

THE Round Table

Summer 2015

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin



Why This Issue?

Her name was Rekia Boyd. In 2012, Rekia was killed by an off-duty Chicago police detective, Dante Servin. Servin fired his (unregistered) semi-automatic weapon over his shoulder from his car at Boyd and her friends (all unarmed) as they walked away, their backs turned towards him. In April 2015, Severin was found not guilty and cleared of all charges by a Chicago judge. Rekia was 22 years old.

His name was Tamir Rice. He was playing in a park with a toy gun and killed by Timothy Loehmann, a Cleveland police officer, in 2014. Loehmann and his partner, officer Frank Garmback, claimed they told Tamir three times to raise his hands, and only fired after he reached for his gun. This claim was proven false by video footage; Tamir was dead within 2 seconds of the police car arriving on the scene. The initial court filings from the city of Cleveland said Tamir was responsible for his own death; the shooting was "directly and proximately caused by the failure of [Rice] to exercise due care to avoid injury." Tamir was 12 years old.

The list goes on and on: Nizah Morris...Aiyana Stanley-Jones...Pearlie Smith...Mike Brown. This country is being forced in a new way to face the insidious cancer of racism that has poisoned our country for hundreds of years. The disease lies far deeper than the extreme examples of KKK marches or the presence of a few "bad apples" on a local police force. It is systemic, and it must be rooted out and dismantled. The demand from the Black Lives Matter movement is simple: "Stop Killing Us."

All oppressions (sexism, heterosexism, ageism, etc.) rely on systemic power to privilege one group of people over another; one group has to fight for basic rights while the other receives them automatically. Oppression is pervasive, manifesting in our personal bias, organizations and culture. Racism shows up in our charities and non-profits, in real estate policies, in church decisions, in our healthcare system, and especially where state power is most bluntly wielded: in the police and military. Simply put, racism is present in every single organization in this entire country (including the Catholic Worker) unless we are doing explicit work to acknowledge and dismantle it. People in the Black Lives Matter movement, with courage and commitment, are holding up a mirror so that we can all better see the disease of racism and its manifestations. We have a unique opportunity as a country to begin a healing process, one which we must start by admitting that we have a problem.

The *Round Table* committee asked, "How can we all learn more about the millions of ways that racism operates in this country?" We bring you an issue that looks a little different from our normal format. We asked our authors to suggest and review online articles, interviews, books, and videos related to racism that can further our learning. Terrell Borum highlights several books and videos that illustrate the intersection of racism and education. Ajala makes the case, looking at media reactions to some popular TV shows, that our "post-racial America" is a myth. We get some great book, blog, and article suggestions from Janae Shepherd on intersectionality (the idea that each of us has multiple identities - our class, race, gender identity, etc.), and from Teka Childress on the multitude of housing and policy decisions that have created a separate and unequal society. We learn about the foundational ideas of Black Liberation Theology. The article on prisons and policing highlights both books and organizations working on this issue. We look at the movie *Selma* in the context of the Ferguson and Baltimore uprisings, and James Meinert highlights some good reading on the ways that racial identity is formed and plays out in society.

Our regular columns follow this theme; Theo Kayser shares the latest from Karen House and Carolyn Griffeth looks at the Catholic Worker through an anti-racist lens. With openness and determination, let's unflinchingly look in the mirror, and continue this hard work of acknowledging and dismantling racism. Let's not add one more person to this list. Our future depends on it. ✚



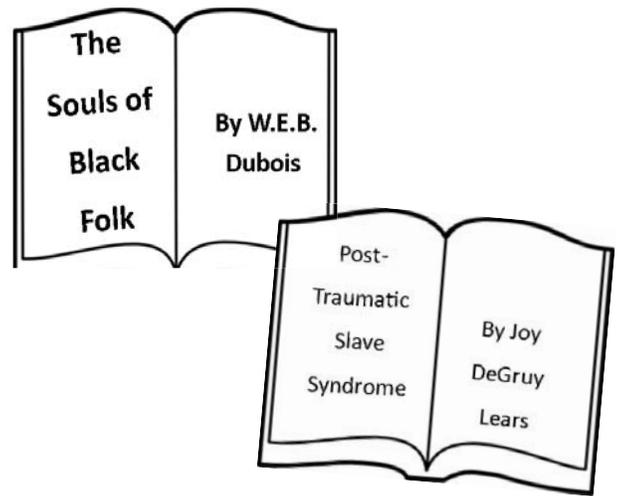
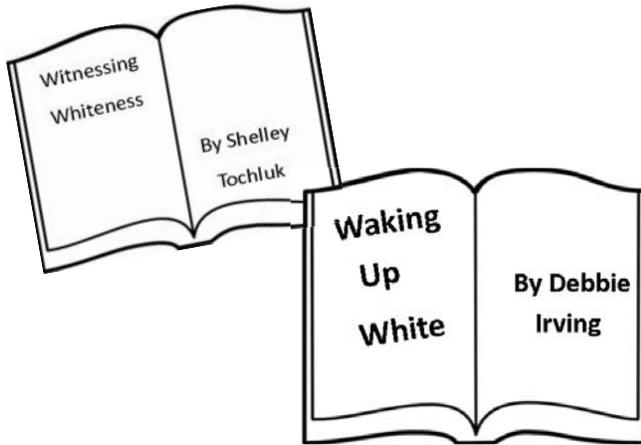
- Jenny Truax

Cover: Kristina Vidovic
Centerfold: James Meinert, Theo Kayser

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work. People working on this issue include: Jenny Truax, Teka Childress, James Meinert, Theo Kayser, Jason Ebinger, and Ajala Valbrun. Letters to the editor are welcomed.

Developing a Racial Identity

by James Meinert



There's an analogy that helps me understand the significance of racial identity. Imagine someone asked you to create and build a space for the storage, preparation, and serving of food. In spite of your font of creativity, you would probably come up with something that looks a lot like a kitchen. There is a way that kitchens exist in the world and a way they exist in our mind. Racism is similar in that sense. It is a system in the world and institutions, but it also resides systemically in our minds. So when we attempt to live and interact in the world without critically analyzing our own racial identity, we (white people) end up reconstructing racism generation after generation.

As an adult white man, I have struggled with forming a racial identity that sheds the messages that I'm superior, that I'm here to help/save others, that my way is the right and normal way. And I still get confused about what a racial identity even is. I think this is because it is not something that most white people in the United States were ever expected to develop. At the same time most people of color living in the US, from the time they were very young, have had to face the reality that race shapes their lives and their very understanding of themselves. White people have been taught to think of themselves as "race neutral," "normal," or "without a race." This confusion around the impact of being raised in a particular race and the general hurt and confusion created because of racism has led white people to attempt to develop a critical racial identity on their own.

As a white person, I have found several books very helpful with thinking about this. I have also been told by Black folks that they too struggle with racial identity and because of that, I have been exposed to some books that some of them have found beneficial on their journey. I am not qualified to write about that experience but will mention those books in brief.

Due to my own ignorance, I'm unable to provide any books or articles for people from other racial backgrounds, but I encourage all people to use whatever resources you can to deconstruct your own racial identity.

Witnessing Whiteness

Shelly Tochluk's book is not only a personal account of her awakening to the impact race has had on her life, but also an academic approach to whiteness and its impacts in society. Witnessing Whiteness is divided into three parts that guide the reader into understanding white racial identity.

The first section is titled "Dis-Ease in the White Community" and introduces the reader to the work of facing whiteness and acknowledging the hard history. Tochluk explores many of the ways that white people are taught to avoid facing race including focusing on ethnicity, claiming we transcend race, or claiming to be color-blind. She writes:

When we say that we do not see another person's color, what we essentially are saying is that we do not see a person's racial placement as meaningful. Basically, we are saying that we do not see the ways that a person of color experiences the world differently than does a white appearing person. Worse, being colorblind usually means that since we do not see differential experiences, people of color will have to convince us that race continues to matter in their lives.

Tochluk then describes the ways that white people who are aware of racism respond to it in ways that can often simply reinforce racism in society, such as trying to "save" people of color or pitying people of color. Finally, in the first section, Tochluk lays



James Meinert has joined a rock-climbing gym in St Louis and ran into his high school best friend. Coincidence?



Source: Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)

out in brief the history of the development of race in the United States and the way in which whiteness was created; how people with European heritage had to give up their culture in order to gain the privileges of whiteness. Section one of her book is rich in information for people trying to face the impacts of race, racism, and a white identity on their own lives and is well worth reading and re-reading.

The second section of Witnessing Whiteness introduces us to several cross-race relationships and uses these relationships to explore in further depth the dynamics of whiteness and its impact on our relationships, especially relationships with people of color. This section builds on the previous section and goes into many of the other aspects of “white culture” such as feeling entitled, the privilege of being unaware of the impacts of race, and guilt, confusion, and shame.

Finally, Tochluk wraps up her book in the third section with a “how to move forward” section titled “The Work of Witnessing Whiteness.” This section is full of advice for white people choosing to take on the challenge of being aware of whiteness and working to eliminate racism. Sub-sections with titles like “Demonstrate Dedication,” “Appreciate the Intimacy of Conflict,” and “Recognize the Value of Releasing Rage” give white people specific recommendation to try in their life contrary to what the dominant culture teaches. A final recommendation Tochluk makes is for white people to form communities of support around confronting racism and deconstructing white conditioning. These communities can function to not only support white people in the journey, but also to hold us accountable when we lose our way.

