

To imagine and pursue racial justice

Matthew Desmond^{a*} and Mustafa Emirbayer^b

^a*Society of Fellows, Harvard University, Cambridge, USA;* ^b*Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA*

At the conclusion of many courses on race and racism, students, having learned, some for the first time, about the existence, origins, and complex dimensions of racial domination in America, are left pondering their next steps. ‘What is to be done?’ many ask. ‘And what, exactly, is it that we want?’ Important as they are, these questions too often are given insufficient attention, usually addressed at the end of the semester, sometimes only on the final day of class. And students inquiring about the most effective ways to strive toward racial justice are at a loss to find a single comprehensive source that provides them with basic analytical guidance about the goals one should work toward (the ends) or the strategies one should employ to achieve those goals (the means). We believe that students would benefit greatly from such a source, and we attempt to offer one here. To effectively address racial domination, we argue, one must have not only an idea of the means with which to struggle on behalf of a reconstructed racial order, but also an idea of the ends for which one is struggling. Accordingly, in the first major section of this article, we specify three ends: (1) a society where racial domination is addressed intelligently; (2) a society that embraces racial justice in all its arenas; and (3) a society that values and practices multiculturalism – offering a glimpse of what a society without racial domination might look like. In the following section, we specify the means – emphasizing four levels or sites of change having to do with: (1) ourselves; (2) our inner circle; (3) our institutions; and (4) our nation – offering some guidance as to how we each can do our part to bring forth a more racially just society. Although we believe this article will provide guidance for advanced scholars and instructors, we have composed it primarily with a broader audience in mind.

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Personal and civic responsibility

No, you weren’t there. You weren’t there when European tradesmen kidnapped families from Africa and shipped them across the ocean, tossing the

*Corresponding author. Email: mdesmond@fas.harvard.edu

dead and sick overboard, to be separated and shackled, branded and beaten and worked. It wasn't your idea to destroy American Indians' way of life, to steal their land, to outlaw their religion, to enforce a system of colonization that brought them to extinction's cliff-edge. 'Manifest Destiny' was not your cry; you did not load your guns and push the people of Mexico back until Texas and California were ours. You had nothing to do with America's racist citizenship requirements, which tore so many Asian families apart and led to the brutal exploitation of Asian workers. It wasn't your idea. Blood is not on your hands.

It is true: None of us are personally or directly responsible for the wrongs inflicted by – or to – our ancestors. But all of us are responsible for repairing the damage, for cleaning up the mess. Why? Because responsibility is more – so much more – than simply our duty to answer for deeds we ourselves commit. We can distinguish between *personal* and *civic* responsibility (Arendt 2003). Personal responsibility is connected to things directly asked of you and wrongs you have committed. If you are a student, it is your personal responsibility to attend lectures and complete assignments; if you steal your roommate's laptop, it is your personal responsibility to return it and make things right.

Civic responsibility, on the other hand, is connected to your ability – your power – to change your community and beyond. Whereas personal responsibility has to do with your connection to the *problem*, civic responsibility is about your connection to the *solution*. If a heavy storm causes a levee to break and flood waters to come rushing toward your town, you are not personally responsible for the flood, of course, but you are civically responsible for protecting your town and its citizens. It is not the levee, but the sandbag, that has your name on it.

The idea of civic responsibility implies that we have an obligation to people other than ourselves and our close friends and family. It means that we have an obligation to justice; that we are responsible for the dispossessed. This fact remains even if we had nothing to do with bringing about their dispossession. But, honestly, how many of us – white and non-white alike – can claim to have nothing to do with the suffering of others? You weren't there at the beginning, that's true enough. But, as scholars have shown, accumulation and disaccumulation, privilege and disadvantage, are inseparable (Brown et al. 2003). Where were your shoes, shirt, and underwear made? Didn't part of the money you paid at the mall find its way into the pockets of those running sweatshops in New York City's Chinatown or on the Mexican border? Do you clean your apartment with chemicals developed in the poor black communities of the Mississippi Delta? Where does your trash go? Is it dumped on an American Indian Reservation nearby? Do you secure a feeling of safety by backing 'tough on crime' politicians, who build more prisons and lengthen mandatory sentences, causing poor blacks and Latinos to bear the brunt of their scourge? Do you wallow only in your

own oppression, refusing to reach out to – or even to notice – other people under the hard heel of domination? Do you believe that your pain is greatest, a conviction that only fortifies racial domination by eroding the possibility of interracial and interethnic coalitions and by causing rifts between blacks and Latinos, Chinese and Koreans, poor whites and poor American Indians? Perhaps, when it comes to racial domination, personal and civic responsibility are not so easily divorced. Perhaps our hands are not as clean as we once thought.

‘But I have done nothing!’ you protest. Exactly: You have done nothing. Today, racial domination persists, not only because politicians and businessmen exploit racial divisions for their own gain, but because millions of us, busy with our own lives, hunker down in the shade, indifferent to the suffering of others. We might hope for the best, but we refuse to ‘stand in the bright sun and cast a long shadow,’ in civil rights activist Bob Moses’s elegant words. As Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel (1986) once said, ‘The opposite of love is not hate; it’s indifference. The opposite of beauty is not ugliness; it’s indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy; it’s indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, but indifference between life and death.’ We can drop bombs on civilian targets without being the one who pushes the button. We can incarcerate thousands of black men without sitting on the jury. We can contribute to the suffering of America’s immigrants without ever doing the deporting ourselves. Indifference is never neutrality; it is loyalty to the status quo. To quote Lorraine Hansberry, the great African American playwright, ‘The acceptance of our present condition is the only form of extremism that discredits us before our children’ (quoted in Nemiroff 1969, 72).

Indifference sometimes is the product of ignorance. Some people simply do not know the nature and depth of the matter. There is a small library’s worth of research to rectify that problem. This article, by contrast, assumes that you have some grasp on racial domination – that you are familiar with its origin and history, how it penetrates various realms of society. Having familiarized yourselves with the problem of racial injustice, what do you do with all this knowledge? What is to be done? And what, exactly, is it that we want? In this article, we address these questions. The first section takes up a discussion of ends, some goals toward which we ought to strive. We specify three ends: (1) a society where racial domination is addressed intelligently; (2) a society that embraces racial justice in all its arenas; and (3) a society that values and practices multiculturalism – offering a glimpse of what a society without racial domination might look like. The second section deals with the means or strategies for achieving those goals. We specify four levels or sites of change: (1) ourselves; (2) our inner circle; (3) our institutions; and (4) our nation – and offer some guidance as to how we each can do our part to bring forth a more racially just society. To put it

another way, the first section addresses the question: What is it we wish to achieve? The second addresses the question: And how do we achieve it?

The ends

Many of America's whites believe that racial equality already has been achieved, while many of its non-whites hold that little has changed since the Civil Rights Movement and that things may be getting worse (Brown et al. 2003, 224–5). One side declares, 'Racial harmony has arrived.' The other side replies, 'Racial harmony will never come.' But the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Two things are undeniable: that racial progress in America has been nothing short of astounding and that racial domination in America has yet to be dismantled. As one sociologist has put it, 'It can be said, unconditionally, that the changes that have taken place in the United States over the past fifty years are unparalleled in the history of minority–majority relations. . . . There does not exist a single case in modern or early history that comes anywhere near the record of America in changing majority attitudes, in guaranteeing legal and political rights, and in expanding socioeconomic opportunities for its disadvantaged minorities' (Patterson 1998, 16). If we refuse to recognize this fact, we foster an angry spirit of cynicism and nihilism, a spirit of hopelessness that causes whites and non-whites to throw up their hands and conclude, 'If racial equality is hopeless, then why should we do anything to fight it?'

