

Understanding & Dismantling Privilege

The Official Journal of The White Privilege Conference and The Matrix Center for the Advancement of Social Equity and Inclusion.

What Anti-racists Stand to Gain from Greater Class Awareness

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Abstract

Anti-racist efforts are often weakened by professional-middle-class cultural practices, and sometimes even by outright classism. To mobilize more white working-class people against racism often requires changing our diversity practices and vocabulary and building more cross-class alliances. Strengthening the class component of race/class/gender intersections will pay off with a bigger and more diverse movement for social justice.

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It goes without saying that I don't know most of you, but I know *one* thing about you—and it's a wonderful thing to know about someone. And that is that you are committed to racial justice. What I am here to do today is to connect that commitment to racial justice to issues of class and classism. So I can talk about how antiracists can build a bigger and stronger movement by becoming more aware of classism and class cultures.

Here's the story of how I came to be here today. Eddie invited me to talk about classism and the movement against racism. I have been an activist for over 30 years. I have been part of a lot of movements, and I have watched even more movements, and just about every social justice effort I have seen has been split, to some extent, along class lines.

Just a few little examples: I was a tenant organizer with low-income tenants, and the tenants who had jobs, a lot of them looked down on the tenants on welfare, and that made their group smaller and weaker. And during the 1990s with the global mobilization movement, we had one great glorious moment in this city, Seattle, in 1999 at the WTO protests, but afterwards the unions went one way and the student and environmental groups went another way, and the movement withered. In the early days of the environmental justice movement there was a lot of leadership from clergy and professional environmentalists and lawyers and professors, but the movement didn't really take off until there was also leadership by the people who were actually being poisoned in their neighborhoods.

I see this over and over again. And of course, I have also seen some great cross-class alliance building, but I just kept seeing these rifts. But even if there were no

conflicts or separations, I would see that whatever the class of the starter group was—even in very racially mixed groups—the class of the people who started the effort, that's the class they would reach out to, and so it would stay a single class, and it would be smaller than necessary.

My passion in life is, before I die, I want to build a mass movement for racial and economic justice in the United States. And a mass movement has to be a cross-class movement, as well as a cross-race movement.

So when I started seeing all these rifts, coalitions breaking along class lines, I went looking for resources related to class. And there were so few. There was practically nothing. So in 2004, along with a lot of other people—some of whom are here—we started a national organization, Class Action, to focus on class and classism. And I figured that I needed to write the book I had wished was there for me to read. So I wrote the book *Class Matters*.

And I made this one claim in *Class Matters*: I claimed that activist groups have class culture differences. I said there were activist class cultures. And that little part of the book got stronger reactions than the whole rest of the book. People were arguing with me, and they were excited, and they wanted me to get it right about their community. And they kept asking me these questions I couldn't answer. Like what are the cross-cultural traits, and do they really cut across differences of race and region and so forth?

So I thought, that sounds like a social science research study, which I didn't know how to do. So I quit my day job and went back to graduate school and I did a study of

25 progressive activist groups in 5 states, all different kinds of groups.

I learned the activists' class backgrounds and life stories and I learned a lot about their approaches to activism. And I made a comparison between the working-class and poor activists, and the professional middle-class and upper-middle-class activists and I found out that—yes—a lot of things *do* vary by class.

So my next book title is going to be *Missing Class* because I think we are missing class, but it will be hopefully subtitled “*Strengthening Social Movement Groups by Seeing Class Cultures*” because my research findings gave me hope that seeing class cultures actually can help activist groups meet their challenges. So what I am here to talk about today is how more awareness of class cultures and classism can strengthen our antiracist work.

I will talk about three ways that social justice groups sometimes blow it, related to class. One is that we don't have any spoken class identities. And we don't talk about class dynamics. The second is that we don't see classism or speak up against classism and don't use class as a basis of affirmative action. And the third is that too many of our organizations are permeated with professional middle-class culture and fail to tap into working-class cultural strengths. These are the three things I will talk about today. So why do Americans talk so little about class? And even worse: Why do activists talk so little about class identities?

