undergo such an internal paradigm shift little will have been accomplished. Thus, for effective improvement in race and ethnic relations, the unit of analysis must not only be the institution but also the individual. It then becomes a reciprocal process of change.

“Inside-out” change takes place on two levels. The first is the level of the individual within the institution. This change entails “individuals finding, nurturing, and creating the conditions that promote care within the social institutions in which the routinely live their lives.” As Pearl and Samuel Oliner remind us, “A caring society. . . depends on just this very process.”⁴⁶ This is the only way institutions will change, as individuals begin to “live the change they wish to see in the world,” as Gandhi so gently reminded us. But what enables individuals to live out this change is the second levels, an internal transformation in their own hearts. This has much to do with character.

Character is an individual trait essential for the creation of a caring society, “a society where people assume responsibility for the Other’s welfare, in that they acknowledge the Others’ needs and act responsively.”⁴⁷ What is character? Character is that quality of soul – mind, will and emotions – that imprints our moral being with personal integrity in word and deed. It has much to do with honor, *the ability to give your word and keep it*. And it is developed through the power of choice in the wise

decisions we make. There is a vast difference between character and reputation. Reputation is who we are in the presence of others; character is who we are when we are alone. What we do when we are *alone* is who we really are. Here is where “true power” is made manifest, in the decisions that we make. A lot of corporations, organizations, as well as individuals are concerned with their reputation and therefore address diversity issues, but only because they are forced to comply or else their bottomline – economic gains – will be effected. Such is not the change that proceeds from character. Character-based change is where change takes place because to do otherwise would be unjust. It is one where the initiative comes, not from the ones experience injustice, but from those who have the power to implement justice and do so because they recognize the situation for what it is, and not because they have been reminded of what it is not. This type of change emerges from an understanding and practice of genuine justice.

Genuine justice is not based on fairness! In fact, a preoccupation with justice as fairness lies at the root of most problems in our society and in the world today, whether between individuals, groups or nations, and is at the center of the affirmative action debate. At the heart of “justice as fairness” lies *equal* treatment, which wrongly assumes everyone is the same and thus the need for “fair play,” which we all learn from childhood. But socio-historical circumstances preclude equality. This is why in some track and field events, the starting blocks are staggered, so that everyone will have an equal opportunity. This is where affirmative action comes in as equitable measures – short of restructuring society – which seek to make for a level playing field. There are many people today in America’s class-divided society that, because of socio-historical conditions or merely accidents of birth, find themselves on the “inside track” and don’t always realize that circumstances are stacked in their favor, but think they are playing on a level field. When they see the starting blocks being staggered, to give those on the “outside track” an equal chance, they cry out, “unfair,” “reverse discrimination,” “preferential treatment,” not realizing that the playing field of American society is stratified. Short of totally redesigning the playing field of socioeconomic, political structures, affirmative action becomes essential in righting societal inequities. It is based on the “principle of redress,” that undeserved inequalities call for rectification. Since inequalities of birth are undeserved, these inequalities are to be somehow compensated for. Thus in order to treat all persons equally and provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those born into or placed in less favorable social positions.⁴⁸ This “fair share” approach is a particularistic and not a universal action, since it is an attempt to place particular groups in the position that they would have held had there been no barriers in their paths to success.⁴⁹

Thus, *genuine justice is based on need, not fairness.* And since people’s needs differ, due to differing socio-historical circumstances, true justice does not spring from what people deserve, but from what they need. It is not fair play but fair share. Why? Because as Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “There is no greater inequality than the equal treatment of unequals.” Thus, at the heart of justice lies *grace* – unearned, unmerited,

undeserved favor. Only when individuals and institutions get to this point will we begin to approximate a caring society. This requires two basic character qualities in individuals: compassion and a positive self image.

Compassion – The Counterpart of Racism: Without compassion we will not create a caring society. Compassion is a rare commodity in the world today, especially in the business and political world. To be successful in the interconnected world of interdependence and interhuman relations of the 21st century, compassion needs to be a necessary individual and institutional character quality.

Compassion is not the same as sympathy. There is a vast difference. Sympathy (meaning to sorrow with) is an emotional response of sorrow toward another being generated by pity. Whereas compassion (meaning to suffer with) is *the ability to suffer with another being – including non-humans – with loving, caring concern, in an endeavor to alleviate suffering and remove the pain.*

Three couplets illustrate the difference between the two.

1. Sympathy *looks down* with teary-eyed pity and says, “Oh, I am so sorry.”
Compassion *comes down* with loving concern and declares, “How can I be of help?”