Change *has* come to America. Indeed, some ethnic conflicts viewed as intractable and eternal a mere 100 years ago hardly exist today. One thinks, for example, of the conflict between Protestants and Catholics, or between Irish and Italians. The historical record demonstrates that what one generation found unrealistic and impossible – idealistic – the succeeding generation made into reality (Du Bois 1996 [1899], 386). 'What is considered impossible today may be possible tomorrow,' observe the authors of *White-Washing Race*. 'It is well to remember that in the 1950s few Americans believed that a revolution in civil rights was just around the corner. Jim Crow seemed to be deeply entrenched, racial prejudice too formidable a presence in the minds of white Americans. Yet many people of all races vigorously opposed segregation anyway, not because they knew they would prevail, but because they believed that doing so was morally necessary. And in the end they did prevail' (Brown et al. 2003, 248).

We cannot deny the progress of the past, just as we cannot turn a blind eye to the problems of the present – or the pregnant promise of the future. Researchers and social commentators rightly have documented the (racial) troubles of today, but what does the future hold? What do we *want* it to hold? Social science is able to provide a much-needed picture of alternative realities. It can, in a phrase, present us with *real utopias*. Creative and radical alternatives for society 'grounded in the real potentials of humanity' as

well as in social-scientific and historical research, real utopias are intellectually rigorous, carefully designed blueprints for a better tomorrow (Wright 2003, vii–viii; see also Bourdieu 2003, 17–25). They are the end products of social change; they are realistic renderings of a society more just, equal, and moral than the one we currently inhabit. Real utopias are hopeful but not naïve; realistic but not cynical. They are what America’s founding fathers envisioned when they longed for ‘a more perfect union’; what Karl Marx had in mind when he spoke of real or ‘human emancipation’ of the working class; of what Martin Luther King, Jr. dreamt when he referred to ‘the promised land.’ (For an extended discussion of realized real utopias in the political and economic spheres, see Cohen and Rogers 1993; Wright 2010.)

To work toward racial justice, we must know precisely what we are working toward. Accordingly, in what follows, we sketch three goals, three real utopias, connected to the dismantling of racial domination. This discussion is not a venture in prediction, the stuff of social forecasting; rather, it is an exercise of the imagination. Nor do we paint a complete picture of what a racially just society might look like, a project too rich and expansive for our purposes here. We simply sketch what we believe are three ends essential to the ascension of racial justice, inviting you to fill in the details and, with us, to imagine further possibilities.

Multiculturalism

The first end we propose is: *a society that values and practices multiculturalism*. Multiculturalism – defined by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (2003, 4) as ‘the equal co-existence of different cultural forms of life within one and the same political community’ – is one specific way in which people (especially those belonging to marginalized groups) can be incorporated into society. It breaks sharply with assimilationist logic. ‘Multiculturalism dramatically expands the range of imagined life experiences for core-group members. In doing so, it opens up the possibility not just for acceptance and toleration but for understanding and recognition. Insofar as such understandings are achieved, rigid distinctions between core and out-group members break down, and notions of the particular and the universal become much more thoroughly intertwined’ (Alexander 2006, 450–5). In its purest form, multiculturalism abolishes ethnic hierarchies and racial domination. All people, whites and non-whites, immigrants and native-born citizens, are not simply tolerated; they are valued and, as much as possible, are understood – their differences and similarities acknowledged, accepted, and welcomed.

Let us take a moment to ponder multiculturalism, not only as a partly and selectively realized reality (which it is), but also as a real utopia. Much has been written about it, in a vast and exciting literature that spans philosophy, political theory, cultural studies, as well as sociology. Here we can only

offer a few brief ideas. To begin with, in multicultural theory, the ideal America is not one in which all citizens dissolve into a single national identity, an America that would only reproduce the worldviews and lifestyles of the dominant groups. On the contrary, it is a world of multicultural incorporation that rests on two key principles: first, that, drawn shoulder to shoulder in common humanity with others, we have a civic responsibility to all people; and, second, that we must respect each others' differences (Kymlicka 1995). Anthony Appiah (who prefers the term 'cosmopolitanism'), puts it this way:

There are two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism. One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from those differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life. (2006, xv)

Multiculturalism promotes the 'norm of equal inclusion,' which, in a racially just world, would become a core component of modern democracies (Barry 2001; see also Kymlicka 1995; Habermas 2003). In such a world, there are no 'second-class citizens,' and groups currently rendered invisible by political elites finally receive their due recognition. To Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1994, 26), failing to recognize fully and to value non-whites and other dominated groups 'shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need.' If one of the primary techniques of those championing racial and colonial domination is to convince those they seek to dominate that whiteness and the 'white way of life' are superior to all other races and lifestyles, then the aim of the multicultural project is to banish all such ideas of white supremacy and cultural superiority (Fanon 2004 [1963]). Despite our differences – and, indeed, those differences often are far outweighed by our similarities – we all are bound within a common humanity (Phillips 2007; Abu-Lughod 1991). Abraham Lincoln recognized this as far back as the nineteenth century, arguing that immigrants have a right to claim full American citizenship 'as though they were blood of the blood and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote the Declaration of Independence. So they are' (quoted in Alexander 2006, 431).

Recognizing this, the multiculturalist cannot deny his or her civic responsibility to dominated groups, and it is here that we witness the convergence of anti-racist movements and the multicultural ideal (Banting and Kymlicka

2006; Figueroa 1999). Multiculturalism demands that we stand with the suffering. It nourishes within us a spirit of solidarity, not only extended to our friends or countrymen, but to every person inhabiting the planet (Alexander 2006; Appiah 2006). The multiculturalist is less interested in protecting exclusively her own group's agenda – constructing a political identity (based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and so forth) and striving to promote only the aims of those with a similar identity – as much as in imagining and fighting for a society in which all groups' needs are realized to the fullest extent possible. In multiculturalism, one finds a set of moral principles that can replace those of 'identity politics,' principles that counter the possibility of interracial and interethnic cooperation (see Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Gitlin 1996). Multiculturalism, after all, is not simply about recognizing other people's identities and cultural scripts; it is also about recognizing their problems – how they are unfairly treated in a democracy that promises them full and equal inclusion – and about responding with intelligent and just remedies (cf. Ford 2005; Phillips 2007). For the multiculturalist, racial justice is the value; racial diversity and equality are the results.

'But,' the cynic interjects, 'wouldn't multiculturalism erode our national culture, undermining American unity and pulling us apart?' Obsessing over our differences, it is true, weakens our democratic potential and breeds animosity. But any multiculturalism worthy of its name does not encourage us to obsess over our differences but inspires us to acknowledge and respect those differences as potential sources of wisdom and good while working *together* to bring about a more just world. Multiculturalism seeks to draw us nearer, not to push us apart. It does not threaten civic community but nourishes its potential by dismantling racial domination (Banting and Kymlicka 2006, 11, 17). It does not weaken democracy but strengthens it. Most critics of multiculturalism believe its alternative to be a color-blind society, where we shed our differences and unite under the banner of 'American.' This train of thought is nothing more than the old idea of assimilation in new garb. It assumes that the stew simmering in the great American melting pot suits everybody's tastes. It also assumes that assimilation melts everyone equally into a new something, even if, in reality, that 'new something' is the dominant group projecting itself as the universal American. Whites do not melt; non-whites do. This means that the alternative to multiculturalism is not national unity but disunity and racial strife.

