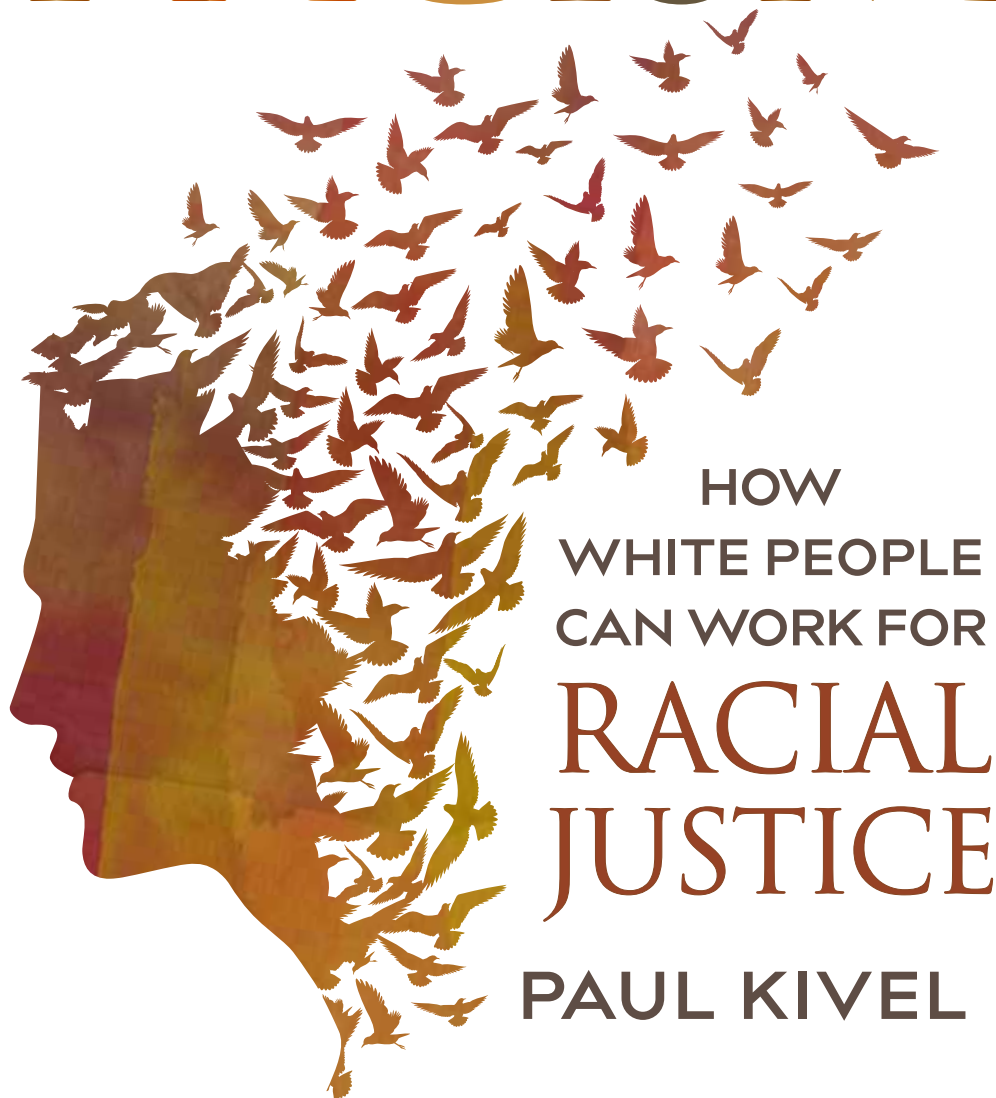


4TH REVISED & UPDATED EDITION

UPROOTING RACISM



HOW
WHITE PEOPLE
CAN WORK FOR
RACIAL
JUSTICE

PAUL KIVEL

Praise for *Uprooting Racism*

With current context, deepened history and new chapters, Paul Kivel's revised and updated *Uprooting Racism* offers visionary and practical tools for white people to reflect, share, learn, show up and act. Given all we have at stake in building a racially just society, this is both a timeless and urgent work. Like my copy of a previous edition, this one will be dog-eared from use, and my wallet thinner as I will gift copies of this book over and over.

