

SESSION 3

Race Is Something We Create

QUOTE

Hope is believing despite the evidence, and then watching the evidence change.
— Jim Wallis, writer and activist

INTRODUCTION

Understanding how race has been politically constructed allows us to identify ways we can politically deconstruct race. This session focuses on the construction of race and, thus, provides a critical first step for participants seeking effective ways to combat racism. Participants recognize some of the ways that race has been manufactured in our society as they address these questions: What is racism? What is “race”? How is race constructed by our government, our scientists, our judges and our society? What is the racial context in which I live my life?

Activity 4 asks the group to view clips from *A Class Divided*. Because the film deals with racism and prejudice, it may raise deep emotions. Some participants may be confronted with privilege for the first time while others may have a lifetime of experience of discrimination affirmed. Be prepared to validate everyone’s experience. It is wise to have a chaplain on hand or to be prepared with contact information for a chaplain who can meet with participants if they wish.

GOALS

This workshop will:

- Engage youth to define “race,” “power,” “privilege,” and “prejudice”
- Demonstrate ways race has been and continues to be legally, scientifically and socially constructed
- Affirm the modern scientific understanding that race is not biological fact, but a concept constructed by societies.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Share their beliefs about race, power, privilege and prejudice and begin to define and questioning these terms
- By exploring examples, understand that race has been scientifically, economically and socially constructed
- Understand that race is a socially constructed concept, not biological fact.

SESSION-AT-A-GLANCE

Activity	Minutes (90 min.)
Opening	5
Activity 1: Definitions – Chalk Talk	20
Activity 2: Scientific Construct	20
Activity 3: Economic Construct	20
Activity 4: Social Construct	20
Closing	5

FAITH IN ACTION & ALTERNATE ACTIVITIES

Faith in Action: Congregational Timeline	
Alternate Activity 1: Making Light of Privilege	20

SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

Take a moment to sit by yourself. Light a chalice, make some tea, or engage in other grounding practices that feel right to you. As you read the material and preview the film clips for this session, you may experience frustration, anger, or pain. These are common responses to evidence of widespread and persistent bias and inequity. Encountering this session's materials and taking some time to reflect on your own beforehand will prepare you to lead the group. Answer some of the questions for yourself that you will later pose to the youth. You will be a better facilitator if you are not processing your own raw emotions while also trying to help participants deal with their potentially intense reactions.

If reviewing the material leaves you pessimistic, reflect on your own observations and experiences. Your journey has led you to facilitate this program to help young people on their journeys. Your work is cause for hope. The youth participants are cause for hope. *We can* make a difference. *You* can make a difference. Our society built this thing called racism. We can unbuild it.

SESSION PLAN

OPENING (5 minutes)

MATERIALS FOR ACTIVITY

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Leader Resource 1: Call to Adventure
- Name badges and markers

PREPARATION FOR ACTIVITY

- Set up the chalice in an appropriate place where everyone can sit around it in a circle or semi-circle.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

Invite participants to create a name badge, as they enter.

Ask the youth to silently reflect while you or a volunteer reads Call to Adventure, a meditation by Kathy Fuson Hurt. Light the chalice. Welcome participants. Say that this session will ask questions about how and why race and racism was and continues to be constructed. How is it kept in place? Who benefits? Is there scientific evidence to support the belief that humans can be classified into three or more distinct races?

Review the covenant created in Session 1. Ask participants to share, popcorn style, anything discussed in Session 1 that still resonates for them. Add anything left out that you wish participants to remember.

ACTIVITY 1: Chalk Talk (20 minutes)

MATERIALS FOR ACTIVITY

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- A variety of color markers

PREPARATION FOR ACTIVITY

- Place four pieces of newsprint in stations around the room where all will be able to reach and write on them. If your group is larger than 20, provide two sheets of newsprint at each station. Label the newsprint Power, Prejudice, Privilege, and Race.
- This will work best if each participant has a different color marker.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

Participants share their definitions of key terms for talking about racism.

Say in these words or your own:

This is a silent activity called a chalk talk. Please walk around the room and write definitions or whatever comes to mind when you see the words written on the newsprint. Do not worry about spelling. You are welcome to respond respectfully to what other people have written as well. You have ten minutes. I will tell you when there are three minutes left and then you can go around and read what others have written.

Distribute markers. Pay attention to the group. If participants are deeply involved or you have a large group, allocate more time. Conversely, if writing goes quickly and most participants finish early, ask the group if they are ready to end the activity sooner. You may need to periodically remind the group that this is a silent activity. You can explain: When they talk to one another, they are less invested in writing their comments.