Multiculturalism seeks to nourish democracy, to strengthen American civil society, making it freer and fuller, wider and warmer, more inclusive and more just. Besides, to deny the goal of multiculturalism is to deny the very essence of America. America always has been multicultural, although it is only in recent years that it has pursued multiculturalism as an ideal. The United States, said Senator Carl Schurz in 1859, was 'a great colony of *free humanity* which has not old England but the *world* for its mother country' (Fuchs 1992, 45). It took an enormous labor to convince us otherwise;

it took a movement of great exertion and coercion, mystification and trickery to present America as a white nation. In America, multiculturalism is the norm; it is racial domination that is its perverse, unnatural substitute – which is why Appiah makes perfect sense when he says, ‘Cosmopolitanism isn’t hard work; repudiating it is’ (Appiah 2006, xx).

Justice

The second end we propose is: *a society that embraces racial justice*. Because racial domination has been such a central feature of American society since its inception, it might be difficult to imagine an America where racial justice finally has come to replace injustice. Some people have given up trying (Bell 1987). But there is no surer way to guarantee racial domination’s continued reign than to conceive of it as intractable and eternal. Imagining alternatives to how we should live is itself a small act of resistance, one that refuses to settle for the world we have inherited and that firmly rejects the defeatist claim, ‘This is how it is, and how it has always been, so get used to it.’

Since the collapse of the Civil Rights Movement, most activists in America simply have not known where to march next (Winant 2001). During Jim Crow, racial domination was obvious and legal; there was a clear enemy (segregation) and a clear goal (desegregation). But today, racial domination can be more elusive and complicated; it can be ghostlike and difficult to confront. There is a good deal of truth to this, but numerous studies (Western 2006; Brown et al. 2003; Feagin, Vera, and Batur 2001; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Gotanda 2000) have shown that today racial domination influences all of society’s fields of life; its consequences are devastating and, in many cases, its presence undeniable. There are tangible problems in need of tangible solutions. A revitalized Civil Rights Movement – uncompromisingly egalitarian, intersectional, and multicultural – is needed. In the paragraphs below, we offer some direction to that movement, ends it can pursue and, in some cases, is pursuing today. What might a racially just America look like? It would take several books, in reality, to answer this question thoroughly. But, in what follows, we imagine some real utopias for several major areas or fields of social life (proceeding from the macro to the micro), in an exercise intended to pry open our imaginations and to stretch the limits of what we believe to be possible.

In the political field, racial justice would come with the advent of a more powerful multicultural democracy, one that lives up to its name (literally, ‘the rule of the people’) (Hacker and Pierson 2005). Because there is no genuine democracy in societies that muzzle dissenting voices, the new American democracy would value and welcome criticism and would promote (not erode) people’s political freedom. Patriotism would be measured by the extent to which we critically evaluate our society and strive to

change things for the better – not the extent to which we nod ‘yes’ to everything party officials say. Current systems of ‘taxation without representation’ would come to an end, as poor communities of color, as well as ex-felons, would enjoy political representation that matches that of wealthy white suburbanites. How, after all, can we accept a society in which ‘the fullness of freedom [is reserved] for those whose income, leisure, and security need no enhancing, and a mere pittance of liberty [is reserved] for the people, who may in vain attempt to make use of their democratic rights to gain shelter from the [powerful]’ (Polanyi 2001 [1944], 265)? In a racially just society, democracy would triumph over oligarchy, and substantive racial representation to political posts would best superficial representation. Appointed officials would be intimately connected to the needs and problems of all citizens, including those living in disadvantaged non-white communities. This might require abandoning America’s two-party system – the only one of its kind in the democratic world – for a political system where one does not have to choose between Democrats and Republicans. It would most certainly require the revitalization of a powerful and multicultural Civil Rights Movement (Smith 1999).

Racial justice in the economic field would mean, first, the complete and total eradication of racialized poverty. ‘Impossible,’ whispers the cynic. But why? In a racially just society, the gap between the rich and the poor would narrow, as would income and wealth disparities across race. The simultaneous extraction of immigrant labor and retraction of immigrant rights would cease. America would develop fair policies that treat its poor immigrants as more than simply an expendable and cheap labor force. And America would help countries such as Mexico revitalize their economy and reduce their poverty, instead of treating those countries as staging grounds where companies can relocate their factories and pay workers a substandard wage. Finally, the skimpy American welfare state – in large part responsible for the millions of citizens living hand-to-mouth today (Wacquant 2007) – would expand by generous proportions, such that ‘the primary obligation of the state’ would be to ‘use its powers and allocate its resources to eradicate poverty and hunger and to assure security of livelihood, security against the major hazards and vicissitudes of life, and the security of decent homes’ (Harvey 2005, 183). The new American welfare state would guarantee people a livable wage, affordable housing, health care for all, and secure retirement plans. There is good reason to believe that racialized poverty could be considerably reduced if poor communities of color were offered a New Deal and Fair Deal comparable to the one offered whites before and after World War II (Katznelson 2005).

A residential field guided by racial justice would not be scarred by drastic segregation but would promote racial integration and multicultural community. More important, it would eliminate the problems associated with racial segregation, problems such as chronic poverty, educational inequality,

and imbalanced political representation. The American state would initiate massive investment in the nation's poorest communities and would nourish and promote self-development and sustainable economic growth on American Indian reservations. Those living in more affluent areas would use their affluence to help others in need instead of building higher fences. Housing discrimination would be shut down. And we would develop cleaner and more energy-efficient ways to live, so as not to burden poor and non-white communities with our trash and pollution.

One of the most racially unjust institutions today is the American criminal justice system. While non-whites have made gains in the economic and educational fields in the past 20 years, they have lost ground in the legal realm, as evidenced by the gross racial discrepancies in our prison population. In a racially just society, those discrepancies would disappear, as would all forms of racial profiling as well as the pervasive spirit of racialized fear that links blackness to criminality and Arabness to terrorism. If 'tough on crime' policies have not made us safer, as the evidence suggests, then we would abandon those policies in favor of more effective and cost-efficient ones. We must think beyond the prison walls, developing alternatives to incarceration that not only decrease racial inequality in punishment but also, unlike our current program of mass incarceration, actually work to decrease crime. A racially just society would mount a proactive assault on the root causes of criminal behavior, instead of relying singularly on reactive programs of harsh punishment. The result would be a safer America – where cities no longer have 'streets you shouldn't drive down' or 'bad areas of town' – as well as an expansion of freedom in poor non-white communities previously subjected to drastic policing measures.

With respect to education, making higher education more affordable would open up opportunities for thousands of people, including many people of color, who currently are excluded from the privileges many others enjoy. What is more, a racially just society would invest in its poor schools; and a racially just society would critically reconstruct its curriculum, replacing Eurocentric accounts of history, art, politics, and philosophy with a more accurate, well-rounded, and multicultural program of studies (Apple 1999; Banks 2002).

In the same vein, the racist aesthetic would be swept out of the aesthetic sphere by an artistic revolution led by non-white and white artists alike, who would renounce caricatured and stereotypical depictions of people of color, as well as distorted and uncomplicated renderings of racism. In their own work, artists would represent people of color in their full humanity, escaping the racist gaze and pushing forward our critiques of racial domination much farther than they have been pushed before. Art of this nature, art upholding an anti-racist aesthetic, would be richly rewarded.

In a racially just society, our associations would be guided, not by the principle of homophily, but by an ethic of multiculturalism. Through our

associations, we would breach racial and ethnic boundaries instead of reifying them. Hate groups would be a thing of the past; and the Internet would become a conduit through which radical multicultural democracy flourishes and expands its reach. Religious associations would flourish as institutions of justice and equality and would work to foster a spirit of civic responsibility and mutual connectedness. More broadly, a racially just society would entail the galvanization of civil society, where citizens would be involved and deeply invested in community affairs, voting and participating more fully in the political process and working together to fight racial injustice and strengthen non-white communities that, for decades, have been overlooked by political elites.