2. Sympathy remains in the realm of *affection*. Compassion always moves from affection to *action*.

3. Sympathy is some times motivated out of *self-interest* in a pious cloak. Compassion is motivated out of a *genuine concern* for others – the opposite of indifference – with no strings attached. The essence of Compassion is *taking the role of the Other* and viewing life from the Other’s perspective, out of the Other’s situation of need, as a motivation for action. Compassion is a character trait of Rescuers.

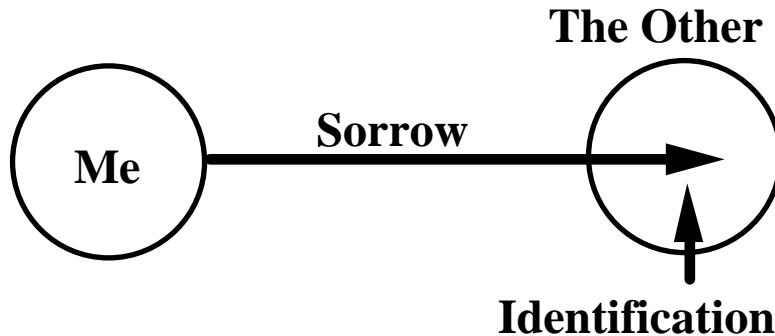
How do compassion and sympathy differ from empathy? These three concepts tend to be confused in the minds of many as similar or even the same, but they are not. They are vastly different and elicit from the respondent three different types of behaviors. These three behaviors can best be illustrated in the following manner.

1. In Sympathy there is *sorrow* for the Other in need. But with sorrow there is also a sense of distance, separation from the Other, an “I’m-not-like-you” type of response. Even though there is an emotional response, the “bridge of identification” with the Other has not been crossed. There is an emotional experience of social distance. This is often the experience of Bystanders.

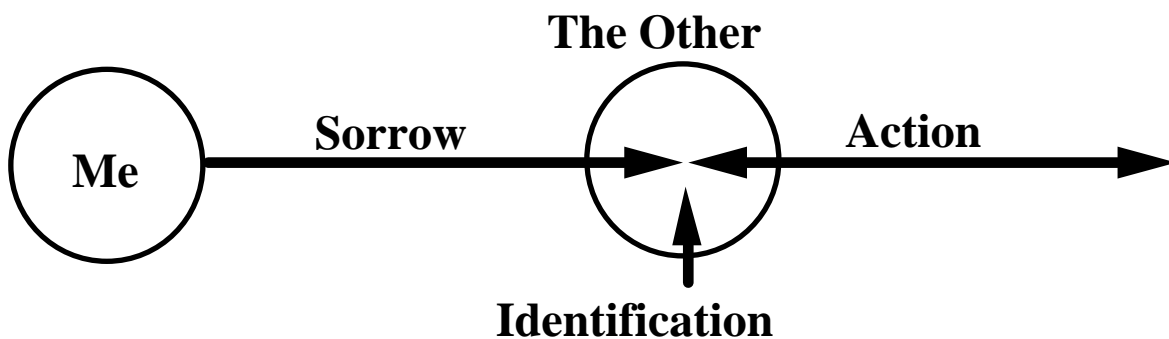


2. In Empathy there is not only sorrow, but also an *identification* with the Other in need. Here the person crosses the “bridge of identification” and enters into the emotional sphere of the Other and identifies with the pain. The Other senses and

knows that identification has taken place. This is a “weeping with those who weep” kind of act.



3. In Compassion, however, there is not only sorrow and identification with the Other in need, but also an involvement in *action* to meet the need.



Here the response does not stop at identification, but goes one step further to take the necessary steps of action to alleviate suffering. The two-way arrow symbolizes that the action takes into consideration the wishes and, if possible, the involvement of the Other in a reciprocal process of bringing about change through empowerment. Much of what passes for compassion is often an imposition from the outside, without regard for what might be best for the Other nor for their input.

There is nothing wrong with sympathy, per se, however. There are many times when the only action a person can take is limited at a sympathetic response. There are other times when one can go further and express empathy. And there will be times when the opportunity will be there to express compassion. The problem comes when one has the ability to demonstrate compassion, but for reasons of one's own choosing, decides to limit the action only to sympathy or at best empathy. This is what the story of the Good Samaritan is all about—to see oneself in the experience of the Other and move into action to change the circumstances, and not just limit one's efforts to a mere sympathetic or empathetic response. Compassion, thus, is an *attitude*, an orientation

toward life, which arises out of *spirituality* – that sense of interconnectedness – and manifests itself in *action*.

