



RACIAL FAIRNESS AMERICA

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Reducing white racism

Ah, yes, the Holy Grail of racial fairness...

We have to do more than keep helping People of Color raise their standard of living and obtain more equal opportunities. As we've seen historically in Jewish communities worldwide, and in many Asian-American communities recently, a cultural dedication to education and achievement can lift people out of poverty and into affluence and even into influence, yet discrimination and even violence persist. Racism is not caused by what people on the receiving end do, but by the oppressors, the bigots. In America, mostly the white people (at least a significant portion of them).¹

What can the Racial Fairness project do about it? There *is* something, on the local level, and as our project extends its reach, on a wider level, too.

1. Education / Expanding people's understanding

Though we probably won't get much opportunity to educate died-in-the-wool white racists, we do intend to speak with groups of white people who will be a mix of anti-racists and moderate (maybe sometimes subconscious) racists. We'll be informing them about historical and present racism and its revolting effects. We'll be sharing real stories about real people. We'll be emphasizing the *unfairness* of these effects, how they make people miserable and often ruin lives, even generations of lives. We'll do our best to make all of this present and personal, without making people we don't know defensive by accusing them individually of racism. Our focus will mostly be "systemic racism" – racism built into most of the ways our society works, where white people benefit whether they're racist or not.

This will help, because quite frankly many white people are clueless about these things. Education precedes sympathy, and we're about doing a lot of education in a lot of forms.

2. Building relationships

If a white person agrees to be a tutor, an ESL teacher, a babysitter, a driver, a volunteer worker at a small business or a farm or a community event, or any number of other opportunities, this is almost always going to happen person to person and usually face-to-face. If the interaction is ongoing, some kind of personal connection is likely to spring up. And even without that, the white helper is going to directly observe the humanity of the person or family on the receiving

¹ "Mostly" white people? Yes. There is also racism between races and even within races (e.g. "colorism"). But these are not a primary focus of ours right now.

end, and that of others who end up having a role. Racism makes people look at others as things rather than people (slaves were property, not persons, in the antebellum south; Indigenous people were seen as “savages”, a different species).

Establishing a relationship where two or more people are working together toward a common goal tears down these phony constructs. It shows us people for who they really are, and replaces bias-founded fear or disdain with a true human-to-human connection. Often a mutually appreciative one.

3. The giving effect

It might seem that thinking about giving implies a certain benevolent intention and that following through on that intention further solidifies the benevolence. That is probably true in one-on-one interactions, but probably not so much when the gift is going to an organization rather than an individual. This is why groups like Save the Children can be so successful turning a financial transaction into a long-term personal commitment – they foster direct communication between giver and receiver.

Such a relationship is a big positive in reducing racial prejudice. But also, there is that extra reinforcement of having been a giver and seen it turn out well.

A variety of studies, mostly of romantic or marital situations, show that (surprise!) giving tends to make the *giver* feel more affectionately toward the receiver, because the giver has *invested* in the relationship, and has a “sunk cost” in making it succeed.

The receiver may feel more ambiguous. Yes, they might (or might not!) feel gratitude for the favor. Either way, they also might feel some sense of obligation to the giver that they really don’t want to feel.

But while this has not been tested as far as we know in giving between strangers, the negative effect on the receiver should be less, or even a positive one, if s/he is receiving something that was desired or even requested. Then the gratitude is legitimate and natural, and in that case *both* parties experience a reciprocal form of pleasure from the transaction, enhancing it for both.

The main point in this context, though, is that when white folks provide a direct, face-to-face, and especially ongoing service to People of Color, the white people will feel good about what they’ve done and good about the person or people they’ve been helping. It’s hard to be racist toward someone you care about and with whom you’ve been working closely. Of course some personal interactions are oil-and-water situations where neither side ends up feeling good about it. But in general, we believe that direct service by one person for another generally has a beneficial effect on the *giver*, and undermines any actual or latent feeling of racism.

That is why the Racial Fairness project promotes the donation of time and skill, not just donating financial and material goods. Every such gift of oneself puts another crack in racist America.

How much does all this matter?

It would be great to have an anti-racist magic wand. The Racial Fairness project is not one of those. Instead, it works its influence one person at a time. But if we can get *multitudes* of people helping other people, then just maybe some sort of magic will ensue.