Re-gather the group and post the newsprint sheets where all can see them. Say that these are this group's definitions of these terms. They may not be dictionary definitions—you will share those during future activities—rather, they reflect the thinking in the room.

Read and discuss the comments on newsprint. Note similarities and differences. Be careful not to single out comments, verbal or written, in a way that might make a participant feel they wrote or said something “wrong”—unless a comment is explicitly racist or could be hurtful. In that case, if a comment is written, point out that it could be received as hurtful. Invite the group to set the comment aside for now and plan to revisit it at the end of the entire training program to see if perspectives have changed. If the comment is verbal, probe gently. For example, you might ask “Where and how have you received information on what these words mean?” If necessary, call participants back to the covenant they established in Session 1. See the Tips for Facilitation posted online with the Be The Change! sessions for more information.

Once you have processed the newsprint sheets, ask:

- Does everyone mean the same thing when they use these words? Why do you think that is so?
- Is there enough commonality to move forward in using these words?
- What was this experience like? Did anyone experience discomfort, either in the writing or reading of other's comments? If so, why?

Say that in the last session, you looked at how power and prejudice work together to cause racial inequalities. Today, you will talk about the definition of race. In future sessions, you will explore the concept of privilege. Participants may find themselves coming back to these words and ideas even if you do not explicitly use these words and are urged to keep self-defining and using them as we move forward.

ACTIVITY 2: Scientific Construct (20 minutes)

MATERIALS FOR ACTIVITY

- Leader Resource 2: Scientific “Proof”
- A copy of the DVD *Race: The Power of an Illusion*
- Computer with Internet access and a digital projector, speakers, and projection screen
- Optional: Other current event examples of race being justified scientifically, if you have them available

PREPARATION FOR ACTIVITY

- Obtain a copy of *Race: The Power of an Illusion*. The DVD may be borrowed from your local library or purchased from [California Newsreel](http://CaliforniaNewsreel.com) at www.newsreel.org. Your congregation’s library, your public library, or the library of a house of worship near you may have a copy. Or, borrow the DVD from the UUA’s [Lending Library](#); contact akapitan@uua.org or cmcdonald@uua.org for information.
- Preview the video.
- Test equipment and queue Episode One, Scene 11 of *Race: The Power of an Illusion*.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

Participants experience how science has legitimized racial prejudices.

Show the group Scenes 11-14 in Episode One of *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (11 minutes). Confirm that what science really tells us is that what we think of as physical racial characteristics are superficial and created by geography – not coded, immutable genetic traits. Two people of the same so-called race have as much genetic variation between them as two individuals from different races.

Say that Western (European and North American) science has been manipulated to show that some races are superior to others, even to supposedly prove that blacks and Asians are sub-human or entirely different species. So-called “scientific proof” of the lesser status of people of color provided excuses for slavery, rape, genocide, and other inhumane treatment. Read or ask a volunteer to read Leader Resource 2: Scientific “Proof.”

State that there is NO significant difference between racial groups in any important category. A racial difference cannot predict any important difference between two people. Race is a human construction, not a scientific given.

Ask:

- What did you learn from the film?

- Did any part of the film surprise you? Had you learned any of this information in school?
- Why is this information relevant today?
- Why do you think it is important to some people for there to be a scientifically significant difference between the races?
- Do you believe such false scientific “proof” is still used today? Ask participants for examples. You can also relate that in June 2011, *Psychology Today* published a blog by Satoshi Kanazawa, “Why Are African-American Women Less Physically Attractive Than Other Women?” which used pseudo-scientific evidence to argue the author’s point. The magazine pulled the article and the blogger’s credentials after controversy erupted, but this example is not unusual by any means.
- How does this activity relate to our definitions from the first activity, particularly definitions of prejudice?

ACTIVITY 3: Economic Construct (20 minutes)

MATERIALS FOR ACTIVITY

- Computer with Internet access and a digital projector, speakers, and projection screen
- A copy of the DVD *Race: The Power of an Illusion*

PREPARATION FOR ACTIVITY

- Familiarize yourself with Scenes 2-9 (0:45-9:49) of Episode Two, “The Story We Tell,” in the documentary *Race: The Power of an Illusion*.
- Test equipment and queue Scene 2 of Episode Two.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

Invite participants to answer these questions:

Given that we know there is no biological basis for race, and that it is something our laws and our culture could create and have created, what purposes did race and racism serve in American history? What purposes do race and racism serve in our society today?

