

## **Guidelines and Suggestions for ERUUF Discussions Involving Racial or Multicultural Topics**

ERUUF's Multicultural Team (MCT) encourages programs and discussions on multicultural topics. We also realize that such discussions can stir strong emotions and may sometimes inflict deep hurt despite good intentions. We have prepared these suggestions to help groups have discussions that value the input and participation of all people.

The Multicultural Team encourages every member of ERUUF to participate programs at ERUUF and elsewhere designed to deepen awareness and sensitivity to how racism works and how it affects us all. ERUUF will soon be offering shorter versions of the Dismantling Racism workshop and can recommend other workshops in the community. We also recommend two excellent books: *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin DiAngelo and *Centering: Navigating Race, Authenticity, and Power in Ministry*, edited by Mitra Rahnema. Robin DiAngelo also has an excellent TED talk on the theme of white fragility.

In the section below there are links to websites and other sources of additional information. (For a digital version with active links, search for "Multicultural Discussions" on the ERUUF website.) We also encourage you to consider the following guidelines and suggestions for leaders and participants in discussions involving racial or multicultural topics:

### **Things to be aware of--**

- Whatever our racial or ethnic background, we all have [biases](#). Our goal should not be to avoid bias or pretend we don't have biases, but to be aware of them and make the choice to set biases aside as much as we can.
- Racism is more than personal prejudice. (See definitions at the end of this document.) Systemic racism is prejudice plus power. Most of the power in our society is controlled by the dominant White majority. The lack of societal power by People of Color (POC) makes racism a White phenomenon. Trying to make a case for "reverse racism" or "Black on Black racism" seems to be an attempt to divert attention from the reality of White privilege and dominance.
- Be aware of the tendency for [White privilege](#) to be present in ways that most White people don't see because it is the water that they swim in. Without realizing it, White people often expect and guide discussions so as to help White people stay comfortable. The tendency of some White people to get defensive about White privilege or Black experiences with racism is sometimes called "White fragility" and can limit the possibility for open and honest discussion.
- Race has been shown to be primarily a social construct that categorizes people with certain "skin-deep" characteristics into groups and then tends to generalize about everyone in that group. Racialized science seeks to explain human population

differences in health, intelligence, education, and wealth as the consequence of immutable, biologically based differences between "racial" groups. "[Race as Biology Is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem is Real](#)" provides anthropological and historical perspectives on social construction of race.

- [Microaggressions](#) may happen during a discussion. A micro-aggression is a "subtle but offensive comment or action directed at a minority or other non-dominant group that is often unintentional and unconsciously reinforces a stereotype." For example, a White person says to a POC: "You speak so well" or "I don't see Black."

### **Things you can do individually and as a group:**

- Create a simple covenant or set of guidelines for your discussion. Guidelines not only set a tone for treating one another with respect; they also give you an agreement you can use to pause the discussion and talk about a problem if it arises. We have included a simple example of discussion guidelines later in this document.
- Speak from your own experience and feelings, and affirm others in theirs. Remember that each participant is an individual and cannot speak for any other individual within a larger group they belong to or identify with. People of Color (POC) cannot speak for all POC nor can they be expected to educate White people about racism.
- Use "I" statements, rather than "Most people. . ." Even using "we" leaves open the question of who is included in the statement to follow. Be specific.
- Avoid generalizing about any group of people. Try to be aware of assumptions or generalizations you may make about groups of people without realizing it. Generalizing about people based on skin color without associating these differences with sociological, political, cultural and historical explanations is harmful. People seeking racial equity must value differences without attributing them to scientifically discredited concepts of race.
- In any discussion, focus on listening first and seeking to understand. Seek to get to know people as individuals, while learning about particular attributes. There are differences among POC as well as common experiences.
- If you feel that something insensitive has been said or done, rather than attack the "offender," ask if the group can stop to consider what is happening. Say that you're not comfortable with what has just happened or been said. Ask if the group can explore what happened not to criticize or judge anyone, but to increase understanding and awareness.
- Expect to make mistakes when talking about racial and multicultural topics. Most of us have limited experience with open and honest conversation in mixed-race groups. Mistakes are part of how we learn. Acknowledging mistakes and apologizing when

appropriate are ways we can deepen relationships and build real bridges across differences.

- Ask yourselves: Are POC encouraged to speak, are their perspectives honored equally by the dominant White culture, and are they allowed to talk about their experience of racism without White people getting defensive?

**An example of discussion guidelines for multicultural topics:**

In our time together we will seek to do the following:

- Create a sacred space for deep listening, sharing, and honoring each contribution.
- Speak from our own experience without speaking for others.
- Listen respectfully and seek to understand.
- Ensure that all have an opportunity to speak.
- Speak from kindness and avoid shaming and blaming.
- Recognize that experiences with racism can stir strong feelings that can be expressed and shared without being destructive.
- Ask questions instead of making assumptions.
- Be open to exploring misunderstandings or hurt feelings in a way that does not find fault but seeks to deepen understanding.
- Keep personal sharing confidential.

**Definitions of Racism**  
Black Concerns Working Group  
Unitarian Universalist Association

<b>PREJUDICE</b>	<p>“Unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand without knowledge, thought or reason.” -from <i>Random House Dictionary, 1967</i></p>
<b>RACISM AND WHITE RACISM</b>	<p>“Any attitude, action, or institutional structure which subordinates a person or group because of their color... Racism is not just a matter of attitudes: actions and institutional structures can also be a form of racism.” -from <i>Racism in America and How to Combat It, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1970</i></p> <p>“Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves having the power to carry out systematic discriminatory practices through the major institutions of our society.” -from <i>What Curriculum Leaders Can Do About Racism</i> by Dr. Delmo Deila-Dora, New Detroit, Inc. 1970</p>
<b>INSTITUTIONAL RACISM</b>	<p>“Power + Prejudice = Racism.” -from <i>Developing New Perspectives on Race</i>, by Pat A. Bidol</p> <p>“Institutions have great power to reward and penalized. They reward by providing career opportunities for some people and foreclosing them for others. They reward as well by the way social goods are distributed -- by deciding who receives training and skills, medical care, formal education, political influence, moral support and self-respect, productive employment, fair treatment by the law, decent housing, self-confidence and the promise of a secure future for yourself and children.”</p> <p>“One of the clearest indicators of institutional racism is the exclusion of Black members of society from positions of control and leadership.” -from <i>Institutional Racism in America</i>, Knowles and Prewitt, Prentice-Hall, 1969</p> <p>“Some of the most conspicuous examples of institutional racism are in housing patterns; segregated schools; discriminatory employment and promotion policies; segregated churches; flight control of newspapers, radio, and TV; routes selected for construction of expressways or freeways; and the textbooks which ignore or distort the role of black people. -from <i>What Curriculum Leaders Can Do About Racism</i></p>
<b>ETHNO-CENTRISM</b>	<p>“A tendency to view alien cultures with disfavor and a resulting sense of inherent superiority.” -from <i>Webster’s 3<sup>rd</sup> International Dictionary</i></p>
<b>CULTURAL RACISM</b>	<p>“When Whites use power to perpetuate their cultural heritage and impose it upon others while at the same time destroying the culture of ethnic minorities.” from <i>Teaching Ethnic Studies</i>, National Council for Social Studies. 1973. (Power + Ethnocentrism = Cultural Racism)</p>