

DRAFT –
For the Unitarian church, Grass Valley, CA:

SOME RESOURCES REGARDING RACE IN AMERICA

Bill Drake - December 2016

(Notes: There are countless resources on this subject. Below are a few that I would recommend. The subject headings and annotations should make it easy for people to find what they are drawn to study. *In my opinion, among the most important resources for white people are the ones on white privilege by Kendall, Rosenberg, Jensen, and Wise.*)

THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA – PAST/PRESENT

(In my experience, it is really hard for us white people to really “grok” what it is like to be a minority person or black person in America, in the face of prejudice and systemic racism. Resources like the following can provide an inkling.)

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage Books, 1962-1991. 128 pages. This very powerful essay conveys the pain of the black experience in white America. It was written decades ago but still has a ring of truth.

Ellis, Catherine, and Stephen Drury Smith, eds. *Say It Loud!: Great Speeches on Civil Rights and African American Identity*. New York: The New Press, 2010. 300 pages. Speeches by 23 African Americans including Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Bobby Seale, Colin Powell, and Barack Obama. Includes a CD with twenty two of the speeches. This is a companion book to another of the editors’ compilations: *Say it Plain, a Century of Great African American Speeches* (New York: The New Press, 2005, 254 pages), “a vivid, moving portrait of black Americans sounding the charge against racial injustice, and exhorting the country to live up to its democratic principles.” It has speeches by 23 black leaders, including Booker T. Washington, Thurgood Marshall, Stokely Carmichael, Martin Luther King, and others.

Griffin, John Howard. *Black Like Me*. 3rd ed. New York: New American Library, 1977. 200 pages. In 1959 white writer John Griffin voluntarily underwent a pigment change that allowed him to pass for a black person in the deep South. This powerful book had a big impact on me. It is based on the journal Griffin kept, details his experiences in Louisiana and Mississippi. As well as making the experience of racism “real,” the book shows how destructive it is for the human personality. Still has relevancy today.

Wright, Richard. 1937. “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow: An Autobiographical Sketch.” In *The Best American Essays of the Century*. Joyce Carol Oates, ed., 159-170. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000. Wright describes the painful experiences that taught him to appear subservient to whites in order to survive. This essay is also in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, Gates and McKay, eds.

THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA – PRESENT

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow*. New York: The New Press, 2012. 300 pages. An important book about the mass incarceration of black (and Hispanic) men, in many cases for low-level non-violent drug crimes. Obama worked to reduce this disastrous trend but the indications are that the Trump administration will increase it.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015. 150 pages. A book version of Coates' letter to his son, which discusses what it means to be black in America and the precautions he needs to take for his own safety. An intense and moving book by a national correspondent to *The Atlantic*. "Americans have built an empire on the idea of race, a falsehood that damages us all but falls most heavily on the bodies of black women and men – bodies exploited through slavery and segregation, and, today, threatened, locked up, and murdered out of all proportion. What is it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden?"

Deerricotte, Toi. *The Black Notebooks: An Interior Journey*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997. 205 pages. A book by a black woman with light skin, who could pass for being white. "...An intimate record of the author's encounters...where she is forced to question what it means to be a black woman living in a racially divided world. ...A meditation about the complexity of race in this country, and a glimpse into the soul of a courageous woman. It is also a book about uncovering the denied and shameful aspects of the self, and the author's journey toward self-acceptance."

Harrington, Walt. *Crossing: A White Man's Journey Into Black America*. New York: Harper Collins, 1992. 450 pages. Harrington, a newspaper reporter who is married to a black woman, travels across America to interview black people, sometimes about delicate racial issues, to understand the "black experience" in our country. "He finds...a wildly divergent nation of people who are more like him and less like him than he could ever have known. Rich, provocative, and utterly absorbing, *Crossing* speaks about race in America today as it cuts across geography, age, occupation, and income."

Lowery, Wesley. *They Can't Kill Us All: Ferguson, Baltimore, and a New Era in America's Racial Justice Movement*. New York: Little, Brown, 2016. 236 pages. The author, a Washington Post report shares his experiences covering some of the murders of black people by police. Much of the book's focus revolves around conversations and interviews with activists and family members of blacks who have been murdered by

BLACK HISTORY – RACISM (See "The Black Experience in America" and the sub-section "Black History – Overview")

(We have to understand the history of racism in America in order to understand the current racial tensions. There are numerous books that cover the history of racism. I mention my book below because in a short space it conveys the intensity of this history up to the modern day civil rights era.)