I found almost zero explicit talk about class identities, where people would name their class background or each other's, during the meetings of the social justice groups. I would ask people, so what's the

class composition of your group? And they would answer with the race composition. So they were merging them, as if class and race are the same thing. But we have to learn to look, of course, look through a race lens and *also* look through a class lens to bring things into focus.

So I am going to give you a thought experiment. When I told you that my research compared all the working-class and poor activists with all the middle-class and upper-middle-class activists, what was your mental picture of those two clumps of activists? Take a second to get it clear in your mind. If you are like most people in the United States you pictured people like this: The working-class and poor people were people of color; the middle-class and upper-middle-class people were White. And, of course, that's because there is a correlation because of institutionalized racism, a correlation between race and class. But that's not everyone's experience, so I will ask you, did you also picture working-class and poor White people and middle- and upper-middle-class people of color?

When we don't picture these folks, we are making some people's class experience invisible. When we do workshops, as we will later today and on Saturday, there are two groups of people who often afterwards are especially enthusiastic and come up to the facilitators and say, “Thank goodness, you represented my reality.” And one is professional people of color, especially African Americans, who say “Yeah, everyone is always asking us to explain the inner-city, but I have never been there, I summered on Martha's Vineyard.” The other is White people who say, “Yeah, everyone always assumes I am middle class, but I grew up in public housing and middle class is a mystery to me.” So we take the race-based correlation and overgeneralize it,

and erase a lot of people's life experience. And this is not just us, not just in activists' groups; it's how class is usually portrayed in the media.

In editorial cartoons, the rich person is usually portrayed as a White male; the middle class is portrayed as being White, and the poor person is portrayed as African American. That's the most common depiction in the media. But it would also be true of a lot of people's experience if you flipped the racial images. That also represents part of reality. A lot of us have much more clear-cut identities about our race and our gender than about our class, and we share vocabularies for those identities. When walking into a room we guess who's there by race and by gender. Sometimes we guess wrong, but often we more or less know who is there, and we use the same vocabulary roughly to talk about our identities. That's not true with class in the United States.

I discovered that people were often guessing wrong about the class backgrounds and even the current class of people in their groups, even people they had known for years. So I will ask you to bring to consciousness the assumptions about people's class you make all the time, but usually a lot of us unconsciously, by practicing on me: So what class do you think I came from? What was my upbringing? What will you wonder about me?

You can't really think about my clothes, because I could have borrowed clothes to match what you would thought I would be wearing. You can't tell by that, so what class indicators are you thinking about? Listening to my accent? Do I look like somebody who's had good healthcare and dental care in my life? Here are some terms that Class Action has found respectful

and accurate, six terms for class identities: owning class; upper-middle class; professional middle class; lower-middle class; working class; and chronic poverty class.

So when I was a child, do you think my family was in poverty or was rich? Owning class or working class? Lower-class professional? Professional middle-class? How would you know if you didn't ask me? If you guessed professional middle class, you would be right. My parents were college-educated, home-owning professionals. And so am I now, a college-educated, home-owning professional. I am here in the ally role to working-class and poor people against classism, just as those of us here who are White are allies to people of color against racism. I told you a little bit about myself. What about you? Does one of those terms fit your childhood life experience?

At this point I don't know how much class diversity there is in the room. I am guessing quite a lot, but I don't know.

But without knowing you, I already know there are class secrets in the room, because there are class secrets in *every* room. There are so many things that people are walking around with, keeping close to their chest. So I know there are people here who have had hardships in their past: bankruptcies, foreclosures, and homelessness you often don't speak of, that you keep hidden in many settings.

And I know there are people here with luxuries in their life stories. Like trust funds or second homes in Switzerland, and habitually you don't tell people those things. But at Class Action workshops we give people an opportunity to share something from their class life story, and do a little

cross-class dialogue. Because at Class Action we believe that honestly sharing our class stories and having real conversations about class dynamics is a first step towards eliminating classism.