—Pam McMichael, Highlander Center, Executive Director, 2005–2016

Paul Kivel . . . presents a powerful yet accessible vision, informed by research and reflection on racism in the US . . . This book provides the best concrete guidance for the new or perplexed would-be white ally that I have ever seen in print. For the individual explorer, the self-study exercises are amazing. As a resource for the educator or trainer's library, *Uprooting Racism* is indispensable and unique. I have personally used many of the exercises in the book in my own teaching. Paul's support and guidance for educators and trainers in his books and on his website is outstanding.

—Victor Lee Lewis, Progressive Life Coach,
founder/director of the Radical Resilience Institute,
Co-Editor with Hugh Vasquez of Lessons from "The Color of Fear."

Uprooting Racism gives the student, activist and practitioner something for their social justice tool box. The expanded edition is challenging, informative and practical. You'll finish the book and want to get right to work.

—Dr. Eddie Moore Jr., Founder/Director, The White Privilege Conference

Uprooting Racism continues to be a powerful and wonderful book, a major contribution to our understanding of racism as white people . . . Not only does Kivel address tough issues related to whiteness and racism, . . . he also identifies specific ways that whites can be allies for change—all done with honesty, forthrightness, respect, and from the heart. For any white person who is sincere about working for social justice, here's the source.

—Judith H. Katz, Ed. D., author,
White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racism Training and
The Inclusion Breakthrough: Unleashing the Real Power of Diversity

Paul Kivel writes with clarity and depth in a style that is adequately complex for understandings of racism in our time. He uses his writing power to illuminate all the systems, inner and outer, which lead to inequitable distribution of power, respect, money, safety, security, and opportunity in the world. . . .

—Peggy McIntosh, founder and co-director, National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum, author, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*

Uprooting Racism is a fact-filled resource for teachers and parents to use in educating ourselves and our young people about the history and the hidden costs of racism in our communities. Kivel presents simple, meaningful actions we can all take to build a more just and healthy society.

—Jackie Shonerd, parent and Coordinator for Conflict Resolution Programs, Oakland, (CA) Unified School District

As a woman of color actively engaged in social justice movements for over 25 years, I have often longed for a book like *Uprooting Racism* to help white people understand the institutional, systematic, and persistent character of racism in our world. Paul Kivel has written a handbook to critically examine racism in our lives, and in our work for peace and justice.

—Luz Guerra, activist, consultant/writer

. . . the 'how-to manual' for whites to work with people of color to create an inclusive, just world in the 21st century. *Uprooting Racism* succinctly describes how intricately racism is tied to all institutions and our daily lives. . . . It should be in the toolbox of anyone who is working for an anti-racist society.

—Maggie Potapchuk, Senior Program Associate, Network of Alliances, Bridging Race and Ethnicity (NABRE), a program of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

Those of us who commit to the life-long journey of being anti-racist whites need lots of help. The revised edition of *Uprooting Racism* offers a clear vision of the journey's destination, an invaluable and accessible map and a set of tools for the steps we must take to get there. . . . I recommend it highly and plan to use it in my own work.

—Louise Derman-Sparks, co-director, of the Early Childhood Equity Alliance. Author, *Teaching/Learning Anti-Racism: A Developmental Approach*

Uprooting Racism is a uniquely sensitive, wise, practical guide for white people struggling with their feelings about race.

—Howard Zinn, author, *A People's History of the United States* (Praise from previous edition)

UPROOTING RACISM

HOW
WHITE PEOPLE
CAN WORK FOR
RACIAL
JUSTICE

PAUL KIVEL



new society
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New Society Publishers' mission is to publish books that contribute in fundamental ways to building an ecologically sustainable and just society, and to do so with the least possible impact on the environment, in a manner that models this vision.



