

MAKING PEACE

FACING RACISM

A *MAKING PEACE* PROGRAM GUIDE

The Television Program

Facing Racism is the fourth program in the *MAKING PEACE* television series. It is the story of five people of different ethnic backgrounds who gather to consider the impact of race and racism on their lives. Trained to keep a personal diary on videotape of their thoughts and experiences, they attend a three-day "unlearning racism" workshop.

Unlearning racism is the process of facing the ingrained assumptions about race that we've grown up with, and learning new ways to relate to people who are ethnically different. As the video diarists discovered, this process can be uncomfortable and sometimes frightening, but is ultimately rewarding.

In the program the diarists consider the impact of racism on their lives as they were growing up. Allan Cooper, now a Buddhist and hospice worker, grew up in Jewish neighborhoods in Chicago, receiving mixed messages from his family about people of other ethnicities. Juan Domingo, a poet and painter, tells of growing up Latino in East Los Angeles and of the pain his own internalized racism has caused him. Spending her childhood in rural Arkansas, Linda Jackson wasn't aware of anti-Black prejudice until she moved to New York. A mother and school district liaison in Berkeley, she is active in educating African American parents about involvement with their children's schools. A writer who lives in Oakland, Michael Hagan grew up in an all-white environment in Washington state and found his move to the racially mixed Bay Area to be a frightening experience. Cynthia Hom talks about growing up Chinese in America and how she has learned to go through life trying to be as invisible as possible.



Video diarists, left to right: Juan Domingo, Cynthia Hom, Michael Hagan, Linda Jackson, and Allan Cooper.

As the five move through the workshop, various events unfold that challenge their beliefs and open their eyes. Allan is confronted by his African American workshop partner, Dennard, over a joke he made that Dennard considered disrespectful. The facilitated conflict resolution that follows arouses strong emotions in both men. The other workshop participants share their widely divergent perceptions of the conflict. This incident becomes the catalyst for feelings of anger and fear, as well as insights that the five diarists share with us in their diary entries. On the final day of the workshop, the diarists find an atmosphere of open and honest communication, and the experience ends on a hopeful note.

Later the diarists come together at a cafe to reflect on the difference the weekend workshop has made in their lives. In the ensuing discussion, they find that many of the issues that surfaced in the workshop came up again and again, underscoring the need for continuing dialogue. As the diarists move back into their daily lives, they express the hope that people watching the program will acknowledge the honest exchanges that took place and, despite the discomfort, will themselves engage in the conversation of *Facing Racism*.

About This Guide

A recent event, recalled in the opening passage of *Facing Racism*, illustrates the differing perceptions of our criminal justice system among European Americans and African Americans. Hearing the announcement of the "not guilty" verdict in the trial of O.J. Simpson, a classroom of African American college students erupts into spontaneous cheering. The same announcement is greeted with disbelief and disappointment by white viewers in a restaurant. In polls, 80 percent of African Americans surveyed felt the verdict was just, while 80 percent of European Americans thought Mr. Simpson should have received a guilty verdict. This is not an isolated incident but an indication of the gap between white and Black perceptions of the world due to racial experience.

This widely divergent perception of events is also seen in *Facing Racism* when the separate ethnic caucuses reflect on the conflict between Allan and Dennard. Everyone witnessed the



same event, yet reactions were very different. This sense of a different "reality" for European Americans and people of color in our society makes communication about race and racial experience difficult. Even among those with the



best of intentions, there is fear that talking about racism in ethnically mixed groups will lead to conflict. Often whites are fearful of being called racist. Often persons of color fear that when they describe their own experience of racism they may be dismissed as being “over sensitive” or “playing the race card.”

Yet without honest and heart-felt cross-cultural dialogue, we will never understand each other and be able to work together to end racism. More important, without listening – really listening to each other – we will not become aware of how racism injures and diminishes Americans of color and, in a different way, white Americans also.

The purpose of this guide is simple: It is to help people to listen. It suggests a framework for dialogues about race and racism, using *Facing Racism* as a catalyst. There are four main parts to the guide. Creating a Dialogue provides a framework for dialogue, some ground rules for participation that help to nurture a climate of trust and receptivity, and dialogue questions. Advice to Facilitators gives specific suggestions to group leaders for effective facilitation of dialogues. Whenever possible it is strongly suggested that at least one of the leaders have prior experience with diversity training. Continuing the Conversation includes a definition of racism as a focus for ongoing dialogue. Racism cannot be banished in a day or a week – or in an intensive

workshop. Unlearning habits ingrained over decades must be a continuing process. We recommend that groups that come together to watch and respond to *Facing Racism* create opportunities to gather on a long-term basis. The final section in the guide includes suggestions for further reading as well as addresses of organizations that offer unlearning racism seminars, workshops and leadership training.

