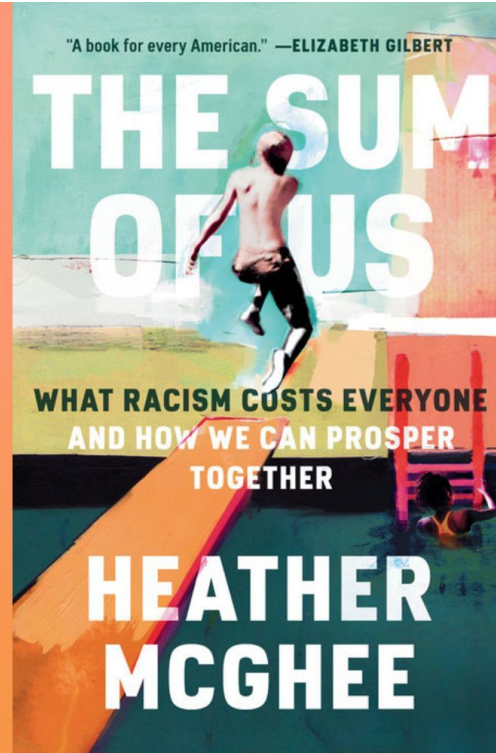


# Addressing Racist Blindspots in our Movement

Sanjeev Sriram, MD, MPH and  
Robertha Barnes, MS-4

# Inspiration for this workshop:



# Structure of Workshop

- A little bit of theory and history
- Obstacles to starting tough conversations
- Start tough conversations using FAQs

# Goals

- Redirect perspectives to bring racism closer to home
- Replicate this workshop in your community
- Have tough conversations locally
- Organize and agitate

# St. Louis drains its great public swimming pool



- 1919: Fairground Park pool = water park
- 1949: City admin desegregates parks & pools
  - Fairground Park Riot: white mob of 5,000 attacks
- City returns to segregation, “public safety”
- NAACP lawsuit reopens pool to all
- 1950: swims down from 313,000 to 10,000
- 1956: City closes the pool
- “... the fight over public pools revealed that for white Americans, the word **public** ... meant ‘**of the white people.**’”

# How did I not know about this? A Blindspot

- History → Legend → Myth ...
- “And things that never should’ve been forgotten are lost”
- But the racism that literally drained pools is not lost. It has adapted.
- “Assets of community” → “privileges of a club”
- Systemic racism works insidiously to prime people against collective (“pooled”) resources/endeavors



# Worsening Blindspot for Progressives



- Racism wrecked Truman's plans for national health insurance
- Racism **divided Medicare and Medicaid**, compromise with "states' rights"
- Racism's impact on the design, perception, and implementation of the ACA
  - 2021: white support still under 50%





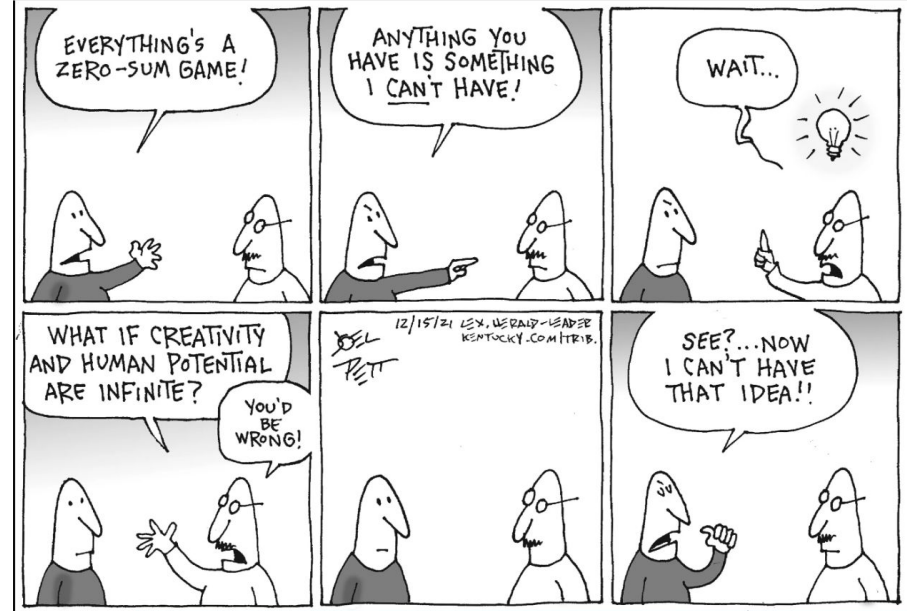
# Racism's Threat to Our Current Movement

- Majority of America's uninsured and underinsured are BIPOC
- Does the single payer movement represent the people who need it most?
- How do we inoculate communities against racist socio-political forces opposing strong public resources?
- How do we undo decades of racist priming?



