Curriculum for White Americans to Educate Themselves on Race and Racism–from Ferguson to Charleston by Jon Greenberg | Jul 10, 2015 | Civic Engagement, Race and Racism, Roads to Racial Justice

When teaching about race and racism, I invite participants to consider the following analogy: ***Think of racism as a gigantic societal-sized boot.***

 “Which groups do you think are fighting the hardest against this boot of racism?” I ask them. Invariably, participants of diverse races answer that those fighting hardest to avoid getting squashed by the boot are people of Color. (Keep in mind that I don’t ask this question on day one of our study of race. Rather, participants come to this conclusion after exploring the concept of White privilege and studying the history of race and racism in the United States through multiple sources and perspectives.)

 “If that’s true,” I continue, “then who do you think is wearing the boot?” The participants’ answer (though it often only reluctantly hits the air): **White people.**

 “If that’s true, then whose responsibility is it to stop the boot from squashing them? The people of Color already pushing upward and resisting the boot? Or the people wearing the boot–consciously or not–who contribute to a system that pushes downward?”

Everyone has a role in ending racism, but the analogy shows how little sense it makes for only those facing the heel-end of oppression to do all the work. **It’s time for White America to take on a far bigger role in taking off the boot.**

There are no doubt complexities that come with White Americans working for racial justice. White privilege can lead to a chronic case of undiagnosed entitlement, creating poor listeners, impatient speakers who talk over others, and people unaccustomed to taking orders. Nevertheless, the movement for racial justice needs more White Americans to get involved. And it’s [our responsibility](http://www.blackgirldangerous.org/2015/02/colored-girls-violently-quoted-king-words-enough/) to help each other get involved–and get involved productively.

I compiled this list to help White Americans do so. One positive to emerge from these difficult times is the wealth of resources now available for White Americans. Never have I seen so many ideas, options, and concrete steps to take action against racism. And we are making progress: [Looks Like White Americans Are Finally Starting to Come Around on Race and Policing](http://mic.com/articles/117482/looks-like-white-americans-are-finally-starting-to-come-around-on-race-and-policing). A few police officers are even being [held accountable](http://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/02/14/black-lives-matter-deserves-credit-nypd-officer-indicted-fatal-stairwell-shooting)–finally–for their devastating decisions.

**But so much work remains.**

Facing this country’s racist past and present will likely stir up a lot of feelings for many of us. Guilt may be among them. In dealing with guilt, I encourage you to read the [words of Audre Lorde:](http://www.blackpast.org/1981-audre-lorde-uses-anger-women-responding-racism) ..I cannot hide my anger to spare you guilt, nor hurt feelings, nor answering anger; for to do so insults and trivializes all our efforts. Guilt is not a response to anger; it is a response to one’s own actions or lack of action. If it leads to change then it can be useful, since it is then no longer guilt but the beginning of knowledge. Yet all too often, guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness.

Instead of spending your energies on guilt, I encourage you to spend them seeking inspiration to act. There’s no shortage of inspiration. For a moment on June 30th, in the wake of terrorism in Charleston, you could even find it on a flagpole at the South Carolina State House.

 Less than two weeks after [Bree Newsome’s act of resistance](http://bluenationreview.com/exclusive-bree-newsome-speaks-for-the-first-time-after-courageous-act-of-civil-disobedience/), the governor of South Carolina signed a bill into law [removing the Confederate Flag from the State House](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/south-carolina-house-approves-bill-to-remove-confederate-flag-from-statehouse/). **Change is possible.**

Disclaimer:

This website is named after the high school course, Citizenship and Social Justice, that Seattle Public Schools unsuccessfully tried to extinguish stemming from the complaints of one white family opposed to study of race and racism.

However, the website is NOT connected to this course nor intended for student use.

Dedicated to social justice and civic engagement, it is the personal website of educator and writer Jon Greenberg.

To learn more about the race curriculum controversy that led to the creation of this website, a controversy in which a public school district attempted to shut down a long-established study of race for seniors–all based on the misinformation of one White family–click [here](http://wp.me/P5loLN-5).