

Working Assumptions for Anti-Racism Training*
Doing Our Own Work: A Seminar for Anti-Racist White People
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1. All prejudice was taught to us and we often resisted this teaching. If we choose to, we can un-learn it.
2. None of us "invented" oppression; it is a legacy we inherited. Though its creation is not our fault, we must now accept responsibility for our role in its continued existence.
3. Racism, sexism, heterosexism and every other form of oppression are simultaneously systems of oppression and systems of advantage.
4. Most of us have had the experience as a target of oppression, as well as the experience of privilege.
5. Racism in the United States is a problem of white supremacy that has world-wide manifestations. It involves an unequal distribution of power for people with white skin privilege in four main areas: a) the power to make and enforce decisions; b) access to resources; c) the power to set and determine standards for what is considered appropriate behavior; and d) the power to define reality.
6. Racism is a systemic problem with individual, institutional, and cultural manifestations. Personal and interpersonal change are very important ingredients in the work of anti-racism, but they must also be grounded in understanding and changing systemic structures. Individual change alone cannot undo systemic oppression.
7. Racism stereotypes, demeans, exploits, and oppresses people of color. Despite centuries of racism in this country and the terrible damage it can inflict, people of color have persisted against enormous odds to love themselves and others, to keep community alive, and to encourage and strengthen one another in the effort to resist racism.
8. The racist conditioning that white people have undergone has thwarted their wholeness as human beings: it has sometimes robbed them of close and trusting relationships, given them a false perception of reality, isolated them from the majority of the world's peoples, blunted their imagination, limited their vision, and hampered their ability to love.
9. White supremacy is embedded in the history, social fabric, and institutions of U.S. society. This is not only an historical fact but a current reality. Therefore, racism is always and everywhere present.
10. Those who are targeted by racism and those who benefit from racism have different experiences, responsibilities, and work in the effort to dismantle white racism.

11. Systemic oppressions (sexism, classism, heterosexism, racism, etc.) intersect, but not all oppressions are the same. Each has its own history and implications, requiring specific strategies for change.
12. Dominant social groups routinely make a practice of consciously or unconsciously appropriating the customs, traditions, objects, or rituals of subordinate social groups, removing them from their original cultural or spiritual context and using them for the personal edification or financial gain of people in the dominant group.
13. "There is no hierarchy of oppression." Trying to rank one group's pain over another distracts us and prevents us from dismantling any and all oppression.
14. All of us have much to celebrate about our histories and our ethnicities; we have rich cultural traditions and proud histories of struggle.
15. In every community, there is a history of anti-racist action and resistance. It is the responsibility of white anti-racist allies to learn about and honor that history.
16. The nature of structural power and privilege is that it is often invisible to those who have it. This means that white people are often unaware of the unearned advantages and conferred dominance that racism provides them.
17. Individuals, organizations, and communities can and do grow and change.
18. Racism is a spiritual, as well as political and economic, dis-order and therefore requires spiritual as well as material attention and responses.
19. In order to sustain the work of confronting and dismantling racism, we need to share experiences, insights, wisdom, energy, hope, and encouragement with each other.
20. This work is never done once and for all.

* These assumptions are drawn, in part, from three sources:
Naming and Claiming Our Histories," by Donna K. Bivens and Nancy D. Richardson in The Brown Papers (Vol.1 No.2 Nov. 1994) from the Women Theological Center in Boston, MA.; "Some Working Assumptions: For White Activists Seeking to Recruit Other Whites as Allies for Eliminating Racism" by Ricky Sherover-Marcuse and; cultural bridges.