

Guidelines for SURJ-DC Reading Groups

Welcome! The SURJ-DC Education Team is so glad that you're willing to engage with other White people to discuss racism. We've created this 7-month curriculum, with articles, videos, and discussion questions, as a way to help your group get started. We've picked out resources and themes that we consider to be foundational. Our goal is to help your reading group build a shared framework for what racism is and how it dehumanizes all of us.

In order to build this framework, we suggest that each person commit to attending their group as regularly as possible for at least seven months. Of course, life happens and we can't always make the meeting, but we've found that study groups benefit from having a consistent group that keeps coming back together over time.

If after seven months you realize that the group isn't for you, we understand. However, our hope is that many of these reading groups will "gel" and lead folks into ongoing study and relationship. To facilitate this, we plan to release new options of curricula (this coming fall/winter) that your reading group can choose from after completing this initial series.

The curriculum looks at how racism affects both People of Color and White folks, however it is designed to be used by a White affinity group - meaning, everyone in the study group is White or "White-identified". For some explanation of the benefits of racial caucusing, go here: <http://tinyurl.com/crossroads-racial-caucusing>. If you choose not to work in caucus, you will want to look over the suggested curriculum and make adaptations to ensure that what you engage in best fits your group's' needs.

Reading groups are an opportunity to learn, and they are an organizing model: these groups have the potential to establish a collective analysis among hundreds of White people across the DC metro area! We hope they will move you to action, and add context to the work you're already doing.

We have a few suggestions that may help you in establishing a sustainable reading group:

1. **Find a regular monthly time** that works for all the members of your group, if possible. You will want to **allow adequate time** for members of the group to grow in relationship with one another, and explore the materials and monthly topic each time you get together. We suggest your group meet for 2 hours, in order to work with the entire curriculum in depth and have the opportunity to develop relationships with one another.
2. One of your group members has offered to serve as the host. This person will do their best to **find a quiet, confidential space** that works for everyone. The host can check in with members about accessibility, allergies, and other concerns of physical comfort. Your group might decide to **bring snacks** to each meeting.

3. At your first meeting, **share any requests you have of one another**. Find out what helps each member maximize their learning. Discuss how to balance meeting your own needs with meeting the needs of your group-mates. Record the requests and post them at each monthly session. Some suggestions:
 - It is very helpful to establish a nonjudgmental space and (overall) to speak from personal experience; if folks are open to offering or receiving feedback, talk about how this can be done in a way that is nurturing and supportive;
 - You may want to find a way to denote who is speaking and when they're done.
 - The readings and videos we've selected for each month's study vary in length; it might be helpful to set expectations around completing reading/viewing assigned material in time for the corresponding meeting.
 - An example of group norms you might want to consider can be found here: <http://whiteawake.org/self-education/shared-agreements/>
4. **Set up a plan to rotate facilitation**. Some people like facilitating, and others prefer never to facilitate. You might assign people to facilitate each month's session at your first meeting, so facilitators can plan ahead. Otherwise, at the end of each meeting, pick a facilitator for the next one.
5. We suggest that the **facilitator be in charge of sending out an email** with the readings 3 weeks before the session, and another email 1 week before the session to confirm the date, time, and location. The facilitator can refer to the discussion questions we've put together to guide a conversation about the readings. Because the amount of material to read/view varies month to month, the **facilitator can also preview assigned readings/video and give folks a heads up as to how much time they might want to allow to prepare** for the upcoming meeting.
6. Finally, **think about how you will open and close each meeting**. You might like to **start each meeting with check-ins**. This is an opportunity for each member to share with the group how they are doing, in life in general. This practice is a nice way to get to know each other, and makes space for members to bring their full selves. A complimentary closing exercise is to invite anyone who wants to **voice an appreciation** of something that stuck out to them in the reading or and something someone else said that touched them. Some groups may also want to begin and end their time together with a **meditation or moment of silence**.
7. Last but not least, remember to laugh! Don't be afraid to challenge one another, but always, always **take care of each other**.