Witnessing Whiteness has an accompanying website with guides for facilitating groups of people reading the book together at www.witnessingwhiteness.com

Waking Up White

For people that find Witnessing Whiteness to be too academic or dense, Debby Irving’s Waking Up White will be an easier approach to many of the same ideas. Irving’s book is divided into nine main sections, each with “micro-chapters” that are from two – ten pages long. Almost every micro-chapter contains a story or analogy from Irving’s life that show the mistakes and insights she has had on her journey in developing her race consciousness. These stories are often brutally honest as she exposes the difficulties she has faced but also the wonderful opportunities and growth that she has received from being open and vulnerable.

Waking Up White also has writing exercises at the end of each

short chapter. These prompts are great for anyone that wants to read a little and then journal about their own experiences and thoughts. A couple examples are: “What stereotypes about people of another race do you remember hearing and believing as a child? Were you ever encouraged to question stereotypes?” and “If both of your parents are white, imagine just one of them being a person of color. Rethink your life from birth to the present. How would your race have influenced your experiences and your outcomes?”

Irving’s book is an honest look at her life and the impact race has had on it. It’s an approachable book that doesn’t leave one feeling judged or guilty but rather invited to join her on this journey. It’s a book that I would recommend to any white person; it’s full of insights and is very relatable.

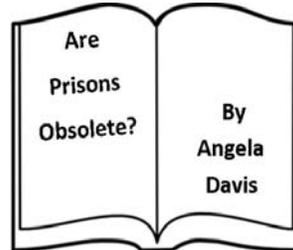
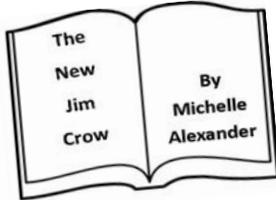
I also want to mention two books written more than 100 years apart that I have been told have helped African Americans with their racial identity. (I’ve also been told that white people should read these too). The first is The Souls of Black Folk. W.E.B Dubois’ classic is still moving and insightful over a century later. The writing is poetic and personal. As he says early on, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.” If the #BlackLivesMatter movement is any indication, racism is still one of the biggest forces shaping the lives of people of color. Dubois’ book is available for free online. The second book, written in 2005, is Dr. Joy DeGruy Lear’s Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome. DeGruy is black professor attempting to explain to a black audience the ongoing inequalities experienced by the black community in the United States. She explains the way in which traumatic experiences are passed on generation by generation to help her readers understand some of the patterns and behaviors in the black community. She highlights not only the resulting self-esteem and anger issues but resilience, community, and love. DeGruy lectures on the same topic and her lectures can be found on YouTube. ✦



Source: Bethel AME Church Flyer, Bloomington IN

Racism, Policing and Mass Incarceration

by Jenny Truax



If you want to understand racism in the United States, you need to understand the role that policing and prisons have taken to enforce it throughout our history and today. For years, my white privilege made it possible for me to remain unaware and ignorant as millions of black and brown folks were targeted by this system. As a Catholic Worker, I'm aware that our somewhat tunnel vision-like focus on U.S. war-making abroad and hospitality domestically has often drowned out the voices of our physical neighbors who are constantly assaulted by domestic war-making. While international justice work and hospitality are important and necessary, they can also reinforce a white hero syndrome, and prevent us from challenging white supremacy, police brutality and militarization literally in our own backyards. As a U.S. citizen, I believe it's important to re-learn some of the history omitted in my high school classroom; learn more about how we got into this mess, and envision ideas for moving forward. These books and resources are just a drop in the bucket, but they are all compelling and impactful resources that will help you better understand the roots of the injustices confronted by the Black Lives Matter movement.

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in an Era of Colorblindness

I put off reading this book for a long time. I guessed that it would repeat things I mostly knew about racism and mass incarceration and be a boring, dry read.

I was wrong. Reading this book felt like racism was physically punching me in the gut, chapter after (ouch!) chapter. When I finished it, I understood a little better the rage, grief and despair that has fueled the uprisings in Ferguson, Baltimore, and beyond.

In The New Jim Crow, Michelle Alexander lays out the basics of mass incarceration in a beautifully thorough and easy to follow way. People of all colors use and sell illegal drugs at similar rates. And yet the War on Drugs (declared when illegal drug use was actually on the decline) has resulted in a sevenfold increase in the prison population from about 300,000 to more than 2 million people- the vast majority of whom are people of color. In fact, the U.S incarcerates a larger percentage of it's black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid and more people are under correctional control (prison, jail, probation or parole) than were enslaved in 1850. As a tool of social control, Alexander describes mass incarceration as a new Jim Crow, a racial caste system that targets one



Source - trgradio.org



During her recovery from recent foot surgery, **Jenny Truax** created a Tolkien-style map of St. Louis, so that she can imagine she's in the Shire all the time. Contact her (cwjedi@gmail.com) if you'd like to see it!

racial group and “operates as a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race.”

So how did we get to this place? Alexander looks to the history of African Americans in the US, from slavery, to Jim Crow, to the present, noting that as one system collapsed, a new one rose up to replace it as a tool for control. This was largely accomplished by the elites in government and business appealing to racism and the vulnerability of lower-class whites- pitted against blacks with racial bribes, propaganda and stereotypes. The historical examples are fascinating to read about from the 1700s and 1800s, as well as the quotes of Nixon, and later Reagan, that perfected the use of seemingly race-neutral language (“tough on crime” etc.) when enacting wildly racist policies and ideas. (For example, Reagan hired a marketing firm to promote War on Drugs, and soon tales of “Welfare Queens” and “Crack Babies” flooded the U.S. vernacular.)

Have you ever been guilty of speeding, violating drug laws, shoplifting or not registering your car tags? If you are white and your answer is yes, you probably received some leniency. The point Alexander makes is that for the same rates of “criminal” behavior, African Americans are made criminals at drastically higher rates because of race. “Thousands of people are swept into the criminal justice system every year pursuant to the drug war without much regard for their guilt or innocence. The police are allowed by the courts to conduct fishing expeditions for drugs on streets based on nothing more than a hunch...[O]nce swept inside the system, people are often denied attorneys or meaningful representation and pressured into plea bargains by the threat of unbelievably harsh sentences- sentences for minor drug crimes that are higher than many countries impose on convicted murderers.”

Alexander chronicles Supreme Court decisions related to mass incarceration and race which made my head spin with their racist absurdity, and concludes that “the system of mass incarceration is now, for all practical purposes, thoroughly

immunized from claims of racial bias.” Later, while exploring some of the differences between slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration, Alexander notes that, “mass incarceration is designed to warehouse a population deemed disposable – unnecessary to the functioning of the new global economy – while earlier systems of control were designed to exploit and control black labor.”

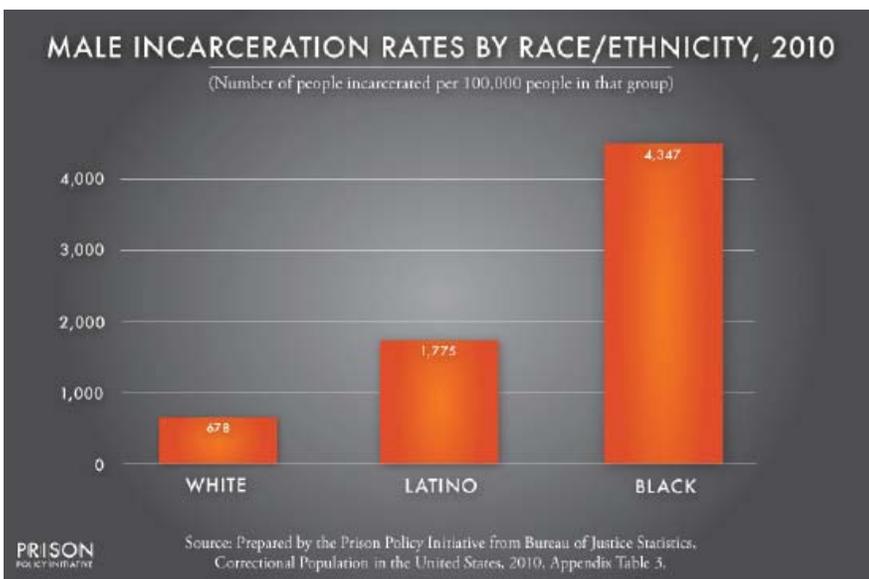
The Black Lives Matter movement is especially powerful because it isn’t tied to one specific reform like body cameras or civilian review boards. As a broad social movement, it seeks to change the very values of US society, values that use black and brown bodies as migrant workers, fodder for private prisons, and at times, punching bags for police. Presciently, Alexander writes in 2010 that only a broad social movement will alter these foundational attitudes, policies and laws. Our country must acknowledge that our crime policy is not really about crime, that it’s not race-neutral, and that while the color of many police officers across the country has changed, their role has not.

Are Prisons Obsolete?

Writing from a prison abolitionist standpoint in 2003, law professor and longtime activist Angela Davis asks us the question: “Why is it so difficult to envision a social order that doesn’t rely on the threat of sequestering people in dreadful places away from family and community?” Now is a powerful time to be considering that question. Her tiny 100-page book, Are Prisons Obsolete? is worth perusing, even if you can’t imagine answering anything to that question but “No!” In the book, she points out that prison isn’t the first complex social institution that seemed so ingrained we couldn’t imagine life without it. Slavery and prisons, Davis argues, are close relatives, and she gives a thoughtful, fact-based comparison.

I first learned about the convict lease system from this book, which countered my misunderstanding that Abraham Lincoln freed all the people who were enslaved. Following the Civil War, the 13th Amendment abolished slavery with one essential exception: it was permissible as punishment for a crime. Enter the new Southern black codes, which arrested huge numbers of the newly freed people for crimes such as not having a job and loitering. Almost overnight, the formerly all-white jails filled up, opening up a huge market for convict leasing and convict labor camps. Today, mass incarceration, marked by its corporately-owned prisons and practically free prison labor (No strikes, union organizing, health benefits, unemployment insurance, or workers’ compensation to worry about) provide an uncanny parallel to these older systems.