Compassion is the opposite of racism, which is nothing but systemic *indifference* justified by biological/cultural differences. But like racism, it is both an attitude and an action. It is an attitude of prejudice *for* the Other, rather than *against* the Other as in racism, resulting in social caring. Such a positive attitude results in action that *empowers* the Other rather than depriving the Other of power and privilege. But compassion, the counterpart of racism, is only possible through spirituality. *Spirituality is a state of interconnectedness with the Other – the divine, the self, the human, the natural, or any combination thereof – resulting in a position of security with a sense of worthwhile purpose.* This is Holistic Spirituality, spirituality in four dimensions, where the human center – our social self – is interconnected with: a *vertical* to God, the world of the sacred; an *inward* to self, the world of personal well-being; a *horizontal* to humankind, the world of people; and a *downward* to nature, the world of all non-human life-forms.⁵⁰

A connectedness to God, however defined, is most important because from this connection springs the compassion and spirituality that connects us to the Other. Malcolm X recognized this. “I said to Harlem Street audiences that only when mankind would submit to God who created all – only then would mankind even approach the ‘peace’ of which so much talk could be heard – but toward which so little action was seen.” It is not without coincidence that the most disconnected people, those without attachments whether to others, to self, society or God, are the ones that often commit the worst of crimes.⁵¹ Racism is the result of being disconnected from the Other. Compassion is what brings us together, eliminating the racism; and spirituality is the socio-divine “glue” bonding human spirits into one common human family.

At the heart of compassion lies “respect” – the process whereby the Other is treated with deference, courtesy and compassion in an endeavor to safeguard the integrity, dignity, value and social worth of the individual. *It means treating people the way they want to be treated.* This includes one’s self, the second quality of internal transformation.

The Need For a Positive Self Image: The inside-out transformation of the Heart Model is not possible without a positive sense of self, the idea of “I’m okay.” From such an understanding emerges the follow-up idea that “you’re okay.” This is what Jesus meant when He declared, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” How I feel about myself is a good indicator of how I feel about others. If I feel that I am superior to others – I, okay, you’re not okay – then I will treat others as inferior to me or my group, and will behave accordingly in a manner that dehumanizes others. If, on the other hand, I feel nothing but hate for myself, this will be reflected in my attitude and actions toward others. Both actions are similar in that they emerge from a negative sense of self. Thus, people’s behavior toward others is already a loud statement as to how they feel about themselves, and tells us more about them than it does about the one they despise. From this it can be seen that racism emerges from a deep psychological sense of insecurity, toward self and toward others. And the legacy can be self-destruction.

The perpetrator of racism dehumanizes him or herself, for they are behaving less than humane. And the recipient of this legacy of structured hatred can end up hating themselves as a result of a socio-psychological sense of being without social value, worth, power and hope.

It should therefore come as no surprise, especially to White people, when this state of social trauma spills out in rage and violence in the streets. Nathan McCall in his autobiography, *Makes Me Want to Holler: A Young Black Man In America* (Random 1993), reminds us that the consequence of teaching people to hate themselves is violence to themselves, what Franz Fanon called, "horizontal violence."⁵² This violence is best expressed in the killing of another person like unto themselves as a form of killing oneself, because my "brother" is an extension of myself. The result is Black brothers killing each other. McCall says, "If my life does not matter, your life does not matter either, since neither one of us has a future." This is what Jesus meant, in that if all I feel is hatred for myself, then all I feel for you, as an extension of myself, is also hatred! Much of the racist violence in society today from all sides stems from this socio-psychological behavior.

This is why Whitney Houston was correct when she sang in her No. 1 song of 1986: "Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all." If I don't have a healthy appreciation of self, I will not have a healthy appreciation of you. This is the universal principle that Nathan McCall learned from reading Malcolm X's autobiography: "that if you change your self-perception, you can change your behavior."⁵³ Thus, in a real sense perception is reality.

The point of the third mode, the Heart Model, is that unity in the human family will not come about because we have restructured the institutions of society, but because our hearts have been transformed. To which Paulo Freire will immediately add. It is an "illusion that the hearts of men and women can be transformed while the social structures which make those hearts 'sick' are left intact and unchanged."⁵⁴ Thus, all three modes – the bureaucratic, the grassroots and the heart mode – are essential for bringing about lasting, effective change, with *living diversity* as the new modus operandi.

These various conceptual models to effect change are summarized in the following seven steps which enable individuals and systems to work toward the reduction of racism. I say "reduction" because human beings being what they are, the complete elimination of racism and prejudice is not possible in a society comprised of flawed human beings. This is what Karl Mannheim declared long ago. "To live consistently, in the light of Christian brotherly love, in a society which is not organized on the same principle is impossible. The individual in his personal conduct is always compelled – in so far as he does not resort to breaking up the existing social structure – to fall short of his own nobler motives."⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the following seven steps are essential to lessen racism's impact.