*To my family—Micki, my love
Ariel, SAM, Ryan, Amanda, Leticia, Kesa,
Niko, Mateo and Anahi, my inspiration
And to all those fighting for justice*

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North America has a long and distinguished history of white people who have fought against racism and racial violence. This history began in the days of Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolomé de Las Casas, Spanish priests who documented and protested against the atrocities Columbus and other early colonizers committed against Native Americans in the West Indies. It continues today with white people fighting against hate crimes, police brutality, housing and job discrimination, and recent attacks against immigrants and poor people of color. These efforts have been inspired by the constant, unrelenting fight by people of color and Native Americans for survival, for justice, and for an end to the political, economic, and cultural exploitation they continue to experience in the United States.

My deepest gratitude goes to the multitudes of people of color who have challenged racism in both small and large ways over the centuries, and who have demonstrated by their lives that the lies of racism are untrue, inhumane and violate the integrity of each person who colludes with injustice.

I am also proud to be Jewish and to be part of the historic struggle of Jewish people to survive waves of anti-Jewish oppression and create our lives anew in the framework of freedom and justice Judaism

provides. I want to acknowledge my Jewish foreparents and the many Jews who are still on the front lines of the battle for racial justice because they understand the connections between anti-Jewish oppression (anti-Semitism) and racism.

There are many people who have inspired my work and writing, most of whom I have never met. I have read their words, heard their songs, witnessed their actions, and strive to be true to their vision.

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Preface to Previous Editions

Before I wrote this book, I accumulated a long list of reasons why it was an important project. Racism is pervasive, its effects devastating, the need to fight against it urgent. People of color are being blamed for our social problems and attacked on all fronts. Recent immigrants, African Americans, youth of color, Native Americans, and Muslims are just some of the current targets of white anger. The civil rights and social justice gains of the 1960s and 70s are being rolled back.

I could also see the huge impact racism had on my relationships with other people, what my children learned in school, how we dealt with economic issues at the state and federal level and what sports and music I paid attention to. Racism is everywhere, influencing us at every turn. There is no shortage of immediate reasons why writing a book like this one needed to be done.

In workshops my coworkers and I were facilitating, participants were eager to talk about these issues and anxious to become involved. Somehow, few of them were able to translate their understanding of the issues and their commitment to ending racism into concrete community action. When they asked me for resources, I could point them to no guides for critical thinking and social action. What was available about racism or white people was theoretical—interesting, important, but not practical.

With all this in mind, I sat down to write this book. I suddenly accumulated a long list of reasons why I couldn't do it. I wasn't qualified. The subject was too big. The issue was too important. How could I add anything new? The connections between racism, religious oppression, gender, and economic issues were too complex.

People of color have addressed all the issues much more powerfully than I could. Other white people would call me racist. The entire task felt formidable, scary, fraught with problems, and I felt ill-equipped to carry it out successfully.

I procrastinated. I hoped someone else would do it. “There must be someone else who knows more, writes better, or knows how to say it the right way.” “There’s certainly someone who could do it without making mistakes or looking foolish.” These thoughts went through my mind as I waited for someone else to step forward.

Then one day I recognized these feelings. They were the same feelings white people experience in our workshops—the same “reasons” they give for not doing more to stop racism. When confronting the reality of racism, white people become sad, angry, overwhelmed, numb, anxious, and passive. When faced with the need to intervene, speak up or take action against racism, we become tentative, waiting for someone more qualified to step up.

There is no one else who can take your place or do your part. I realized it was crucial for me to write what I could; that was my responsibility. Yes, I didn’t know all the answers; I wouldn’t be able to cover everything; some people might not like what I wrote. But a book like this needed to be written, and I was in a position to write it.

I’m sure you will experience many feelings as you read this book. Let them guide you, but don’t let them stop you. It is easy to become overwhelmed by our feelings, by how much there is to do, and by how confusing and risky it seems. I’m asking you to tap into another set of feelings—understanding and compassion for people of color; outrage at injustice; courage, passion, and commitment to building a democratic, multicultural, and just society. Concentrate on what it is we can do, how we can make a difference.