Davis also has a great chapter on how “gender structures the prison system.” It describes the ways women in particular are targeted by this system, and also how patriarchy influences us to think of criminalized men within the confines of “normal” male behavior while “the fallen woman” in prison is beyond moral recuperation and can be treated



Source - prisonpolicy.org

accordingly. If you wonder if this is true 12 years later, look up Marissa Alexander, who faced a potential sentence of 60 years in jail for firing a warning shot into a wall above her abusive husband's head.

Davis sees prison abolition as both a goal and an organizing strategy. Within the effort to “decarcerate,” she says, “we would try to envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment—demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance.”

Whether you're a reformist or an abolitionist, this short book is a fantastic primer on how the prison industrial complex operates, and gets you thinking about your own underlying assumptions about crime, race, punishment, etc.

Suggested Resources

Many groups in St. Louis and nationally have been working for years to dismantle the prison industrial complex and to expose the racism endemic in the criminal justice system. Recently, the St. Louis-based Organization for Black Struggle released its **Quality Policing Initiative**. It states, “The killing of Mike Brown... and others are not the result of abnormal incidents resulting in accidents, nor do these killings reflect “one bad apple” police officer. It is a manifestation of a system of policing that is unaccountable, out of control and acts from its worst impulses of racism and aggression....We will be working to dismantle the current structure that undergirds the Human and Civil Rights-violating relationship between the community and the policing authorities.”

The Quality Policing Initiative seeks to make all five phases of policing authority - recruitment, training, deployment, accountability and advancement - responsive to the communities that they are policing and to the elected officials who regulate and deploy them. It's a good read if you're interested in learning some specific demands of local groups working for change. And for more answers to the ubiquitous question “What do the protesters want?” look at thedemands.org, which has an easy-to-navigate list of both national and state-wide movement demands.

In addition to this Initiative, check out St. Louis-based **CAPIC** (Coalition to

Abolish the Prison Industrial Complex) whose website has some great videos and infographics explaining the PIC. **Decarcerate St. Louis** is a local group of formerly incarcerated St. Louisans and their allies, and **CAPCR** (Coalition Against Police Crimes and Repression- capcr-stl.org) has worked for police accountability for over 30 years in St. Louis. National groups **Critical Resistance** and **The Real Cost of Prisons** both have extensive resources on their sites - statistics, personal stories, organizing toolkits and further reading suggestions. Both are action-based groups with great Facebook updates and work at the grassroots level for change.

Last, James Kilgore from *Truthout* suggests these **four new books**, saying that they “constitute a distinct alternative to any temptation to define mass incarceration as simply a set of policy errors that can be reversed through legalistic changes....[T]hey offer us fresh perspectives on the framing of mass incarceration put forward by mainstream politicians and formulaic activists heavily invested in relief for “nonviolent offenders” and the gospel of re-entry.”

Here's a nutshell of Kilgore's summaries of these new books: “With scrupulous attention to historical detail in [The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America](#), Naomi Murakawa tracks the growth of the prison industrial complex from its LBJ roots in the 1960s to today. ...In [Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era](#), Dan Berger links prisoner activism with the social movements of the era, especially Black Power. ...[Caught: The Prison State and the Lockdown of American Politics](#) by Marie Gottschalk, [provides] a strong counter-narrative to existing quick-fix solutions to mass incarceration...from both a statistical and theoretical perspective. ...In a highly readable style, peppered with lots of stunning data Joe Dole has created a wonderful primer on mass incarceration in [An American Type of Hatred](#), [from]

the voice of someone who is still living the nightmare of the system.”

Most people can't imagine a world without the prisons, even though they understand the threat the whole system poses to our society as a whole. The Prison Industrial Complex feels intractable, and yet it was created and grown within our lifetimes. We can do something. We can do what we can to educate ourselves, to make the connections between the PIC, militarism, war and patriarchy, and to contribute to groups resisting it. Truly, another world is possible for us. ✚





Queers come out for Black Lives Matter demonstration, San Francisco. Source - Unknown

Black Girl Dangerous is a reader-funded, non-profit blog that seeks to amplify the voices, experiences and expressions of queer and trans people of color. It was founded by Mia McKenzie, who identifies herself as a black queer feminist. The blog offers radical intersectional thought on topics such as race, resistance, trans issues, queer issues, current events, gender, feminism, education, community, solidarity, family, and even humor. I highly recommend a recent article on the blog entitled, "Whose Lives Matter? Trans Women of Color and Police Violence." The article is written by an afro-latina trans woman named Princess. She tells the story of Nizah Morris, a black trans woman murdered on December 22nd, 2002 in Key West by three police officers. The article goes on to talk about the police violence experienced by trans women of color in Philadelphia. There used to be a competition among the officers of the Philadelphia Police Department in which precincts and individual officers would compete to see how many transgender women they could arrest or stop in one night. Princess goes on to describe the harassment she has personally experienced by cops. This article in particular gives us a necessary view into the lives of trans women of color and helps us understand why we need to fight in solidarity with them. In doing so, it connects the current movement against police brutality with the daily struggles of our black queer siblings, whose realities *are* police brutality. *Black Girl Dangerous* has countless other important articles written by QTPOC speaking the truth of their experiences, which bring about education and empowerment in intersectional ways.

I also recommend a book entitled [The Autobiography of Assata Shakur](#). Assata Shakur was among a small number of women who were activists with the Black Panther Party. She was charged with killing a police officer, spent six and a half years in prison under brutal circumstances, escaped out of the maximum-security wing of the Clinton Correctional Facility for

Women in New Jersey in 1979 and then fled to Cuba. She has been living in exile in Cuba since 1984.

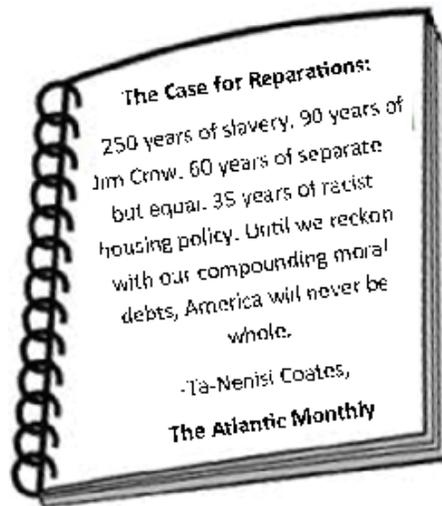
I didn't know of Assata Shakur until Millennial Activist United, an activist organization started by three queer black women, proclaimed her words at an action protesting the murder of Vonderrit Myers. MAU repeatedly chanted to the officers in riot gear, "It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support one another. We have nothing to lose but our chains." This was one of the most beautiful quotes I had ever heard and I had to know where it came from. After I found out it was by Assata Shakur, I had to know everything about her. I purchased her autobiography, which has inspired me to keep fighting to liberate all of my people. Reading the testimony of another black woman freedom fighter is empowering because it shows that women have been doing black freedom work throughout our history. Her book counters the narrative that black men have always been the only people putting in the work.

Shakur's autobiography is relevant to the Black Lives Matter Movement because she was framed and jailed for her political beliefs, for working to free all black people. This is an act that we have seen happen over and over again during our current movement – targeted arrests of leaders in an attempt to break us. If one takes to the streets and proclaims the radical notion that black lives matter, one can expect to be abused by the police and jailed for such beliefs. Assata teaches us that we must continue her work today, and gives us the courage to stand up to such power structures. Her writing shows us that nearly nothing has changed since the 1970s, and her spirit shows us that persistence in our fight is not only possible, but is mandatory. Her autobiography is a must-read for anyone working in the current movement for black liberation. ✦

Black and White America: Separate and Unequal

"When we think of white supremacy we think of 'colored only' signs but we should picture pirate flags."
-Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Case for Reparations*

by Teka Childress



In giving a title to my article, I used the method I learned from the authors whose work I am reviewing. Like them, I stated my thesis in my subtitle by quoting the pointed and true observation of Ta-Nehisi Coates. The three authors make it clear that to understand the current disparity in the lives of blacks and whites in this country, we must realize the centuries of biased policies and outright theft upon which it is based.

Ta-Nehisi Coates, excellent editor and regular contributor to *The Atlantic Monthly*, provides a convincing and clear history of the centuries of "kleptocracy" and theft by whites from African Americans in his article, "A Case for Reparations." The stolen lives and labor taken by slavery, the land and labor taken by forced and outrageous share-cropping practices and lynchings in the Jim Crow south and the segregationist and predatory housing policies of Chicago and other northern cities during the 20th century, have created the socioeconomic disparity we have today. He rightly believes that we will not be whole until this is addressed by making reparations. He describes some of the efforts that have historically been made to seek reparations and identifies a Congressional bill presented for the past 25 years by Congressman John Conyers, Jr. as a vehicle to begin the process currently. That bill would initiate a

"congressional study of slavery and its lingering effects as well as recommendations for 'appropriate remedies'."

Mr. Coates makes a compelling case for the need for reparations by weaving together documentation of a history of injustice toward blacks and the story of one man's experience of it. That man, Clyde Ross, began his life in 1923 in the Jim Crow south. As a child, he saw his family's wealth taken away from them with no legal recourse. He lost his opportunity to go to a good school and his one possession, a horse, was taken from him. But the most outrageous and heart-breaking event Mr. Ross endured is described as follows, "When Clyde Ross was a child, his older brother Winter had a seizure. He was picked up by the authorities and delivered to Parchman Farm, a 20,000-acre state prison in the Mississippi Delta region. 'He was a gentle person,'" Clyde Ross says of his brother. 'You know, he was good to everybody. And he started having spells, and he couldn't control himself. And they had him picked up, because they thought he was dangerous.'" When his family went to retrieve him, they were told he was dead and buried. They were never able to see his body. When discussing one of these experiences, Mr. Ross is quoted as saying, "So, that's just one of my losses."