Seven Month Study Group (to complete by Dec, 2016)
Suggested Readings, Video, and Discussion Topics

Month #1: Develop group norms; share personal stories

- *Focus of first meeting:* In this first meeting, there is some housekeeping to attend to (group norms, logistics, and any particular needs members have for comfort or accessibility); in addition, spend time sharing personal stories.
- *Discussion Prompt:* What brought you to this study group? (to SURJ-DC; to the desire to act for racial justice?)
- *Reading and prompts for personal reflection (ahead of meeting):* “Qallunology 101: A Lesson Plan for the Non-Indigenous” by Derek Rasmussen
 - <http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org/qallunology-101-a-lesson-plan-for-the-non-indigenous/>
 - When have we seen the desire to “help” actually turn out to be harmful?
 - How does it strike you to bring this perspective of indigenous worldview and European history into a conversation about racism?
 - What would it look like if we, as white people/members of the dominating group, ask ourselves this question before diving in to “rescue”: “*did we cause this problem in the first place?*”
- *Reading and prompts for personal reflection (ahead of meeting):* “White Americans in a Multicultural Society: Rethinking our Role” by Gary Howard
 - <http://www.workforcediversitynetwork.com/docs/article-whiteamericans01-03.pdf>
 - Who am I? Who are my people? How can I develop a positive sense of identity as a white person?
 - How do white people, collectively, abandon our position of dominance?
- *Additional, Optional Reading:* “Racial Identity Caucusing: A Strategy for Building Anti-Racist Collective” by Crossroads AntiRacism Organizing & Training
 - <http://tinyurl.com/crossroads-racial-caucusing>
- *About Racial Caucusing* - We suggest that the facilitator and/or host of this first meeting be familiar with the reasons for racial caucusing, and running this reading group as a “white affinity” group. This doesn’t need to be a point of group discussion, unless it is important to members of the group. Sending out this reading ahead of time can help orient folks as to why the reading group is being handled this way, and the facilitator can be prepared to answer questions/offer guidance if there are concerns (mentors can also be pulled in to support this process).

Month #2: Structural racism/white supremacy, and how this is distinct from individual bias

- *Reading:* “What is White Supremacy?” by Elizabeth Martinez
 - http://soaw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=482
- *Video:* “Reverse Racism” - Aamer Rahman
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dw_mRaIHb-M
- *Discussion Prompts:*

- How did the reading and video strike you?
- Did it shift your perspective in any way?
- How does this feel?
- Do you feel you could talk about the difference between structural racism and individual bias? How would you explain it to someone in your life? (Optional: practice/role-play?) Have you tried to have those conversations and how did they go?

Month #3 Race as a “social construct” and a “divide and rule” strategy

- Video: “The myth of race, debunked in 3 minutes”- Vox video
 - <http://www.vox.com/2015/1/13/7536655/race-myth-debunked>
- Reading: *A People's History of the United States*: “Bacon's Rebellion”
 - <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/zinnvil3.html>
- Discussion Prompts:
 - What information was new for you?
 - Do you remember when the idea of racism as a “social construct” started making sense to you?
 - What does it mean to you that racism is a “divide and rule” strategy?
 - How does learning about the history of race in the United States shift your understanding of current issues? (refer to discussion prompts from Month #3 for examples)
 - Do you look at anything in your life/spheres of social contact differently now? How?
- Supplementary Video: *Race the Power of an Illusion*: Episodes 1 and 2
 - <http://newsreel.org/video/race-the-power-of-an-illusion> (digital rental available through Vimeo)

Month #4: How, when, and why did our families become White?

- Reading: “How Did Jews Become White Folks”, by Karen Brodtkin
 - <http://nelsonssociology101.weebly.com/uploads/2/6/1/6/26165328/jews.pdf>
- Reading: *How the Irish Became White*, by Noel Ignatiev
 - <http://racetrailor.org/zmagazineinterview.pdf> (interview the author)
- Assignment: Everyone seek out info about your family’s “coming-to-America” story (including adoption, if applicable), and be prepared to share about it in the meeting.
- Discussion Prompts:
 - How does your story relate to the reading material?
 - How do you feel about what you have shared? If you don’t know this story, how does that feel?
 - How do the different stories people in the group have shared relate to one another? What is the same, or different, about your experiences?
 - How does your knowledge of the arbitrary nature of who is or is not white (and when) affect how you view race in America?