Whenever I become overwhelmed thinking about how much there is to do, I remind myself of a saying by Rabbi Tarfon. I hope it will guide you as well.

It is not upon you to finish the work.

Neither are you free to desist from it.

Preface to the Fourth Edition

When the first edition of *Uprooting Racism* was published in the mid-90s, there were books about racism, but few documented how white people benefited from and participated in perpetuating it. Even fewer examined the way racism influenced the workings of our institutions. But, perhaps as a legacy of the Civil Rights movement, there was still a vigorous discussion of racism in US society and a widespread acceptance that we had work to do to make racial justice a reality.

Over 20 years later there are a massive number of studies and other forms of documentation demonstrating the workings of racism in everything from its devastating impact on the lives and opportunities of people of color to how white people think, act and talk about racism, what benefits we gain from it and how it is perpetuated in the everyday practices and policies of our organizations and institutions.¹

Despite all of this documentation, it has taken the disruptive, bold, and creative leadership of the Movement for Black Lives, the courageous resistance of Native peoples at Standing Rock and the national prisoner's strike, coupled with the increasing visual evidence of everyday violence against people of color, to bring racism to the attention of white people in the US. And even with this leadership and visual evidence, there is a white culture of denial and minimization about the existence and centrality of racism. Despite pervasive segregation and discrimination in education, housing, health care, and the job market; despite widespread surveillance, control, and punishment of people of color through the

welfare, child welfare, foster care, education, police, immigration and criminal/legal systems; despite hate crimes, police brutality, racial profiling, and everyday forms of what has been called micro-aggression against people of color, a November 2015 poll showed that while most white people believe acts of racism still occur, less than half (43%) believe racism is a major societal problem² and 56% said racism wasn't a problem in their community.³

In fact, I often hear references to a "post-racial" society, a belief the Civil Rights movement and subsequent legislation "took care of all that," and a feeling that having had a black man as president proved we have moved beyond race in the United States.

We are now in a third, major phase of racism/white supremacy in US history. The first phase included the military invasion and conquest of North America including theft of the land, genocide against Native Americans, and the mass enslavement of Africans. The second phase encompassed Jim Crow exploitation, segregation, industrialization, violence, and the assimilation of European immigrants into a system of white Christian cultural supremacy. The third and current phase is the stage of capitalism termed neoliberalism. Racism, a constantly shifting and adaptive system of white dominance, has looked different in each of these phases.

Neoliberalism is the current strategy of the ruling class (basically "the 1%") dating from the 1960s. It promotes so-called market strategies, i.e., deregulation and privatization, over public institutions and public services. These strategies eliminate public oversight, eliminate restrictions on corporate practices, and drastically reduce the size and scale of government at every level, especially the social services they provide. Attacks on unions, wages, and working conditions follow, along with attempts to divide poor, working-, and middle-class people around issues such as immigration, gay rights, reproductive rights, and Islamophobia. Claiming to be "race-neutral" (even though their policy applications and impact are intentionally racialized), neoliberal advocates use phrases such as "individual choice," "meritocracy," "standards," "efficiency," and "level playing field" to justify policies which continue to strip resources from com-

munities of color and poor and working-class white communities while concentrating even more wealth in the white, Christian ruling class.

The evidence of pervasive, life-destroying racism throughout our society persists—not only in statistics and broad patterns of discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization, but also in the everyday experiences of people of color. Recently, for example, three of the African American women who live in the apartment next door to me described how they have been harassed by a white resident in the apartment on the other side of them. This person not only drops trash and dog shit onto their driveway and parking spots, but also calls them “n*****s” when they complain. When they call the police, the officers don’t take down all the details of the situation, minimize the incident, and discourage them from pursuing the matter. On our neighborhood’s NextDoor listserve, I routinely read vague racialized descriptions of the suspicious activity of my neighbors of color which I know often lead to calls to police and harassment for them. And I constantly see the displacement of entire communities of long-time residents of color from my city by young white gentrifiers who can afford higher rents, and expect cafes and upscale restaurants, better services, and “safer” streets.