Teka Childress is impressed with her brooding chicken who is determined to hatch her eggs. Teka is expecting a little Horton to pop out of one of them.

After going to Guam as a soldier during WWII, Clyde Ross returned home and decided to join the migration to the North by blacks hoping for a better life. He moved to Chicago. He found, however, that he could be robbed up North just as easily as he had been in the South. Because regular mortgages were not generally available to black people, he was forced to purchase his home in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood through a predatory contract agreement. According to Mr. Coates, these agreements had all the "responsibilities of homeownership with all the disadvantages of renting." Mr. Ross had purchased his family's home in North Lawndale, expecting it would be a good neighborhood to raise his children. Years later, though, as an older man, he found himself living in an extremely low-income neighborhood. He had not been able to escape poverty despite all his efforts. Mr. Coates points out that this is not an isolated example, but the experience of most African Americans.

Mr. Coates writes, "The income gap between black and white households is roughly the same today as it was in 1970. Patrick Sharkey, a sociologist at New York University, studied children born from 1955 through 1970 and found that 4% of whites and 62% of blacks across America had been raised in poor neighborhoods... Black people with upper-middle-class incomes do not generally live in upper-middle-class neighborhoods. Sharkey's research shows that black families making \$100,000 typically live in the kinds of neighborhoods inhabited by white families making \$30,000."

One who has not been the recipient of a lifetime of racist practices might look at the above information and wonder, how can this be so? Mr. Coates provides a good deal of detail of what practices caused this to happen. The racist housing that created this reality can also be found in the detailed and cogent work of Richard Rothstein in his piece, "The Making of Ferguson."

Once again, the subtitle is a key to understanding his thesis. Mr. Rothstein subtitles his piece, "Public Policies at the Root of its (Ferguson's) Troubles." This phrase is important in understanding Mr. Rothstein's work because his key contention is that the making of townships like Ferguson did not happen accidentally, but were a result of deliberate public policy. He identifies inter-weaving and overlapping policies at the federal, state and local level that were put into place in the early part of the twentieth century, that continued for a good part of that century, and that have created the legacy we live with today.

The following is just a sampling of some of these policies and how they interacted:

Racial Zoning

In 1916, Harland Bartholomew was hired by the St. Louis City's first Plan Commission, taking the job of planning engineer to oversee a survey of the City's properties. The purpose of his plan was to survey current properties and to propose rules for future zoning that would prevent multifamily, industrial or commercial development from impinging on single-family homes. Lest one doubt the racist underpinnings in the planning, Mr. Rothstein writes, "According to Bartholomew, a St. Louis zoning goal was to 'preserv[e] the more desirable residential neighborhoods,' and to prevent movement into 'finer residential districts...by colored people.'"

If a neighborhood had housing that prohibited black residence or resale to black people by having in place restrictive covenants (attached to deeds and often enforced by neighborhood associations), it would almost certainly get a first residential zoning designation that prohibited future construction of multifamily, commercial, or industrial buildings. This zoning designation, accompanied by the use of restrictive covenants, kept black families in neighborhoods comprised of multifamily, commercial and industrial buildings, while allowing many white families access to neighborhoods with single family homes on larger lots.

Segregated public housing projects

Mr. Rothstein writes, "At the beginning of the New Deal, Congress adopted a public housing program to simultaneously put Americans back to work and address a national housing shortage." He notes that the creation of this housing was deliberately done in a way to segregate formerly desegregated neighborhoods. The newly established housing projects separated black people and white people who had previously lived in more integrated urban areas. This forced segregation happened in in South St. Louis, with the establishment of Clinton-Peabody for white residents, and in North St. Louis, with the establishment of Carr-Square Village for black residents.

The Suburban housing expansion was subsidized by FHA (Federal Housing Administration) loans after World War II that were given almost exclusively to whites. It was deemed by those who measured the risk of the loan that housing and neighborhoods with restrictive covenants were the best financial bet. Mr. Rothstein presents documentation of the FHA's planning when he writes: "The 1938 FHA Underwriting Manual, which contained the criteria used in determining



Protest following the Eric Garner killing in New York.

continued on page 14

VIDEO

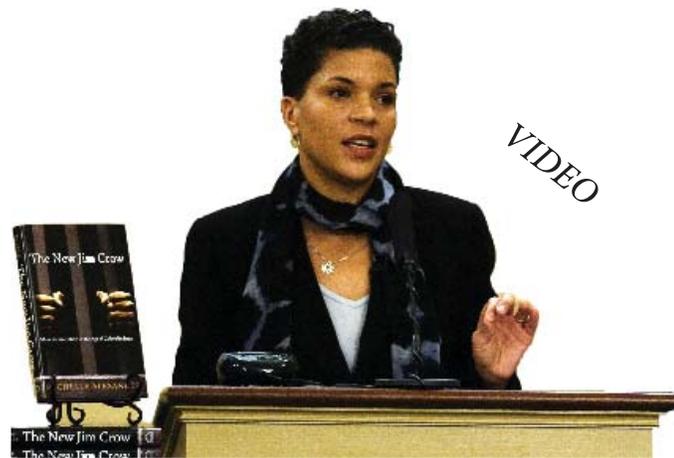


“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie:
The danger of a single story

to watch, go to: www.TED.com and search “single story”

VIDEO



Michelle Alexander:
The future of race in America

to watch, go to: www.youtube.com
and search “future of race”

Videos, Blogs, and to Deeper

BLOG



INCITE! is a national, activist organization of radical feminists of color. We mobilize to end all forms of violence against women, gender non-conforming, and trans people of color and our communities.”

Check out their website at: <http://www.incite-national.org/>
and blog at: <https://inciteblog.wordpress.com/>

Betsy Leonard-Wright writes about race and class issues. In her widely read article “Climbing the White Escalator” she compares privilege to an escalator lifting some up and powered by public policy.

Read it on www.alternet.org,
search “white escalator.”
find other articles on race and
politics on alternet.org

"I'm going to share with you how my own eyes have been opened and how I have learned to care more about a group of people we're supposed to despise, people we're supposed to hate, people we're supposed to fear... I'm here to talk about criminals"

VIDEO SERIES



ColorLines.com

Colorlines is a daily news site where race matters, featuring award-winning investigative reporting and news analysis.

"I had heard that white people had the longest life expectancy in the country in Washington D.C. while at the same time in the exact same city black people had the shortest life expectancy."

Life Cycles of Inequity: A Colorlines Series on Black Men

to watch go to www.ColorLines.com or search life cycles of inequity

and Articles n Understanding

ARTICLE



"Of course, effort and talent make a difference in climbing the staircase to prosperity. But for most white men, the staircase has been an escalator powered by public assistance."

WEBSITE WITH LOTS OF ARTICLES



WeTheProtesters.org

WE, THE PROTESTERS OF FERGUSON AND BEYOND, IN ORDER TO FULFILL THE DEMOCRATIC PROMISE OF OUR UNION, ESTABLISH TRUE AND LASTING JUSTICE, ACCORD DIGNITY AND STANDING TO EVERYONE, CENTER THE HUMANITY OF OPPRESSED PEOPLE, PROMOTE THE BRIGHTEST FUTURE FOR OUR CHILDREN, AND SECURE THE BLESSINGS OF FREEDOM FOR ALL BLACK LIVES, DO ORDAIN AND DEDICATE OURSELVES TO THIS MOVEMENT OF RADICAL LIBERATION.

eligibility for receipt of FHA benefits, warned against insuring property that would be used by ‘inharmoonious racial groups,’ and declared that for stability of a neighborhood, ‘properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes.’ The Manual contained a model restrictive covenant which FHA strongly recommended for inclusion in all sales contracts.”

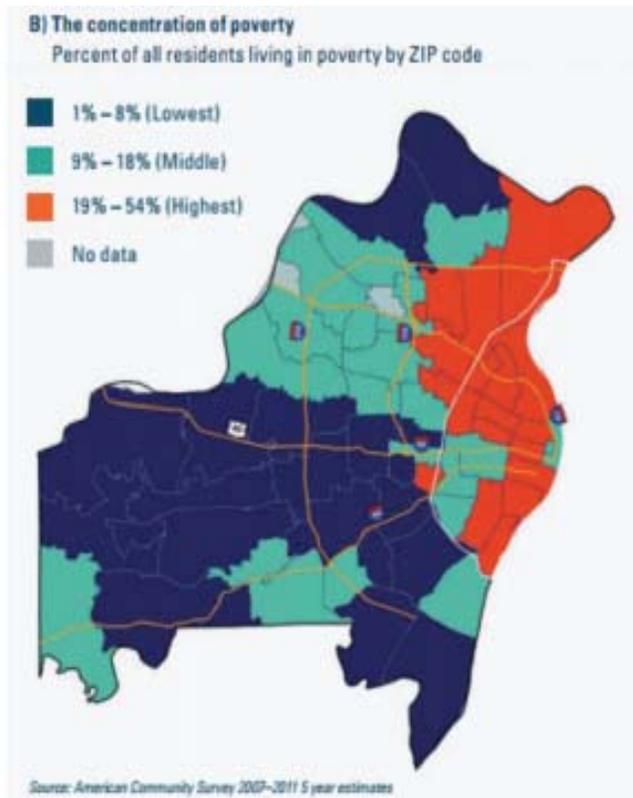
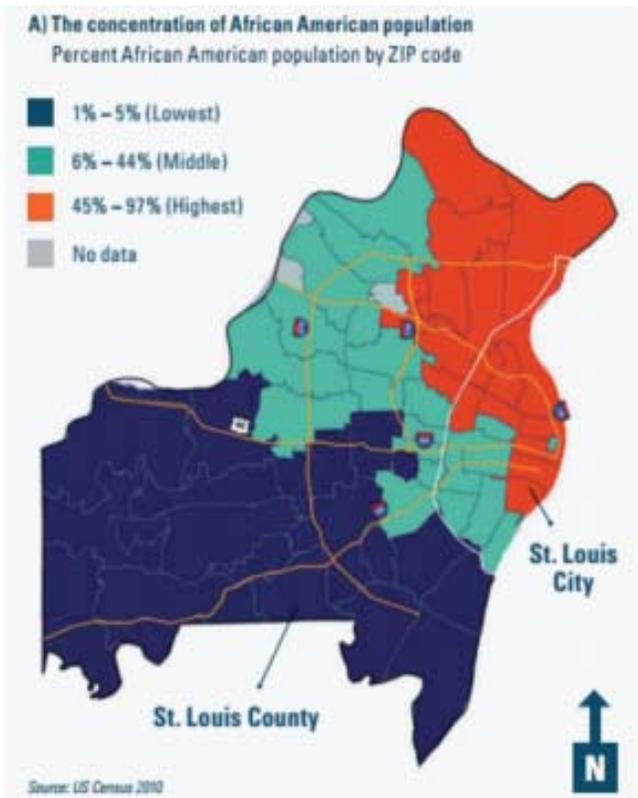
While these policies were later legally challenged, they had the overall effect of making extremely beneficial mortgage financing inaccessible to most black families.