Finally, in the intimate field, a racially just society would disallow stigmas from being attached to interracial marriages. All consenting adults would be free to marry whomsoever they chose, unbound by family and community prejudices or by unjust laws. Aggressive programs would be developed to help single mothers and to abolish the feminization of poverty. The majority of citizens would enthusiastically embrace the concept of 'doing the (racial) work,' the cultural labor required to transverse ethnic and racial boundaries, the determined broadening of one's cultural competence in an attempt to adopt, as sincerely as possible, another perspective on the world. Citizens would cultivate their intercultural competence and their desire to understand the world through multiple perspectives, admitting that, on some occasions, their vision of the world may be neither universal nor correct. As a result, everyday interactions between blacks and Jews, Jews and Muslims, Latinos and whites, whites and American Indians, American Indians and Asians, and so forth, would be defined, not by anxiety, anger, or fear, but by mutual respect and kindness. Whites would deny their white privilege and use the advantages granted them by racial domination to work on behalf of racial justice. Rejecting feelings of superiority as well as white guilt, both of which stifle positive action, they would embrace a healthy white identity. Non-whites would abandon any form of ethnic chauvinism and would evict from their thinking all traces of internalized white supremacy.

All these ends, these real utopian possibilities, are distant, to be sure, but they are not beyond our collective reach. Like the first flowers of spring after a long hard winter, changes promoting racial justice already are sprouting up all across the nation. The stigma around interracial marriage has been weakened; some American Indian Nations successfully have pulled themselves out of destitution; the Alternatives to Incarceration Movement has developed many practical forms of punishment that take place beyond the prison cell; chronic poverty has declined by sizeable margins over the last century. We still have a long row to hoe, but the work has already begun – and, already, we have started to reap some fruits of the harvest. You might agree with some of our ideas and disagree with others. And, indeed, we

have only scratched the surface of the matter. But one point is undeniable: We must never become numb to the now; we must never allow ourselves to be lulled into mistaking the present for the permanent; we cannot permit our minds to be closed to the real possibilities tomorrow offers. We can – and must – do better.

Intelligence

The third end we propose is: *a society where racial domination is addressed intelligently*. We use the term ‘intelligence’ deliberately, for what is called for is precisely an application of intelligence in the philosophic sense of that term. To philosophers, intelligence has to do with one’s ability to exercise good judgment in a world full of uncertainty. As John Dewey wrote in *The Quest for Certainty*, a person ‘is intelligent... in virtue of his capacity to estimate the possibilities of a situation and to act in accordance with his estimate’ (Dewey 1988 [1929], 170). For Dewey, our ability to solve the problems we confront was directly connected to our ability accurately to assess those problems and to develop different courses of action. American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley, a contemporary of Dewey, concurred that ‘the test of intelligence is the power to act successfully in new situations. We judge a man to be intelligent when we see that in going through the world he is not guided merely by routine or second-hand ideas, but that when he meets a fresh difficulty he thinks out a fresh line of action appropriate to it, which is justified by its success... It is, then, essentially a kind of foresight, a mental reaction that anticipates the operation of the forces at work and is prepared in advance to adjust itself to them’ (Cooley 1966 [1918], 351).

Racial domination, like all forms of domination, relies on a tangled collection of distortions, illogic, and lies sometimes misrecognized as truth. Logic, rational decision-making, and good sense – the execution of a *racial intelligence* – can shine a revealing light on the obfuscation linked to racial domination; it can lay bare the true nature of the beast. Racial intelligence can promote a political climate where people desire – need – to know the best and latest information on the pressing problems of the day; and it can lead to successful resolution of those problems. We imagine an opening of the American mind, where ideas and science are treated seriously and with respect and where people realize the power of clear thinking. As Kurt Lewin remarked over 50 years ago, ‘Nothing is more practical than a good theory’ (Lewin 1951, 169).

Freedom and knowledge, that is, liberation and rational awareness, are welded together. One cannot exist without the other. C. Wright Mills wrote:

Freedom is not merely the chance to do as one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom is, first of all, the

chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them – and then, the opportunity to choose. That is why freedom cannot exist without an enlarged role of human reason in human affairs. . . . The social task of reason [therefore] is to formulate choices, to enlarge the scope of human decisions in the making of history. (1959, 174)

Freedom, in a word, goes hand in hand with intelligence, the ability to spread wide your horizon of possibilities and to make sound judgments in respect of them.

In a society such as ours, so filled with misleading language and technologies of mystification, acting intelligently – that is, actively seeking truth rather than passively accepting this or that party line – is itself a powerful political act. Mills knew this well. Not only did he seek, as a public sociologist, to foster critical thinking in the American citizenry as a whole, but he also noted, with respect to more specialized research, that

the very enterprise of social science, as it determines fact, takes on political meaning. In a world of widely communicated nonsense, any statement of fact is of political and moral significance. All social scientists, by the fact of their existence, are involved in the struggle between enlightenment and obscurantism. In such a world as ours, to practice social science is, first of all, to practice the politics of truth. (Mills 1959, 178)

‘The politics of truth?’ mocks the cynic. ‘What is truth?’ Too often, wherever the question, ‘What is truth?’, or, more brashly, the declaration, ‘There is no truth!’, is uttered, indifference, the washing of one’s hands of the problem, is nearby. If there is no right or wrong *answer*, so the logic goes, then there is no right or wrong *action*. Is there no better recipe for indifference? The notion that all truth is relative and forever beyond our reach is thoroughly misguided and ought to be discarded. Besides, those who apply such reasoning to the social world would not dare do so to the natural one. The world remains round whether or not you think it so.

Reducing hard-earned facts to ‘mere words’ or ‘relative truths’ is a travesty and an affront to struggles on behalf of racial justice. There *is* a difference between opinion and truth. The latter is those opinions that have been subjected to what Dewey called ‘the test of consequences,’ assertions that have been examined and tested and determined collectively and systematically to have warrant (Dewey 1988 [1920], 171, 169). Not all opinions are equal; some are quite wrong and ought to be labeled as such. A black working-class man might perceive that Mexican immigrants are ‘stealing his job,’ but that, according to the best available evidence, would be wrong (Borjas and Tienda 1987; Borjas 1990). The evidence also leads us to conclude, contrary to popular belief, that white men have *not* been harmed by affirmative action (Norton 1996; Jackson 1996; Morin 1997; Reskin 1998) and that the prison boom has *not* led to a decrease in violent crime (Western

2006, 185). If we believe otherwise, we ought to be corrected. Opinions should be submitted to the best available evidence.

A society of racial intelligence would look quite different from the one we have today, in the domains both of everyday life and of high-level policymaking. In everyday life, citizens would, as a matter of disposition, approach problems and conflicts not in terms of their received prejudices and opinions but in a more open-ended, experimentalist spirit, setting alternative proposed solutions to the pragmatic test and seeing what works and what doesn't in furthering a more just and harmonious experience. In high-level policymaking, our politicians would have the best data at their disposal and, crucially, would *want* to be better informed. Political rhetoric would not be chock full of coded language, buzzwords, and manipulations; the days of the political spokesperson adept at dodging questions and masking truth would come to an end.

What is more, instead of making it difficult for Americans to know what they are up to, politicians would encourage transparency and openness. We are envisioning a society in which all citizens – from teachers and engineers to domestic workers and truck drivers – would be informed and educated. They would participate in a politics of reason, where their opinions would be tempered by intelligence and the cool-headed evaluation of the best available information. And they would possess a 'radical doubt,' a skepticism, sharpened by the scientific enterprise, which would help them better to distinguish truth from falsehood (Mullings 2005; Feagin and Vera 2001; Willett 2001).

