

Racial Equity and Society: A Seminar for Community Change Leaders

Convened by:
Roundtable on Community Change
The Aspen Institute

January 5th – 9th 2005
Palm Beach, FL

Wednesday

January 5th
(evening session)

Introduction and reception

Purpose:

To discuss the Structural Racism framework and share ideas about the potential possibilities and limitations the framework offers.

Readings:

Aspen Institute, Roundtable on Community Change (2004) *Structural Racism and Community Building*

Discussion Questions

- What insights does the structural racism framework offer? The *Structural Racism and Community Building* book outlined multiple factors at play within our communities, what is most controversial about this framework? What is most intriguing?

Thursday

January 6th
(morning session)

The history of ideas and the contemporary relevance

Purpose:

To reflect on what are often referred to as “national values” or “American values.” To identify competing perspectives and tease out ways tensions unfold and shape popular and political debates about important social outcomes.

Readings:

Marshall, Thurgood (1987) “Commentary: Reflections on the Bicentennial of the US Constitution” *Harvard Law Review* (November).

Reynolds, William Bradford (1987) “Another View: Our Magnificent Constitution” *Vanderbilt Law Review* (November).

Sunquist, Christian (2002) “Equal Opportunity, Individual Liberty, and Meritocracy in Education: Reinforcing Structures of Privilege and Inequality” *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy*, IX(1): 227-47.

US Supreme Court Case: The Civil Rights Cases (October 15, 1883) and
US Supreme Court Case: Plessy v. Ferguson (May 18, 1896)

Discussion Questions

- Certain values are held up as fundamentally American (e.g., justice, individualism, meritocracy, equal opportunity and equality) what groups were considered in the conceptualization of these values and why might that be an important point for reflection? Are these “national values” universal, that is to say, do they manifest uniformly across social groups?

Thursday

January 6th

(afternoon session)

Prevailing democratic ideals, fluid racial categories and resilient positions of privilege

Purpose:

To think critically about meaning of “race” by discussing the historical and contemporary relevance of racial identity. To begin developing a common language and shared understanding of central concepts underlying discussions of race within our communities, organizations, and public policy arenas.

Readings:

Macintosh, Peggy (1989) “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”

powell, john, Michael Omi, and Manuel Pastor – (2001) “Making place and making race: Community building, structural racism and America’s changing demographics”

Supreme Court of California Case: The People v. George W. Hall (October, 1854)

Winant, Howard (2000) “The theoretical status of the concept of race” in Back and Solomos (eds.) *Theories of Race and Racism*. New York: Routledge Press.

Discussion Questions:

- Contemporary theories about race tends accept that racial categories have been “socially constructed” and reject many of the historical perspectives that define race as an “objective condition.” What do these terms mean? Can you imagine any ways that the conceptual shift, from “objective” to “social,” affected popular perceptions about social conditions?
- In both national and global arenas “whiteness” is generally considered a privileged social position? What are the implications of “white privilege” on your community’s history and current reform efforts? Why isn’t there more discussion about “white privilege?”
- Over the past thirty years, the American economic and demographic landscape has been transformed by an array of factors; chief among them is the influx of new immigrants. Given the “political currency” of racial categories, coupled with tacit acceptance of “whiteness” as the most privileged position on what is often referred to as a “racial hierarchy,” how have newly arrived racial and ethnic groups been situated along the “racial hierarchy?” How can we explain the fixed social position for some groups and the fluidity for others? How are social positions along the hierarchy determined?

Friday

January 7th

(morning session)

Popular explanations and alternative perspectives: The advantages and limitations

Purpose:

To explore the three most common explanations of racial disparity: individual, institutional and structural perspectives and articulate the similarities and differences in definitions, underlying assumptions, and beliefs about change. To analyze ways these perspectives unfold in our communities, organizations and with in public policy debates

Readings:

Eitzen, Stanley D. and Kelly Eitzen Smith (2003) *Experiencing Poverty: Voices from the Bottom* "Individual/cultural and structural explanations" p. 15-38.

Multiple levels of Racism – adapted from Ilana Shapiro (2002) *Training for Racial Equity and Inclusion: A Guide to Selected Programs*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.

Young, Iris Marion (2003) "Responsibility and Structural Injustice" Prepared for presentation at the Political Theory Workshop, Princeton University (Draft)

Discussion Questions:

- Explanations of racial disparity and prescriptions for change can be articulated with an individual/cultural, institutional or structural lens, which perspective most frequently informs public policies and institutional change initiatives supported within your community or organization? In what ways has comparing the three perspectives illuminated, obscured or affirmed your preexisting notions? Are there important differences between perspectives?
- The term "*ideology*" is often used to mean: cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes that explain and justify social systems, and are maintained through imbalanced power/political relationships, do you think there is a "dominant" *ideology* in America? How would you characterize it? How do the three perspectives reinforce and/or challenge the dominant ideology?
- What are some of the widely held beliefs in your community that explain longstanding racial/ethnic disparity in key opportunity areas (e.g., education, employment, housing, health, criminal justice)? Which of the three perspectives most accurately captures the community's beliefs?

Friday

January 7th

(afternoon session)

“Racial equity ideals” vs. “Racial diversity tactics”

Purpose:

To unpack the term “racial equity” and focus on its meaning and implications across scales (e.g., micro-macro, community-state, and organization-field) and over time and to envision social change.

Readings:

Aspen Institute, Roundtable on Community Change (2003) “Racial equity vision statement”

Discussion Questions:

- The frequent use of “racial equity” and “racial diversity” suggests increased consideration of “racial issues” but the terms are also frequently conflated. In what way are “racial equity ideals” and “racial diversity tactics” distinct concepts? What does it mean to accept racial equity as a guiding principle within your organization or community? How may that be different from embracing diversity?
- What does racial equity look like? What needs to change in order to achieve it? Why develop a “macro” vision statement when your professional concerns are located within communities and/or regions?

Saturday

January 8th

(morning session)

Practicum:

Develop a Racial Equity Theory of Change (RETOC)

Purpose:

To specify central components of the RETOC process and to highlight the contributions and limitations of the process. To facilitate discussion about the rationale for linking structural racism and the RETOC. To support teams as they define a long-term racial equity goal and identify various underlying factors.

Recourses and Tools:

Aspen Institute, Roundtable on Community Change (2003) “A racial equity theory of change”

Helpful Hints:

- A racial equity long-term goal should include...

Saturday

January 8th

(afternoon session)

Practicum:

The RETOC: Think structurally, act locally, and develop strategic alliances

Purpose:

To identify central public policies, institutional practices, and popular cultural representations (PPRs) believed to directly affect the important “underlying factors” of your racial equity goal.

Helpful Hints:

PPR

Powerbrokers
Strategic alliances

Sunday
January 9th

Home Work: Sustain motivation, build momentum and communication

Purpose:

To develop a “work plan” or “agenda” that can help teams maintain individual/organizational motivation and participation but also fosters a sense of collective accomplishment. To discuss foreseeable challenges when “reframing” and “communicating” issues, and begin to develop “smart” communication strategies.

Resources and Tools:

Applied Research Center (2002) excerpt from the *Racial Justice Education and Action Manual*

Things to consider:

- What are the challenges of applying a racial equity lens? Can you think of any suggestions for overcoming these challenges?

Distill and analyze strategies going forward

Purpose:

To analyze local community strategies for changing policies, practices and cultural representations to promote racial equity. What is common across communities and what is context specific? Are there opportunities for cross-community problem solving?