Every day I hear a new story, read a new report, witness the devastating impact of racism on our community. I don’t ask for these stories, but I listen carefully when I hear them. I don’t take them personally or try to defend white people. I know these stories are not about me, and sometimes the white people involved have no conscious intention of hurting a person of color. These stories are about the everyday discrimination and disrespect toward people of color racism produces and people of color have to live with.

I have become even more acutely aware of how interdependent our lives are and how dependent I am on the low-paid work of people of color in the United States and in other countries. I look at the label on my jeans, shirts, and underwear; I track the work that produced my computer, TV, and cell phone; I learn more about who grows, picks, packages, and prepares the food I eat; I notice who cleans the

public buildings and classrooms I use. Usually people of color perform the poorly paid, low-status jobs which allow me to enjoy the benefits of inexpensive clothes, low-priced electronic equipment, cheap food, and clean and well-maintained public spaces.

Just walking down the street to the park makes me aware of our interconnection and dependency. I meet people like Renee, an immigrant from the Philippines who maintains the flowers and trees in the park down the block from us. I see the immigrant women who are caring for white babies in the park or who arrive to clean houses in the neighborhood.

My daily life is interwoven with the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of people of color. Yet so much of their lives, work, and culture is ridiculed, exploited, or rendered invisible by our society I often don't see or make the connections. My ignorance and subsequent inaction contribute to their exploitation, discrimination, and marginalization. I become a partner in racism, a collaborator in injustice.

A few years ago I was hopeful we were making some inroads in recognizing and addressing racism. However, watching the response to the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center and Pentagon bombings, the response to the disasters of Hurricanes Rita and Katrina, and the collapse of the stock and housing bubbles, I fear the US has suffered major setbacks. There has been an alarming increase in hate crimes against Arab Americans and Muslims. African Americans, Latinx, Native Americans, and Asian Americans are threatened by racial profiling and murder on our streets and at our borders. Mosques are being attacked across the US. The housing and financial meltdowns have disproportionately affected communities of color—transferring even more wealth to white communities.⁴ And all of us face attacks on our civil liberties, increased police and military surveillance, and the further shifting of resources from education, health, and other social programs to war, surveillance, and prisons. The election of Donald Trump seemed to give permission for even more white resentment and attack, while showing once

again the deep roots of racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and misogyny in US society.

I know many white people find it hard to read about racism. I have been told stories of students who, required to read this book, would read a chapter and then throw the book across the room because they were so upset at what I was saying and what it meant for their lives. But then they would go across the room, pick up the book and read another chapter. Determination is what it takes to confront racism. We need to keep going back and picking up the task no matter how uncomfortable, angry, or frustrated we become in the process. Being an ally is like that. We keep learning, doing our best, leaving something out, making mistakes, doing it better next time. It is a practice, not an identity—and it is best done in collaboration with others.

In a world in which racism continues to be one of the bedrocks of our organizations and institutions, in which most people of color, every single day, are confronted with the repercussions of racial discrimination, harassment, and exploitation, we must ask ourselves:

- What do I stand for?
- Who do I stand with?
- Do I stand for racial justice, the end of discrimination and racial violence and a society truly based on equal opportunity?
- Do I stand with people of color and white allies in the struggle to uproot racism?

These are the challenging questions I offer you as you begin to read this book. I hope *Uprooting Racism* helps you to be clearer and more effective in answering them.