# The Theory of “Zero-Sum Hierarchy”

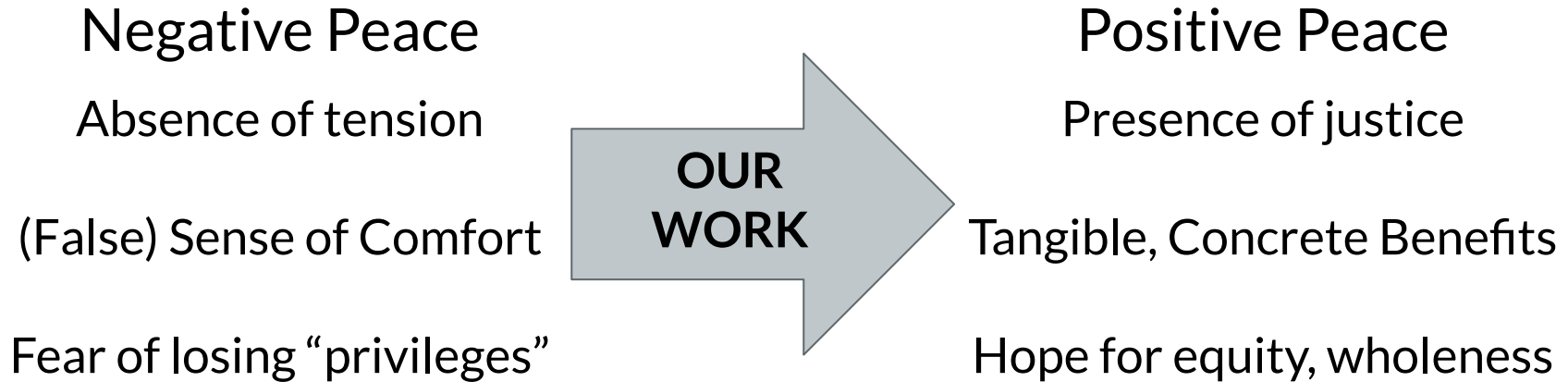
- Many white Americans on race: here's us, there's them.
- Deserving vs undeserving: false sense of meritocracy poorly veils racial hierarchies
- **More for the undeserving leaves less for the deserving**
- Ignores how socioeconomics, history, and policies perpetuate uneven playing fields





# GOAL: Moving from a negative to a positive peace

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's Letter from a Birmingham Jail:
  - "... the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace, which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice..."



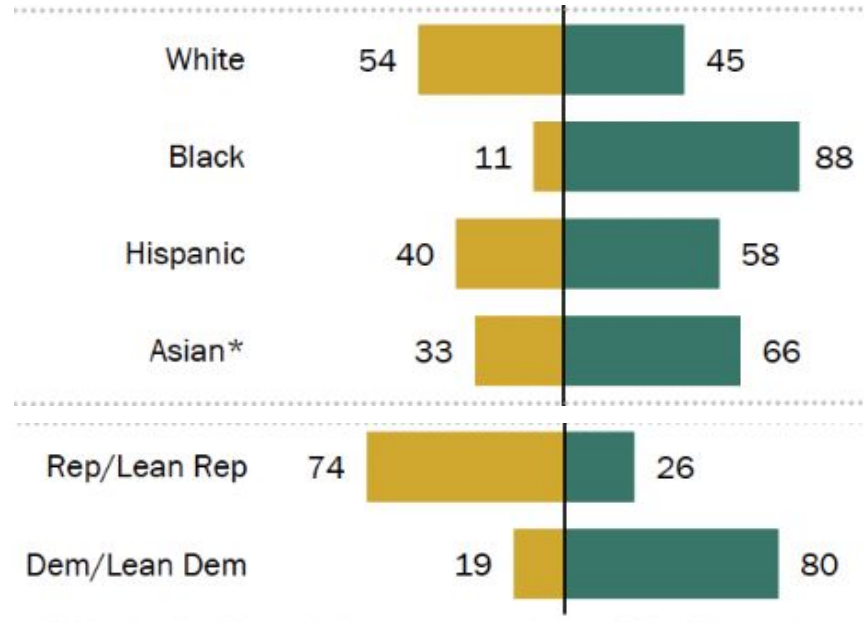
# What if we just don't talk about race?