The means

Like a great locomotive, the movement toward racial equality and justice began slowly and with considerable effort. But it gained speed with every turn of the wheel and every grate on the track and, soon, it shook the rust off its gears and fired up the engine, and got to rolling. It lumbered forward with great momentum and power and quite literally changed the world. But, since the late 1960s, the movement seems to have lost steam, even in a time when the tenets of anti-racism have grown more widely accepted.

Today we find ourselves in a unique historical moment. On the one hand, there has never been a time in American history when so many people reject racism. A mere generation ago, racial segregation was the law of the land and was embraced by millions; today, nothing could seem more anti-American. On the other hand, while racial domination continues to cause a great deal of suffering and makes a mockery of our democracy, many movements for racial justice have faded away. Never has the value of racial equality been so strong while the movement for racial justice is so weak (Winant 2001).

Right now, there are thousands of people working in the name of multiculturalism and racial liberation. They are running for local office, teaching on reservation schools, giving water to dehydrated border crossers, arguing civil rights lawsuits, and organizing on college campuses and in inner-city neighborhoods and small towns. Of course, on the opposite side of the continuum, there are also thousands of people working on behalf of racial domination. Not just members of hate groups, but business owners who discriminate against black applicants, real estate agents who only show Puerto Rican families homes in poor areas of town, movie producers who encourage distorted depictions of Native Americans, and politicians who turn a blind eye to the pressing problems of racial domination. And in the middle are the hordes of the indifferent.

Where do you stand? ‘I cannot change things,’ you say. In fact, it is the other way around: You *cannot but help* change things. By virtue of existing, we change things. We affect people in our classes, dormitories, jobs, families, and social clubs, even if we cannot fully realize exactly how. It is not a question of *if* we will change things but *how* we will – for the better or for the worse.

What is needed is not just an impassioned response to racial injustice but an *intelligent* response as well. ‘We are not in danger of being excessively generous; indeed, most of us are in no danger of meeting. . . our basic obligation. But what’s wanted. . . is the exercise of reason, not just explosions of feelings’ (Appiah 2006, 170). Where, then, do we start? In what follows we explore four levels or sites of change having to do with our (1) selves; (2) inner circle; (3) institutions; and (4) nation. These are not stages one proceeds through so much as overlapping areas of struggle. All are important; all are integral elements in the search for positive change in racial life. One cannot simply choose among them. The intelligent reconstruction of our racial order requires them all, in combination and in creative synthesis.

Self

Leo Tolstoy, perhaps Russia’s greatest novelist, once wrote, ‘Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.’ But this is precisely where we must begin. How, after all, could someone claim to be an environmentalist while refusing to conserve water or to recycle? How could someone claim to be a feminist while mistreating the women in his own life? How could any of us claim to be fighting for racial justice without yet critically examining our own prejudices? If we want to help dismantle racial domination, we must first address it within ourselves. The goal here is not to purify ourselves of all traces of interpersonal racism before getting involved with anti-racist movements. If it were, nothing would ever get done, for, if we are honest with ourselves, most of us have prejudices that cling, barnacle-like, to our thoughts and feelings. The goal is

not perfection but critical self-engagement, not complete purification (an impossibility) but rigorous reflexivity.

Interracial and intercultural competence, moreover, is not a state at which we arrive or something we achieve. It is not a destination but a *process*, a way of living. There is no conversion moment, no glorious awakening, where once and for all we come out of the darkness and into the light. There is only a life lived, striving and working, succeeding and failing, moving from light to dark and back again. The apt metaphor here is one of training, where day after day we discipline our thoughts and actions so they are not dictated without our consent by forces of domination.

This self-training requires, foremost, identifying our prejudices and attempting to scrutinize and, as much as possible, evict them. We must pay serious attention to our thoughts and actions, evaluating how we treat people differently because of their racial identity or how we feel about this or that 'kind' of person. Knowing ourselves means taking a good hard look in the mirror and being as honest as a reflection about what we see. Many of us are truthful with ourselves far too rarely, and, oftentimes, we can practice a kind of *disingenuous reflexivity* that errs in two opposite directions. On the one hand, we can search within ourselves and happily report that we are free of all prejudices. 'I treat everyone the same,' we might declare. 'I do not have a racist bone in my body.' On the other hand, we can claim, after a thorough inward-looking meditation, that we are wretches, full of only prejudice: 'I am so completely racist; I am helpless.' One kind of dishonest exaggeration looks inside and finds an angel, seemingly immune to racial domination; the other finds a demon that welcomes racial domination without resistance. But the truth is that we are all made up of a complicated blend of good and evil, courage and cowardice, ignorance and intelligence. Honest reflexivity confronts the self in its full complexity, and it does not shy away from the nasty bits but seeks them out in order to set them straight. 'We only become what we are by radically negating deep down what others have done to us' (Sartre 2004 [1963], li).

Our thoughts are ours; we must take responsibility for them. But having a racist thought does not make you a bad person or a 'racist.' It makes you a person who has been influenced by a society up to its neck in racial domination. You might feel ashamed when a racist thought trespasses your mind, but if shame is your only reaction, you have little chance of controlling your prejudices. 'Rolling in the muck is not the best way of getting clean' (Huxley 1998 [1932], vii). To restrain our unconscious racism, we must objectify it and subject it to a historically informed analysis and critique.

This endeavor, a sort of socio-analysis that complements and perhaps even goes further than psychoanalysis, is a reflexive enterprise, in which we objectify all those forces that control our imaginations and actions in order rationally to assess and control how they affect our thinking and behavior. We must never stop asking ourselves: Is my idea correct? From where does

my information come? How do I know that this is the truth? How is it that I know the world works in this way? How might my upbringing and racial identity influence my thinking on this matter?

Racial intelligence also requires that we become good listeners, that we ‘pay attention – to others and to the world around [us]’; that we take note of human achievements in art, music, craftsmanship, poetry, politics, sports, literature, and journalism. It requires that we read and that we learn how to communicate our ideas more clearly to others. If we hope to become people of intelligence, driven by a love of learning and a deep commitment to the truth, we must discipline our minds and reject half-baked, sloppy thinking. We must also invest in others’ passions and ideas and ‘understand the power of other people’s dreams and nightmares as well as [our] own.’ We must acknowledge that ‘freedom of the individual is possible only in a free community, and vice versa,’ and therefore understand that our livelihood is inexorably connected to livelihoods of others (Cronon 1998, 76–8). And we must surround ourselves with people who are different than ourselves, who disagree with us, and who can push and challenge our thinking. In a multicultural vein, we should never fear differences or ‘strangeness.’ Rather, we should seek them out, knowing full well that our ‘little shard of mirror cannot reflect the whole’ (Appiah 2006, 8).

Perhaps above all, we must develop empathy. You might be the smartest mind of your generation, able to analyze racial domination with precision and brilliance, but if your stomach does not turn when you hear about a hate crime that happened on your campus or when a friend cracks a racist joke or when you pick up the newspaper and read about America’s growing anti-immigrant sentiment, then your intelligence is in vain (Feagin et al. 2001). The philosopher Hannah Arendt (1978, 104) put it this way: We ‘do not become just by knowing what is just but by loving justice.’ Changing ourselves into agents of change, therefore, means changing our minds by cultivating knowledge *and* changing our hearts by cultivating empathy. One kind of change drives the other. The more you learn about racial injustice, the more your heart will break for its victims; likewise, the stronger your passion for justice grows, the more you will want to learn about racial domination and the more you will seek out the best prescriptions for change (Pedersen, Walker, and Wise 2005; Stephen and Finlay 1999).

