

Group Reflection: Responding with Justice to Mike Brown

1. Welcome Remarks (We are here to listen to each other, to create a safe space to share and respond vulnerably, to look at our own racism and how to talk to other white people)

2. Reading: Sylvester Brown

Now, for this brief moment, you see me.

As we gather in throngs, angrily, defiantly, desperately confronting your apathy, your arrogance, your utter disdain...you see me.

Now, after killing me; shooting me down like a rabid pup, leaving my body on the cold, cold ground for hours, like garbage...you hear me.

As my 18-year-old blood soaks into our concrete detention, you fear me.

Now, as I once again face German Sheppard's and M-16's held in the shaky, sweaty hands of mentally pubescent, conditioned "heroes"...you feel me.

I am the subject of "Today's News"; the analysis of stale analysis, the giant awakened by a blast of unrestrained, unnoticed and unchecked indifference.

And you...now, you've come home...if only for the moment.

Like absentee parents, you revisit the nightmare you abandoned to chase "the Dream." Where were you while poverty and unemployment mounted...while they packed the children of your parent's parents in prisons, herded your kin into Gateway ghettos and stereotyped us all into irrelevance?

Your impotent call for calm is too late, even though my blaze validates your worth.

This is the "fire next time." It is St. Louis finally claiming its 1960's moment. It is the vomit that spews after a centuries-long diet of naked injustice. It is the protruding pus from a rancid, untreated wound. It is the communal outcry to the manifesto of systemized, antiseptic assassination.

Now, as I run your streets, trashing your QuikTrips and looting your Taco Bells; as I gag on tear gas and defiantly await rubber to turn to lead, you see me as you've always projected me: angry, reckless, violent, out-of-control, in need of restraint.

I am different...but not.

If only, in this brief moment, you can really see the "me" that is us, that is we.

- Sylvester Brown, Jr. / August 10, 2014

3. General Discussion: How are you feeling about this situation? What is being brought up for you?

4. Discussion on White Distancing Behaviors and Anti-Racist Attitudes

Inner Work to Combat Racism: Distancing Behaviors

People within dominant groups (males, “white” people, people without disabilities, heterosexuals, etc.) often employ these techniques to avoid acknowledging and acting on oppression.

Tactic	Explanation
Denial	Denial of existence or responsibility for the oppression. When an issue involves racial justice: “It’s not about race, it’s really more about class” “Racism ended when Obama was elected”
Deflecting or Minimizing	Changing the subject, minimizing oppression when we see it: “Enough about racism what about the drones in Pakistan?” “People of color may have it rough here, but at least they’re better off than people in Afghanistan or Mexico.”
Blaming the Targeted Group	When faced with an incident of police brutality against a person of color, we think, “What was the ‘victim’ doing wrong to deserve it?”
Over-Analyzing	Nitpicking about definitions of oppression to prove their existence, when we wouldn't do the same for other subjects. Debating the problem ad nauseum without taking any action.
Scapegoating	Shifting conversation to an extreme example of <i>someone else’s</i> oppressive behavior. “We’re all all-white community and haven’t really looked at racism in our communal structures- true. But you should listen to my mother-in-law - she’s soooo racist! It’s terrible!” The accusing person feel righteous, and meaningful discussion closed down.
They Just Didn't Know	When soup line guests make racist comments, making excuses and rationalizing: “It was only a joke, don't take everything so seriously. They don’t know any better. We don’t want to make a scene.”
Targeting the Expert	Without a real relationship, asking a person of color to represent all others in a tokenistic way: “What do Arab Americans think about the Syria situation?”
Claiming Innocence	“There aren’t that many people of color in our town, so our community doesn’t make it a priority to address racism.” “We participate as little as we can in ‘the system’, so we’re not responsible for structural racism.”
Competing Victimization	Claiming that people of color have too much/enough power: “The events of the local Hispanic culture group are diverting resources away from our (very important) ministry to women.”
Savior Complex*	Unrealistic view of ourselves as indispensable to people of color without acknowledgment of the privilege dynamics present. Guilt, shame, and a desperation to help, without being asked. “White hero” complex.
Superiority Complex*	Inappropriately taking leadership positions within communities of color; overestimation of our education and skills/underestimation of our inexperience; an “I know best” attitude.
Sympathy Trap*	Outrage over racism morphs into pity, causing us to act in disempowering, paternalistic ways; over-analysis without action; focusing only on the results of racism while underplaying groups’ resources and successes.