— Paul Kivel
June, 2017

A Note on Language

Language is important because it invites in or excludes people from conversation and other forms of participation in community life. I strive for respectful and inclusive language. That's why I use the gender inclusive third-person pronoun "they" instead of "he" or "she." It is also why I use the term *Latinx*, an alternative to Latino, Latina, and Latin@. Used by scholars, activists, and an increasing number of journalists, Latinx aims to move beyond gender binaries and is inclusive of the intersecting identities of Latin American descendants.¹

A Note to Readers Outside the US

Most of the examples used in the book are from the United States, where I live and about which I have more access to information. Many reports, studies, and accounts of racism in other white majority societies—Great Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Australia, and New Zealand—show similar patterns of racism against people of color. For example, the Parekh Report, *The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain*, documented extensive institutional and cultural racism throughout Great Britain.¹ The anti-immigrant, anti-Indigenous people and racism in public policy and daily practice in Canada, Australia, and throughout Europe are quite visible. If you live in a white majority country, talk with people of color, read the studies and reports, and don't let yourself be complacent or indifferent simply because your situation is not exactly the same as that in the United States.

Introduction:

“Only Justice Can Put Out the Fire”¹

There is fire raging across the United States—usually a series of brush fires erupting whenever conditions are right—sometimes a firestorm, always a smoldering cauldron. Whether it is major urban uprisings, intellectual debates, or everyday conflicts in our neighborhoods and schools, racism is burning us all. Some of us have third-degree burns or have died from its effects; many others live in charred wreckage. Most of us suffer first- and second-degree burns at some time in our lives. We all live with fear in the glow of the menacing and distorted light of racism’s fire.

As white people we do many things to survive the heat. Some of us move to the suburbs, put bars on our windows, put locks on our hearts, and teach our children distrust for their own protection. Some of us believe the enemy is “out there”—and we can be safe “in here.” When we don’t talk about our fears, we are prevented from doing anything effective to put out the fire.

Poll after poll shows most white people are scared. We are scared about violence; about the economy; about the environment; we are scared about the safety, education, and future of our children.² Much of the time those fears are directed toward people of color whether they are long-term residents or recent immigrants. It is easy for us to focus on them, and yet doing so devastates our ability to address critical national issues of economic inequality, war, social infrastructure, family violence, and environmental devastation which affect everyone.

Since the attacks of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, white people are even more afraid. We have been shown our vulnerability and our complicity.³ Many of us wanted to do something, to pick up a bucket and throw water on the flames, but the size of the blaze seemed to make our individual efforts useless. Besides, many of us thought we were too far away from the cause of the fire to make a difference. Arabs and Muslims were defined as the problem; the danger was anywhere and everywhere. Unending war was declared the only solution.

In fact, there are already flames in our (all too often predominantly white) schools, churches, neighborhoods, and workplaces. Poverty, family violence, drugs, and despair are not limited to somewhere “out there” nor to “those people.” Our houses are burning too, and we need to pick up our buckets and start carrying water now. But just like the volunteer fire departments in rural communities and small towns, we need to be part of a fire line where everyone realizes that when the sparks are flying, anything can begin to burn. As a community we can be alert for sparks and embers so they can be put out before a bigger blaze develops.

We don’t need scare tactics. They just reinforce fear and paralysis. We don’t need numbers and statistics. They produce numbness and despair. We need to talk with each other, honestly, simply, caringly. We need to learn how to talk about racism without rhetoric (which fans the flames); without attack or intimidation (which separates people from one another). We need to share firefighting suggestions, skills, and experience so we can work together to end racism.

I think it is crucial each of us speaks up about issues of violence and injustice. It is true our words would have more moral credibility if we were leading a mistake-free life and were totally consistent in what we say and do. We have to “walk the walk,” not just “talk the talk.”

However, issues of social justice are not fundamentally about individual actions and beliefs. This book is about racism, an institutionalized system of oppression. Although my actions can either

support or confront racism, it is completely independent of me. In fact, even if most of us were completely non-racist in our attitudes and practices, there are many ways unequal wages, unequal treatment in the legal system, and segregation in jobs, housing, and education could continue.