So that's going to be the second point I want to talk about; the second thing we too often fail to do is to speak up against classism.

Let me tell you about a flyer that was plastered all over a town right next to mine in Massachusetts about a tax increase referendum. The caption says, "Don't let the rednecks ruin our schools and cripple our library." The image is of a slovenly, dumb-looking, White, working-class guy, with his butt-crack showing, saying, "Don't need no schools." I don't think I need to explain to you why this is a classist stereotype. He's stupid; he's antieducation and antilibraries. I wish I could say this is rare, but it's not.

And since I am showing a picture of a caricature of a White, working-class man, I want to say, White working-class men get a bad rap, especially from liberals and progressives. Liberal voters tend to blame the terrible state of our nation's politics on White working-class men because of the subset of them who vote very right wing, including against racial affirmative action. But that is not all White working-class men. There are a ton of potential allies out there who are White working-class men. And White working-class men get stereotyped as the worst racists; the stereotype is that they are all bigots. Not only are they not all bigots, but who is it that has the power to enforce institutionalized racism in institutions? It's much more often White privileged-class people. And White working-class people are far more likely to have multicultural relationships in workplaces and neighborhoods than college-educated

White professionals are, so if you're on the professional end of the class spectrum, a little humility is in order.

But people who would never say an outright racist slur—even if they were thinking it—such people will unconsciously say the most classist things. I made a friend who was a liberal, upper-middle-class, White woman, and she would have known that I would have been offended if she had said a racist slur. So in talking about a dispute she was having with her neighbor about a fence, she says, "Yeah, he's really low-life redneck trailer trash." It didn't occur to her that I might be offended by that, so we ended up talking about it all weekend and I was trying to convince her that she said something offensive. And it turned out the guy was not low income or working class. She was insulting him by comparing him to working-class people.

Think how many insults are used that compare people to working-class and poor people? Like "that's really low class!" And White people get called "white trash" and African Americans get called "ghetto" to criticize their behavior. And it's reversed for compliments. If someone's behavior is really gracious and dignified and generous, she is a "class act." "That showed a lot of class." As if working-class and poor people couldn't be gracious and dignified and generous! We do a competition every year at Class Action for the most classist comments of the year by a public figure, and we post it on the blog. Of course, Mitt Romney won in 2012. But it's not just politicians. We have classist comments submitted by liberals and progressives and people in social justice organizations. Here is a really doozy — submitted to us during the Iraq War:

In 2004, when a Halliburton worker was taken hostage in Iraq there were literally

hundreds of posts written by liberals and progressives condemning the man for working for such a company, some saying that if he were beheaded, it was his own fault. Turns out that he had lost his farm, and his wife needed heart surgery and they didn't have health insurance and that was why he had to take that job. One person wrote that it didn't matter, he should have found another job and paid for her surgery some other way. There is often complete cluelessness about the kind of financial necessity that is faced by working-class and poor people of all races.

Classism is not only stereotypes and slurs and cultural classism. Like all other oppressions, classism has not just cultural and interpersonal dimensions, but is also institutional, which is the most familiar; the most talked about. But we think at Class Action that it's really important to connect the three. Because the stereotypes and slurs and disrespect are the insult that justifies the injury.

It's the stories that get told to blame the victim: to say it's poor people's own fault that they are poor, and it's working people's own fault that they are struggling. And so you have to, again, look through the race lens and the class lens and put it in the context of growing economic inequality. Economic inequality is growing and class mobility is shrinking because the systems are rigged. So that the people who are born into working-class and poor families are the most likely by the end of their lives to be working-class or poor.

So poverty is both a race issue and a class issue; again, it's a matter of putting on both the lenses and seeing what's disproportionately true and what's majority true.

Let's look at the dramatically different poverty rates by race. Clearly poverty is an issue of institutionalized racism, because of the enormously high poverty rates for Blacks and Latinos and Native Americans, and smaller poverty rates for White and Asian people (US Census, 2012). But when you look at the pool of people in poverty overall, the majority of poor people are White. (US Census, 2012).

