

Structural Racism Reflective Self-Assessment

Whitewater Valley Presbytery

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This self-assessment is intended to help you discern where you are in the process of learning about racial inequities and help you in taking action to address those inequities.

Although there are many different ways of learning, there are four steps that are usually involved. These stages are not separate but fluid and intertwined – we move back and forth in them as we grow. Because we all come to the conversation at different stages in the learning process, it's important that we see and acknowledge those differences and accommodate them in our conversations. It's also important that we not rush into action on the assumption that we know how to "fix" the injustice of racism. For each stage, the material that follows includes questions for self-assessment and possible actions to take. A list of resources, identified by stage, follows. You may also want to return to it from time to time as you move further with understanding and actions related to structural racism.

I. The first step in learning is PERCEPTION. Until a person discovers that there is something to be learned, learning cannot take place. Until we become **aware** of structural racism, we cannot begin to learn about it and begin to think about how to undo it. White people often have not been aware of structural racism for a part (or most) of their lives. Black people, on the other hand, generally have been aware of such racism for all of their lives.

1. Do you generally think of racism as a characteristic of individuals?
2. Do you feel confused or uncertain when people talk about structural racism?
3. Have you realized that you have never had occasion to think much about racial differences in areas such as education, housing, health care, or employment?
4. Do you think that everyone in this country has equal opportunities?
5. Are you uncertain what is meant by terms such as structural racism, systemic poverty, and microaggression, and do you want to understand them?
6. Do you assume that white European-derived culture in this country is "normal" and "American," and expect everyone to conform to that culture?

Actions: If you answered *yes* to any or all of these questions, you're ready to explore the issues involved in structural racism. Here are some actions you can take at this point.

- A. Join conversations about racism in your church, the presbytery, or your community.
- B. Listen to people of color when they describe their experiences with racism, and imagine yourself in their position.
- C. Observe your own comments that involve race and your own interactions with people of color. Observe the statements and actions of others, as well.
- D. If you can, join a workshop or take a class in racial awareness.
- E. Look at the diversity level of your own neighborhood.
- F. Campaign and vote for better resources for your local public schools.
- G. Campaign and vote for candidates for public office who are serious about racial equity.
- H. Wherever possible, make use of businesses and services that are owned by African Americans. Your local Black Chamber of Commerce can supply information.
- I. Support and campaign for equity in health services.

- J. Watch the local evening news for one week and keep track of the subject of news stories and the race of the people in the story. Note any patterns you perceive.
- K. Watch the movie *Crash* (available from Amazon and through HBO) and determine what perceptions were portrayed and the reactions that occurred. (Warning: explicit language.)
- L. Watch a play or movie not about a race-related topic and ask yourself how many of the characters could have been played by a person of color
- M. Drive through two different neighborhoods and record your perceptions. Afterwards ask yourself which perceptions were based on fact or what you actually saw and which ones were assumed.

II. The second step is KNOWLEDGE. Knowledge is acquired through experience and through the deliberate gathering of information. Most white people have very little knowledge of black history, of black achievements, of black contributions to the wealth and prosperity of white culture, or of black experiences of racial bias in our social structures – economic, educational, legal, medical, religious, and so on.

1. Do you think the Civil War was basically about states' rights and economics?
2. Do you feel that black people in this country are generally treated equally, and that their problems are mostly their own fault?
3. When you think about the contributions of black people to American culture, do you think primarily of music and sports?
4. Are you not aware of the *1619 Project* of the *New York Times*?
5. Are you not aware of the disparities in the ways people of different races suffer from infant and maternal mortality, heart disease and diabetes, and COVID-19?

Actions: If you answered *yes* to any or all of these questions, you can move further toward understanding by gathering more information. Here are some ways to do that.

