Addressing Racist Blindspots in our Movement

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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…”

**Negative Peace**
- Absence of tension
- (False) Sense of Comfort
- Fear of losing “privileges”

**Positive Peace**
- Presence of justice
- Tangible, Concrete Benefits
- Hope for equity, wholeness

**OUR WORK**
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
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All adults 45 53
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
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

OUR WORK
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”
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”
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?
Can you think of other examples in society of the white majority’s willingness to accept the suffering of “others?”
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: