

10 Reasons Why Racism is Still With us in the 1990's

For several years now, we have been dreaming (through the strategic planning process), about who we wish to become. As important as it may be, our goal of Growth Through Diversity will not be achieved by simply wishing or dreaming it, or by passive action. It's been nearly 100 years since DuBois said that the problem of the 20th century would be "the color line." Derrick Bell argues that racism is a permanent condition in this country, a part of our cultural landscape – unless and until people of European heritage organize to eliminate It. I cannot envision growing through diversity without also addressing racism. Here's why:

1. Many of us have not moved from the 1960's assumption that integration is *the* goal; that people of color are willing to assimilate and accept European American perspectives, while the reverse is not true.
2. There is a perception that racism expresses itself as personal prejudice and to a lesser extent as unjust laws. Since many Unitarian Universalists believe that they harbor little personal prejudice and since the Civil Rights Movement accomplished much, there is a failure to understand how they participate in sustaining racism.
3. Most of our efforts have focused on solving the problems of the oppressed rather than on deconstructing systems of institutional and cultural oppression.
4. We say that all people and cultures are created equal, but we do little to challenge assumptions that say they are not. European culture, history, and philosophy are still presumed to be normative and superior. However, the philosophical assumptions and values of many European Americans are fundamentally different from many peoples of color. This complicates communication in critical ways.
5. Racism is often unconscious. It is supported *by* denial, defensiveness, quietude and inaction.
6. If we do little or nothing to dismantle racist Institutional policies and Euro-centric cultural norms, assumptions and practices that uphold one culture as supreme over all others, we participate in sustaining racism.
7. We often assume that if we simply get "the right mix" of people that we will have solved the problem. Though we'd like to see more racial diversity, when people of color become a critical mass (between 15 and 30 percent), European Americans tend to feel threatened and find it is difficult to genuinely share power and authority. The risks associated with fundamental change seem to be too high for many to remain at the table.
8. Many approach racism in a linear, quantitative manner – as a task to be solved within a finite time – rather than a *process of* learning and unlearning.
9. Multicultural programming, as it has been formulated In- recent years, helps us to gain a deeper - appreciation for those unlike ourselves and to value diversity. But multiculturalism does not address systemic oppression. It is often presented as a disguise, as a way of avoiding the issue of racism.
10. European Americans often don't recognize or acknowledge racism until there is a crisis. Further, they often expect (or wait for) people of color to teach them about racism.

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