- Comfort zone of suburban whiteness: absence of tension
- Fails repeatedly. Perpetuates gaslighting and avoidance of difficult work

## Views on racial discrimination differ by race, ethnicity and political party

*% of U.S. adults saying when it comes to racial discrimination, the bigger problem for the country today is ...*

■ People NOT seeing racial discrimination where it really does exist  
■ People seeing racial discrimination where it really does not exist



# Systemic racism hurts BIPOC ... and white people?

- Don't forget who must be at the center of racial equity/justice
- The burden of systemic racism is most dangerous for BIPOC
- Increasing spillover to white people, especially (but not limited to) low-income and rural whites, over the last 40 years



© SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

# Systemic racism hurts BIPOC ... and white people?



- UCLA Center for Policing Equity report on Covid-19
- “Any serious effort to fight this disease has to **treat inequity as a driver** of infection and death for everyone, rather than an unfortunate consequence for other people”
- “...the burdens of the most vulnerable – and racism specifically – pose a **collective threat**.”

# GOAL

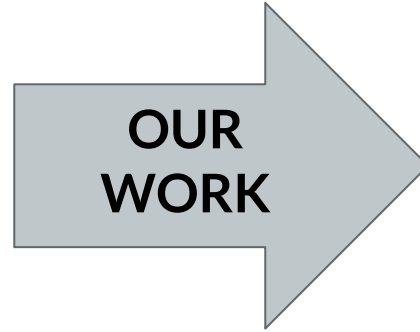
## Negative Peace

Absence of tension

(False) Sense of Comfort

Fear of losing “privileges”

Dismantle “misfortune”



## Positive Peace

Presence of justice

Tangible, Concrete Benefits

Hope for equity, wholeness

Build equality

# Truth, Racial Healing, & Transformation (TRHT)

- Vision of Dr. Gail Christopher, expert in public health and social policy
- Developed in 2016 with 175 experts convened by the Kellogg Foundation
- **NOT reconciliation**: “connotes restoration of friendly relations – ‘reuniting’ or ‘bringing together again after conflict’ ... the US needs transformation.”
- Community leaders gather representative group of people to identify community decisions that have created hierarchies in law, separation, economy
- Individual stories → **narrative change** → desired policy change
  - Identify manifestations of the belief in human hierarchy
  - Replace with “stories honoring full complexity of our humanity ... forging more equitable future.”



# Truth, Racial Healing, & Transformation (TRHT)

- Community racial history
  - Historical analysis of policy and place, of race, and people from distant past to present
  - Realize fallacies of racial hierarchy
  - “... the great lie at the root of our nation’s founding was a belief in the hierarchy of human value”
- Community visioning process
  - Convening multiracial, multifaceted group of people to develop a shared community vision
  - “... the proximity of so much difference forces us to admit our common humanity”

# TRH&T Practice Session: Question #1

**What are your initial thoughts on the “Zero Sum Hierarchy?”**

*“Settler colonialism set up a zero-sum competition for land that would shape the American economy to the present day at an unforgivable cost....The narrative that white people should see the well-being of people of color as a threat to their own is one of the most powerful subterranean stories in America”*

## TRH&T Practice Session: Question #2

**Heather McGee postulates that racial hatred is the primary reason America won't fund public resources like a national healthcare system. Before today, what was your primary reasoning?**

# TRH&T PTRH&T Practice Session: Question #2 Practice Session: Question #3

**Can you think of other examples in society of the white majority's willingness to accept the suffering of "others?"**

## TRH&T Practice Session: Question #4

**Is there a blindspot in the M4A Movement? How can we apply the knowledge of America's history of defunding public resources to the M4A Movement? What new strategies should be implemented?**

## TRH&T Practice Session: Question #5

**What do you think of America's Unwillingness to talk about race? What the the barriers to talking about race with your friends/family/community? Would you be willing to host a conversation about race within your activist community?**



# Resources & Guides to Host Your Conversations

- Heather McGee's The Sum of Us
- John Dittmer's The Good Doctors
- Ijeoma Oluo's So You Want To Talk About Race
- Beverly Tatum's Can We Talk About Race?: And other conversations in an era of school resegregation
- Kellogg Foundation's Truth, Racial Healing, & Transformation guidebook:
  - <https://healourcommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/TRHTImplementationGuide.pdf>