A good deal of this work, this self-work, is carried out in solitude. By ourselves, we read and think in the library; we ponder our own thoughts while walking down the street; we imagine a better world while riding the bus. But this can only take us so far, for reflexivity is a fundamentally *collective* enterprise. We cannot fully change ourselves by ourselves. For our shortcomings to be brought most fully to light, we need to participate in collective dialogues that cut across racial boundaries. The importance of honest discussions that grapple with the complexities of racial domination – and especially of conversations that take place between women and men of different racial

identities – cannot be overstated. As you might already have discovered, talking about race can be painful. Fear and anger, stubbornness and selfishness can choke rational dialogue and get in the way of progress. What is needed is cool-headedness, humility, and respect; in certain instances, what is needed most might be honest contrition; in others, forgiveness (Patterson 1998; Tatum 1997).

Weariness and apathy, too, are significant barriers to engaging in these – often exhausting, often maddening – conversations. ‘I am tired of talking about race,’ you might say. ‘Let’s just put it all behind us.’ Most of the time, white students are the ones who voice this complaint, a complaint that itself is a product of white privilege (Rich and Cargile 2004). Non-whites, whose livelihood, and whose children’s livelihood, depends on overcoming racial domination, do not have much choice in the matter; their weariness comes, not from conversations about racial domination, but from the thing itself.

It goes without saying that all of us, whites and non-whites alike, need to carry out this self-work, confronting the many ways in which racial domination is alive in our innermost beings, our unconscious habits, dispositions, and postures. Whites need to come face to face with their racial privilege. They need to interrogate how their thinking is informed by racial domination; they need to reject notions of rugged individuality, which encourages them to ignore the power of history and society (Katz 1978). Non-whites, too, need to confront their own prejudices as well as to turn away from all whispers of self-hate and embrace a positive image of their self in a society that day after day projects negative ones. They need to come to the full realization that racial inequalities are the product of racial domination, not of the deficiencies of non-whites, and must struggle against reproducing the terms of their own domination (Bell 1987, 228–9). And all of us must strive to understand the world through multiple perspectives.

Inner circle

Racial domination has to be eradicated, not only from our ideas and practices, but also from the ideas and practices of those nearest us – the persons in our intimate circle. You can have great influence over how your family members and friends think about the world. How can you address their racism? Every situation is different and requires a good deal of thought, strategy, and patience on your part. But if there is a single guiding principle for addressing racism in the lives of people closest to you, it is this: *Hold them accountable* for their words and deeds – and ask them to do the same to you.

A father sees a group of Mexican-American men and observes, ‘All these Mexicans. They are taking our jobs away!’ Knowing he is misinformed, his son responds, with genuine interest, ‘Why do you think that?’ The father

replies, 'It's just obvious, isn't it? I mean, you know Bob Kapatruck down the street, he lost his job last year.' The son answers, 'That really is sad about Mr Kapatruck, but are you sure he lost his job because of Mexicans? I mean, couldn't there be other factors involved? I read in the paper that a lot of workers from that factory were laid off, including Mexican workers. You know, I used to think that Mexican immigrants took jobs away from Americans, but I've been convinced otherwise. I started reading up on it, and the best evidence out there shows that Mexican immigrants don't take jobs away from native-born citizens. They mainly compete for jobs with other immigrants. What do you think?'

When people with racist beliefs are faced with an alternative interpretation about how the world works, a more intelligent interpretation informed by social science, they have a difficult time justifying their beliefs. In time, they may come to change their minds and embrace a more informed (and anti-racist) understanding of society. But people often grow defensive and uncomfortable when asked to justify their ideas. Accordingly, there are at least *four useful techniques for holding people accountable* for their prejudices. First, take their prejudices seriously. Do not yell at them; do not call them 'stupid' or 'ignorant'; try not to get too angry. If you blow up on people every time they say something racist, you will not teach them to think differently; you will only teach them not to say such things around *you*. When confronted with a racist statement – or, more softly, a benign yet misinformed statement about racial domination – realize that the person who uttered the statement matters very much, that their *ideas* matter very much, and that their beliefs most likely are tied to their personal experience. If you want them to listen to you, then you must listen – sincerely – to them.

Second, ask people questions. In the above conversation, the son responded to his father's remark with a question and inserted questions throughout the conversation. If he had responded with a statement such as 'You're wrong!' or 'How can you believe such garbage!' or 'You're so racist!' he might have blown the teaching opportunity. Questions – posed authentically, not sarcastically or presumptuously – are disarming and inviting. They're also quite natural. If someone says, 'I think the Los Angeles Lakers are the best basketball team in the country,' the natural response is to ask, 'Why?' Similarly, if someone says, 'I don't think American Indians want to climb out of poverty,' it is equally natural to ask, 'Why?' Questions, at bottom, are pursuers of the truth. As such, they are powerful weapons against racist beliefs (Kivel 2002 [1997], 113–14).

Third, do your homework. How can you hope to change someone's mind if you can't offer them a better interpretation than the one they currently hold? The son was able to offer his father a different way of understanding how Mexican immigrants affect the labor pool because he had read up on the issue. Racial domination's arch-nemesis is a critically informed citizen. This does not mean you have to memorize statistics (although it's good to

store a few in your arsenal) or be able to recite the precise date that marked the beginning of the prison boom. But it does require you to have a grasp of the relevant research firm enough to allow you to articulate educated positions on certain matters. If your knowledge is a bit shaky, don't be afraid to tell your family members or friends that you'll hit the books and get back to them – and be sure you do.

Finally, the worst thing you can do upon being confronted with a racist belief – other than remaining silent – is to turn the conversation into a debate you intend to 'win.' It is extremely difficult to learn when you are competing. After all, in a debate you are not trying to understand; you are trying to beat your opponent. And it is an extremely rare thing for someone to walk away from a debate having learned anything. In most cases, both winners and losers leave the debate thinking one thing: that the other person is an idiot. You should be firm in your convictions, determined with your questions, and confident in your knowledge, but the goal should be a rational discussion, not a debate in the sense of a verbal sparring match. If you set out to intimidate someone or make them feel stupid, you usually will produce in them the desired effect, losing credibility and perhaps even calcifying their racist or wrongheaded beliefs. If you truly want to change someone's mind, then you have to be willing to be vulnerable and (if appropriate) honest about your own prejudices. One last thing: think about the timing of your conversation. Sometimes a racist utterance is best addressed on the spot; other times, it is better to confront the person at a later time.

Be prepared for resistance, and gird yourself for the long haul. It will take much more than a single conversation adequately to address your friends' and family members' interpersonal racism. This – it bears repeating – is a process, not a conversion. Understand, too, that, despite your best efforts, you will not always be successful. Some people will go to their graves with their racism. After trying and trying, sometimes the only thing left to do is to move on, expending your energies elsewhere, like fighting for racial justice at the institutional level.

Institutions

Racial domination must be confronted at the interpersonal and institutional levels. There are two kinds of change-oriented institutional action: individual and collective. *Individual action* involves conducting ourselves in a certain manner within the institutions to which we belong so as to promote racial justice. For example, all of us, no matter what our chosen profession, can promote racial justice within our workplaces. Are you a police officer? You can decry the pervasive practice of racial profiling, never employing this unfair technique and criticizing other police officers who do. A journalist? You can promote an anti-racist form of reporting, cutting through the mystifications of racial domination to clutch hold of the truth. A nurse? You can

strive to provide the same level of care to all patients, regardless of their racial identity or socioeconomic status – and you can pull strings for those who need help but lack health insurance, encouraging other nurses to do the same. A teacher? You can petition the school board to promote a multicultural curriculum; speak out against the racist practice of tracking; and teach your students about white privilege. A nutritionist? You can organize free classes in impoverished neighborhoods, giving lessons on how to live well and eat right. An artist? You can work with an anti-racist aesthetic and encourage fellow artists not to depict people of color in overly simplistic modes. A lawyer? You can fight for civil rights and speak out against injustices within the criminal justice system. A business owner? You can make sure your firm hires and promotes well-qualified people of color and that it is defined by a healthy and warm racial climate. We easily could go on, but the point is clear: We can be advocates for racial justice in any and all lines of work.