It is clear how such practices described by Mr. Coates and Mr. Rothstein have forced generations of black people like Clyde Ross to end up in poorer neighborhoods despite their best efforts. The result of decades of black people being prohibited from living in areas established as middle and upper-middle-class neighborhoods zoned for primarily single-family dwellings, essentially kept them from reaping the wealth from increased housing values that is the backbone of the wealth gains for most middle-class white families. This wealth is what sent white children to college and provided for white people in their older years. Additionally it often forced middle-class black families to raise their families in more depressed socio-economic areas whether they wanted this or not.

While Mr. Coates and Mr. Rothstein give a picture of how things happened, Mapping Decline, a web project that is the companion to Colin Gordon’s book, Mapping Decline, The Fate of the American City, provides a great visual of what happened. It is a wonderful resource that shows in black and white the housing patterns in St. Louis from 1940-2010. By clicking certain fields,

one is presented with a visual representation of suburban white flight (the movement of whites from the city to the suburbs), and “urban renewal” (which moved many blacks from the central corridor of the city to its inner-ring suburbs.) With words and maps, it tells the story of St. Louis’s racist housing history. For example, one can click on the field, “1945 deed covenants,” and see where these were in existence on a map of St. Louis at that time. In the way that a picture speaks a thousand words, seeing all the white dots representing whites moving out west makes the point in a way that words often don’t.

Reading and looking at these resources provides an excellent education on the depth and breadth of the racism that permeate most aspects of American history and certainly its housing. One may love summaries and somehow think they have learned it all by reading over this quick review. There is so much more to be gained, however, by looking at these resources themselves. Information is provided in much greater detail and illumination than presented here. Mr. Coates is eloquent and compelling and deserves to be read. Mr. Ross’s story deserves to be known. The policies highlighted here from “The Making of Ferguson” are just a few of those talked about in that outstanding piece. “The Mapping Decline” resource might surprise both those who think they know St. Louis’ housing history and those who do not yet know the depth of its racism. While our effort to understand the path of racism will not alone dismantle it, it is a key step. Only by understanding the reality of our history will we be rightly able to see our present and make the necessary reparations and changes that will bring us to a more just future. ✦



Source: For the Sake of All Report - 2014.

Resistance Movements Then & Now: From the Edmund Pettus Bridge to West Florissant Avenue

by Kellie Carter Jackson



There are few moments when you can watch a film and feel as though it's speaking to the exact moment in which you are living, where art is imitating life with fluent vocabulary, dialect, and nuance. The last film I saw that provided an artistic outlet of the intense moment I was living was *Fruitvale Station*. The film featured the life of Oscar Grant and the day leading up to the moment he was shot in the back by BART police early on New Year's Day in 2009. The film debuted during the summer of 2013 when the trial of George Zimmerman over the killing of an unarmed black teenager, Trayvon Martin, was running heavy in the news. When *Fruitvale Station* was over, I left the theater feeling deflated, grief-stricken, and to some extent, expendable.

This week, I saw *Selma*, a dramatic historical film covering the collective campaign to bring about the monumental Voting Rights Act of 1965. I realized I was again watching a film during a moment in which life was being imitated on screen. We were only just one month out from the failure to bring an indictment in both the Mike Brown case in Ferguson, MO and Eric Garner of New York City. Marches have been ongoing throughout the country, but particularly in New York City where in an unrelated event, two police officers, Wenjian Liu and Rafael Ramos, were gunned down in their patrol car. I say, 'unrelated' because despite the outrage over police brutality, the alleged murderer had no ties to the movement that is spawning over a desire to see real systematic change in our police forces and judicial systems. I say all this to say that in viewing the film *Selma*, context is prologue.

What made *Selma* remarkable to watch was its uncanny resemblance to our current circumstances. Just when the skeptic in me believed that marches were becoming ineffective obsolete tools of the past, I was reminded of what it meant to gather in solidarity, visually, symbolically, and politically. As the credits rolled to the soundtrack song "Glory" by John Legend accompanied by Common rapping the lyrics:

That's why we walk through Ferguson with our Hands up
When it go down we woman and man up
They say, "Stay down" and we stand up
Shots, we on the ground, the camera panned up
King pointed to the mountain top and we ran up

Indeed, Ferguson was *Selma*, gas masks and all.

For me, what makes a historical film like *Selma* successful is more about what it doesn't do than what it does. It doesn't try to cover the entire Civil Rights movement and boil it down into two neat hours, *Eyes on the Prize* could not even do this. It does not try to make it all about Martin Luther King Jr; this is not a bio-pic. Had Steven Spielberg directed it, we might have expected this and a victory that concludes with the dominating contributions of white liberals. It does not give us the Disney's version of King, a proverbial sandman talking of dreams and harmony.

Is *Selma* historically perfect? No, but dotting every historical "i" and crossing every "t" is not as necessary as showing an



Kellie Carter Jackson is a 19th century historian at CUNY whose research focuses on violence as a political discourse, slavery and emancipation in the Atlantic World, historical film, and black women's history.

audience an authentic portrait of the human experience. What *Selma* offers is a multifaceted, nuanced King who was loved and despised by his own people. It shows us a King who leaned on others for encouragement and direction. King is flawed and even fearful, but does what many of us do in the black community: laugh to keep from crying. The film shows that us that the movement is not about the man, but about the collective. Titled appropriately, this film is called *Selma* and not King for a reason. In the film white allies are present, but they do not overshadow. They do not take over. Yes, this is what happens when we put a black woman behind the camera. Bravo Ava DuVernay!

I hope this film will be widely seen. There are many things I loved about this film. I loved the brief scenes that were used to make powerful points, such as the inclusion of Malcolm X as someone who understood well the polarizing politics of perception and that to disagree was not a declaration of enmity. I loved seeing the humanity of a people tired of being denied, deterred, and disposed. I saw black people who were not dwarfed by speeches and rhetoric, but made real by their grief, and rage. I loved seeing Annie Lee Cooper, played by Oprah Winfrey, strike an officer with her handbag for assaulting an elderly man who could not bend his knees to kneel with

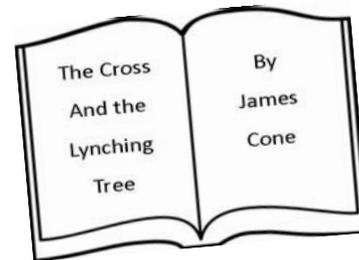
his fellow protestors. I loved the uncanny likeliness of Coretta Scott portrayed by Carmen Ejogo and the indomitable force that is David Oyelowo as Martin Luther King Jr. I love any history that can show white Americans as allies, and not perpetual liberators recycling troupes of white supremacy that we are all too familiar within film. The film was visually stunning to watch and made you feel as though you were looking at the artwork and illustrations of Khadir Nelson jumping off the canvas and onto the screen. This was film to love and be moved by and not through the accomodationist lens of which we saw *The Butler*, but in the forceful way that glorifies resistance to tyranny.

Perhaps last year's Oscar win of Steve McQueen's *12 Year's a Slave* will continue to usher in new provocative and authentic portraits of the black American experience from it defeats to its victories and beyond. Perhaps its momentum can bring on new films that will tell the story of Birmingham, Montgomery, Watts, and in time Ferguson. Audiences are ready. ✦

Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in The African American Intellectual History Society Blog and is reprinted here under a Creative Commons agreement.

Black Liberation Theology

by Theo Kayser



What is black liberation theology? As “founder” James Cone says in an NPR interview titled *Black Liberation Theology, in its Founder's Words*, “Black Liberation Theology is mainly a theology in which we see God as concerned with the poor and the weak in society, and since this theology comes out of the black community, we call it Black Liberation Theology. While it is not just for black people in the narrow sense of that term, it is for black people because it focuses on the concerns of black people who are living and who are voiceless in this society. That makes it Black Liberation Theology, but it is concerned about the gospel for everybody in this society, and if everybody in this society was concerned about the gospel, then they would be for the poor and the weak. And if you are for the poor and the weak,

you are also concerned about the liberation of black people. Black Liberation Theology is a theology that sees justice for the poor as the heart of what the gospel is really about,” and so “any interpretation of the gospel, in any historical period, that fails to see Jesus as liberator of the oppressed is heretical.”