Drake, Bill. *Almost Hereditary: A White Southerner's Journey Out of Racism, A Guide to Unlearning and Healing Racism*. Nevada City: Almost Hereditary Press, 2015 (revised ed.). Part 1, Chapters 1 and 2 (75 pages). These chapters provide an overview of slavery, racist attitudes of Southern whites, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow era. Some of the descriptions of slavery are intense (excerpts from the diary of a slave plantation owner, my great-great-grandmother, are interspersed with excerpts from interviews of former slaves). Regarding the Jim Crow era, it is my experience that many people today don't have a real clue of what life was like for blacks and other minority families and how pervasive this system of oppression was. These chapters give a sense of how deep the Southern experience is – *for whites and blacks* (Civil War, slavery, etc.) – and why the history of the South affects Southern blacks and whites today, while also pointing to racism in the north.

HEALING RACISM

Drake, Bill. *Almost Hereditary: A White Southerner's Journey Out of Racism, A Guide to Unlearning and Healing Racism*. Nevada City: Almost Hereditary Press, 2015 (revised ed.). Part III, "Understanding and Healing Prejudice" (86 pages). This section is designed to help individuals work on their own prejudices and be better able to break down barriers between themselves and others. It also looks at some of the psychology behind prejudice. Jeremy Taylor, who trains Unitarian ministers, expressed the view that the greatest factor in oppression in America is (us) white liberals suppressing our own racism and projecting it onto others ("those racists"). In my opinion, one of the most important things we can do is to become more aware of our prejudices and racism. This makes us more honest in being an ally for the oppressed and in confronting prejudice in others and in our world.

Kivel, Paul. *Uprooting Racism: How White People can Work for Racial Justice*. 3rd ed. Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society, 2011, 350 pages. Looks at the role white people can play in creating racial equality while offering strategies and guidelines. Discusses what it means to be white, the dynamics of racism, being an ally for oppressed people, and fighting institutional racism. Exercises help readers explore their relationship to these subjects.

RACISM AND RACE IN GENERAL

James, Judith and Nancy Peterson. *White Women Getting Real about Racism*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2013. 170 pages. Essays by several white teachers about their experiences, and what they learned, from teaching in multi-cultural classrooms.

Wise, Tim. *Affirmative Action: Racial Preference in Black and White*. New York: Routledge, 2005. 200 pages. Examines arguments for and against affirmative action and makes an excellent case in favor of it. As he points out, the question should not be "Should there be affirmative action?" but rather, "Should there be white privilege?"

Wise, Tim. *Colorblind, The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equality*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2010. 215 pages. Wise points out how being “colorblind” (denying blacks their experience of living in America as oppressed people, and seeing everyone as the same) perpetuates racism.

WHITE PRIVILEGE

(I would suggest that the vast majority of white people in America do not have a clue about “white privilege.” It is so pervasive, like the air we breathe, that most of us don’t even notice it. It is essential that we (whites) develop an understanding of it. As anti-racist Tim Wise has pointed out, we are not responsible for creating the systems of white privilege and systemic racism in America, but we can take responsibility for changing them.)

Kendall, Frances E. *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*. New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2012, 2nd ed. 160 pages. Very good book on this important topic. Discusses: why it is important for whites to explore white privilege, what it means to be white, understanding white privilege, what to do about white privilege, and being an ally for non-white people.

Jensen, Robert. *The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege*. San Francisco: City Light, 2005. 95 pages. This book is intended to help white people become aware of white privilege. It makes the case that America is a white supremacist country. This is a powerful little book that intends to be educational as well as a call to action. He writes, “It is possible to not be racist (in the individual sense of not perpetuating overtly racist acts) and yet at the same time fail to be antiracist (in the political sense of resisting a racist system). Being not-racist is not enough.”

Roithmayr, Daria. *Reproducing Racism: How Everyday Choices Lock in White America*. New York: New York University Press, 2014. 200 pages. Roithmayr “shows how ‘racial cartels’ like the Jim Crow system gave white Americans a now self-reinforcing and troubling permanent economic advantage in life. Critically, she shows how today’s ostensibly race-neutral processes of family inheritance, social network ties, and institutional practices and meritocratic standards made racial inequality automatic.” “...Roithmayr, argues that racial inequality lives on because white advantage functions as a powerful self-reinforcing monopoly, reproducing itself automatically from generation to generation even in the absence of intentional discrimination.” “This book is designed to change how we think about racial inequality.” The author is a law professor and the book is a little academic in nature.