So this is also an institutionalized class issue that cuts across race—and the same is true of just about every economic justice issue. Who was foreclosed on in the housing crisis? Who was uninsured? Unemployed and homeless? Disproportionately people of color, because of institutionalized racism; the majority White, because institutionalized classism hits people of every race.

The education system is the greatest scandal—the supposed engine of mobility. Starting with K-12 schools, education is funded through local property taxes. This means that if you are a richer kid, you get better schools. So schools are rigged from the get-go. Moving to college admissions, most four-year selective academic colleges have a race affirmative action policy and not a class affirmative action policy. That's by far the most common situation.

So who loses out when there's race-only affirmative action? Of course, the White working-class and poor applicants who usually get no priority given to them in admissions, but also the low-income and working-class applicants of color, because the colleges that only have race affirmative action policies try to fill their racial priority slots with wealthy international students and with people of color who come from upper-middle-class families.

One study found that elite and private colleges admit more students from the top 2 percent of the income spectrum than the bottom 50 percent (Espenshade, 2009). So it's a rigged system.

You might think, “No, it's a competition between race and class, and if we give more scarce scholarship slots to White working-class applicants, we will have to give less to people of color.” No, not true. Please do not fall into the scarcity thinking, because of legacy admissions. Legacies are the applicants whose parents and grandparents went to the same college. Legacy admissions are so common and so numerous that they outnumber all the sports scholarships and all the affirmative action slots and every other kind of special admissions advantage put together (Golden, 2007). There are more legacy admissions than all those put together. And this is just blatant classism. The people who already have educational advantages from their parents are more likely to get in.

This ought to be a scandal, we should make it a scandal, because this should not exist. It's blatant, ugly classism. And if legacy admissions were abolished there would be lots and lots of open slots for working-class and poor applicants of all races.

So you look through a class lens, and these kinds of institutionalized classism pop out. And it's just essential to see them, to name them, to speak up against classism as part of winning racial justice. At Class Action our vision is a world without classism, and we know perfectly well that you cannot get a world without classism without eliminating racism. But similarly uprooting racism is going to require tackling class and classism. So that's our goal here.

And the third way that we sometimes blow it in our antiracist work is by having our default culture be professional middle-class culture.

Of course, there are exceptions, but in general, who runs nonprofits? Who gets onto boards? Disproportionately college-educated professionals. And, really, disproportionately people whose parents were college-educated professionals, too. Management staff positions? Definitely heavily professional middle class and upper middle class, even in antiracist organizations, organizations full of people of color, with great racial affirmative action policies, there's still often a class bias. If there are high-school-educated people, or people with associates degrees or less in progressive nonprofits, it's usually as support staff with very little say over the policies or the programs or the messaging. And we are losing out because of that.

And if there are low-income people, poor people involved in progressive social justice groups, it's usually to give input, with no rewards and no clout. “We want to hear your voice.” That's a red flag that says, “We are not going to pay you.”

But I understand how it happens, because I have been on hiring committees a number of times, and you have a limited budget and you really need some complicated skills, such as financial planning, or the cultural capital to relate to the funders and the funding agencies. Those are some really hard skills. Okay. But why doesn't the progressive movement do more to train people? Why don't we have a pipeline of leadership development so that someone coming from a poor or working-class background who doesn't go to college can learn the skills that progressive nonprofits need?

Class Action and my old employer United for a Fair Economy have personnel policies that say you cannot require a certain degree to apply for a certain job. You can't say, "B.A. required." Of course, you can require certain knowledge and ask for certain skills needed to get the job done, but if you learned them another way, good for you. But those policies are rare.

What's the fallout? You have organizations run with the best intentions in the world by good-hearted, professional, middle-class, and upper-middle-class people. I found in my research that the way most social justice organizations are doing diversity and talking about antiracism is infused with professional middle-class culture. And that's alienating a lot of potential working-class and poor supporters of all races. I will give you some examples, starting with how we talk about racism. What is racism?