Those of us who are white and living in the United States often find ourselves confused as to our location Biblically and are thus guilty of this heresy. Black Liberation Theology reminds us who it was that owned slaves and who it was that was treated as property in our history, and then challenges us to reconsider where it is we find ourselves in the Biblical narrative. We think that we are Israel, but in reality we are Egypt, Babylon, and Rome.



Theo Kayser enjoys cooking large amounts of food for large numbers of hungry people and doing crosswords while on duty at Karen House.



#BlackChurch action hosted by Millennial Activists United

same thing would happen to them if they did not stay in their place.” - [The Cross and The Lynching Tree](#)

Cone describes the agony of thousands of victims of lynching only to ask how it was that the white church could allow these things to happen. He focuses specifically on Reinhold Niebuhr, the most influential Christian theologian of his time, and asks why Niebuhr was not passionately opposed to lynching. Pessimism and failure to dialogue with the victims of white supremacy are the answers given.

And so what does this critique of white theology mean for us living today? Lynchings of the sort described in the book are not as common place as during Niebuhr’s time but they have not disappeared, only transformed. When unarmed Michael Brown was killed by Darren Wilson, his body was left uncovered in the street and remained there for four hours; comparisons to lynching were not hard to make. And what of a prison-industrial-complex that locks up black men at six times the rate of whites? Surely the goals of intimidation are not so different between this system and the lynching tree. Cone asks theologians, “Do you see yourself in the Neibuhr I have described? If so what will you do?” To challenge these new forms of lynching is what it means for us to be Christians today and the only path of redemption for this nation. †

**“I was born again
on the streets of
Ferguson. I have
seen the face of God,
and God has got
tattoos on God’s face,
and God sags God’s
pants, and God is
angry and God is
queer.”**

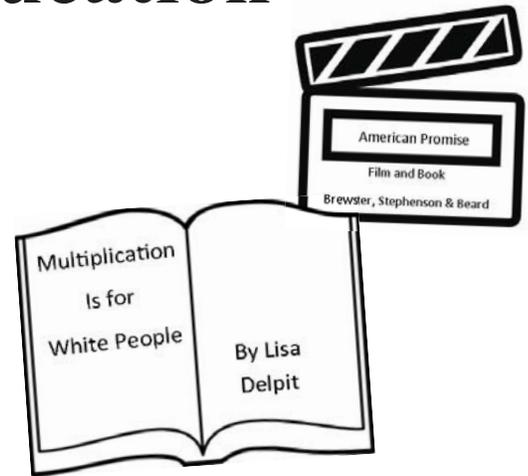
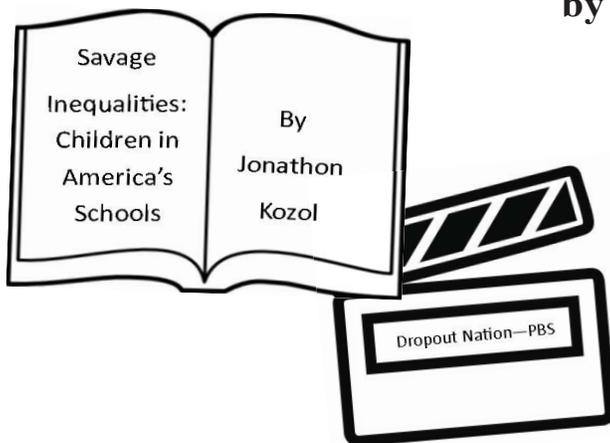
- Rev. Osagyefo Sekou

Cone’s book [The Cross and Lynching Tree](#) helps us find our way to this understanding. Cone wants us to understand one as the other. In order to truly comprehend the symbol of the cross in America today we must juxtapose it to the lynching tree. For so many of us the cross has become sterile, an irrelevant, archaic symbol of millennia ago. We white folks forget that it was a public spectacle of torture and murder meant to instill fear into an oppressed population and we are often unable to understand the connection that the cross has to pictures of burnt, black bodies hanging from trees.

“As Jesus was an innocent victim of mob hysteria and Roman imperial violence, many African-Americans were innocent victims of white mobs, thirsting for blood in the name of God and in defense of segregation, white supremacy, and the purity of the Anglo-Saxon race. Both the cross and the lynching tree were symbols of terror, instruments of torture and execution, reserved primarily for slaves, criminals, and insurrectionists—the lowest of the low in society. Both Jesus and blacks were publicly humiliated, subjected to the utmost indignity and cruelty. They were stripped, in order to be deprived of dignity, then paraded, mocked and whipped, pierced, derided and spat upon, and tortured for hours in the presence of jeering crowds for popular entertainment. In both cases, the purpose was to strike terror in the subject community. It was to let people know that the

Racism and Education

by Terrell Borum



When looking at the intersection of racism and education in the United States, another very important variable must be critically examined. Yes, the data tells us that Black and Hispanic children as a whole, across all socio-economic classes, are lagging behind their White peers regarding most educational outcomes, but the majority of these students who are lagging behind are *poor* Black and Hispanic children. Racism and classism have worked so well together that most of the school systems that predominantly serve Black and Hispanic children are grossly underfunded and brutally under-resourced. For this reason, we must also interject classism when looking at the intersection of racism and education.

Savage Inequalities

For anyone who is attempting to gain any level of understanding of the intersection of race and school systems in the United States of America, Savage Inequalities is a must read. Published in 1991, but still as truthful for today, it provides a no-holds-barred look into the quality of education that is being produced for poor, urban communities throughout the country. This book provides glaring insights into the inputs that result in these outcomes. It does this in two ways. Kozol gives first-hand accounts of what he has seen in the lives of students and staff members from East St. Louis, Illinois to New York City. Taking it a step further though, he looks at the systematic influences on the school systems. Funding formulas, teacher education, poverty, and drug addiction are among the systematic influences that are touched on.

Dropout Nation (PBS)

This resource examines one of the outcomes of the “savage inequalities” that Johnathan Kozol explores in his aforementioned

book. The outcome that is examined here is the dropout rate. *Dropout Nation* is a documentary film that was produced by PBS in 2014. The film explores the dropout crisis by using Sharpstown High School in Houston, Texas as a case study. The film chronicles the stories of a few of the staff members and students at the school in order to explain their daily struggles and to unmask the reasons that that many of the students in the school are academically unsuccessful.

Race is put on display from the opening of the film. The images that are shown are all of Black and Hispanic students. Furthermore, the Dean of Students introduces himself into the story with this analysis of his student body: “Most of our kids are Black and Hispanic, but they all share one common denominator. They are all poor.” From there, race is not overtly the focus of the film. But even without attempting to do so, the effects of an educational institution rife with racism and classism can still be seen.

Multiplication is for White People: Raising Expectations for Other People's Children

The first chapter in Multiplication is for White People reminds us that there is no [educational] achievement gap at birth. In fact, we read the following within the first few sentences of the text: “Many reasons have been given for why African American children are not excelling in schools in the United States. One that is seldom spoken aloud, but that is buried within the American psyche, is that black children are innately less capable—that they are somehow inferior. I want to start by dispelling this myth.” The title comes from a belief that has been overtly and covertly drilled into the minds of many Black and Hispanic children across the



Terrell Borum is the school social worker at Sumner High School.

country, the belief that they are not capable of being academically successful.

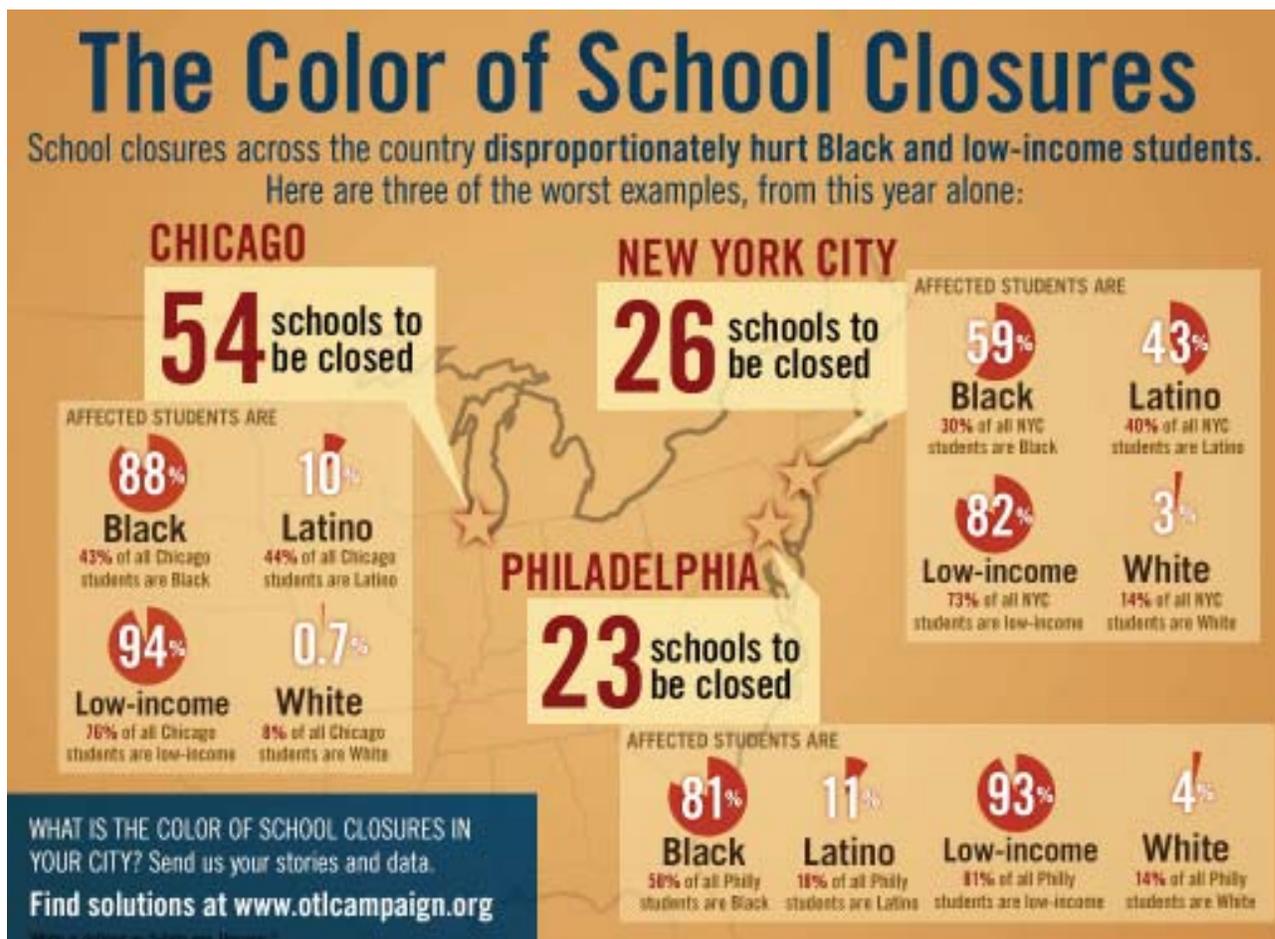
This book builds on the work that was done in her previous book Other People's Children. It is rooted in the understanding that most of the poor, Black and Hispanic children in this country are taught by middle and upper-class White educators. This in turn can, and has at times, created cultural conflict in the classroom. It examines the role that this conflict can play in the classroom and also how to deal with it. And although it is written for teachers, others are able to get a deeper understanding into the classroom that they may not otherwise be able to get.