Creating a Dialogue

Watching *Facing Racism* often generates strong emotions among both people of color and white viewers. Anger, fear, guilt, embarrassment and grief – as well as strong identification and/or rejection of individuals in the film are not uncommon. The goal should be to create an environment in which people feel safe enough to express their feelings and describe events in their own lives that have generated the emotions they are experiencing. If an open atmosphere for listening and honest and mutual exchange is cultivated, then the group will be participating in the healing task of facing racism. If trust is not established, the discussion will tend to remain focused on the film itself – what the people in the film should have done or said, or not done and not said – rather than the viewers’ own personal experience and insight.

Breaking the Ice

To dispel any tension or anxiety at the start of the discussion, a simple exercise is suggested: Have participants pair up with someone they don’t know and answer two questions: “What are your worst fears for this dialogue? What are your hopes for this discussion?” Each person should be given three or four minutes to respond and answer both questions without comment or response from their partner. Simply expressing one’s anxieties before a witness will help to relieve their intensity. Expressing hopes can help generate a receptivity among participants.



Ground Rules

Another way to help build an atmosphere of mutual trust is to ask everyone to agree to some ground rules for dialogue.

- Listen to each other respectfully and without interrupting.
- Speak from your own experience, using “I” statements rather than using “we,” “you” or “they.”
- Respect confidentiality. If you talk about your experience outside the group, do not identify others with what they have said.
- Respect privacy. If you want to speak to someone about what they have said after the session, ask their permission first and respect their response.
- Everyone is free to participate at their own level of comfort. But they may keep in mind that the more open they are, the more they are apt to gain and contribute.

If you have other suggestions for ground rules, add them. After you’ve presented these rules, ask everyone to indicate their agreement by a show of hands.

Creating Small Groups

Having acknowledged people’s very real anxieties when it comes to talking about race, and having laid down some ground rules, you are ready to begin the dialogues. It is best to start by

asking the group to divide into small groups of three or four. This gives everyone a chance to speak and be heard.

Explain that the first part of this exercise will be carried out in silence. Divide the group in half. Ask one half to stand and look at those who remain seated. Ask those who are sitting to look at those standing. Ask everyone to notice the differences in the room, including those of ethnicity, gender, age and appearance. After a pause, the entire group should divide itself into small groups of three or four. It is important to maintain silence during this process. Ask participants to look for group partners who are different in some respect and whom they don’t already know. The aim is to create small groups that are as diverse as possible. Facilitators should take an active role in helping people to form groups. When this is accomplished each group should find a place to sit together with a degree of privacy.

Instructions for Small Groups

Once the small groups are established, facilitators should explain the structure for the dialogues that will take place. Everyone gets a chance to speak, while the others in the group listen without interrupting, asking questions or commenting. Everyone gets equal time – five minutes each. Facilitators should keep track of the time, let speakers know when they have a minute left and indicate “time” when the five minutes are up. A moment of silence between each five-minute period, to take in what has been said, is helpful.

Ask the group to consider the dialogue questions below. Ask each participant to answer the one question that is of the greatest relevance to him or her personally, and to explain why they chose that question. The *why* is important. In responding, participants should consider how the experience and perceptions of the character(s) in the film are similar or different from their own. What memories of racism and racial encounters does the film bring up in participants’ own lives?

Dialogue Questions



At the beginning of *Facing Racism*, Juan says: "My fear is that you will think I am less of a man because of the wound that makes me so shy sometimes." •

What is the wound he is referring to? • What does he mean?

Michael says: "I met a woman named Mary who is African American. Every day she wakes up and she thinks 'I'm Black.' I have never woken up and thought to myself, 'Hey, I'm white.'" • How do you account for the difference in the experience of Mary and Michael?



Cynthia says: "My methodology for going through the world was to be as invisible as possible, make the fewest number of ripples in the pond." • What does she mean by this? • Why

do you think that Cynthia has developed this approach to "going through the world?"

Reflecting upon his own introduction of his African American partner, Dennard, as Danish, Allan asks himself some questions: "Is that construed as racism? Is that not seeing him? Was I not seeing him?" • How would you answer Allan's questions? Why?

Dennard says to Allan: "Your calling me Danish just wiped me out. You shut me down. I get shut down every day." • Why does Dennard feel this way? • What is he referring to when he says he gets "shut down every day?" • What does Dennard want from Allan?