This book is about uprooting the *system* of racism. You may need to reexamine your individual beliefs and actions in order to participate effectively in that uprooting. This book will help you look at how you have learned racism, what effects it has had on your life, what have been its costs and benefits to you, and how you have learned to pass it on. More importantly, this book will help you become a member of a network of people who are committed to racial justice. It offers you strategies and guidelines for becoming involved in the struggle.

Don't take it too personally. You did not create racism. You may have many feelings while reading this book. Confronting racism may trigger a range of emotions including guilt, defensiveness, sadness, or outrage. Acknowledge the feelings, talk with others, but don't get stuck. If our feelings immobilize us, we cannot strategically plan how to transform the system. I am reminded of the statement to white people by Maurice Mitchell, a leader in Ferguson Action and Black Lives Matter: "Your anxiety about getting it right has nothing to do with black liberation."⁵

This book is not about unlearning racism.⁶ Unlearning racism makes it easier for people of color to live and work with us, but it doesn't necessarily challenge racist structures. Unlearning racism may or may not be a path toward eliminating racism. In a society where individual growth is often not only the starting place, but also the end point of discussion, strategies for unlearning racism often end in complacency and inaction.

Uprooting Racism begins with the understanding that racism exists, it is pervasive and that its effects are devastating. Because of this devastation, we need to start doing everything possible to work for racial justice. The first step is for us to talk together, as white

people. For as white Southern civil rights activist Anne Braden reminded us:

In a sense, the battle is and always has been a battle for the hearts and mind of white people in this country. The fight against racism is not something we're called on to help people of color with. We need to become involved as if our lives depended on it because, in truth, they do.⁷

PART I

What Color Is White?



Let's Talk

I AM TALKING TO YOU as one white person to another. I am Jewish, and I will talk about that later in this book. You also may have an ethnic identity you are proud of. You likely have a religious background, a culture, a country of origin, and a history. Whatever your other identities, you may not be used to being addressed as white.

Other people are African American, Asian American, Pacific Islanders, Native American, Latinx, or Muslims. *Other* people have countries of origin and primary languages that are not English. White people generally assume people are white unless otherwise noted, much as humans can assume people and animals are male.

Read the following lines:

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- *This new sitcom is about a middle-aged, middle-class couple and their three teenage children.*
 - *They won a medal on the Special Olympics swim team.*
 - *He did well in school but was just a typical all-American kid.*
 - *They didn't know if they would get into the college of their choice.*
 - *My grandmother lived on a farm all her life.*
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Are all these people white? Read the sentences again and imagine the people referred to are Chinese Americans or Native Americans. How does that change the meanings of these sentences? If you are

of Christian background, what happens when you imagine the subjects as Muslim or Jewish?

White people assume we are white without stating it because it is “obvious.” Yet there is something about stating this obvious fact that makes white people feel uneasy, marked. What’s the point of saying “I’m white?”

White people have been led to believe *racism* is a question of particular acts of discrimination or violence. Calling someone a name, denying someone a job, excluding someone from a neighborhood—that is racism. These certainly are acts of racial discrimination. But what about working in an organization where people of color are paid less, have more menial work or fewer opportunities for advancement? What about shopping in a store where you are treated respectfully, but people of color are followed around or treated with suspicion?

People of color know this racism intimately. They know that where they live, work, and walk; whom they talk with and how; what they read, listen to, or watch on TV—their past experiences and future possibilities are all influenced by racism.

For the next few days, carry your whiteness with you. During the day, in each new situation, remind yourself that you are white. How does it feel? Notice how rarely you see or hear the words white, Caucasian or Euro-American.

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- *Where is it implied but not stated specifically?*
 - *Who is around you? Are they white or people of color? What difference does it make?*
 - *Write down what you notice. Discuss it with a friend.*
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Particularly notice whenever you are somewhere there are only white people.

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- *How did it come to be that no people of color are present?*

- *If you ask about their absence, what kinds of explanations/ rationalizations do people give?*
 - *Are they really not there, or are they only invisible?*
 - *Did they grow some of the food, originally own the land, build the buildings, or clean and maintain the place where you are?*
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