I think that we would agree that there's something limited when you just call it bigotry. That's the mainstream frame, what you see in the mainstream media. I think we share the goal of changing that and adding all the institutional kinds of racism that are missing from the bigotry frame. And often social change involves frame shifts: You are trying to get the general public to adopt a new frame, and that's part of the mission of the White Privilege Conference.

So who currently holds the institutionalized White supremacy frame? Well, I have some bad news for you.

I coded all mentions of race and racism at 37 progressive group meetings and in 61 interviews with activists, and I found that it was by far the most likely that professional, middle-class activists were the

ones bringing up the institutionalized White supremacy frame.

And the working-class people—and remember, these are activists, not the general public—used lot of different frames, but the most common was that mainframe bigotry frame. And only a quarter of the working-class people would use the institutionalized White supremacy frame, and it tended to be working-class leaders and the most politically experienced working-class activists. Mentions of the institutionalized racism frame by rank-and-file working-class and poor group members were almost nonexistent

So why do you think this is happening? Okay, how is the institutionalized White supremacy frame being spread? Sometimes through conferences like this. But mostly it's through people learning it at college, and in particular at colleges where there are critical race theory professors. In my research that is where people said they learned it; I saw so few signs that we have reached past the academic gated community. I ran into two working-class activists who had gone to the workshops of the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. So that group teaches the institutionalized racism frame outside academia, and so does the White Privilege Conference, and I know they're not the only ones. There are groups that are doing some reaching across the class divide, but not enough to have it reach most working-class and poor people.

And worse, when the professional middle-class activists tried to promote the institutionalized racism frame during the meetings observed in my study, it often backfired and alienated people. And one way that it backfired was the language that they used.

My former boss Meizhu Lui, the executive director of United for a Fair Economy, had been a hospital cafeteria worker. She had a lot of experience talking politics with working-class and working-poor union members. So when we started working on the project that became the *Color of Wealth* book, she said to me and the three women of color who are the other co-authors, “We will have no jargon. This is going to be in everyday language. Of course, we have to introduce some complicated things about policy, but we will explain clearly and use everyday vocabulary.”

So we toned down the rhetoric and did not use the words “hegemony” or “imperialism,” for example. If you go to our online bookstore (www.classism.org/store) and get *The Color of Wealth*, you will see that the term “White supremacy” doesn't occur in there. And I will tell you this: The term “White privilege” also does not appear in the book.

Uh, oh. I just said something risky: “Did she just say that?” Yeah, I just said that. Clearly that phrase works to mobilize some communities, because look, this conference has been growing every year. So why would you not say “White privilege”? Why not say it in *The Color of Wealth*? Not just because it's jargon in general, but also because “privilege” sounds luxurious and elite.

So if you hear a White working-class or poor person say, “I don't have privilege,” are they denying the realities of racism? Maybe. Probe and maybe you will find out they are, but maybe they are not, maybe they are just accurately describing their White working-class reality.

So I have a challenge for you all. Think of someone who has helped you this

week. Like a bus driver, cabdriver, hotel worker, or somebody who served you food or cleaned your hotel room. And you say you are here for a conference, and the person says to you, “Oh, what's the conference about?”

I want you to have an imaginary conversation in your head where you answer the person, and say what the conference is about without using the word “privilege” or “supremacy,” or any other terms not in everyday vocabulary. I will be silent for about 30 seconds and let you think, have your imaginary conversation.

Alright. So I would be really interested to hear how that thought experiment went. I'll bet some of you came up with some really great lines. So email me—at info@classism.org—and tell me or feel free to disagree with me for challenging our shared word. Feel free to come and talk to me.

On the *Color of Wealth* book tour we had to do that message crafting a lot. We were talking on radio and to audiences not already convinced of the *Color of Wealth* analysis of historical White advantages. And I found that in talking to White working-class and poor people, a little empathy went a long way.