If you work for change within your institutions, you will face obstacles and hardships. There might come a time when racial justice requires you to sacrifice something important to you. It is one thing to write your boss an email, asking him why a white employee was promoted over a more qualified non-white one. But what if you were the one promoted? Or perhaps you are a person of color who has climbed the ladder to a position of power within a company but whose very presence in that position allows the company to get away with all kinds of discriminatory practices. Will you let your voice be heard, even if it threatens the position you worked so hard to attain? When you are looking for a home, will you move into a segregated gated community or invest in a multiracial neighborhood, perhaps in a less affluent part of town with less attractive property values?

Today and in the future, if you fight for racial justice, you might be faced with some tough decisions. They are tough precisely because they require you to endure discomfort or hardship at the expense of doing the right thing. But, as Socrates said long ago, ‘it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong’ (Arendt 2003, 151). What is needed is courage and integrity. Change never comes without sacrifice. Those who fought in the Civil Rights Movement endured prison and beatings. They were humiliated and spat upon. They were fired from their jobs. Their children were threatened and shoved and punched and bullied to tears. They endured depression and weariness; insomnia and terror. Some endured their homes being firebombed; some gave their lives to the movement. What will we endure?

Can we expect whites to endure much, to set aside all claims to white privilege and actively to work against a system of racial domination from which they benefit? Since the earliest days of the anti-racist movement in America, whites have spoken out against racial injustice and have been persecuted, even killed, as a result (Thompson, Schaefer, and Bond 2003; Thompson 2001; Aptheker 1974 [1943]). In 1899, after emphasizing the

responsibility of non-whites in the liberation struggle, Du Bois wrote these words: ‘Discrimination is morally wrong, politically dangerous, industrially wasteful, and socially silly. It is the duty of whites to stop it, and to do so primarily for their own sakes’ (Du Bois 1996 [1899], 394). Why would Du Bois argue that whites should help put an end to racial domination, not simply because it is the moral thing to do, but ‘for their own sakes’?

The answer, of course, is that, despite the advantages whites enjoy on account of their skin privilege, whites, too, are afflicted by racial domination. For one, by creating racial antagonisms within the working class, racial domination has reinforced non-white *and* white poverty. Moreover, racial domination is costly, and white taxpayers shoulder the bill when they pay for prisons, police officers, and superficial fixes for old and entrenched social problems (Brown et al. 2003; Feagin et al. 2001). Racial domination, studies have shown, takes a psychological toll on whites, who live in fear of the racialized Other and with a good deal of guilt, depression, and shame (Spanierman et al. 2006). White people also suffer a kind of spiritual cost under the forces of racial domination. For their skin privileges, whites pay with a piece of their humanity. ‘The price of the liberation of the white people,’ Baldwin (1993 [1962], 97) would write, ‘is the liberation of the blacks [and, we add, all people of color] – the total liberation, in the cities, in the towns, before the law, and in the mind’.

Collective action pitched at changing institutions complements individual-level action. Both approaches are important, but collective action is far more effective. If you want to effect real and lasting change within your institutions, then organize others to join you in pushing change forward. Start where you are, changing the institutions to which you currently belong: your social associations, religious organizations, political parties, and workplaces. How would we do this? We tender two simple guidelines: *join* and *reach*. As for joining, in most cases you do not have to start from scratch. You can seek out organizations already at work and lend a hand. Join a union or an anti-racist organization on campus or an interfaith alliance. And once you have joined, reach. Coalition-building means bringing others along with you in your pursuit of racial justice. Look for unlikely alliances; think of unusual connections. Seek out people in all areas of the institution to join your cause, from the mailroom to the corner office. Above all, reach across racial divides. Turn your back on false divisions separating ‘Latino issues’ from ‘African American issues’ or ‘class issues’ from ‘race issues’ and instead pursue an agenda that unites these causes. Multiracial coalition building is bound to fail unless organizations widen their vision and critically assess how their proposed solutions to institutional problems produce differential effects across race (Fortier 2005).

Consider an issue at the top of today’s feminist agenda: violence against women. If an organization working to protect women from abuse persuades the state to increase the severity of domestic violence laws, it may unintentionally

tionally make things worse for victimized black women. The reason is that, because they are fully aware of the rampant inequalities faced by young black men within the criminal justice system, black women increasingly are reluctant to turn their abusers over to the police. In fact, studies have shown that, in black communities, the frequency of domestic violence calls decreases as the severity of domestic violence laws increases. The important point, one stressed over and over again by women of color, is that today's feminist movement must be utterly multiracial if it hopes to address the problems of all women. Tokenism simply will not do. The voices of women of color must be heard throughout feminist organizations, and the feminist movement must address their problems with the same commitment and intelligence as it does those of white women (Roberts 1997; Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991).

Workers' rights won by union mobilization demonstrate the importance of interracial alliances. Asian-American and Mexican-American farm workers, along with documented and undocumented immigrants, joined together to fight for more rights and helped energize a movement that would eventually result in the thoroughly multiracial United Farm Workers of America. Chicago's white and black packinghouse workers, whom the business elite long had pitted against one another to drive down the price of labor, overcame ethnic and racial antagonisms to form the powerful United Packinghouse Workers of America. In 1946, the interracial union went on strike to increase workers' wages – and won. And Hawaii's racially diverse working-class movement united native Hawaiian, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino workers to win better pay and the institutionalization of antidiscrimination guidelines (Brueggemann and Boswell 1998; Halpern and Horowitz 1996; Barrett 1987; Jung 2003). In the tradition of the interracial labor movement, we can band together to bring about significant change in our society. 'Working in multiracial coalitions of equal members,' writes Frank Wu, 'united by shared principles, we can create communities that are diverse and just. Together, we can reinvent the civil rights movement' (Wu 2002, 325).

Nation

Racial inequalities have persisted to this day in large part because, for far too long, the American state has refused to develop effective policies aimed at abolishing these disparities. The state has invested, and invested handsomely, in mass incarceration, but it has invested meagerly in drug treatment or job creation programs. It has invested mightily in warfare and weapons technology but has invested meagerly in public education, head start programs, or teachers' salaries (Brown et al. 2003, 230). A national anti-racist movement would work to reverse these trends and to push for intelligent

‘reforms that would ease the circumstances of people at the bottom of American society’ (Piven 2008, 1).

How would we reform policy and social structure? How would we change our nation? Through ongoing, energetic, and collective political action. We can start by lobbying our elected officials, asking them to embrace anti-racist reforms. Write them letters; circulate and sign petitions; participate in Internet-based political movements; put our energies behind a candidate willing to fight racism and volunteer for her or his campaign. And never fail to vote (Piven and Cloward 2000). These political activities are the bread-and-butter of democratic participation and the least we should do as politically engaged citizens.

As history attests, however, bold reform and transformative social change are brought about, not only through such measures, but also – and primarily – through methods of public protest, including strikes, sustained boycotts, public demonstrations, civil disobedience, racial uprisings, and full-scale revolutions. Democracy entered the world through a revolution, and it is a revolution that we celebrate on the Fourth of July. Slavery was abolished because abolitionists employed revolutionary methods while agitating for slaves’ freedom – and because, as Du Bois pointed out, black slaves themselves rose up in rebellion; women gained the right to vote because members of the suffrage movement took to the streets; union strikes during the beginning of the twentieth century helped boost thousands of workers from poverty into the middle class; the Vietnam War drew to a close because the powerful anti-war movement of the 1960s demanded it happen; and segregation folded because anti-racist social movements forced its hand (Metzgar 2000; Piven 2008). In 1984, Cesar Chavez reflected on a lifetime spent organizing farm workers with the words, ‘The UFW [United Farm Workers of America] was the beginning! We attacked that historical source of shame and infamy that our people in this country lived with. We attacked that injustice, not by complaining; not by seeking hand-outs; not by becoming soldiers in the War on Poverty. We organized! . . . [And in so doing,] we created confidence and pride and hope in an entire people’s ability to create the future’ (Chavez 2008 [1979], 426).