STEPS TO ELIMINATE RACISM

<u>Steps</u>	<u>Problem Eliminated</u>
1. Information	Ignorance
2. Equal educational opportunity	Status Inequality
3. Self-Acceptance	Psychological need to feel superior
4. Noncompetitive group contact	Prejudice
5. Economic parity	Group competition
6. Behavior changing legislation	Discrimination
7. Compassion	Indifference

None of these steps by themselves will effect lasting change. All seven, however, as an embodiment of the models presented, taken together, will go a long way toward creating a caring society.

Conclusion:

Let me conclude with a story. Malcolm X, in his autobiography, relates the experience he once had in Michigan during winter, when he decided to give himself a good conk. I don't know whether or not you know what a "conk" is, so let me explain.

We live in a society that portrays by various means what it regards as beautiful, acceptable and of value. And when it comes to hair style, what is usually conveyed is that long, flowing, straight hair is beautiful, while nappy, curly, "kinky" hair is not desirable. At least this was the value system in the 1940s, 50's and early 60's, prior to the Black Power Movement. Latinos talk of "good" hair and "bad" hair—*pelo bueno y pelo malo*. I now realize that there is only one kind of *bad* hair, the one that keeps failing out.

Many African Americans bought the assumption that if the hair could be straightened, then one would be more acceptable by the prevailing values. African American men then made themselves stocking caps, from their mother's or wives nylon stockings, to use at night while they slept, to keep their hair from getting curly too soon. The process whereby nappy hair was straightened was called "conking," due to the special home-brew substance called "congolene." There was a saying in the ghetto that

praised the value of congolene that went like this: "Naps may snap, and curls may twirl, but congolene will rule the world."

And so one mid-winter day in Flint, Michigan, Malcolm X decided to give himself a conk. He went to the grocery store and bought a couple of eggs, two medium-sized white potatoes, and a can of Red Devil lye. Then at the drug store, he got a large jar of Vaseline, a large bar of soap, a large-toothed comb and a fine-toothed comb, a rubber hose with a metal spray head, a rubber apron and a pair of gloves.⁵⁶ He went home, peeled the potatoes, grated them, worked in the two eggs, then poured in the lye, and the congolene – a pale-yellowish, jelly-like, starchy-looking glob – began to get warm, due to the lye. He then took the apron, tied it high around his neck and combed up his bush of hair. Then the vaseline was worked into the scalp, down the neck, over the ears and forehead. This was the precautionary measure, for wherever the skin was not protected by the vaseline, the lye would burn in sores. The congolene was then applied to the hair and combed in. All of a sudden Malcolm's head caught fire, as the lye began to cook the hair. The idea was that "the longer you can stand it, the straighter the hair."⁵⁷

As the comb worked the congolene through the hair, Malcolm X says, "it felt as if it was raking my skin off."⁵⁸ With gritted teeth, eyes watering and nose running, finally he could not take it any longer and bolted to the kitchen sink to wash it all off . . . *and the pipes were frozen!* The situation immediately made his scalp burn all the hotter. In desperation, Malcolm finally stuck his head in the *toilet*, and flush after flush after flush, he washed off all that junk.⁵⁹

But from that toilet arose a changed man, one who realized the steps toward self-degradation and self-mutilation multitudes of African American men and women in America were willing to be "brainwashed into believing that the African American people are 'inferior' – and white people 'superior' – that they will even violate and mutilate their God-created bodies to try to look 'pretty' by white standards."⁶⁰

The life of Malcolm X (Malcolm Little, alias El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz) went through three stages of change. From the pimp and hustler – before prison; to the militant Black Muslim – after prison, first conversion; to the world citizen – after Mecca, second conversion. Such radical change represents what I call, "The X Factor" – *The ability to change*. Malcolm thus becomes a model of what is possible in the human condition.

Manus Buthelezi, South Africa's leading Black theologian, is therefore correct in declaring: "The black man must be enabled through the interpretation and application of the Gospel to realize that blackness, like whiteness, is a good natural face cream from God and not some cosmological curse."⁶¹ The same can be said to Latinos, Asians, Indians, and all human beings who negate their God-given humanity. We must stop seeking to mold people after distorted human images and allow them the right to be born into the beautiful image of God, thereby bringing about a divine corrective to a dehumanized and dehumanizing world. It is then, and only then, that we will have some semblance of a chance to end prejudice and racism.

- ¹Bernard Kramer, "Dimensions of Prejudice," *Journal of Psychology*, (April 1949).
- ²Theodorson and Theodorson, *A Modern Dictionary of Sociology*, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979.
- ³ Nathan McCall, *Makes Me Want to Holler* (New York: Random, 1994), p. 337.
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