

USING THE EXAMINING WHITENESS CURRICULUM: A GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUALS

TWO FORMATS FOR THE CURRICULUM

There are two formats for the Examining Whiteness curriculum. One is written for individuals who want to explore the issues of white identity, white racism, and white supremacy. These folks are interested in engaging the issues but they don't have time or interest in leading a group on whiteness in their congregation or community group. There is another format for persons who are interested in leading a discussion group in their congregation or community organization.

This is the introduction for the use of the Examining Whiteness curriculum by individual users. The introduction for facilitators is found in a different section on the UUA website.

HOW TO SEQUENCE THE SESSIONS

You need to determine how you would like to use these materials. Are you the kind of person who likes to start with the larger context – the big picture – and then work down to your own personal experience? Or do you prefer to start by connecting to your own personal experience and then work toward seeing your experience in a larger context?

If you like to start with the big picture first, one way to sequence the modules is to begin with the “History of White Supremacy in the United States” and “The Racial Identity Journey of the Unitarian Universalist Association,” which explores how white supremacy impacted on the development of our faith community. This approach provides a historical, cultural, and institutional framework for understanding how these larger forces impact on our personal lives and shape us as white people.

Another way of sequencing the modules is to start with your personal experiences first – your experience of white privilege, the story of your racial identity journey, and your racial identity development – and then introduce the larger historical framework. The value of this approach is that you are grounded in your own personal experience of whiteness before you think about the broader context.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE MODULES IN THE WHITENESS CURRICULUM

THE HISTORY OF WHITE SUPREMACY IN THE UNITED STATES

The culture of white supremacy has a history that goes back over four hundred years. As a result of this history we live in a society based on white cultural supremacy.

- Section one focuses on white supremacy in the context of colonization, the conquest of Native Americans, and the enslavement of African Americans.
- Section two explores a number of important historical events that shaped the development of white supremacy during the time of the American Revolution.
- Section three discusses how race science was developed to ensure white supremacy.
- Section four deals with manifestations of white supremacy from the early 19th century up to Reconstruction.

- Section five reflects on the immigration of Europeans to America and the labor movement and how they fit into the construct of whiteness.

There is an opportunity for group discussion of questions relating to the paper on the history of white supremacy and a review of the “Bibliography of Historical Resources.”

THE EMOTIONAL LIVES OF WHITE PEOPLE

In this section we explore the “emotions of whiteness” including hatred, indifference, amnesia, anesthesia, denial, shame, guilt, anger, hopelessness and helplessness. We also probe the many dimensions of white guilt. This includes discussion of the sins of the fathers and mothers, whites whose relatives came after the Civil War, sins of commission, sins of omission, and the guilty/man woman syndrome.

RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

White People go through stages of racial identity development. Drawing on the work of Janet Helms we explore the stages of white identity development: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Reintegration, Pseudo Independence, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy. Participants explore how these stages operate in their lives.

RACIAL IDENTITY JOURNEY

One of racism’s powers is to shape identity. We are socialized to be a racist (white person) or a victim (person of color). As white people we internalize this socialization process. We learn to be white. We encourage you to use the video “Brown Eyes, Blue Eyes” as a way for understanding how the internalization process happens. There is also an exploration of the handout “Different Ways of Being White.” Here participants learn to talk about their racial identity journey.

WHITE POWER AND PRIVILEGE

The purpose of racism is to provide power (political) privilege (economic) and benefits for whites. In this session the video “True Colors” is used as an exercise for recognizing white power and privilege. There is also a personalizing exercise that helps participants recognize how they benefit from white privilege in their lives.

DEVELOPING A POSTIVE WHITE IDENTITY

One of the difficult challenges we face as white people is to identify a positive way of being white while recognizing we live in a culture based on white supremacy. To affirm our whiteness in a culture of white superiority we may end up affirming or supporting white supremacy. But most of us abhor white superiority and all it stands for. Personally, I want to have a racial identity that is not based on the oppression of people of color. I want a racial identity that is not based on the deification of whiteness or white supremacy. Here we discuss the actions that white people can take that can lead to a useful way of being white in the world.

- Be an accountable ally to people of color.
- Work to change racist institutions.
- Learn to live as multi-racial people.
- Take responsibility for our own racial identity journey.

- Learn the truth about the racist history of our country.
- Build a White anti-racist collective.

THE RACIAL IDENTITY JOURNEY OF THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION: THE IMPACT OF WHITE SUPREMACY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

[Note: The resources involved in this module are not available online. To obtain copies please contact Bill Gardiner at BillGardiner@verizon.net]

The topics covered here include:

- Pilgrims and Puritans
- Abolitionists and Supporters of the Slave System
- Reconstruction
- Boarding Schools for Native Americans
- The Call to Selma
- The Empowerment Controversy
- Twenty Years of Silence Following the Empowerment Controversy
- Reengagement at the Calgary General Assembly
- The passage of the Journey toward Wholeness Resolution in Phoenix in 1997
- Anti-racism Work Done Since the Passage of the Journey Toward Wholeness Resolution

SEEING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE STORIES

This curriculum is grounded in stories. One story is that of our nation's history in relation to white supremacy. A second story is that of the impact of white supremacy on Unitarian Universalism.

All of these stories are interconnected. White supremacy in United States history and culture impacts on the history of our faith community as it developed here in the Americas. And the way white supremacy plays out in our Unitarian Universalist Association impacts on our congregations.

Then there are our own personal stories of our racial identity journey, our racial identity development, and the impact of racism in our emotional lives. All of these personal stories are intertwined with one another.

In addition, our personal stories are also deeply connected to the stories of our history, culture, institutions, and Unitarian Universalism. For it is racist institutions – families, schools, religious institutions, and media – that socialize us and whose messages we internalize. We struggle with our personal racial identity journeys because of the history of white supremacy in our country. We are thwarted in achieving beloved community in our congregations because of how white supremacy has played out in the history of Unitarian Universalism.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS IN DEVELOPMENT

There will be additional articles added to the Examining Whiteness curriculum as they become available. One will be called "Toward an Anti-racist Spirituality." A second will be on "Defining the Qualities of White Culture." And a third will discuss "The Barriers that Whites have to Dealing with Racism."

A NOTE FROM BILL GARDINER

There is another article entitled "The Story of the Development of the Whiteness Curriculum" which tells the story of how the curriculum was written.

In this article I explore the questions raised for me by people of color during the Empowerment Controversy during the 1960s.

During the early 1990s I had an opportunity to reengage these issues when I became an anti-racism trainer in the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Being an anti-racism trainer requires a person to study racism in depth. Over the past ten years I have read dozens of books about race and racism. Being involved in Crossroads and forming teams in UU organizations, I have been involved in lots of white caucuses. In caucus and in the reading I have been particularly interested in the issue of whiteness and white identity. Partly I was trying to figure out my own identity as a white male. I felt a need to deepen our discussions of whiteness in the trainings that we do. I wanted to find an adequate response to the question: What are the issues that we white people should be addressing in our caucuses? These questions led to the development of the curriculum.