Hear a few responses. Then, show the group Scenes 2-9 of Episode Two.

Lead reflection and discussion with these questions:

- What other stories have you heard about why race was created in America? How do they match or differ from the video?
- Is it surprising to learn that the powerful classes of white Americans in the colonial era in part established race categories to manipulate working classes of white Americans?
- Why does it matter that race was created to justify slavery?

- How does this activity relate to our definitions from the first activity, particularly those concerning privilege?
- If society is skewed to the advantage of one group of people, how will this benefit their children and future generations? Will their future offspring need to ask or work for these benefits or will they simply exist? How will the future unfold for children from the disadvantaged (or marginalized) group? Will they have the same opportunities to succeed economically as children in the advantaged (or dominant) group?
- What do our UU Principles have to say about a system that is advantageous to one group of people at the cost of another?

ACTIVITY 4: Social Construct (20 minutes)

MATERIALS FOR ACTIVITY

- Computer with Internet access and a digital projector, speakers, and projection screen
- Journals and pens or pencils

PREPARATION FOR ACTIVITY

- Find the documentary *A Class Divided* at www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/etc/view.html. Preview at least Part 1 (a little over 10 minutes), more if you will have time to watch more with the group.
- Invite a chaplain to join the group, or, have contact information for a chaplain whom participants may contact.
- Read the questions in the activity description. Select three to five questions with which to start discussion after watching the documentary clips. Write them on newsprint.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

Participants witness an example of how racial prejudices can become legitimized in society.

Say that you will watch excerpts from *A Class Divided*, a documentary on third-grade teacher Jane Elliott's "blue eyes/brown eyes" exercise, originally conducted in the days following the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. Distribute journals and pens/pencils. Explain that the film may give rise to feelings of anger, frustration or fear and that they are invited to journal during the video and during the discussion to follow. They may wish to make a drawing or write a poem, paragraph, or story to express what they are feeling or explore what they have learned. Say that anyone who feels uncomfortable during the activity may step out of the room and a facilitator (or chaplain, if one is on hand) will be willing to help them process whatever feelings they may have.

Show the documentary Part 1, “The Daring Lesson.” If you have more time, also show Parts 2 and 3.

Debrief by engaging with as many of these questions as time permits:

- What did you learn?
- What scene or scenes do you think you will still remember a month from now? Why those scenes?
- Did any part of the film surprise you? Do you think someone of a different race, ethnicity, or religion from yours would also find it surprising?
- What impact did the negative or positive labels have on the children? Why do you think this happened?
- In another part of the program, both Elliott and her former students talk about whether or not this exercise should be done with all children. What do you think? Could the exercise be harmful to children, as Elliott suggests? How might suffering actual discrimination harm children? How might being encouraged to discriminate on others affect children?
- What features did Elliott ascribe to the superior and inferior groups and how did those characteristics reflect stereotypes about blacks and whites?
- How did Elliott's discrimination create no-win situations for those placed in the inferior group? How did she selectively interpret behavior to confirm the stereotypes she had assigned?
- How does this activity relate to our definitions from the first activity, particularly those concerning prejudice?

If youth say they have experienced racial disparity and racism in school, say that you hope this program and their further learning about how to dismantle racism will help them feel better equipped to push back against racism at school and in the world in general. Tell the group that in the next session, they will have more opportunity to explore their personal experiences with racism.

CLOSING (5 minutes)

MATERIALS FOR ACTIVITY

- Chalice, candle and extinguisher or LED battery-operated candle
- Small pieces of paper based on the number of youth present
- Pencil or pens
- Basket or bowl

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

Ask the youth to reflect on what they have learned about the construction of race. Say that acknowledging race as a social construct moves us in the right direction towards

deconstructing racism. There is still a long way to go, but our country has made progress in last 200 years. Hoping for change is a place to start. That the youth learn how to be the change is one goal of this program.

Share the opening quote from activist Jim Wallis, "Hope is believing despite the evidence, and then watching the evidence change." Ask participants to think about what they would hope to change about their community, congregation, or world to start breaking down, or "deconstructing" racism. What evidence would they look for, to see if the change they wish for is happening? Ask everyone, including the group leaders, to complete this sentence on a piece of paper (anonymously): "For the future of my congregation, community, and the world, I hope for ..."

Collect the pieces of paper in the basket, mix them around, and invite each person to pick a piece of paper and read the wish. Instruct the group that no one is to comment on what the person says.