American Promise & Promises Kept: Raising Black Boys to Succeed in School and Life

American Promise is a documentary that chronicles the experiences of Dr. Joe Brewster, M.D., Michele Stephenson, and their son Idris after Idris was enrolled into one of the top college prep schools in the country. The film also follows Idris' friend, Sean, after he is accepted into a very prestigious college prep school. Although Sean is similarly academically gifted, he comes from a less privileged socio-economic background. Their paths soon split as Sean goes to public school after he is deemed "not outgoing enough" for his prep school and Idris continues on his journey in private school. Ultimately, *American Promise* does a pretty good job of helping the viewer to get an accurate account of the journey that two different families go through to raise academically successful Black boys.

As a companion to the film, Promises Kept: Raising Black Boys to Succeed in School and in Life was written. This book used Idris' journey that was told in *American Promise* as the backdrop to identify solutions. The authors pinpoint research that targets ages from pre-birth to the late teenage years to help parents, and possibly others who work with youth, to understand how to empower young Black males to become successful. The book includes chapters such as "How to Make the Right Choices for Your Son-Before He's Even Born," "How to Talk to Our Sons About Race," "How to Teach Our Sons to Combat Stereotype Threat and Develop Persistence," and "How to Participate in Our Sons' Formal School and Advocate for Change."

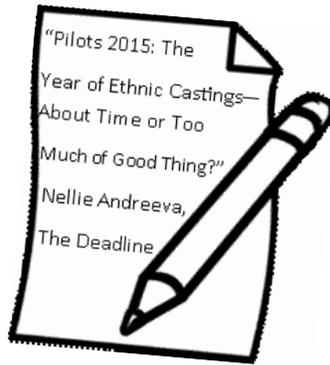
Both *American Promise* and Promises Kept are written with Black male youth in mind. Much of the time though, the term boys is replaceable. Many of the solutions in the book can be applied towards raising successful Black girls. In addition, one of the most innovative concepts in this book is that the solutions begin pre-birth. Racism in America has existed for as long as this country has existed. That means that the negative effects of racism are targeting these children even before they pass through the birth canal. For that reason, it is imperative that we take the same approach when empowering students to combat racism. ✦



Source - oltcampaign.org

Racism in a So-Called "Post-Racial" Society: Popular Media

by Paulna "Ajala" Valbrun



The misconception that we are living in a post-racial society has given birth to an evolution of white complicity, when whites perpetuate institutionalized racism by refusing to acknowledge the struggles and oppression of the systematically marginalized. Manifestations of white complicity are often exhibited in popular media. I will use a comparative analysis to examine *The New York Times* article "Wrought in Rhime's Image," by Alessandra Stanley, *The Deadline's* Nellie Andreeva article "Pilots 2015: The Year of Ethnic Castings—About Time or Too Much of Good Thing?" and Lena Dunham's response to the lack of diversity displayed in her hit TV series *Girls* to argue that the idea of a post-racial society is a false notion.

The publication of articles such as Alessandra Stanley's "Wrought in Rhime's Image," in *The New York Times* thwarts the claim that we are a post-racial society by the author's display of racism and her refusal to acknowledge this. The article was met with a tremendous amount of derision because of Stanley's decision to use the racist "angry black woman" stereotype to both describe television producer Shonda Rhimes, and the black protagonists in her television shows. She began the article by shamelessly declaring that "When Shonda Rhimes writes her autobiography, it should be called 'How to Get Away With Being an Angry Black Woman.'" This outrageous assertion on Rhimes' character dates back to the racist stereotypes from the 1830's:

The first 'black women' American audiences saw on the American stage were minstrel 'Negro wenches.' Using burned cork and greasepaint to blacken their skin, white men in their performances as black men and women became wildly popular in the mid-19th century.

White men used crude drag along with the burned cork to mark black women as grotesque, loudmouthed, masculine and undeserving of the protections afforded to white "ladies" in American society.^[1]

Stanley went on to make some disconcerting comments on the physical appearance of Viola Davis, the actress starring in *How to Get Away with Murder*. Stanley stated that:

Ms. Davis, 49, is sexual and even sexy, in a slightly menacing way, but the actress doesn't look at all like the typical star of a network drama. Ignoring the narrow beauty standards some African-American women are held to, Ms. Rhimes chose a performer who is older, darker-skinned and less classically beautiful than Ms. Washington, or for that matter Halle Berry, who played an astronaut on the summer mini-series *Extant*. (para. 16)^[2]

Stanley's description of Davis' beauty as "menacing" and "less classically beautiful" than lighter skinned African-Americans such as Halle Berry and Kerry Washington reinforces the idea that whiteness continues to be the beauty standard of the US.

In addition to this racist commentary, Stanley delivered a non-apology apology that was arguably more insulting than the article itself, and an example of white complicity. Stanley exhibits white complicity by refusing to acknowledge why so many black people and their allies got upset over her article. She claimed that she simply "referenced a painful and insidious stereotype



Paulna "Ajala" Valbrun is a Knox College Alum and newest Karen House community member. She is also a recent graduate from the Community Arts Training Institute through the Regional Arts Commission.

solely in order to praise Ms. Rhimes and her shows....If making that connection between the two offended people, I feel bad about that.”^[3] Not only did Stanley use an old racist stereotype to describe Rhimes and black women in general, but she tells disgruntled readers to consider this a compliment.

The backlash to this article also caused many to call for the removal of the article from *The Times*, but Shonda Rhimes rejected the idea. She wanted the article to stay posted because, “In this world in which we all feel we’re so full of gender equality and we’re a post-racial [society] and Obama is president, it’s a very good reminder to see the casual racial bias and odd misogyny from a woman written in a paper that we all think of as being so liberal.”^[4] Rhimes wants the article to remain public as proof that our so-called post-racial society is actually non-existent.

The idea that our society is beyond racism has also created a climate that encourages a “reverse racism” argument, which gives people the idea that whites are being marginalized. *The Deadline’s* Nellie Andreeva presents a similar argument in “Pilots 2015: The Year of Ethnic Castings—About Time or Too Much of Good Thing?” She argues that a recent surge in “ethnic” television shows has caused white actors to be marginalized. Andreeva states that:

A lot of what is happening right now is long overdue. The TV and film superhero ranks have been overly white for too long, workplace shows should be diverse to reflect workplace in real America, and ethnic actors should get a chance to play more than the proverbial best friend or boss. But, as is the case with any sea change, some suggest that the pendulum might have swung a bit too far in the opposite direction.^[5]

Not only does this argument reek of white privilege, but it presents a dangerous argument. Andreeva’s argument makes the industry seem like whites are being marginalized. It also denies the racism and whitewashing that goes on in Hollywood. Earlier this year the popular Twitter hashtag #oscarssowhite was made popular because of the lack of diversity at the Oscars. In fact out of 87 years of Oscar’s existence, only 31 black people have won an Oscar. That’s 31 out of 2,900 winners. The Oscars represents one of the most respected institutions in the film industry yet has virtually no diversity. All of this makes Andreeva’s argument incredibly absurd.^[6]

The movie and television industry is well known for its lack of diversity. And when Lena Dunham received criticism for the lack of diversity on TV show *Girls*, she simply responded by claiming that it was an accident. The idea that this whitewashing was an accident presents an argument equally problematic as Andreeva’s claim that white actors were being marginalized. Dunham told NPR that, “I really wrote the show from a gut-level place, and each character was a piece of me or based on

someone close to me. And only later did I realize that it was four white girls. As much as I can say it was an accident, it was only later as the criticism came out,”

She also said that, “I take that criticism very seriously. ... This show isn’t supposed to feel exclusionary. It’s supposed to feel honest, and it’s supposed to feel true to many aspects of my experience. But for me to ignore that criticism and not to take it in would really go against my beliefs and my education in so many things. And I think the liberal-arts student in me really wants to engage in a dialogue about it.”^[7]

Dunham’s claims can be disputed since *Girls* the TV Show is based in Brooklyn, which is an incredibly diverse borough of New York City. In fact a *Brooklyn Neighborhood Report* from 2012 said that Blacks make up 32.7% of the borough’s population, while Latinos account for 19.5% of the residents, Asians 9.4% and Whites 36.8%.^[8]

Dunham’s claim that this whitewashing was an accident is not only absurd, but seems more like an excuse for upholding a racist standard of giving white people their chance to be represented. The fact that Dunham mentions her liberal arts education only makes it more obvious that her aims were intentional. She graduated from Oberlin College, an institution that highly encourages diversity by requiring all students to take at least three courses in cultural diversity. Since Dunham has a liberal arts education, she should be well aware of the systematic marginalization of black people.