Referring to the Holocaust Allan says: "For the first time in my life, I grieved." • Why do you think this happened to Allan at the unlearning racism workshop?



Why does Linda say: "You go figure who brought all the oppression on the people, every people. White man. Not people of color. White man."

On Saturday night, looking back on the day, Michael says: "I felt really threatened. I felt full of fear." • What do you think he is afraid of?

At the meeting in the cafe, after the workshop, Linda says to the group: "I feel like I'm here to teach you how to feel about me as a Black woman. I've already been taught how to feel about you as a white man, as an Asian woman. It's been inbred in me from birth." • What does she mean?



Facilitators should make sure that everyone gets their turn to speak and that one or two people do not monopolize the discussion. Remind people to respond to the questions from their own personal experience, using "I" statements. There are no right or wrong answers. The video and the proposed questions should not be the focus of the dialogues but rather the catalysts that move people to share their personal experience of race and racism.

When everyone in the group has spoken, allow an extra 10 minutes for the participants of the small groups to discuss with each other what they heard and said. When the 10 minutes is up, give the whole group a short break before bringing everyone back together.

Large-Group Discussion

After the break, have everyone gather in the large group. This is an opportunity for those that want to share, with everyone, their experiences in the small groups. It may be good to ask each person who speaks to give their name and ethnic identity before they start. It is instructive to see how people identify themselves. Often people who look white have a different ethnic identity.

One way to start is to have a person of color speak. It is effective to begin by giving European Americans a view of how a person of color experiences racism. This rarely happens in a cross-cultural setting of peers. Encourage people to share their feelings and to use "I" statements. If necessary, ask speakers to limit their remarks so that others can speak. Reflect, clarify, and paraphrase where needed. Thank the speaker



and select another volunteer. As much as possible, see to it that the speakers selected represent the diversity in the room.

Stories told in a gathering like this are more effective in making the existence and pain of racism evident than reams of statistics. Stories by people of color about how they have experienced or coped with racism are often what most people take home from an event like this. The

stories can touch hearts and change attitudes in the listeners in ways that reasoned discussion cannot. Facilitators can summarize what has been shared and perhaps, if appropriate, speak of their own feelings and experience.

Encourage Further Communication

Near the end of the session, invite participants to explore possibilities for ongoing dialogues with each other. The hope is that your gathering will have opened channels of communication between people of diverse backgrounds within your community. But in all likelihood you will have just scratched the surface of what can be accomplished.

Encourage people to meet on a continuing basis. As relationships between participants deepen over time, so do the rewards. The Continuing the Conversation section of this guide contains suggestions for further dialogue.

Closing

Before ending, ask each person in the group to say one short sentence about how they feel. Anyone who wishes should be free to pass when it is their turn to speak. Thank the group and the sponsors.

Advice to Facilitators

For most people, a discussion on racism will arouse a certain degree of apprehension. The facilitators' primary task is to establish a safe environment for dialogue. They should convey genuineness, openness and empathy. When they are comfortable and knowledgeable in discussing cross-cultural issues they can help the participants feel at ease. Getting agreement on ground rules for the dialogues also helps. Intervening to prevent verbal abuse without invalidating legitimate expressions of anger is crucial. Clearly setting out when the session will end gives the proceedings a clear framework.



Biracial Teams

This work is best conducted by a team of at least two people who support each other, taking turns leading the group and observing. If possible, at least one of the team members should have some experience in diversity training. The most effective teams are biracial, with a person of color working with a European American. Often a white participant can more easily hear something coming from an European American facilitator than from a person of color, and vice versa. The model of a biracial team of facilitators, working successfully together, is a constructive image that participants will take home with them. A team of two white facilitators is not recommended.

Working Together

Before the workshop starts, and as it evolves, the facilitators should plan how they will work together. Transitions from one facilitator to the other should be comfortable and natural.

Doing anything that is not natural to the facilitators will compromise the authenticity that is their greatest asset in this work. Communicating in whispers in front of participants is not recommended. A facilitator in the observer role who needs to speak to the other facilitator while he or she is leading an exercise should speak normally. The concerns, advice or shifts in agenda expressed will help to create an atmosphere of open communication.

An Atmosphere of Inclusion

Facilitators should allow room for all opinions, and try to solicit them from more reticent participants. Participants will watch closely to determine whether only comments of a certain point of view are accepted. This can be difficult when remarks are contrary to the facilitators' own values. But if the participants see a facilitator put down, disagree with or ignore someone who makes a politically incorrect comment, they will not feel safe and will withdraw into themselves.