If time permits, invite youth to share a brief comment about what they are feeling and anything else related to the session. Everyone has the right to pass.

Invite the youth to blow out the chalice.

FAITH IN ACTION & ALTERNATE ACTIVITIES

FAITH IN ACTION: Congregational Timeline

MATERIALS FOR ACTIVITY

- Large roll of paper or a pad of newsprint
- Markers and tape

PREPARATION FOR ACTIVITY

- Cut a sheet of roll paper several feet long and post it horizontally (or, post five sheets of newsprint). Draw a horizontal line across the center. On the far left write the year the congregation was founded and on the far right write the current year. At the top of the timeline write "Tolerance and Multiculturalism" and on the bottom write "Intolerance and Oppression."
- Consult with your congregation's archivist or historian to gather resources for research. Arrange interviews with people or visits to archives for the youth.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

This activity is adapted from Workshop 9 in the UUA Tapestry of Faith curriculum A Place of Wholeness, by Beth Dana and Jesse Jaeger:
www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/wholeness/workshop9/workshopplan/167906.shtml

Participants engage adults in the congregation construct a congregation-specific timeline of multicultural activities and growth over the years. It can be done just with the youth or with the whole congregation. It is intended as a learning experience for all involved about the role of tolerance and intolerance throughout the history of the congregation and how that has had an impact on the congregation being a multicultural community. A large part of the time required for this activity involves research that can be done by individuals or pairs. The actual timeline creation activity will take about 45 minutes.

Introduce the project: Explain that the group has an opportunity to reconstruct a timeline of the history of intolerance, multiculturalism, and tolerance or welcome of racial/ethnic diversity in their congregation. The first part of the project is research, and the second involves putting together the timeline and discussing it.

Suggest these sources of information: the congregation's historian or archivist, archives and written records, the congregation's website, the minister and religious educator, elders in the congregation, members of the justice committee. Instruct participants to gather experiences of multiculturalism, tolerance, and intolerance in the congregation. Encourage the youth to include their own stories as well as to research the years before they were born.

Lead the group to brainstorm topics to research for the timeline. If they do not suggest these topics, add:

- the story of the congregation's formation or any relocations,
- the history of the land they are located on (its connection to Native American communities),
- slavery and the larger economy of the slave trade,
- involvement in the local community,
- partnerships with communities of color and/or faith,
- multicultural partnerships,
- social justice work,
- participation in the Underground Railroad,
- implementation of the Welcoming Congregations Program, a Building the World We Dream About program for Adults or Young Adults, or other UUA anti-oppression program.

Give the group opportunity to do research. This could be built into the time allotted to the activity, with prior arrangements to have access to archival and people resources, or it could happen between meetings.

Once the group has gathered historical facts, events, people, and movements of significance within the congregation, have them write these on the timeline. Remind them to write items that represent tolerance and multiculturalism on the top half of the timeline, and items that represent intolerance or oppression on the bottom half. Urge them to read what is already there before adding items, to ensure none are repeated. Give them about 15 minutes to do this. Tell them that if they finish writing their items before the time is up, to read what others wrote. After 15 minutes, go through the timeline from left to right, and ask each participant to share what they wrote.

Lead a discussion using the following questions:

- Is there anything on the timeline that is surprising to you?
- How was the research experience?
- Do you see any connections between items along the timeline?
- Given this timeline, how would you tell the story of your congregation's history of tolerance?
- If it was difficult to find information or none exists, what do you think that might mean?

ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 1: Making Light of Privilege (20 minutes)

MATERIALS FOR ACTIVITY

- ☐ Computer with Internet access and a digital projector, speakers, and projection screen or a large monitor

PREPARATION FOR ACTIVITY

- Online, find the 1984 Saturday Night Live Eddie Murphy skit, “White Like Me.” The Hulu website (www.hulu.com) offers this clip to Hulu Plus subscribers. Or, try http://www.snotr.com/video/422/Eddie_Murphy_goes_undercover.
- Test equipment and queue the video clip “White Like Me.”
- Optional: Preview and queue a YouTube clip of Vaudeville performer Al Jolson performing in blackface: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Plaj7FNHnjQ>
- Optional: Search online for the transcript of the 1984 Eddie Murphy “White Like Me” skit on Saturday Night Live.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

Participants sample and discuss race humor.