Rothenberg, Paula S. *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*. 4th ed. New York: Worth Publishers, 2012. 165 pages. An important book by a consultant who specializes in issues of diversity, social justice, and white privilege. It has 19 articles by a variety of writers on this subject, divided into four parts: Whiteness: The Power of Invisibility, Whiteness: The Power of the Past, Whiteness: The Power of Privilege, and Whiteness: The Power of Resistance. The book includes Peggy McIntosh’s classic

article, “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” in which she lists her benefits as a white person. Includes questions for discussion and reflection.

Wise, Tim. *White Like Me, Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*. 2nd ed. New York: Soft Skull Press, 2008. 190 pages. Tim Wise is the foremost white anti-racist in the U.S. today. This book is an excellent exploration of, and introduction to, the problem of white privilege. Chapters: Born to Belonging, Privilege, Denial, Resistance, Collaboration, Loss, Redemption. A number of his speeches can be found on YouTube (see “Webb Resources” below).

WHITES’ EXPERIENCE OF PAIN REGARDING RACIAL INEQUALITY

Haskell, Caroline T., and Ann Todd Jealous, eds. *Combined Destinies: Whites Sharing Grief about Racism*. Sterling, VA: Potomac Books, 2013. 224 pages. Includes stories by 53 white people who have come to question white privilege. Some stories relate to whites who grew up with black servants with whom they had loving relationships but whom they were not allowed to experience as equals. Has chapters that address such issues as shame, guilt, and being silent in the face of racism. Encourages the reader to reflect on experiences in light of white privilege. A premise of the book is that healing takes place in our society when hearts as well as minds open.

TO BETTER APPRECIATE BLACK CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMERICA

BLACK HISTORY - OVERVIEW

Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *Life Upon These Shores: Looking at African American History, 1513-2008*. New York: Knopf, 2011. 512 pages. This large book is an excellent overview of the subject by a renowned scholar.

BLACK LITERATURE

Gates, Henry Louis Jr., and Nellie Y. McKay, eds. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2003. 2,700 pages. An excellent volume of black literature.

Marable, Manning, and Leith Mullins, eds. *Let Nobody Turn us Around: An African American Anthology; Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal*, 2nd ed. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009. 640 pages. An excellent collection of writings.

(You can also explore black music, etc.)

WEB RESOURCES

PREJUDICE IN AMERICA

Sawyer, Diane, host. *True Colors*. ABC Primetime, September 26, 1991. Part 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyL5EcAwB9c>; Part 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOS3BBmUxvs>. Seventeen-minute film giving a shocking demonstration of the racism black people experience in America. Although this was filmed in 1991, it is still relevant today.

“I, Too, Am B-CC (High School)”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KpKEFEpHms>

A powerful 6 minute video created by minority students at a high school in Maryland. It demonstrates the biases they experience at their school. Inspired by the video “I, Too, Am Harvard.”

“I, Too, Am Harvard”

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIsd5gDuEBGIKLSa_vcJFlg

A profound play with about 20 short presentations (4-5 min. each) by minority Harvard students, which describes the biases they experience at their university. 2014.

SYSTEMIC RACISM

“7 Ways We Know Systemic Racism is Real”

<http://www.benjerry.com/whats-new/systemic-racism-is-real>

Ben and Jerry of Ben’s and Jerry’s ice cream, have put a page on their website that gives an overview of systemic racism in America, with links to background material. They share a brief video at the end of the page: “We Must Talk About Race to Fix Economic Equality” (presented by Demos and MoveOn.org). This is a great overview. It does have some weaknesses. For example, in the section on “Wealth” their description of “wealth” of women of color is in the context of racism but ignores sexism and other variables. The video makes some good points but, in the beginning, tends to stereotype all “conservatives.” Otherwise, this is a very valuable resource.

WHITE PRIVILEGE

Wise, Tim. “The Pathology of White Privilege: Racism, White Denial, & the Costs of Inequality.” Mt. Holyoke College, Massachusetts, October 2007. 58 min. Videotape of speech. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOB_ix10--I. This is a powerful presentation about the nature of white privilege by the country’s foremost white anti-racist.