So I would say things like, “As rough as this economy has been for White people who have to work for a living, it's been even harsher for most people of color.” And that would connect. That little bit of acknowledgment of someone's experience.

And we had to really change our way of talking. We were all people with college degrees; the five coauthors have various numbers of degrees, and in college they tell to you take the emotion out of your voice

and take the first-person stories out of what you write. And they tell you to use big abstractions—and those are bad communication practices no matter who your audience is. Right?

So some of us need a little communication help. We need an infusion of the working-class tradition of making political points by telling stories, to restore our communication ability. So we all five put our family stories into the book, into how we told the complicated story of the racial wealth divide. This is something I would say when on book tour:

Because my dad was a World War II-era White veteran, he got to go to college almost for free under the G.I. Bill and got a really cheap first mortgage. And because of those benefits, he was able to save for my college education and for his own retirement, so when he got old I didn't have to support him. But the vets of color were almost all excluded from those benefits by the regulations of the GI Bill. So then that generation of Black and Latino and Asian and Native American veterans, most of them were forced to be renters in urban or rural areas. And most of them got high school educations or less. So then the generations now in the workforce have had to support, in many cases, the elders in their family, and that has meant less money for the college education and down payments of children and grandchildren, and that's part of the explanation for the racial wealth gap we see today.

What we need in this country is something like the GI Bill, only for everyone this time. So reaching across the class divide would

mean changing our vocabulary and way of communicating and the stories we tell, but not just about language; it's about our practices, how we do diversity. There's some culture building up of doing diversity that's infused with professional, middle-class, and upper-middle-class culture, and I saw it backfiring with poor and working-class activists. Someone who has written about this a lot is Jane Ward (2008) in her book *"Respectably Queer."* Jane Ward studied three LGBTQ groups, but they could be any groups. Two of her stories I will tell briefly. First a big social service agency had an annual Diversity Day, and the low-level staff of color would groan when it was mentioned. "Oh, no!" And one support staff person of color asked, "Why do you have to talk about it so much? Why can't you just start doing the right thing now?" And, of course, Diversity Day was planned by a committee, and the committee was multiracial, but it was all college-educated professionals.

Now an even worse story from Ward's book. (This is this one that takes the cake, I think. I didn't see anything this bad in my own research.) So there was an all-volunteer group that planned Gay Pride parades, and the board of directors was all working-class, and half Black and half White. And some of the professional gays in the community said that this board was unprofessional and tried to replace some of them. In the one gay newspaper in the city someone wrote, "These people should be working at 7-Eleven not representing our community." The longtime president of the board was a lower-income African American gay man, and this new crop of board members said he didn't have the diversity skills to represent the group to funders and corporate sponsors and politicians of color and organizations of color and that a White professional gay did.

The new White guy had a lot of diversity work experience. So they replaced the Black working-class guy and made the White diversity professional be the president of the board.

This is not an unusual story. Look who gets paid as diversity consultants. The cultural capital to do diversity for big institutions is cultural capital you learn at elite universities. Which means that the people actually most affected by the problems are not recognized as having any expertise on solving the problems.

In my research too, I found four kinds of professional, middle-class cultural approaches that sometimes bombed with the working-class and poor members of these groups.

One was ideological litmus tests that require you to use certain lingo or believe in certain political analysis. For example, in one group, antiracist group, there was a proposal by an Antiracist Committee to reject all coalitions with any group that did not share its analysis of institutionalized White supremacy. And the working-class and poor members of the group, among others, said this made no sense and asked, "Why make ourselves smaller by rejecting potential allies?"

A second professional, middle-class cultural mistake is looking first and foremost inward, having all your examples of racism be inside the group, the internal race dynamics. Placing focused attention on an internal critique of the group was often led by professional, middle-class people. Not that you shouldn't talk about those things, but that should not be the extent of your examples. Working-class and poor people of all races mostly brought up racism in its harshest forms in the wider society.