Tell the group they will watch a skit from 1984’s Saturday Night Live with Eddie Murphy. Watch the video. Then, ask:

- Did you find the skit offensive? Why or why not?
- Did you find it funny? Why or why? Invite responses from participants of diverse racial/ethnic identities.
- Is the skit different from hearing someone tell a racist joke? Why or why not?
- Saturday Night Live has always been known for controversial humor. What other TV shows, venues, or performers are known for controversial humor?
- Make sure youth know that white performers have put on “blackface” and performed in minstrel shows in vaudeville for years. Optional: Show the group the Al Jolson clip. Does knowing this give participants a different perspective on White Like Me skit. Why or why not?
- Tell youth that a popular book in 1961 was *Black Like Me*, the true story of a white man who disguised himself as black and traveled in the South for six weeks. Some youth may have read the book.
- The humor in the skit largely derives from the concept of privilege. The privileges in the video are obvious. Many in real life are not. What are the privileges in the video? Humor often is gained through exaggerating. What real life privileges is the video exaggerating?

RESOURCES

LEADER RESOURCE 1: Call to Adventure

By Kathy Fuson Hurt, from the meditation manual Quest (UUA, 1986 (out of print)). Used with the author's permission.

It starts out quite simply, as complex things can do. We rise one morning, at the usual time. We dress, eat breakfast, and set out for the office, in the usual way. We do our usual job, and then return home as usual. And so it goes, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday world without end—but not this time. Today, something is different. In the middle of our work, we wonder, “Why?” and everything changes.

The universe shifts when we ask “Why?” Things do not look the same after the question, “Why?” Although we may go on with our usual routine, it will not feel usual anymore because that “Why?” has intruded. Wondering why, reflecting on the meaning of what we do, indicates that our lives are about to move in a new direction. When the old, familiar patterns have been outgrown, when the time comes for crossing a threshold and entering a new existence, the question “Why?” appears.

Having once asked, “Why?” it is difficult to keep on with our accustomed ways because that “Why?” hints at the possibility of something more than the usual. Like a siren, the “Why?” calls us to an adventure.

LEADER RESOURCE 2: Scientific “Proof”

An excerpt from *Speak Up! A Personal Stories Project* by The Speak Up Team (Cambridge, MA: Sub/Urban Justice, 2009). Used with permission from Boston Mobilization.

For several hundred years, scientists have been trying to prove that different races have significant genetic differences. Occasionally, a study will emerge that ‘proves the point’ the scientist is obsessed with. However, within a few years, each of these studies have been disproven when more closely examined. For example, Dr. Samuel Morten concluded in 1844 that Europeans were at the top of the intelligence chart due to larger skulls and therefore bigger brains as compared with non-Caucasians from around the world. When the exact same skulls were remeasured in 1980 by Stephen Gould, however, (read more in *The Mismeasure of Man*) it turned out that the skulls all had about the same volume. The difference? Perhaps Morton – the white scientist who used peppercorns to measure skull volume – packed them more tightly into the skulls of Caucasians, thus “proving” what he expected to find all along. The conclusion of reputable scientists today is this: While genetics might predict your hair texture or eye color or skin tone (though not always perfectly) it is not a predictor of intelligence, athletic ability or personality. There is no biological basis for the values attached to race.

HANDOUT 1: Scientific Article

By Chris Messinger, Boston Mobilization. Originally appeared in *Scientific Magazine*, June 31, 2008; reprinted with permission.

A group of Swedish scientists at the prestigious Narne Institute of Advanced Science and Comparative Physiognomy published results of a nine-year longitudinal study which found that people whose first names begin with the first half of the alphabet (letters 'A' through 'L') have a greatly decreased aptitude for complex spatial relations as compared with those individuals whose first names begin with the letters 'M' through 'Z'. More significantly, researchers discovered a number of simple activities which both adults and children whose first names begin with the letters M through Z completed more easily. These included human pyramid building, the human knot, and various versions of group calisthenics.

Said Klaus von Lierhausen, lead scientist of this exhaustive four-year study, "It seems that when it comes to understanding the best way to solve physical problems, M- through Z-named individuals are intrinsically more capable. We tested their group problem-solving ability, their group sense of rhythm, and their group balance. Of course this form of intelligence does not mean they excel in other areas nor can we yet conclude that A- through L-named individuals lack basic intelligence, but it is a fascinating discovery that needs to be studied much more carefully in the future."

Researchers are puzzled as to the cause of the discrepancy, but maintain that a number of simple explanations might be involved, including the likelihood of physical education teachers separating students at a young age based on name or parents with less spatial aptitude being more inclined toward names in the latter half of the alphabet. For more information and a complete copy of the findings, visit the Institute's website, www.M-to-Z.edu.