- A. Read some books that describe various experiences with racism (see Resources)
- B. Watch movies and video presentations that deal with racism (see Resources)
- C. Learn more about the history of African Americans in the United States, the history of Native Americans, and the history of immigration in this country. Examine your own ethnic roots.
- D. Seek out opportunities to hear or read the opinions and stories of people of all races.
- E. Keep in open conversation about racial issues, either in your own church or in your community. Classes and workshops are a good way to do this, but not the only way.
- F. Explore the history of people of color in your community and state.
- G. Find out what is being taught about racial equity in your local schools and what the poverty level is for children in those schools (e.g., percentage who receive free or subsidized meals).
- H. Explore local and statewide statistics for infant and maternal mortality, health care availability, poverty, and educational opportunities.
- I. Widen the basis of your news sources to include various perspectives.
- J. Explore the ways in which churches and denominations in this country have contributed to and been part of structural racism.
- K. Explore organizations and projects in your own community and learn what they are doing to promote racial justice and equity. When you feel called to do so, join in their efforts. For example, contact the Urban League in your area to determine volunteer opportunities, attend Black History Month activities, and/or visit a predominantly African American church to worship or join in planned activities.

- L. Serve in a local food bank or food pantry.
- M. Volunteer to tutor children in your local schools.
- N. Speak out for racial equity in your own family, work environment, and community.
- O. Revisit the two different neighborhoods you drove through (section I M), walking this time, and record your perceptions. Afterwards ask yourself which perceptions were based on fact or what you actually saw and which ones were assumed.

III. The third step is UNDERSTANDING. Knowledge must be assimilated, internalized, and organized if information is to become understanding. This requires action of the mind, certainly, but also action of the heart and the spirit. Information must be considered in the context of individual and social moral values and of spiritual imperatives.

1. Have you been able to increase your knowledge of racial issues and discuss what you've learned with others?
2. Have you assimilated and internalized what you've learned?
3. Have you imagined and discussed with others what it is like to be a person of color in this society? In this city or town?
4. Have you examined your own values and your own attitude toward people who do not look like you?
5. Have you examined your attitudes and actions in the light of the teachings of Jesus regarding love and inclusion?
6. Have you taken a moral inventory of your own thoughts, attitudes, and actions?

Actions: If you answered *no* to any or all of these questions, you can increase your understanding by thinking more deeply about the issues and seeking a deeper level of involvement. Here are some ways to do that.

- A. Seek spiritual guidance from a trusted group or spiritual guide as you confront your own assumptions and possible biases.
- B. Keep listening to the experiences and views of people of color, seeking to listen with compassion and consciously interpret what you hear through the perspectives of justice, values, and principles.
- C. Volunteer to facilitate a group conversation or study group focused on structural racism in your church, your community, or among your family and friends.
- D. Take some positive actions that bring you into contact with people of different races and ethnic groups. This action might be anything from joining a racially diverse organization to working in a food pantry to tutoring public school children to supporting a local discussion group.
- E. Take other action in support of racial equity. This action might be anything you feel called to do, from writing letters to political leaders to working in a community garden to contributing to causes and candidates who support racial equity.
- F. Get involved in or support financially efforts to register voters and encouraging voting.
- G. Mentor a college student who is a person of color.

IV. The fourth stage is WISDOM. It is not the product of our own efforts, but rather a gift of the Spirit, so it is not so much a step we take as it is a state of being we enter through God's transforming power. Wisdom is the basis for the most powerful and effective actions we can take. Dr. Harrison-Jones, the pastor of Witherspoon Presbyterian Church, urged us to "stand in the tension," and to wait for the guidance of the Spirit. That does not mean that we should refuse to act when we can, but that we should not assume that we know what we

should do before we have fully taken in the horrors of structural racism and allowed understanding – and perhaps wisdom – to take over our decisions.

1. Have you moved through anger at injustice and inequity into a deep sorrow at the many lives damaged and destroyed by these sins over the years?
2. When you see injustice and inequity, do you search for the elements in people's lives and in our cultural systems and structures that have supported and fed these things?
3. Do you find joy in the positive actions and expressions of the people of cultures different from your own?
4. When you observe young people working for justice and equity, do you feel joyful hope that they will build a better future for all?
5. Have you thought about how your personal gifts and skills might contribute to that better future?

Actions: Your positive answers to these questions suggest a level of wisdom that opens you to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

- A.** Pray for guidance and listen for the call of the Holy Spirit.
- B.** Find one cause, organization, or concept that resonates most clearly with your own sense of call. Then devote yourself to that one thing with energy, love, and compassion.