And this was connected to the third professional-middle-class pitfall, which is more talk than action. I learned that working-class and poor activists suspect college-educated professional activists of being all talk, that they don't walk the talk. Working-class activists would monitor the group and its leaders, waiting to see if there was going to be some action coming out of all this talk. So over-relying on long and elaborate special sessions and workshops is a problem. Not that there's something wrong with workshops, but having that be the only place that you talk about racism is a problem, and having an excessive talk-to-action ratio is a problem.

And fourth, the norm of interrupting others' speech. You may have that word "interrupting" or the term "calling out oppression" in your vocabulary. I think that it sounds like a one-shot speech act is enough. You have spoken, so you have taken care of the problem.

George Lakey, who is a lifelong working-class activist and author, thinks the calling-out culture of finger pointing stems from elite, educated people feeling like they're entitled to sit in the seat of judgment and critique other people. Instead of thinking of it as interrupting or calling-out, think of it as digging in. Build your relationships not just with people targeted by the oppressive speech, but build a relationship with the offender too, and speak to them humbly like someone who has also said oppressive things in your life, as we all have. In Class Action workshops, we say "connect before correct": yes, you've got to bring it up when someone acts oppressively, but with human connection and respect, focused on long-term change, not just on being right or superior.

So those were the four ways of doing diversity that I saw infused with downsides of professional, middle-class culture that didn't go over well with working-class people. Every class culture has strengths, but also limitations, including professional middle-class culture.

By contrast, working-class activist cultures have strengths that we need in order to do antiracism better. Working-class activist cultures understand that change happens through strength in numbers, and strength comes through solidarity and unity. I heard that over and over and over again, from working-class and poor activists of all races.

So what would a more working-class way be of opposing institutionalized racism? There were four approaches I saw that worked well. One is to create a story that's got an "us" and a "them," in which the bad guy is outside of the group. So your first and worst examples of racism are the really, really hurtful examples from the wider society. It's important to start there and not start with or focus primarily on racism inside the group.

And all the activists I talked with were enthusiastic about concrete action, where the outcomes would benefit particular people of color. Getting out on somebody's picket line or testifying against police brutality or whatever—nobody of *any* class would criticize that method of being an ally against racism. In introducing the institutionalized White supremacy frame at meetings where most people weren't familiar with it, the brilliant working-class leaders would just weave it into the conversation, like "yeah, what the bank did, that's an example of corporate racism." So they wouldn't rely only on special

workshops. They would put it into everyday language.

And last and maybe most broadly, attentiveness to the unity of the group, understanding that most working-class activists see their strength coming from solidarity. And so when they talked about dynamics in the group, or how there's a subset of the group targeted by a certain oppression, working-class leaders would stress how tackling the problem would help the whole group reach its goals. The message is that sticking up for the subgroup is going to strengthen the unity and solidarity of the whole group. The superior calling-out behavior by college-educated activists, I saw a big contrast to how working-class people handled incidents with camaraderie, maybe over beer after the meeting, saying, "That was really messed up what you said. I love you, but you got to cut that out." It's just a really different tone from the finger wagging.

So to conclude, if we draw on working-class activists' traditions and cultural strengths, we are going to build bigger groups and bigger movements with a stronger unity among us.

I am talking about learning from the solidarity ethics of the old labor movement, where people called each other "brother" and "sister," and they said "all for one and one for all." And I am talking about the old African American movement tradition, where people feel a sense of linked fate across class; they also call each other "brother" and "sister," and say, "we will lift as we climb." And I am talking about the great community organizing tradition, where people in low-income community groups have an ethic of mutual aid and protection toward each other, like a family. So when we draw on these working-class activist

traditions, we stand together and we say, if anyone messes with any working-class or poor person, they have messed with all of us.

And if anyone messes with any person of color, they have messed with all of us.

And if anyone messes with any immigrant or Muslim or Arab or Jew, they have messed with all of us. If they mess

with any woman or transgender person or LGBTQ or young or old person they have messed with all of us.

If they mess with any of us, they have messed with all of us, because we are not leaving anyone behind.

Because none of us is free until all of us are free.

Thank you.

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