*From Witnessing Whiteness, Shelly Tochluk

Inner Work: White Anti-Racist Attitudes

In contrast with these Distancing Behaviors, white people can employ these attitudes in doing the daily anti-racist work at home, work and school.

Attitude:	In Action:
I do not expect to be absolved for my racism (or for the oppression white people have incurred,) either by people of color, or by the good works I do.	My work is not a shame- and guilt-fueled penance for the sins of whites. I don't need to anyone's thanks to challenge racism.
I intentionally seek to educate myself about racism, and lean into situations that are uncomfortable.	I attend discussions and actions hosted by local groups led by people of color. I read books, articles and publications that address racism. I try to leave the comfort zone of my white privilege.
I talk about racism at community dinner, at work, and with friends. When I do, I acknowledge that people of color have been talking about these subjects for a long time, and have been routinely ignored in the process.	I name racism when I see it, with a humble and open spirit. I don't pretend to be an expert, but speak the truth as I understand it, regardless of my social discomfort.
I remember that white privilege is not having to deal with racism all of the time. I do the inner work and examine how my own attitudes reinforce or combat racism.	I intentionally take time, alone and with community, to examine my relationships, actions and beliefs through an anti-racist lens.
I am hyper-vigilant about interrupting racism (challenging racist jokes, comments or references, etc), but I am NOT hyper-arrogant about the badge of "ally".	I don't expect people of color to advocate for themselves to whites who are being ignorant or hateful. I consider "ally" to be more of a journey and an attitude than a final, static goal.
Following the lead of people of color, I work for social change and to defend civil rights of all people.	I make it a priority to read newsletters, FaceBook posts, and other material from organizations representing groups led by people of color in forming my opinions on social justice issues.
Despite my best intentions, I have blind spots and make mistakes. I realize "it's not about me." I avoid over-personalizing challenges from people of color. I accept criticism with a relaxed attitude.	When I say something that is unintentionally racist, I accept challenge graciously, knowing that it provides an opportunity for discussion, growth, and deeper relationships.
I contribute time, talent, or treasure to organizations that confront racism, and am willing to leave my comfort zone.	I am a member, and make donations of money and my time to local and national organizations that directly confront racism.
I listen responsively to people of color. I acknowledge that it is not their responsibility to educate me about racism.	I ask for feedback from the Palestinians I work with, and I'm willing to change based on that feedback. I don't ask my African American friends to prove that racism exists.
I choose to overcome my shame, fear and guilt, and seek out relationships with people of color that are genuine and honest.	I seek authentic relationships - not token ones - that involve both support and challenge.

Distancing Behavior and Anti-Racist Attitudes: Questions for Reflection

1. Have you used any of the distancing tactics? When and why?
2. What are your individual strengths and weaknesses in regards to “Attitudes of Allies?”

5. Role Playing: Talking to other white people

One person is the “well meaning” white person, and the group takes turns responding to difficult things they say. This gives people a safe space to practice, and people can throw out ideas for responses to help each other.

Well Meaning White Person Ideas:

- Why do they have to be so violent/destructive?
- He did steal stuff, so he’s not exactly blameless.
- I don’t know what all this protesting has to do with it.
- They’re using this an excuse to steal, so they don’t have to get jobs
- What do you expect the police to do? They have a right to defend themselves, and they should have all the weapons they need.

6. Wrap Up and Action Ideas:

1. White people need to be **talking to other white** people about this! We need to be talking about about our own racism and struggles, structural racism, police brutality, etc. Bring together a small group of friends or co-workers **this week** and talk about it! Use these materials or others (karenhousecw.org has links to several articles for white people- whatever is helpful!
2. **Show up** when you’re invited: “Like” [Organization for Black Struggle](#) and [Show Me 15](#) on Facebook for event announcements. Then bring a friend, and show up!
3. **Donate** to support organizers on the ground: <http://obs-onthefrontlines.org/support-obs/>