RESOURCES FOR DISMANTLING STRUCTURAL RACISM: Please note that this is intended to be a short introductory list, not a comprehensive one. Many more resources are available.

General Resources:

Resources are available through Whitewater Valley Presbytery <http://www.whitewatervalley.org> and the Presbyterian Church (USA) <https://www.pcusa.org/racial-justice-resources> and <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/racism/>

The Racial Healing Handbook: Practical Activities to Help You Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism, and Engage in Collective Healing, by Anneliese A. Singh; the flow of this particular book makes it a great companion through each of the stages

How to Have Helpful Conversations About Race in the Church,” by Inez Torres Davis, from the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America https://www.womenoftheelca.org/resources?fwp_resource_categories=racial-justice-advocacy

Kroger Allyship Guide; introduces terms and concepts and contains a compilation of further resources <https://www.thekrogerco.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Kroger-Allyship-Guide.pdf>

Perception:

Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race, by Debby Irving; perhaps the most accessible book for those at the beginning of the journey to explore racism

Witnessing Whiteness-The Need To Talk About Race And How To Do It, by Shelly Tochluk

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism, by Robin Diangelo; great introductory material for a group starting to explore racism

“The Dehumanizing Condescension of White Fragility,” by John McWhorter <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/07/dehumanizing-condescension-white-fragility/614146/>

Dear White People: a Guide to Inter-racial Harmony In “Post-Racial” America, by Justin Simien and Ian O’Phelan; the ultimate silly-yet-authoritative handbook to help the curious and confused navigate racial microaggressions in their daily lives. Based on the eponymous, award-winning film, which has been lauded as “a smart, hilarious satire.” Film available on Netflix and Amazon.

From the PC(USA) Welcome Kit for Matthew 25 churches and mid-councils:

Matthew 25 Bible Study: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/M25-BibleStudy.pdf>

Resources for Structural Racism: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/M25-Racism.pdf>

Facing Racism (General Assembly policy statement 2016): https://facing-racism.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/facing_racism/resources/facing-racism-policy.pdf

This Is a Moment of Reckoning on Race for White Christians, a CNN presentation on the need for white Christians to do more than issue statements of support for racial equity: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/19/us/white-christians-racism-robert-jones/index.html>

Board of Pensions PC(USA) Statement on Racial Justice: <https://www.pensions.org/news-and-events/articles/Board-of-Pensions-statement-racial-justice>

Indianapolis Public Schools Racial Equity Policy: <https://myips.org/blog/district/ips-board-approves-racial-equity-policy-and-black-lives-matter-resolution/>

Knowledge:

How to Be an Antiracist, by Ibram X. Kendi; takes readers through a widening circle of antiracist ideas— from the most basic concepts to visionary possibilities— helps readers see all forms of racism clearly, understand the consequences, and work to oppose racism in our systems and in ourselves

The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism, by Jemar Tisby; a general historical review and current analysis of how the white church benefits from keeping racism alive; explanatory video available on Amazon Prime

Becoming an Antiracist Church: Journeying Toward Wholeness, by Joseph R. Barndt; concise and practical historical review, present assessment, steps for the future

Gather at the Table: The Healing Journey of a Daughter of Slavery and a son of the Slave Trade, Sharon Leslie Morgan and Thomas DeWolf

Movies:

Twelve Years a Slave, based on the 1853 memoir by Solomon Northup, a New York State-born free African-American man who was kidnapped in Washington, D.C. by two conmen in 1841 and sold into slavery; available on Amazon

The Long Walk Home, based on a screenplay about the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–1956) and a short film by the same name, produced by students at the University of Southern California in 1988; available on Amazon

Glory, a film about the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, the Union Army's second African-American regiment in the American Civil War; available on Amazon

Remember the Titans, based on the true story of African-American coach Herman Boone, and his attempt to integrate the T. C. Williams High School football team in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1971; available on Amazon

Selma, based on the 1965 Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches initiated by James Bevel and led by Martin Luther King Jr., Hosea Williams, and John Lewis; available on Amazon