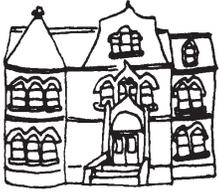
The commentary of Andreeva, Dunham and Stanley serves as proof that we are not a post-racial society through their displays of white complicity and racism. Although they are not responsible for creating institutionalized racism, they are complicit in upholding it by refusing to acknowledge the structural racism that keeps some systematically marginalized. They each used their platforms to reinforce the idea of blacks as a marginalized group. This was accomplished by perpetuating negative stereotypes of black women as angry or “less classically beautiful” than lighter skinned people, dismissing the fact that most television shows exclude black actors, and claiming that this was all “accidental.” †

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From Karen House

by Theo Kayser

Since Mike Brown’s murder on August 9th and the uprising in Ferguson, dialogue about racism has entered our national conversation in a way that it hasn’t done in a long time. Part of this discussion that has been thrust on a too-often unwilling America is the redefining of racism. Racism is much more insidious than the (now anachronistic) bigot publicly using overtly racist language or a handful of Ferguson PD officers sharing racist jokes privately via email. Any definition of racism worthy of serious examination must include how race and power play out institutionally. In America, white people are the ones who continue to hold power and the ones responsible for continued racial inequality. Those of us who are white are blind to how in everyday life this kind of institutional racism plays out, and those of us who call ourselves Catholic Workers are not immune to this blindness despite our radical politics.

Working with this definition of racism, the St. Louis Catholic Workers hosted the Midwest Catholic Worker Faith and Resistance Retreat this past March. This annual spring gathering of like-minded folks has always focused on targets outside of ourselves - towards military institutions or those profiting from the destruction of our planet, but this year, our hope was to look inward at how we knowingly or unknowingly perpetuate injustice within our own communities in the form of racism.

The first day of our gathering was facilitated by two trainers from Crossroads, a group that does anti-racism training and organizing. Catholic Workers think of ourselves as something different from other non-profits, but the folks from Crossroads challenged that notion: “You’re really not an institution? Do the

people you serve experience it that way?”

The weekend also featured a number of round table discussions in the CW tradition. We explored topics often discussed at our gatherings, but through a different lens. We looked at how racism plays out in our anarchism, hospitality, resistance, rural communities, religious services, donations and property ownership, and more. There were many more questions than there were answers. We consider ourselves anarchists, but how is our ability take steps away from the system an example of our privilege as a movement of predominantly white people? Is imbalance of power implied in the very notion of hospitality?

What does it say about our resistance to violence when we can challenge the US military’s actions across the globe but rarely challenge the violence of a militarized police in our own cities? How do our backgrounds as predominantly white middle class white people affect our access to wealth, and by extension, effect our projects - whether it be access to donations or things like interest-free loans?

The community at Karen House has been wrestling with these same questions. We are a group of people who are relatively new to each other (four of the 11 of us have been here less than a year) but our hope is to meet monthly to continue the tough work of transformation into an ever more anti-racist community. The trainers from Crossroads suggested that there are six steps towards becoming an anti-racist organization and that each one takes 20 years! We like to think we are somewhere around the middle of that spectrum, but know that wherever we actually are on it, we aren’t even close to the top and have a long way to go. ✚



KH Community, January 2015



Theo Kayser is glad to be home in St. Louis after almost five years at Catholic Workers in California and around the Midwest.



Catholic Worker Thought & Action

The Catholic Worker through an Anti-Racist Lens by Carolyn Griffeth

All too often when someone really annoys me, I realize that the very thing that irritates me about them is also a part of myself. This happened recently when I visited a rural, white eco-village; I cringed at the self-satisfied, triumphant way that they described their sustainable lifestyle without any mention of privilege. "Why does it bother me so much?" I questioned. The answer was obvious: It was all so white, and I had to admit, so familiar.

I too am a white radical, though of a slightly different school: the Catholic Worker. In the CW my lifestyle has been framed by the narrative of having the answer to society's problems, and of being a moral exemplar who is willing to make sacrifices in service to others. Though at one time I may have enjoyed seeing myself as such, looking deeply at racism and white superiority has fundamentally challenged this narrative. I no longer see myself as a moral exemplar, sacrificial helper, or friend of the poor; instead, I have begun to see myself and the CW through the lens of whiteness: the unique conditioning given to white people.

One of the marks of being raised white is an almost desperate search for identity to make up for the lack of inherent belonging within our families and communities and the lack of cultural heritage resulting from our ancestor's assimilation process from a variety of unique cultures into whiteness. Because of this loss, whites often use their relationships with people of color to create an identity for themselves. Since whites are also taught to see themselves as moral and superior, there is also a pull to take on the identity of saviors, or helpers who have all the answers. As a Catholic Worker, I have been positioned to further enforce this myth: I am the white savior for other whites to follow. You can have this identity too by supporting me and my community!

Though this critique is harsh, I remain committed to the Catholic Worker. I believe in our non-violent spirituality and our capacity to evolve by grappling with challenging questions. Nonetheless, looking at whiteness has challenged my identity and my self-righteous sense that I, or the Catholic Worker, have all the answers. My question now is: How might an anti-racist identity frame the Catholic Worker differently? Here are a few of stabs at an answer:

Most fundamentally, a commitment to ending racism challenges whites and white-dominant communities to acknowledge white privilege. This is particularly important when talking about economics. Voluntary poverty, simple living, and the gift economy are generally made attractive and plausible because of white connections, familial financial security, and privileged access to education. Also, without acknowledging white privilege, white Catholic Workers, like me, can sound



"Tree of Life" - Hori Kurisu

rather self-congratulatory when speaking of our chosen lifestyle: "Look at me and all the amazing things I am doing!" To maintain perspective, I sometimes ask myself, "How much have I really extended myself compared to the fast food or farm workers striving for a living wage?" That said, I am equally weary of the tendency of whites to over-extend themselves in acts of service, solidarity, or resistance because of white guilt, and then to expect others to admire us, or cater to us, because of our over-extensions. By neglecting self-care and acting as martyrs, whites both hurt

themselves and fail to build a movement that is either healthy or attractive to people of color.

I also believe that an anti-racist lens challenges us to act in ways that are more committed and accountable to our local communities. This would include supporting and promoting the leadership for social change coming from people of color—even if these groups have different philosophical starting points. It would also compel us to be more connected to our neighbors and local communities and responsive to the inspirations and requests that flow out of established relationships—just the opposite of the cookie-cutter, "I'm going to start a CW community" approach. Lastly, I believe an anti-racist lens challenges us to shift our activism away from the paradigm of being the lone prophets acting in isolation, toward acting alongside others, often from our own communities, to address the issues that targeted populations deem important.

I write this just after the St. Louis CW hosted an anti-racism workshop attended by many CWers in the Midwest. Not surprisingly, the workshop brought into question many of our tightly held values and entrenched ways of organizing our communities, striking at the core of our CW identity.

This identity crisis was brought this into focus for me by an exercise led by Crossroads, who asked us to draw a picture of a tree representative of the Catholic Worker. The roots were to represent our guiding values, the trunk represented our structures, and the fruit was the outcome of our values/structures. Our trees were put on display. Looking at the variety of trees, I was both struck by the deep roots that hold the movement together: personalism, non-violence, care for the earth, faith, resistance, and saddened that ending racism was, with a few exceptions, not included. The question I am holding now is: What if it was? How might the value of ending racism reinforce, or be in tension, with our other values? And, how might the adoption of this value transform the future of the movement? While holding dear to the core CW values, I imagine a future CW, deeply rooted in the value of anti-racism, that is more connected, vibrant, and fruitful. ✦



With her son, Ghana, thriving while living with Grandma, **Carolyn Griffeth** is reconnecting with her practice of contemplative prayer, spiritual direction, and gardening in communion.

The Round Table

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www.KarenHouseCW.org

Karen House Updates

We could use DONATIONS of:

- Pasta and pasta sauce
- Rice
- Laundry and Dish Soap
- Toilet Paper
- Salad Dressing, Soy Sauce
- Fans, ice cream!

- Check our website for an updated list of needs!

We could use VOLUNTEERS to:

- Cook Dinners (Call Colleen 314-761-7428 to sign up!)
- Take House (Talk to Theo 314-621-4052 to begin training!)



Our Leaky Roof!

After many, many years of patching, it's finally time to replace our roof. We have several leaks - two into guest rooms - and need to raise around \$20,000 to finally replace it. We're grateful for any donation you can give to help. Thanks in advance for your support!

Don't forget, we're keeping great resources on white privilege, racism, and the Black Lives Matter movement on our website!

We welcome your donations and participation. As Catholic Workers our hospitality to the homeless is part of an integrated lifestyle of simplicity, service, and resistance to oppression, all of which is inherently political. For this reason, we are not a tax exempt organization. Furthermore, we seek to create an alternative culture where giving is celebrated and human needs are met directly through close, personal human relationships. Thus, all of our funding comes from individuals like you who share yourself and your funds so that this work can go on.

Check www.KarenHouseCW.org for updates on Karen House, information on the Catholic Worker, an archive of past Round Tables, and more!