To participate in collective political action – to employ the time-honored methods of public protest – is to engage as fully and completely as possible in civil society and to refuse to ‘become victims in a democratic society.’ Of course, some social movements are more effective than others. Why do some movements succeed while others fail? Sociologists have devoted considerable effort to answering this question. In what follows, we organize their findings around *seven components of successful political protest*, stated here as injunctions.

First, *realize you have power*. Society is fundamentally a collection of relations of mutual dependence. Workers rely on capitalists for a paycheck, but capitalists rely on workers’ labor; consumers rely on corporations for

their goods, but corporations depend on consumers' buying their products; citizens are subject to politicians' decisions, but they also hold great sway over politicians with the power of the vote; and we all depend on one another to uphold the laws and customs of civil society. When we acknowledge these relations of power – and determine how to exploit these relations – we have discovered the foundation of political protest.

Second, *build coalitions*. The practice of coalition-building discussed under the rubric of institutional change applies as well to social movements fighting for political or structural change. Successful movements accurately identify their targets, their adversaries, as well as their allies: many times, neither group is what one first expects. They also find ways of incorporating multiple institutions – religious organizations, social associations, student groups, unions – into their organizing efforts so that different institutions can work in concert with one another. To do so, they identify points of congruence with other social movements so as to widen their base and appeal (Meyer and Whittier 1994).

Third, *remember that the insurgency matters more than the insurgent organization*. Protest organizations are extremely important and can get quite a lot accomplished, but formal organizations can sometimes end up discouraging instead of promoting social unrest. As Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward point out in their important book, *Poor People's Movements*, elites often are happy to comply, as they know it is insurgency, not insurgent organizations, they have to fear (Piven and Cloward 1977, xi–xii). The successful social movement, then, has its priorities in line. It realizes that the power is in the mob not the meeting – that what is powerful is organizing not the organization – and it does not squander rare opportunities to breathe fresh life into the discontented masses.

Fourth, *exploit weaknesses in the dominant system*. Racial domination is old and powerful, it is true; but it is not a total system, immune to challenges. The smartest social movements finger its structures, find the weak spots, and tear them open. They identify simple strategies that can have large and far-reaching effects. Even individual acts of agitation can throw off the system of racial domination. Each of us, in our own fashion, can 'throw [our] grain of sand into the well-oiled machinery of resigned complicities' (Bourdieu 2003, 65).

Fifth, *do not be afraid to break some rules*. Some laws are just; others are not. Successful social movements do not allow unjust laws to stand in their way. This is the central idea undergirding civil disobedience, that tactic of protest upon which the Civil Rights Movement relied so heavily – and with great success. Throughout the history of America, people have found it impossible to act justly while obeying an unjust law. For a new society to burst forth, the unjust rules holding it back had to be snapped. In his essay, *Resistance to Civil Government*, Henry David Thoreau put it this way: 'If it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another,

then I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine.'

Sixth, *plan for the long haul*. The successful social movement develops strategies to support its members throughout the organizing campaign, especially if those people are participating in political action that causes them some hardship. In many cases, activists need to figure out, not only how to mobilize together, but also how to live together, how to survive the insurgency without acquiescing to systems of domination. This is especially important in this day and age, when one finds many avowed anti-racist people but very few organized anti-racist activists – and where resistance to fundamental racial change remains strong (Hero and Preuhs 2006; Winant 2004, 57–62).

Finally, *have fun*. A peculiar injunction? Perhaps, but organizing against racial domination is difficult work. People often disagree about the fundamental nature of the problem and how, precisely, to confront it. One person might suggest that her organization focus on children's education; another might point to the family unit; and still another might suggest concentrating efforts on housing, prison, job-creation, community revitalization, or any number of things. The scarcity of any organization's time and resources requires the narrowing of objectives; and choosing to confront one problem over another often leads to serious inter-organizational conflict. Agendas clash, especially within coalitions comprising a diverse array of activists. Matters pertaining to the gay community or women of color might be raised; some members of the coalition might charge the organization with paying too much attention to 'Mexican issues' (like immigration) or 'black issues' (like inner-city poverty) and not enough attention to 'American Indian issues' (like environmental racism) or problems confronting poor whites (like rural poverty). The magnitude and depth of the problem as well as inter-organizational conflict might lead those who hope to struggle against racial domination to grow weary and burn out. Or they might fall in love with their outrage, overlooking the perhaps small but nonetheless significant victories (Gitlin 2003, 143). Activists might grow bitter and pessimistic and perhaps not recognize the triumph of justice even if it comes. This is why it becomes so important to laugh together. Those in a healthy social movement share stories and jokes; they horse around and pull pranks; they respect one another and look forward to working together. They are forward-thinking and optimistic, holding fast to the truism that we have come a long way and can go much farther. They believe in the promise of democracy. In such a social movement, power is evenly distributed throughout the organization, and control is not monopolized by a cadre of 'elite activists' (and neither is the brunt of the labor). Working toward racial justice may require sacrifice; it undoubtedly will result in frustration, anger, and feelings of defeat. But, ask any activist, it will also give you a deep sense of purpose and joy. When you work for something bigger than yourself, something more important

than your checking account or your personal ambitions, life grows flush with meaning and importance.

The next word

‘It does not require a majority to prevail but rather an irate, tireless minority keen to set brushfires in people’s minds.’ Samuel Adams, one of America’s founding fathers, offered these famous lines, words that ring true up to this very hour. It is necessary to remind ourselves time and again that during the Civil Rights Movement, the majority of white *and* non-white Americans stood on the sidelines while a core cadre of committed activists pushed the country forward. The same is true of most major historical events. Analysts have referred to it as the 80/20 phenomenon: the common observation that roughly 80% of social change is brought about by 20% of the population. Sociologist Mario Small (2004, 177) has gone even further, suggesting that a community association that involves less than 1% of the total neighborhood population can bring about significant social change in that neighborhood.

When a few impassioned citizens gather together around a single cause, the potential to move the world is in their hands. ‘Idealist and naïve,’ dismisses the cynic, coldly and confidently pointing to the countless times people have tried and failed. Yes, there have been failures aplenty – power never cedes ground easily – but we owe many of the freedoms we enjoy today to idealistic souls who joined hands and marched forward as the cynics snickered off to the side.

Collective action is most effective when people break down the racial cleavages that slice civil society into a hundred different groups. The Civil Rights Movement is a prime example of this, for the movement was never more powerful than when blacks were able to incorporate other non-whites and whites into their liberation struggle (Alexander 2006). ‘The present problem of problems,’ Du Bois (1999 [1920], 33) once remarked, ‘is nothing more than democracy beating itself helplessly against the color bar, – purling, seeping, seething, foaming to burst through. . . [but] held back by those who dream of future kingdoms of greed built on black and brown and yellow slavery.’ Democracy has poked through the veil bit by bit, letting some light through with each advance, but its full potential has yet to be unleashed upon America.

This article has provided some guidance for how we might advance the march of a multicultural democracy, ways we can address racial domination. We have specified three ends – intended to provide a picture of possibilities that, once in our line of vision, may be used to direct and galvanize engaged citizens – as well as some guidelines for how we might go about achieving these ends. So much more could be said – and we invite you to say it. The next word is yours.

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