13th, a documentary film by Ava DuVernay that examines racial inequity in the American prison system as an extension of slavery; available on Netflix

Attucks: The School That Opened a City, an account of Crispus Attucks High School's persistence in enriching the lives of young African-American students – and the city of Indianapolis – in spite of being designed to fail; available from PBS at <https://www.pbs.org/video/wfyi-education-programs-attucks-school-opened-city/>

Understanding:

My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies, by Resmaa Menakem; explores the racialized pain/trauma for both blacks and whites that we carry in our bodies based on our histories

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, by Michelle Alexander; the subject matter is so specific it would best be used by a church/group that wanted to focus on that element of racism

The Cross and the Lynching Tree, by James Cone; a deeply theological reflection on the union of the Cross of Jesus and the lynching trees that have held so many black bodies; it explores the complexities of white supremacy in connection with religious beliefs

Minority Population Profiles, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health; detailed information on health and health-related issues in racial and ethnic populations, including

comparisons to the white population

<https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=26>

32 Black Federal Prosecutors' Plan to Make the Criminal Justice System More Fair, a Washington Post report on the recommendations of federal prosecutors in Washington, D.C., with implications for justice across the country: https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/32-black-federal-prosecutors-in-washington-have-a-plan-to-make-the-criminal-justice-system-more-fair/2020/09/05/1774d646-ed4b-11ea-ab4e-581edb849379_story.html

The Climate Legacy of Racist Housing Policies; analysis of studies of how 20th century redlining has led to housing patterns that put black populations at greatly increased risk as warming continues <https://news.yahoo.com/climate-legacy-racist-housing-policies-141625415.html>

A Look At Housing Inequality And Racism In The U.S., by Dima Williams; article in Forbes which is very current, but also does a fair job of providing some history and some realities of racial inequity in matters of housing <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dimawilliams/2020/06/03/in-light-of-george-floyd-protests-a-look-at-housing-inequality/#51a652a039ef>

Time for justice: Tackling race inequalities in health and housing, Brookings Institute report; provides a good “glossary” of issues related to racial inequities in housing, has some helpful visual statistics, and proposes some areas in which work could be done; also addresses health care inequities <https://www.brookings.edu/research/time-for-justice-tackling-race-inequalities-in-health-and-housing/>

The Voucher Promise, by Eva Rosen; deals with section 8 housing

The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America, by Richard Rothstein; explores how “legal” practices sustain racial segregation in housing

Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership, by Keeanga-Yamhata Taylor; examines how Black Americans have been excluded from home ownership via federal homeownership financing

Stuck in Place, by Patrick Starkey; uses much comparative data to show the differences of homeownership among Black and White families and how racial inequities perpetuate Black families getting “stuck in place”

Black Newborns More Likely to Die When Looked After by White Doctors, CNN report:

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/18/health/black-babies-mortality-rate-doctors-study-wellness-scli-intl/index.html>

Calls to Declare Racism a Public Health Crisis Grow Louder amid Pandemic, Police Brutality, Washington Post article: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/09/15/racism-public-health-crisis/>

32 Black Federal Prosecutors in Washington Have a Plan to Make the Criminal Justice System More Fair, Washington Post article that provides a good explanation of how unrecognized bias affects our judgment: https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/32-black-federal-prosecutors-in-washington-have-a-plan-to-make-the-criminal-justice-system-more-fair/2020/09/05/1774d646-ed4b-11ea-ab4e-581edb849379_story.html

U.S. Cities and States are Discussing Reparations for Black Americans. Here's What's Key, Washington Post article examining how reparations might be structured:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/08/24/us-cities-states-are-discussing-reparations-black-americans-heres-whats-key/>

7 Findings that Illustrate Racial Disparities in Education, Brookings Institute summary of research on racial differences in educational outcomes: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2016/06/06/7-findings-that-illustrate-racial-disparities-in-education/>

How Racism Affects Minority Students in Public Schools, summary of ways in which education is racially biased: <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-racism-affects-public-school-minorities-4025361>

How the Stress of Racism Affects Learning, article from The Atlantic:
<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/10/how-the-stress-of-racism-affects-learning/503567/>