- Supplementary reading: The entire manuscript of How the Irish Became White can be found here: <http://jroan.com/HtIBWhite.pdf>

Month #5: What historical policies created the racial wealth gap?

- Reading: The Color of Wealth, The Roots of the Racial Wealth Divide (chapter), by Rose Brewer
 - <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B1rltqWkDPTtOW5MUk96TWRraWc>
- Video: Race the Power of an Illusion: Episode 3 “The House We Live In”
 - <http://newsreel.org/video/race-the-power-of-an-illusion> (digital rental available through Vimeo)
- Discussion Prompts:
 - What wealth, opportunities, or access to resources have you inherited?
 - Where can you see your life/your family in relationship to the material covered?
 - Did you formerly believe in the American “meritocracy”?
 - Recognize the disparities and diverse experiences among members of your group; if there are wide income/class disparities in your group, consider discussing some of the cultural differences among people of different income backgrounds, and other aspects of life experience.
 - Regardless of our own and/or our family of origin’s access to wealth, are there ways in which we and/or our family, as white people, have “aligned ourselves with the interests of the ruling class”?
- Supplementary Reading: “The Case for Reparations”, by Ta-Nehisi Coates
 - <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

Month #6: The Cost of Racism to White People

- Reading:
 - “White Supremacy Culture”, by Tema
 - http://www.csworkshop.org/PARC_site_B/dr-culture.html
 - “Costs of Racism for White People”
 - <http://unfaircampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Uprooting-Racism1.pdf>
 - Costs of Oppression to Members of the Dominant Group
 - https://www.mtholyoke.edu/sites/default/files/diversity/docs/cost_oppression.pdf
 - “Grieving the White Void”, by Abe Lateiner - first two sections only (ending with “I am all I need, and there is nowhere I need to go”; sections are divided by ellipses)
 - <https://medium.com/@abelateiner/grieving-the-white-void-48c410fdd7f3#.p6plq88ys>
- Discussion Prompts:
 - What in the readings stood out to you? What do you identify with (personally, or your family, or an extended community you have membership in)? What are the costs of racism for you?

- How does considering the costs of racism interact with your desire to act against racism? How might it impact how you go about “eliminating” racism?
- Again, your group may want to consider class differences as they come up (see article in classmatter.org listed in Month #5)

Month #7: Collective Liberation and the Work Ahead

- **Reading:** “Anti-Racist Organizing Strategy” - the Catalyst Project (modified version of chapter from Chris Crass’ book “Towards Collective Liberation”)
 - <http://www.leftturn.org/Collective-Liberation-Catalyst>
- **Discussion Prompts:**
 - In “Anti-Racist Organizing Strategy” Chris Crass outlines a vision of collective liberation and several aspects of strategy around how we can engage with this vision.
 - What points of this vision and strategy stood out to you?
 - Crass also outlines the significance of working with the white supremacist world view we have internalized, as white people, as a necessary component of activism.
 - Here towards the end of this round of study, how do his observations strike you?
 - Has this period of study helped you uncover some of the ways that white supremacy has limited you?
 - How can you see yourself building on this work?
 - What action steps might you take in your own life to dismantle white supremacy?
 - Reflecting on the total concept outlined in Crass’ article (the vision of collective liberation; strategies for achieving it; and the necessity of transforming the ways we’ve internalized white supremacy as part of the strategy):
 - Where do you see yourself now after seven months of our reading group?
 - What unique passions, skills, spheres of influence do you bring to this “big picture”?
 - How can you plug in, in such a way that is joyful and sustainable for you, in a way that builds on your unique gifts and sensibilities, and play your part within a larger body of people (SURJ DC; wider network of solidarity organizations nationally and internationally) working towards collective liberation?