Humor

Humor helps. During the weekend that *Facing Racism* was filmed, there was much laughter mixed in with the conflict and expressions of anger. Laughter is a way of releasing tension. There is often laughter during screenings of the program. If there is not, it usually means that the group is tense and possibly angry. Humor conveys that even though we are doing work that brings up fear and anxiety, we can still laugh at things. If we don't all agree on everything, it's not the end of the world.

Racially Mixed Groups

The facilitators should strive to create a climate in which people of color feel comfortable enough to share their experiences and in which European Americans may listen to them and to speak themselves. When people of color are a small minority in a racially mixed group they are less likely to speak openly about racism and how they have been affected by it. Their experience is that white people don't want to hear about racism and will become defensive and hostile if the issue is brought up. White people are often fearful of being called "racist" and being the focus of anger about racism. Remind people of their commitment to the ground rules, especially "to listen to each other respectfully and without interrupting" and "to speak from your own experience by using 'I' statements rather than using 'we,' 'you' or 'they.'"

Often a personal story about racism from a person of color is the most powerful event at a post-video discussion. Such an account can move the listeners to understand how racism works in specific ways. Often white people will respond by remembering experiences of internal conflict or powerlessness in acting against racism. Awareness of white privilege and how it contributes to racial injustice often grows out of these dialogues.

Continuing the Conversation

At the beginning of this guide we noted how, in our society, people of color and European Americans often experience different realities. This may also have been illustrated in the way that persons of different ethnicity responded in the dialogue on *Facing Racism*. It is impossible to account for these significant differences without an understanding of the way that racism functions in our society. In this section of the guide we present a definition of racism as a focus for dialogue. In much the same way that



your group responded to the video program, bringing personal experience and insights to bear, we encourage a response to this definition.

We recommend presenting this definition only after people have had a chance to respond to *Facing Racism* and participate in discussion in the small groups. The definition will have more meaning and resonance (especially for European Americans) if they have had a chance to listen to persons of color describe their encounters with racism.

RACISM: *The belief in one's own racial, ethnic, or cultural superiority and the use of power to enforce that paradigm on an individual, cultural and institutional level. It is a combination of the belief in superiority and the access to and use of power to enforce it. This belief may be conscious or unconscious, and the use of power intentional or unintentional.*

Everyone is capable of believing in their own racial, ethnic or cultural superiority. Racial prejudice (supported by stereotypes and persistent misinformation about those who are different) exists between all ethnic groups. But in our society not everyone has had access to the power needed to enforce the paradigm on a cultural and institutional level. Historically and continuing into the present, the access to power has been generally limited to European Americans.

In our society, on a cultural level, racism is the belief that European American values are universal, best or most civilized. Accordingly, the contributions of people of color in science and in many other fields are invisible in comparison with white achievements. On an institutional level, racism is found in social and economic policies, regulations and practices that maintain the dominant position of European Americans. For example, people of color do not have access to housing to the same degree that whites do because they are less likely to be approved for



mortgage loans, tend to be steered to "their neighborhoods," and are likely to be quoted higher prices. European Americans are more likely than people of color to be judged as having positive attributes because they have white skin. The police and other authorities are more likely to treat them with respect; bankers and lenders of all types are more likely to consider them as credit-worthy; and automobile sales staff will offer them prices lower than those offered to people of color. These are only a few well-documented examples of European American privilege.

It is very difficult to see benefits that accrue to oneself without virtue, merely because of the color of one's skin. Most whites do not consciously acknowledge privilege based on race. When it is pointed out, it is very difficult to accept because it does not fit our concept of a democratic society in which rewards are distributed according to merit and where justice and equality are basic values. It is easier to believe that racism is a thing of the past and that what little of it persists is perpetuated by mean-spirited and ignorant individuals such as would-be Nazis and white supremacists.

Because racism is so much a part of American life, it is often invisible to European Americans who are the beneficiaries of it. Yet, in order for

white people to take steps to banish racism, they need to see that it exists and that it is damaging to both people of color and to themselves. Being aware that racism exists is more than an intellectual recognition; it is the ability to notice how racism is present in the words, actions and reactions of daily life.


The promise that the United States makes to all its people is that of equality, justice and opportunity. We are still working on making this true. Racism is antithetical to these values and continues to cause grave damage and suffering. There is a growing sense of urgency in our nation on the need to heal the wounds this social dysfunction has caused and continues to inflict on Americans. We cannot heal these wounds without engaging in an open and honest dialogue about racism between white people and people of color.



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